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SERIES: WE ARE FREE (A Study of Galatians)

SPEAKER: NAT CRAWFORD

TITLE: An Interview with Craig Hazen: Fearless Prayer

Pastor Nat Crawford interviews Dr. Craig Hazen, founder of the Apologetics program at Biola University and author of *Fearless Prayer: Why We Don't Ask and Why We Should*:

NC: Today, I am here with a special guest author and director of the Master's program in Christian Apologetics at Biola University, Dr. Craig Hazen. Craig, it is great to have you on the show today.

CH: It's terrific to be on with you Nat.

NC: Well, Craig, I think I met you - I'm going to guess around seven years ago - at an Apologetics event in Milwaukee, Wisconsin - the EPS Conference. And I was a student in your program, and I'll be honest - we've chatted, you know, over the years - but I honestly think it's fair to say, that your program through Biola radically changed my life, and for the better. And so I just want to say thank you so much for what you're doing out there.

CH: Wow, way to make my day. Thanks. Praise God.

NC: And so today we're going to talk about your book, *Fearless Prayer: Why We Don't Ask and Why We Should*, but before we dig into your book, I think it's important for my listeners to know who you are. So share a little bit about yourself, and about how you became a follower of Christ.

CH: Yeah. I did not grow up in a Christian home, but I was thinking about these things a lot. And I remember, by the time I was a sophomore, junior, senior in high school, I thought a lot about, and I actually had some conclusions about, what it all was supposed to be like - in other words, what was the universe really all about? - and all that. And my basic conclusion was that, there's just no way to know. You know, I took a peek into some of the world religions, and they didn't seem to have anything much more going for them than Christianity did. And it seemed to me, it was just a blind faith operation. Either you close your eyes and you leap blindly into the religious abyss, or you don't, you know, and I thought, I'm not going to; I'm going to just stick with knowledge, and science, and all that really solid stuff, you know?

But because of my stance there, you know, I was the person who most of the Christians on campus were after. So, I know they were praying for me, and the Lord really heard their prayers. When I really heard the Gospel, empowered by the Holy Spirit, man, I drank the whole cup. I went forward at a big old altar call, and, you know, I got my brain scrubbed good after that. And I mean, it turned out this shocked me at the time, and I was kind of a budding intellectual, you know. Although I was still in high school, I really loved education. I always pictured myself being a professor somewhere. Knowledge was really the key, and to discover that Christianity is actually true, that you could actually investigate it, and determine that there really is a God, that Jesus is a real historical figure, that He was killed by a Roman crucifixion team, that then He really did come back from the dead on the third day - this is a big deal. I wake up still about every third morning, stunned that I signed up for the right one, you know, and that God was so generous in giving us a trail of evidence down through history, testifying to what He did on our behalf.

NC: I think it's fair to say, that that decision changed your life, and your pursuit of knowledge has not changed at all. In fact, you've been very pursuant in it, and because of that, you've grown in your faith, you've grown in your confidence of Christianity, and you've become an apologist. And you created this program for Biola. Just share for a little bit about that program that you created.

CH: Yeah. Well, ever since my conversion, I've just been kind of in love with the idea that Christianity is true, and that you can show it to be true. God actually thought that was an important part of our enterprise as Christians - is to demonstrate the truth of what we're talking about, through holy living, but also through good solid argumentation. The Apostle Paul was really keen on setting this up as a standard for us. So yeah, that just stuck with me forever. In fact, I mean, the moment I became a Christian, I'm thinking, how am I going to use this? And what's going to be my next educational pathway? And so I decided to do something a bit off the deep end, and I did my doctoral work in Religious Studies at the University of California in Santa Barbara. I mean, you know, Jesus-loving Bible-reading Christians don't go there for grad school. But I really wanted to find out what the Buddhists had to say, and the Muslims, and, you know, Japanese religions, and things you've never heard of. I wanted to know about them, and I've got to tell you - studying the other great religious traditions gave me quite a bit of confidence that I had done the right thing, deciding to be a follower of Jesus. You know, none of the other religions on the planet today, or even through history, hold a candle to what Jesus started.

NC: Right. Right. But I've heard you say this - that Christianity - it's a weird religion. It's a weird faith. And I remember, when I first heard that, I thought, "Oh, that's really not great to hear this guy say", but as I heard your response, and I thought about it, I think you were right. So what did you mean by that - Christianity is a weird religion?

CH: Yeah. That is just kind of a way to shake people up, but it is. When people think of religion

in the modern world, right - you take your average Joe walking down the street - you say, "Hey, what do you think about religion?" and "Religion's fine", you know? And then you have them describe religion a little bit. And when you hear religion described, when you really understand Biblical Christianity, what they're thinking of in terms of religion, doesn't match up - that Christianity is a weird fit for the category of what we call religion. [Right]. And there's a number of things that really, I think stand out. I mean - and one that's really near and dear to my heart - is the idea that Christianity is objectively testable. [Yes.] And I have not found that to be the case with Islam, or Hinduism, or Buddhism, or you name it. You know, Christianity is uniquely testable, and it invites investigation. I don't find the others inviting objective scientific scrutiny.

NC: Right. Right. Well, you know, I think one of the unique elements of Christianity, about our faith, really is prayer. But not just prayer - because prayer is in so many other religions - but there's an intimacy, there's a uniqueness, in how we approach God. And then we also have a privilege in prayer. And so, that's where I want to take our conversation now. You wrote this book, *Fearless Prayer: Why We Don't Ask and Why We Should*. I think a great question to start with is, why write this book?

CH: That's what my colleagues were saying too. And I remember one summer, they're like, "Hey, Hazen, what are you doing this summer?" "Oh, I'm working on a book. I got a contract". And they go, "Oh, really? What's it on?" "It's on prayer". They would - they all looked stunned. Like "You're going to write a book on prayer?" You know, I'm not the kind of guy who wanders around in sackcloth and ashes, you know? And I don't look all that monkish. And so, people don't expect me to write a book on prayer. And they're right - I'm not the kind of guy who writes a book on prayer.

But so, I'm reading my Bible in my comfortable Bible-reading chair. [It's right there - I can actually show you my comfortable Bible-reading chair]. I get up early, the rest of the family sleeps in, and I just love reading the Bible in the morning. And you know, there are all those books in the Bible that are difficult to understand, but not the Gospel of John. You know, you crack that baby open, and it's a rich feast. So I'm reading through there, really enjoying it. And I get to Chapter 15 of the Gospel of John, and in verse seven of Chapter 15, it says this, *if you abide in me and my words abide in you, ask for anything, and it will be done for you*. What in the world?

So this particular time, I read that verse in my comfortable Bible reading chair, there's like a woodpecker on top of my head. You know, the Holy Spirit's like trying to get my attention: "Pay attention to this, because you don't believe this for a second." [Right]. It was the message I was getting, and it was true. I didn't really believe that. I didn't know for sure that I knew anybody who really believed that - maybe some of the kooks and crazies on religious television, or something. But, you know, that really set me off on a journey, trying to figure out what that really meant. And it resulted in this book, *Fearless Prayer*. And I've got to tell you, it was the

most exciting investigation of my adult Christian life - looking for an answer to what that particular statement by Jesus really meant.

NC: And it's clear it took you on quite a journey.

NC: Craig, here we are - we're getting into your book, *Fearless Prayer*. From your perspective, from what you've studied and researched, what is prayer, and why should we engage in it?

CH: You know, I wasn't expecting to make this such a fun part of this little study. You know, I figured I knew what prayer was, but when I started to dig into what prayer was - you know, what the Scriptures say - and then, what the greatest thinkers through the history of the church say prayer really is - I was kind of surprised to find out the answer. And it's very simple, and I found it to be freeing - not just for me, but for people who read the book, and who I communicate with this about. And prayer is asking God for stuff. It's asking God for stuff. Now, see, I was led to believe that you can ask God for stuff, but that's really not where prayer is taking you. You see, that's a very low level aspect of prayer - asking God for things. Really, the highest level of prayer is just kind of sitting, and being one with Him in some way, you know. [Right]. And all right, but that's not what the Bible was talking about, when it's talking about prayer. It's always about asking for things.

In fact, the Lord's Prayer itself is about six asks. You know, it teaches us to ask in six different ways for God's help, in our regular daily lives. [Right]. And so I found it odd, and I discovered there was some really wonderful Christian thinkers, who discovered the same thing, and I found that very freeing. So in other words, I feel much freer to communicate with God, like almost moment by moment, about ridiculous things. You know, they're not ridiculous to Him, and most of the time, they're not ridiculous to me either. But, you know, you've heard the old stories about praying for that open spot in a parking lot at the mall or something. And hey, I'm big on that - I think I'm praying for that kind of thing. I think God really likes us doing that. I think He likes us being in kind of a moment by moment, fellowship process with Him. I think He likes that. So I'm big on praying for all kinds of crazy things, and trying to keep the channel of communication open with the Lord, all day long.

NC: Right. Well, you know, as parents ourselves, and we know what it's like to have our children ask us for the big, the small, the crazy, and the mundane, but there's something very precious about that, and how much we really enjoy it, because our children feel the comfort and the competence to ask. And so let's talk a little bit more about, you know, when you were studying John 15, and this whole *abiding in and asking*. I mean, just kind of unpack what you discovered in there, because I honestly think what you just said about, "Hey, prayer's asking", I think there's probably some of our listeners going, "Whoa, whoa, whoa. I think he has overly simplified it". So let's hear more about your process, and what you discovered in John 15.

CH: Yeah. So trying to figure out what that actually meant - *if you abide in me and my words abide in you, ask for anything and it will be done for you* - I did dig a bit deeply to find out all kinds of things. In my interviews of Christian leaders and pastors trying to figure this out, I came up with some basic objections. There's some really crazy objections. I remember one pastor said that, "I think that means you've got to be within spitting distance of Jesus, you know." That was great fun, but there were some objections that actually caused you to think. And for instance, I've discovered that most Christians who are pretty thoughtful, are a bit afraid of a verse like this, even though it's so powerful and wonderful. They're a bit afraid of it, because it sounds too much like the Prosperity Gospel people - the health, wealth, and prosperity teachers - who aren't really hitting the mark with Christian orthodoxy, enough to make most people comfortable. So we don't want to go there. But my response to that is: I'm not going to let some people, who are abusing a verse like this, rob me of its power and promise. I mean, this is just too good to just trade away, because other people are abusing it.

NC: Right. Well, we've got to remember, we need to teach the whole counsel of God, right? And even things like this, which do get abused - and let's be honest - I think you could take any passage, and people frankly do abuse them - to work for their own needs and for their own desires. So that happens all the time. So we shouldn't do it to any piece of literature, and I think you've focused on that here.

Well, okay. So it's about asking, and you know, you've heard that acronym for prayer: ACTS, right? You know, when in prayer, we're supposed to have Adoration, we're supposed to have Confession, we're supposed to have Thanksgiving, and Supplication - or we might say asking - and you really focus on asking. Okay again, as you admitted a little bit ago, when you came to this passage, you're like, "Ah, I don't know. I'm not buying that". I've been the same way when approaching this - with this passage, going, "Okay. Really, ask? - I mean, what qualifies this?" But I think people get to that point where they don't ask, because they've experienced what they would call ineffective prayers, right? They've talked to God, they've communed with God. They've confessed. They've given Him adoration. They've given Him that thanksgiving, and then, they've made the ask, and they go, "Wait a second God - where's my yes?" And so again, they're really feeling like their prayers are ineffective. Do you think that their prayers really are ineffective? And if so, why? And if not, why not? I mean, what's happening?

CH: Yeah, it dawned on me that there's two things - and there's more, but these two are real standouts - there's two things that cause me to not take that verse seriously. The first one is a worldview that we're all immersed in, right? We're all immersed in a worldview called naturalism, and put simply - there's very sophisticated ways to define this, but then to put it simply - it's having the idea that supernatural things really don't happen. And a lot of Christians find themselves in that position. They might think, "Oh, but I believe in the Resurrection and all

those Bible stories.” Yeah, I think they do. But when it comes to like living real life, day-to-day, in kind of a supernatural way, and thinking God might intervene supernaturally - I think we shy away from that, I think. And really, for good reason, because we are - since the time we're born - immersed in a view of the world called naturalism that really doesn't allow supernatural activities. And so, it's difficult to get that breath of fresh supernatural air to take all this seriously. But once you do, oh my goodness - it's not all about God, and now He's answering prayers, and before He wasn't. It's like, now, I actually have the eyes to see how He's answering the prayer. That was a big shock to me. Because now, I watch God sometimes move the chess pieces on the board, to get to the point where He's answering my prayers. So that'd be one - that we're immersed in the philosophy called naturalism, and we need to extricate ourselves. But really, it's difficult to do that. We have to call upon God to give us a better supernatural view of the world.

NC: Okay. So the first reason that people might be having ineffective prayer is because of this inclination towards naturalism - kind of denying the reality of the supernatural. That's something that can really happen. But you said there's a second. What is that?

CH: Yeah, it's a very simple thing. It's patience. We're very impatient creatures. We don't really live for eternity. And I've got to tell you, God is really on the job when it comes to prayer. In my view, and in just practical terms - He like - I pray for something, and I'm stunned how often it comes so quickly. In fact, the famous prayer servant, George Müller, who ran a series of orphanages, and supported them just through prayer - just an amazing story - he kept a journal of his prayers. And he said - well he journaled about 50,000 prayer requests. And he noted at the end of all of this, that about 30,000 of them were answered, like as quickly as you could possibly imagine.

However, there's sometimes the most important things to us - especially, you know, the salvation of a loved one, or physical healing - takes time - and it's just a much more difficult situation - we're not good at being patient for those things. There's things I've been praying for, for, you know, a good decade. And I've got to tell you, when I read John 15:7, I'm still very hopeful that God is going to really do something wonderful. But I have to learn to live for eternity. I don't want to discourage your listeners by that, because, “Oh, that's so long – oh my gosh, a decade - are you kidding me?” No, this is a God who, if He gets the opportunity, He will answer it immediately, and blow your mind.

NC: Right. Well, it seems so often, you know, God's timing is not our timing, but His timing is always perfect. And part of that is being trusting, you know, of our Heavenly Father, that He does know what we need. He knows what we want, and He also knows what's best. And so I would agree. I think patience has got to be one of the hardest parts, when it comes to waiting on God in prayer. Okay. So we need to reject naturalism. We need to be patient. Is there anything else we should be doing, when we approach God in prayer?

CH: Yeah. There's something about - you've got to understand the context of John 15:7, because it really isn't asking God for anything. There's a very specific context for John 15:7, and it's about fruit-bearing. And what we mean by fruit-bearing, is doing the Lord's work, moving His Kingdom forward - making things happen for the Church, and for Salvation, history and all that. I mean, that's where God's in the mix big time. And I think that's where this specific promise applies. God loves to answer any kind of prayer, but in John 15:7, there's a special kind of prayer: It's a fruit-bearing prayer. Those are the ones that Jesus promises to His disciples. When He's saying this in 15:7, He's basically - this is His last discourse with His closest followers, so it's very important. And He says to them, *if you abide in me, and my words abide in you, you can ask for anything and it will be done for you*. And what He's talking about there is Kingdom work, in the fruit-bearing context of John 15.

NC: Right. Well, I mean, I think it kind of reminds me of a passage in Psalms, you know, *delight yourself in the Lord and he'll give you the desires of your heart* (37:4). Well, it's not a "name it and claim it" type promise there - it was tied to aligning ourselves with the heart of God, and so that our prayers fall in line with that, and our desires as well. And so I think you're exactly right. We need to be focused on the context to know exactly what Jesus was talking about, but it really does come back to who we are, and are we walking with Christ? Are we being obedient? Are we actually being His disciples and following him daily? So I'm curious, as we close out our time today - because of what you've discovered in John 15, and because of what you've discovered in writing this book, how has this changed how you approach God in prayer?

CH: It's weird, because I can't wait for a strong Kingdom issue to land on my plate, because when it does, and I go, "Aw, this is the kind of thing God is just all over", you know? And I can't wait to see what happens. When George Müller - again, back to him and some of the miracles that happened through his hand, by the Lord - feeding orphans out of nothing - you read the answers to his prayers, and then his responses. And it's as if he just didn't hesitate for a second - he knew that God would do this, because that's who God is. He's not going to let orphans starve. And if you pray, oh, you just stand back and watch it happen.

NC: Right. Yeah, I think so often we do - we approach God like we approach many other people that we know, and maybe our experiences with other people. "So God, Hey, you know, if you're willing, if you're able to, but I get it if you're not going to" - or you know, we treat God like any other human being, and that's such a mistake, because God is the God of all resources. He has everything at His disposal. And He asks us to come to Him as trusting children, and ask Him in faith. And it's amazing. You've seen it in your life. You've seen it by studying the faith of others in researching this book, and just in your faith journey. And I've seen it in my life as well. And I know our listeners are going to be encouraged by this conversation, but also by what you've written.

So, if our listeners or those watching want to pick up, either *Fearless Prayer*, or *Five Sacred Crossings*, or any of your other books you've been attached to, where should they go?

CH: You've got me. I know Amazon carries them.

NC: Okay. That's it - Amazon. And they'll get there the next day still. I think so – it depends on where you're at.

CH: That's right.

NC: If people want to learn more about you, or about the program at Biola, which again, I highly endorse - it changed my life and it's changing the lives of many other people - where do they go?

CH: Just Google Biola Apologetics: B I O L A – Biola - Apologetics. And you'll bump into one of the finest grad programs on the planet in defending the faith.

NC: Yep. It absolutely is. Well, Dr. Hazen, we're glad you came on the show today. And again, I have no doubt that this talk is going to impact the lives of people listening, so thank you for your time today.

CH: Oh, thanks Nat - you're doing great work. Keep it up.

NC: I appreciate it.