

PRAYER

YOU ASKED FOR IT (PART 7)

There was once a man who owned a GREAT DANE. This Great Dane was not only extremely large-he was also a very ferocious dog. He was a huge muscular animal with jaws of iron and a mouth full of sharp teeth. He was definitely not the kind of dog you would want jumping up in your lap. One day the owner of this monster of a dog took him for a walk. Actually, I'm not sure who was walking who, but as they strolled through the neighborhood, he saw another man across the street who was also walking his dog. However, unlike the Great Dane, this dog was little. He had short legs, a pug-like head, and no tail. He had no hair-and instead his body was covered with green, leathery skin. In short, he was a very odd looking dog and compared to the Great Dane, he appeared to be very weak and powerless. The Great Dane suddenly turned his huge head and caught his first sight of this odd little dog. Immediately, the huge dog strained against the leash until it snapped in two. Then he charged across the street at top speed obviously intending to attack this odd-looking little creature. The owner of the Great Dane yelled to the man across the street, "LOOK OUT! My dog is on the loose, and he's vicious! He will kill you and that little dog of yours! run for your life!!!!" But, it was too late-the Great Dane was already at top speed, teeth bared, but when he leaped to attack, the odd little dog bared its teeth and simply opened his mouth unbelievably wide and swallowed the Great Dane whole. Then he began smacking his lips in satisfaction as if he had just enjoyed a great meal. Well, that was the end of that big, mean Great Dane. The owner of the Great Dane was absolutely astonished by what he had just witnessed. He said to the other man, "What kind of dog is that?! I have never seen a little dog that could do what your little dog just did!" The man replied, "Dog? What dog? This is not a dog. Before he got his nose run over by a truck and his tail cut off by a train, this used to be an alligator!"

Appearances can be deceiving. Sometimes things that we think are little or insignificant are actually very powerful. A great example of that fact is seen in the spiritual discipline of prayer. Many of us tend to underestimate the power of prayer. That is a big mistake because prayer is the key to accessing the most powerful force in the entire universe.

Someone has rightly said, "When we work WE work but when we PRAY, GOD works!"

It has been said that, as wonderful as his sermons were, John Wesley's prayers changed the face of England far more than his preaching did, and I'm sure that is true.

You will never become a strong Christian until you learn to pray strong prayers. If you were to check out the great men and women of God throughout history, there would be many differences in them, but the one thing that would always be the same is the fact that they were prayer warriors.

WHAT IS PRAYER FOR?

SERMON SPICE (Pray Where You Are)

Why did God give us prayer in the first place? Someone who came in to church for the first time in stayed for one week would realize very quickly that prayer is an important part of what we do. So what is it for?

1. PRAYER CONNECTS US WITH GOD

We often use the word "pray" as a synonym for "ask," but prayer is more than just asking and receiving. If there were no asking and receiving involved in prayer, prayer would still be essential to our well being because it enables us to talk with our Creator.

Psalm 84: 1-2, "How lovely is your dwelling place, O LORD Almighty! My soul yearns, even faints, for the courts of the LORD; my heart and my flesh cry out for the living God.

The psalmist is not asking for anything. He simply says, "Lord, I love being with you." He goes on to say in verse 10, "Better is one day in your courts than a thousand elsewhere; I would rather be a doorkeeper in the house of my God than dwell in the tents of the wicked." It is good just to be in the presence of God, just talking, praising and worshipping Him, and that comes through prayer.

2. PRAYER MEETS OUR NEEDS

Throughout the scriptures, we see people praying to God to meet their needs. Jesus said in Matthew chapter six we are to pray that God will give us our daily bread, and bread in that context speaks of anything that we need to sustain life. If we need a car, that's our bread. If the washing machine breaks down and we need another one, that's our bread.

God is honored when we ask Him for needs that we know we cannot meet ourselves. Alexander the Great wanted to reward a philosopher who had helped him. "Ask what you want of me," said the emperor. The philosopher took the offer seriously and told the royal treasurer he wanted 10,000 pounds of gold. Shocked by such an enormous request, the treasurer refused then went in anger to the emperor. "This man has asked too much. His request is unreasonable." Alexander the Great listened patiently and then instructed the treasurer to give the philosopher what he had asked for. "He honored me three ways. First, he believed my word. Second, he believed my wealth. Third, he believed my willingness to do what I said I would do. Give him the money. He has honored me by his great faith in my words."

In Psalm 81:10 God gives a wonderful invitation to his children, "Open wide your mouth and I will fill it." Ask what you need, God says, and I will do it for you. Someone said that Jeremiah 33:3 is "God's telephone number." It says "Call to Me, and I will answer you, and I will tell you great and mighty things, which you do not know" (NASB).

3. PRAYER MEETS THE NEEDS OF OTHERS

E.M. Bounds in Possibilities of Prayer said, "Prayer affects men by affecting God. Prayer moves men because it moves God to move men. Prayer influences men by influencing God to influence them. Prayer moves the hand that moves the world."

The book of Colossians gives us an example of someone who was faithful in praying for others.

Colossians 4:12-13, "Epaphras, who is one of you and a servant of Christ Jesus, sends greetings. He is always wrestling in prayer for you, that you may stand firm in all the will of God, mature and fully assured. I vouch for him that he is working hard for you and for those at Laodicea and Hierapolis."

Epaphras was probably converted by Paul in Ephesus, and his prayers were constantly going out for his brothers and sisters. The greatest thing anyone can do for God and man is to pray. Think about this for a moment. In all likelihood, you are where you are today because somebody prayed for you. No one knows how much sin and sorrow we've been saved from because somebody prayed for us. Do for others what others have done for you.

a) Pray for our leaders

1 Timothy 2:1-4, "I urge, then, first of all, that requests, prayers, intercession and thanksgiving be made for everyone—for kings and all those in authority, that we may live peaceful and quiet lives in all Godliness and holiness. This is good, and pleases God our Savior, who wants all men to be saved and to come to a knowledge of the truth."

Who are we to pray for? The scripture says that we're to pray for everyone. Obviously, that does not mean everyone on the planet because that would probably take you a little bit longer than you've got to pray. It means that no one should be excluded from your prayers. It is interesting that he specifically mentions Kings and those in authority and tells us that the result of our prayer for them will be that we may live peaceful and quiet lives. He is saying is that prayer is so powerful that it can even move the hearts of people in the government. That's pretty powerful! And he tells us that our lives will be different if we pray for those people than it would be if we didn't pray for them.

b) Pray for spiritual growth in other believers

"I keep asking that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the glorious Father, may give you the Spirit of wisdom and revelation, so that you may know him better" (Ephesians 1:17 NIV).

Paul's greatest concern for others was the greatest concern that he had for himself. He wanted people to know God better. Christianity is all about having a relationship with God, and that relationship is a growing one. If it stagnates, it is not healthy. Paul prayed for people that they would know God better, and he kept on praying.

Colossians 1:9- "For this reason, since the day we heard about you, we have not stopped praying for you and asking God to fill you with the knowledge of his will through all spiritual wisdom and understanding. And we pray this in order that you may live a life worthy of the Lord and may please him in every way: bearing fruit in every good work, growing in the knowledge of God,"

Paul is asking God to give them wisdom and spiritual insight so that they will know God's will. That's a very practical prayer. Almost everyone thinks about the will of God at one time or another. He is praying that they would know what God wanted for them.

The word "fill" in its basic form means to be filled to overflowing. It can also mean "overwhelmed" by something. It has the idea of "fully possess." Pray for people that they will be so filled with the knowledge of God's will that there will be no doubt in their minds about what God wants them to do.

c) Pray for the salvation of those who don't know Christ

We have to remember when we share our faith with a non Christian, that he is spiritually dead. That presents a problem because dead men can't hear, can't see and can't understand. You might as well tell a corpse to run jump high hurdles as to tell a spiritually-dead person he needs to be saved. Because he is physically alive, he hears your words. Because he is spiritually dead, your words make no sense to him. You can quote Scripture all day long, and the lost will still be lost. We must pray for the lost that God will open their eyes, give them a hunger for Jesus, and then grant them faith to believe the gospel. God is in the "eye opening business." I wonder if there is someone here today who would not have seemed like a likely candidate for salvation. I am sure that there were people who thought the Apostle Paul would never become a Christian, but they were wrong. If God can open your eyes and open the eyes of an enemy of Christ like the Apostle Paul, then he can bring unlikely people to himself today. No one is beyond the reach of God's grace.

d) Pray for your enemies

Matthew 5:43-45, "You have heard that it was said, 'Love your neighbor and hate your enemy.' But I tell you: Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, that you

may be sons of your Father in heaven. He causes his sun to rise on the evil and the good, and sends rain on the righteous and the unrighteous.”

The world's way to respond to someone who has hurt you is to try to hurt them back. Normally speaking, the only thing that does is to cause the situation to get worse. But what if there was a way to change that person so that he or she would no longer hurt you? Prayer is God's means to do just that. It is not what we would naturally like to do. We're naturally bent on revenge. And if we have to pray for the person who is hurting us, at least let us pray for God's judgment on them. Maybe God will answer our prayer and break their leg. That'll show them! Not only does our prayer for our enemies change them, the biggest change may be found within us. Praying for your enemy transforms your heart so that you become like your father in heaven who does good to the evil as well as to the righteous.

4. PRAYER BUILDS OUR FAITH

R.A. Torrey was a well-known bible teacher who followed D.L. Moody as the pastor of the moody church in Chicago. Torrey said, “if there is a hole in my wall, and I put my hand through the hole and ask for an apple, and if I win I'd take my hand out of the hole, there is an apple in my hand, and if I do this over and over again, I'm going to believe there someone on the other side of the wall. This, said Torrey has been my experience with prayer.

Prayer builds our faith by allowing us to understand there's someone on the other side who hears what we're asking that who gives us what we're asking. No doubt, sometimes God allows us to get in difficult situations just so that we will go through that process, and our faith will be built. Faith is built when we see God work, and God works in answer to our prayers.

HOW SHOULD I PRAY?

I. I MUST MAKE PRAYER A PRIORITY

Real communication takes time, and if you only communicate with bits and pieces of left-over time, you will never really connect. People who truly seek God do it differently.

Psalm 130:6, “My soul waits for the Lord more than watchmen wait for the morning, more than watchmen wait for the morning.”

The watchmen were the men who were given the task of standing guard on the walls that protected the city. Their job was to diligently watch for an approaching enemy. If they didn't do their jobs, they and the rest of the city could be attacked and killed. So, these watchmen were very serious about what they did. This psalm writer says, "I seek the Lord with more diligence than those watchmen on the wall."

If prayer is to be what God wants it to be, we must give it a priority place in our lives. That's why many Christians have the practice of beginning each day with the Lord.

Psalm 5:3 - In the morning, O LORD, you hear my voice; In the morning I lay my requests before you and wait in expectation.

The key to this verse is not the time of day. Some of you are not morning people! Some of you feel like your day is just starting at noon when your eyes are fully open! If that is true, I do not suggest you try to have your prayer time at 5AM! The key to this verse is that David had a regular time to talk with God that he made a priority. Find a time that is the BEST time for you to be without distractions and make a regular meeting time with God.

2. I MUST PRAY IN FAITH

"Have faith in God," Jesus answered (Mark 11:22).

If you want to know what God wants from you in prayer, the answer is "faith." You see that all over the Bible. Faith is to believe what we do not see; and the reward of this faith is to see what we believe. The issue of faith is very important to God. Mark 6 tells the story of Jesus going back to minister in His hometown. When He got there, the people didn't believe in Him. As a result of their unbelief, chapter 6:5 says, "He could not do any miracles there, except lay his hands on a few sick people and heal them."

Hebrews 3 tells the story of the unbelieving Israelites who wanted to enter the Promised Land but who did not believe God for it. Hebrews 3:19 says, "So we see that they were not able to enter, because of their unbelief."

Mark 11:24, "Therefore I tell you, whatever you ask for in prayer, believe that you have received it, and it will be yours."

Believing in advance is like a young couple who puts up a nursery even before the wife is pregnant. Or it's like a "hope chest" prepared by a young lady for the day she will be married. Believing prayer is like buying a Christmas present in September but hiding it in the closet when Christmas draws near. "If your Father wants you to have it, it may not be in your hands, but it's already in the closet."

Fellowship Bible Church

Pastor: Don Griffin

So, how is your prayer life? I believe that when you come to the end of your life, it will be your prayer life that will have shaped you more than anything else. If you end up as a strong believer, it will be because you have had a strong prayer life. We need to say with the disciples, “lord, teach us to pray.”