

Rethinking Prayer Part 1

Shayne Payne

Jesus' disciples, like most Christians were taught to pray from an early age and were no doubt most comfortable with their prayer life. As they journeyed with Jesus however, they noticed such a drastic contrast from their own prayer life that they approached the Teacher with the request, "Lord, teach us how to pray."

Jesus, from His vantage point as the Son of God, spent time with His Father observing many prayers that were not acceptable. He knew what would please His Father and was therefore able to counsel His followers on effective vs. ineffective prayer. His presentation on the subject forced His disciples to rethink prayer.

In what we today call the Lord's Prayer, Jesus laid out a model of prayer in three phases:

1. It is all about my Father and what He wants
2. Pray for yourself (within the context of phase 1)
3. The Father is worthy of what He is asking for

Effective prayer therefore requires the following assumptions:

- God is my father
- He knows what He is doing and does not need my counsel
- I am His Child
- I have some understanding of what He wants
- I agree with what He wants
- I am praying to pursue what He wants

If these assumption holds true, then I must ascribe to the following:

- He is at work and is committed to finishing it well
- He sees and thinks differently than I do, therefore whatever He does, He is right
- If what I want conflicts with what God wants, I must yield my position
- I need to trust that His plans for me are better than my own plans
- Prayer outside of this is trying to manipulate God to change His mind, robbing Him of His desires.

During this phase of training, the disciples were impressed with Jesus but did not understand Him or what He wanted. They were most excited to have a seat at the table. Praying therefore according to this model would not have made much sense to them then. It was not until after Jesus' ascension, that they began to understand layer by layer the unfolding of God's plan and their role in that plan. Their prayer then took on a different meaning.

Prayer for them was a time to yoke themselves with the Holy Spirit, allowing Him to reveal the Father's desires, then allowing themselves to be molded as tools necessary for the work. Even when the demands of the ministry grew at alarming rates, these leaders covenanted themselves to stay focused on reading the Word to understand God's work and then praying it through. As they were careful to hear and follow Jesus' instructions, He confirming the Word with accompanying signs (Mark 16:20). The Father was getting what He wanted.

IT IS ALL ABOUT THE FATHER AND WHAT HE WANTS

In teaching His disciples about prayer, Jesus helped them to see the fundamental block in the first phase is: *"Your kingdom come and your will be done in earth as it is done in heaven."*

He has promised to answer prayers and yet again He goes on record to say some prayers He will not hear. Apostle John, one of Jesus disciples, provided some insight to this truth in his epistle, 1 John 5 14-15: *This is the confidence we have in approaching God: that if we ask anything according to His will, He hears us. And if we know that He hears us-whatever we ask-we know that we have what we asked of Him.*

That suggests the secret to answered prayer is to be heard in the courts of heaven. According to John, being heard depends on praying per His will. Jesus Christ spent considerable time praying and fasting with full assurance of being heard. Jesus prayed, *Father, "I thank you that you have heard me. I knew that you always hear me, but I said this for the benefit of the people standing here, that they may believe that you sent me"* (John 11: 41-42). He had absolute confidence of being heard because He was praying in line with His Father's commands (will) for Him.

The battle in the garden of Gethsemane, rolls back the curtain and gives the reader a front row seat to hear the heart of the matter. Jesus as the Son of Man, had to decide with His own free will to drink from a bitter cup prepared for Him. That battle was with Jesus carnal nature (inherited as a seed of a woman) and His spirit man covenanted to fulfilling God's purposes.

It is obvious His carnal nature did not want to die. It sought other alternatives to bring about God's desired end. The spirit man was alive and purposed to stay the course. One of them had to die. Listen closely to the language of the travailing intercession in the garden (my own emphasis added for clarity). *This is a bitter cup. If it was up to me I would choose another path but Father, I am here to do your will. I am surrendering to doing it your way. Father, if you are willing, take this cup from me: yet not my will but yours be done. Luke 22:42.* When it was obvious that line of prayer was not producing results, He continued, *"my Father, if it is not possible for this cup to be taken away unless I drink it, may your will be done."*

God alone knows how many times I have come to that same place in prayer...knowing what God wants but not willing to submit to it. I often resolve to give The All-Knowing God my counsel, advising He who is called the Ancient of Days, how best He should manage His kingdom affairs. Master Jesus submitted to the wise counsel of His Father and trusted Him with the outcome. He fought an intense spiritual battle praying past His own feelings and desires. This is the daily war that rages in every believer. Notice Jesus needed help in this battle to finally submit his carnal nature. God sent an angel to minister to Him. With renewed strength, He was then able to battle to the point of breakthrough. Breakthrough was the point where his carnal nature died and the will of God prevailed. Jesus overcame. You too can overcome!

PRAY FOR YOURSELF (WITHIN THE CONTEXT OF PHASE 1)

Praying for yourself about your own needs must be done with the understanding and firm conviction that He already knows what we need before we ask (Matthew 6:8). As you pray, *"Give us this day our daily bread,"* you must know that He, as a faithful father, has a vested interest in making sure all His servants are equipped and provisioned to serve Him. If He know already what we need and is committed to be a faithful father, then we can confidently come to him to make petition on behalf of our needs and the needs expressed around us.

Your daily provisions are given to you so you can serve Him best. Notice here He requires a daily requisition. Every day we need to be reminded that God is our only source and that everything comes from Him. It brings us daily to His throne to connect with him. God Himself must derive joy from this daily communion time. Remember His counsel to disciples in John 15:4... *"Abide in Me and I in you."* That abiding is a daily position.

Understand that God's definition of daily bread goes far beyond the food we eat. Consider His response to the Canaanite woman in the region of Tyre and Sidon. This woman was crying out to Him for deliverance for her daughter. She was persistent with absolute confidence Jesus had authority over those demons tormenting her daughter. Jesus referred to what she was asking for as bread, saying it belongs to his children; not for those outside of the house.

Jesus call himself the bread of life (John 6:35), and the source of living water (John 4:14). As you come daily for provisions, be reminded He sent out the invitation asking you to come. He is expecting you and has your gifts in hands, but is more interested in your fellowship with Him. The object of your asking should always be for the fullness of His life expressed in you.

Your heart's desire

Be careful what you ask for. Do not to fooled into trusting your own heart. It will deceive you. Abundance of provisions often leads to independence from God! *Take delight in the Lord and He will give you the desire of your heart* (Psalms 37:4). Be careful: *For from within, out of the*

heart of men, proceed evil thoughts, adulteries, fornications, murders, thefts, covetousness, wickedness, deceit, lewdness, an evil eye, blasphemy pride, foolishness. All these evil things come from within and defile a man (Mark 7:21-23).

Listen carefully to how God said He will respond to prayer. Per this next scripture, He will search the heart then will reward you according to your conduct. *The heart is deceitful and above all things and beyond cure. Who can understand it? I the Lord search the heart and examine the mind, to reward each person according to their conduct, according to what their deeds deserve (Jeremiah 17:5).*

Forgiveness

This is one of the most critical and yet often over looked cause of blockages in prayer. In forgiveness, God is seeking to bring his people back to honoring the second great commandment: love your neighbor as yourself. This passage leads us into treating others the way we want to be treated. Forgive them in the same way we want to be forgiven.

Why is this important? Unforgiveness is one of the most powerful and effective tools use by the kingdom of darkness to frustrate the believers. Unforgiveness opens the door to woundedness, rebellion, and bitterness. Together, they infect man akin to a fatal illness which usually remains untreated because we have justifiable reasons to hold on to our hurt. Unforgiveness defiles the believer. Repentance therefore is more about your heart than the person who caused the offense.

Jesus taught us to ask the Father to forgive us on the level we forgive others. How many of you will boldly pray...Oh Lord treat me just the way I treat everyone else? He is the Righteous Judge who listens to the accusation the devil brings against you. When you forgive with all your heart, all the accusations are silenced. The sickness or oppression that came because of un-repentent unforgiveness now loses its legal ground and is easily addressed. Walking that out however, is easier said than done.

Jesus knows that it is not easy so He ask us to bring this to Him in prayer. Rather than offering some simple words to those who offended us, Jesus is saying bring it to Him and plead it out before His courts. Only He can break the power of woundedness and give us the power to love those who would otherwise offend. Breakthrough in this area means that you can not only forgive but bless those who hurt you. Fight for this position and win.

Continued in part 2 under the same heading