



Intimacy with God – Restoring the Relationship

Spiritual Exercise

¹⁴ For this reason I bow my knees to the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, ¹⁵ from whom the whole family in heaven and earth is named, ¹⁶ that He would grant you, according to the riches of His glory, to be strengthened with might through His Spirit in the inner man, ¹⁷ that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith; that you, being rooted and grounded in love, ¹⁸ may be able to comprehend with all the saints what *is* the width and length and depth and height— ¹⁹ to know the love of Christ which passes knowledge; that you may be filled with all the fullness of God.

²⁰ Now to Him who is able to do exceedingly abundantly above all that we ask or think, according to the power that works in us, ²¹ to Him *be* glory in the church by Christ Jesus to all generations, forever and ever. Amen. Ephesians 3:14-21

Prayer

Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, from whom the whole family in heaven and earth is named, I pray that You would grant us, according to the riches of Your glory, to be strengthened with might through Your Spirit in our inner man, that Christ may dwell in our hearts heart through faith; that we, being rooted and grounded in love, may be able to comprehend with all the saints what *is* the width and length and depth and height— to know Christ’s love which passes knowledge; that we may be filled with all the fullness of God.

Father, I pray knowing that You are able to do exceedingly abundantly above all that I can ask or think, according to the power that works in us. To You be glory in the church by Christ Jesus to all generations, forever and ever. Amen.

Introduction

God lost three things when mankind rebelled in the Garden: His reign, His habitation and His relationship with man. The Bible – His story – contains His plan for restoring what was lost. In this module, we will discuss the restoration of His relationship with man through prayer. There has never been a more critical time for the followers of Christ to search out this matter.

Call my people to repentance. Yea, call them to their knees for prayer and fasting, for confession and vigilance. For this is a strategic hour. The enemy is rejoicing already over his anticipated victories. Ye can disappoint him and thwart his evil designs if ye lay hold upon the throne of God in steadfast, believing prayer. (*Come Away My Beloved*, Francis Roberts)

This is a strategic hour – perhaps the most strategic hour in the history of the church. Something must be done. But what? “Only God knows” may have jumped into your mind. So why don’t we ask Him? I believe that is exactly what He intends for us to do.

Every Christian knows that the “effective fervent prayer of a righteous man avails much.” Prayer is powerful (at least it’s supposed to be), and nothing of heavenly value is possible without prayer. So why

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do we struggle to pray, both individually and corporately? Why are we so unsure about the effectiveness of our prayers? And why does it seem that so many of our prayers go unanswered? Why is our prayer life so ineffective, difficult and dissatisfying?

The first strategic move in every war is to cut off communications between the forces on the ground and the central command center. Consequently, much force and intelligence is focused on keeping the lines of communication open. The situation is no different in the war we are fighting against our greatest enemy. And we must be as diligent to defend what we have been given: The means for effective communication – and relationship – with God.

It is no coincidence that God has made prayer man's most powerful weapon in the battle for the kingdom. This is the place where God is most intimate in revealing His plans and encouraging His children. As we battle with Him in prayer, He establishes His relationship with us. There is no more important thing we can do in our search for joyful, Spirit-filled ministry.

Definition

Prayer (*deēsis*): need, indigence, want, privation, extreme poverty; a seeking, asking, entreating, entreaty to God or to man. From *deomai*: to want, lack; to desire, long for; to ask, beg; the thing asked for; to pray, make supplications. *Outline of Biblical Usage, BlueLetterBible.org*

Effective (*energeō*): to be operative, be at work, put forth power; to effect; to display one's activity, show one's self operative. *Outline of Biblical Usage, BlueLetterBible.org*

Scripture

(All but those noted are NKJV; Thomas Nelson, Inc.; footnotes excluded)

And this is eternal life, that they may know You, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom You have sent. John 17:3

All that we do with our mind, heart, soul and strength should be motivated primarily to know God the Father and His Son, Jesus Christ. Prayer is the place to start.

¹³ Is anyone among you suffering? Let him pray. Is anyone cheerful? Let him sing psalms. ¹⁴ Is anyone among you sick? Let him call for the elders of the church, and let them pray over him, anointing him with oil in the name of the Lord. ¹⁵ And the prayer of faith will save the sick, and the Lord will raise him up. And if he has committed sins, he will be forgiven. ¹⁶ Confess *your* trespasses to one another, and pray for one another, that you may be healed. The effective, fervent prayer of a righteous man avails much. ¹⁷ Elijah was a man with a nature like ours, and he prayed earnestly that it would not rain; and it did not rain on the land for three years and six months. ¹⁸ And he prayed again, and the heaven gave rain, and the earth produced its fruit. James 5:13-18

Searching Out the Matter

The Promises of Prayer

The promises of prayer laid out in the James text are enough to motivate any warm-blooded Christian (if we believe them): healing, forgiveness and power over nature. But there is more.

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Call to Me, and I will answer you, and show you great and mighty things, which you do not know.

Jeremiah 33:3

He will not only answer us, but show us the mysteries of His kingdom.

¹² Then you will call upon Me and go and pray to Me, and I will listen to you. ¹³ And you will seek Me and find Me, when you search for Me with all your heart.

Jeremiah 29:12, 13

God promises to listen to us and reveal Himself in prayer.

⁶ Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known to God; ⁷ and the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus.

Philippians 4:6, 7

The cure for anxiety, and the path to supernatural peace, is prayer.

If you then, being evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will *your* heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to those who ask Him!

Luke 11:13

Another great promise of prayer is the Holy Spirit – given to those that ask the Father for Him.

Effective Prayer Requires Hearing from God

Every follower of Christ that I know wants to see their prayers accomplish the thing for which they are praying. Most are righteous and many are fervent in their prayers. Yet, there is very little evidence of the outcomes James alludes to in the passage surrounding this text (e.g., healing, weather miracles). Perhaps it is a matter of praying effectively.

²¹ So Jesus answered and said to them, "Assuredly, I say to you, if you have faith and do not doubt, you will not only do what was done to the fig tree, but also if you say to this mountain, 'Be removed and be cast into the sea,' it will be done. ²² And whatever things you ask in prayer, believing, you will receive."

Matthew 21:21-22

One prerequisite of effective is "believing". But, how do I believe? Do I work up faith? No, for "faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the word of God." To believe, I must hear a word from the Lord about the object and objective of my prayer.

²² And whatever we ask we receive from Him, because we keep His commandments and do those things that are pleasing in His sight. ²³ And this is His commandment: that we should believe on the name of His Son Jesus Christ and love one another, as He gave us commandment.

1John 3:22-23

Many like to stop with the first phrase of these verses, treating God like a vending machine. But, as we can see, we must keep His commandments and do those things that are pleasing in His sight. How does that happen? It happens when I listen to what He would have me obey AND what will please Him.

¹⁴ Now this is the confidence that we have in Him, that if we ask anything according to His will, He hears us. ¹⁵ And if we know that He hears us, whatever we ask, we know that we have the petitions that we have asked of Him.

1John 5:14-15

Effective prayer begins with asking "according to His will", not my own. How do I know His will if it is not in hearing Him express it? Yes, it is clear that effective prayer requires an "ear" to hear God. This must be developed; and it will include moments of failure. We must remember that He is more interested in our attempts than in our success. He have grace to cover a multitude of mistakes.

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Effective Prayer Begins with Knowing God

Our common ideas regarding prayer are not found in the New Testament. We look upon prayer simply as a means of getting things for ourselves, but the biblical purpose of prayer is that we may get to know God Himself. It is the only way we can get in touch with the truth and the reality of God Himself.

To say that "prayer changes things" is not as close to the truth as saying, "Prayer changes *me* and then I change things." God has established things so that prayer, on the basis of redemption, changes the way a person looks at things. Prayer is not a matter of changing things externally, but one of working miracles in a person's inner nature.

Oswald Chambers (My Utmost for His Highest)

In his book, *The PAPA Prayer*, Larry Crabb discusses how many in the church turn to God in prayer as if He were Santa Claus sitting behind a vending machine. If we just put in the right change (our time) and push the right buttons (our requests), He will give us what we want. As Crabb laments, this approach has drawn us far from God's intention in our prayer time with Him – to establish a relationship.

That's right – believe it or not – God desires our relationship more than He desires to give us things. Our motivation in prayer must begin with a desire to know God. Only then do we find ourselves in a position to hear what He wants to give us, so we can pray for those things.

Practicing the PAPA Prayer

Once you get a feel for it, praying relationally comes as naturally as breathing. Relating to God is what we were destined to do. The most important thing is to be honest with God in each of the following areas.

Present yourself to God – Present authentically to God whatever you discover in yourself, whether good or bad. Are you happy, sad, or mad? Disappointed or depressed? Be who you are, where you are.

Let us therefore come boldly to the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy and find grace to help in time of need. Hebrews 4:16

Attend to how you are thinking of God – Attend to who God really is versus who you think God is or who you want Him to be.

Our Father in heaven, hallowed be Your name. Matthew 6:9

Purge yourself of anything that blocks your relationship with God – Purge whatever is blocking your intimacy with God by acknowledging without excuse or explanation the self-obsession that the Spirit chooses to reveal. Begin by surrendering to His reign.

Your kingdom come. Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven. Matthew 6:10

²³ Search me, O God, and know my heart; try me, and know my anxieties; ²⁴ and see if *there is any* wicked way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting. Psalm 139:23-24

If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us *our* sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. 1John 1:9

Approach God as the "first thing" in your life – approach God with confidence that what He loves to give you is what you want the most.

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³² For after all these things the Gentiles seek. For your heavenly Father knows that you need all these things. ³³ But seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added to you. Matthew 6:32-33

As Larry Crabb carefully argues, once we have found this place of intimacy with God, we are perfectly positioned to offer pure worship and thanksgiving, and to hear His voice in our intercession for others and petition for ourselves.

A Few Additional Thoughts

¹⁶ Rejoice always, ¹⁷ pray without ceasing, ¹⁸ in everything give thanks; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you. 1 Thessalonians 5:16-18

“Praying without ceasing” has also been called “practicing the presence of God”. It is desiring a continual relationship with the One that has all the answers. As Larry Crabb says, “Praying relationally comes as naturally as breathing. It is what we were destined to do.” Relational prayer is the key to prayer without ceasing.

But seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added to you. Matthew 6:33

Jesus also said that it was the Father’s good pleasure to give us the kingdom of God. We are to seek the very thing He intends to give. He is eager to give it.

²⁸ Come to Me, all *you* who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. ²⁹ Take My yoke upon you and learn from Me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. ³⁰ For My yoke *is* easy and My burden is light. Matthew 11:28-30

The relational approach to prayer is not a burden. If it seems to be, then back up and ask God to expose why this is so with you. Most likely, you are still seeing Him as something He is not, or you are not praying out of a motivation to know Him.

If you abide in Me, and My words abide in you, you will ask what you desire, and it shall be done for you. John 15:7

This verse has been added simply to draw your attention to the relationship of the abiding life and the life of relational prayer. We will share more about abiding in the future. For now, I suggest you pursue it through a word study, as the Lord leads.

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Assignment

Review your notes and the Scripture passages from this week's module. Share the ones that are most meaningful to someone you are discipling.

Practice the four day PAPA Prayer exercise, from the practical helps beginning on page 169.

Evaluate your prayer life – how *strong is your prayer life relative to each of the following categories (1=don't have a clue, 10=perfect)? Explain the extreme ratings (3 and below; 8 and above).*

- a) *Disciplined*
- b) *Relational*
- c) *Fervent*
- d) *Effective*
- e) *Persistent*
- f) *Self-transformational*
- g) *Expectant*

Develop a prayer plan – what are some immediate steps you can take to improve your prayer life?

Reduce your plan to a written covenant with God.

Begin a prayer journal – reflections on your experiences in prayer.

John Eldredge Devotion

Tuesday, August 16, 2011

Sin and Culture

Guys are unanimously embarrassed by their emptiness and woundedness; it is for most of us a tremendous source of shame, as I've said. But it need not be. From the very beginning, back before the Fall and the assault, ours was meant to be a desperately dependent existence. It's like a tree and its branches, explains Christ. You are the branches, I am the trunk. From me you draw your life; that's how it was meant to be. In fact, he goes on to say, "Apart from me you can do nothing" (John 15:5). He's not berating us or mocking us or even saying it with a sigh, all the while thinking, I wish they'd pull it together and stop needing me so much. Not at all. We are made to depend on God; we are made for union with him, and nothing about us works right without it. As C. S. Lewis wrote, "A car is made to run on gasoline, and it would not run properly on anything else. Now God designed the human machine to run on himself. He himself is the fuel our spirits were designed to burn, or the food our spirits were designed to feed on. There is no other."

This is where our sin and our culture have come together to keep us in bondage and brokenness, to prevent the healing of our wound. Our sin is that stubborn part inside that wants, above all else, to be independent. There's a part of us fiercely committed to living in a way where we do not have to depend on anyone—especially God. Then culture comes along with figures like John Wayne and James Bond and all those other "real men," and the one thing they have in common is that they are loners; they don't need anyone. We come to believe deep in our hearts that needing anyone for anything is a sort of weakness, a handicap.

([*Wild at Heart*](#), 121-122)