

WORD-ROOTED PRAYER AND WORSHIP - Keeping Your Heart Close To The Flame - Part four - Sunday, June 19th, 2022, 5:30 p.m.
Pastor Don Horban, Cedarview Community Church, Newmarket, ON

Last week we were looking at some of the structural foundations used by the Holy Spirit to build faith and confidence and power into our prayers. Particularly we focused on three: the ***direct promises of God in Scripture***, the ***passion of God to glorify his name***, and a ***heart and conscience tenderly obedient to the inner voice of the Holy Spirit*** as we pray. These principles need to work in ***concert*** on a consistent, growing basis. One can't be exercised at the expense of the others. God is faithful and will help with our ***weaknesses*** as long as our hearts are ***willing***.

Today we will consider ***three more*** foundational principles to cooperating with the Holy Spirit in the growth of faith. Continuing from last week, we commence with principle number four:

4) **FAITH GROWS AS WE PRAY FOR THE DIRECT FULFILMENT OF GOD'S WILL AS REVEALED IN SCRIPTURE**

There's a powerful example of this in the life of Daniel:

Daniel 9:1-3 - “In the first year of Darius the son of Ahasuerus, by descent a Mede, who was made king over the realm of the Chaldeans— [2] in the first year of his reign, I, Daniel, perceived in the books the number of years that, according to the word of the Lord to Jeremiah the prophet, must pass before the end of the desolations of Jerusalem, namely, seventy years. [3] Then I turned my face to the Lord God, seeking him by prayer and pleas for mercy with fasting and sackcloth and ashes.”

Faith begins to flex when we have certainty as to the appropriateness of the desire of our prayers. Are we certain our hearts line up with the heart of God Himself? Daniel’s experience and prayer in this text is helpful precisely at this point. His prayer is intense and fervent because he begins to feel the ***heart of God*** as he reads the words of the prophet Jeremiah.

He is passionate about what God says. This begins to fuel his intercession. Notice, he doesn't just say, "Well, God has already predicted this, so I'll just sit back and watch it happen." He wraps his own heart around his understanding of God’s Word. God’s Word ***feeds*** Daniel’s prayer. God's plans and intentions, when known and embraced, fuel faith, sharpen the focus of our prayers, and unite our hearts with His.

The lesson here is we need to be praying about God's revealed plans for our world. Do you study His Word enough to mingle it readily with your own requests? That's the trick. There are many examples: His announcement that ***the Gospel of the Kingdom would be preached in the whole world before the end came*** - or that ***the antichrist would come and if possible deceive the very elect*** - or that ***wars and fear would be on the increase***.

Or what about some of the ***warnings*** of what would come upon the earth. How do you pray when you have bubbling in the back of you mind that ***the love of many will grow cold***, or that people right in the church will be ***lovers of pleasure more than lovers of God?***

God has ***told*** us of these things in advance for a ***reason***. They are designed to top our prayer lists. They should lead us, not only into a fresh alertness to our ***own*** vulnerability, but to ***intercede*** for the weakness of the saints. Our tendency has been to write books and make movies about these things rather than using them to feed and turn the wheels of the church's prayer meetings.

5) PRAYING WITH A PREPARED MIND

Trust isn't an emotion at the command of our wills. To pray with faith one must trust God. To trust God one must **know** God. This is a knowledge that is born of **relationship**. To know God takes much time and effort. And the **kind** of effort required is different from the effort you expend in a gym or health club. The effort to know God is a **moral** effort. Particularly, it takes specific times of **separation of worldly concerns**. This is how **purity** is related to **knowing** in the spiritual realm. And this is how purity is related to **trusting** God in prayer.

I know this sounds terribly dated in our fast-paced world. But in another era this was considered common knowledge in the Christian prayer life: **Richard Baxter** ("A Christian Directory" - 1664) - ***"Clog not the body either with overmuch eating and drinking, or over-tiring labours. Rush not suddenly upon prayer, out of a crowd of other businesses, or before your last worldly cares or discourses be washed clean out of your minds."***

Those words should remind us of the warning Jesus gave in **Matthew 13:22** - **"As for what was sown among thorns, this is the one who hears the word, but the cares of the world and the deceitfulness of riches choke the word, and it proves unfruitful."**

The same concept is being pursued in Matthew 6:6 - "**But when you pray, go into your room and shut the door and pray to your Father who is in secret. And your Father who sees in secret will reward you.**"

The closet is only a symbol of ***shutting out - distancing oneself -*** from the things that normally draw out our affections and attention. One can't ***pray*** effectively until one ***trusts*** the One to whom one prays. And one can't learn to ***trust*** God until one ***knows*** God. And finally, one can't ***know*** God until one begins, at least gradually, to ***unknow*** (in terms of affectional attachment) ***all the other things that fill up our hearts.***

Psalm 46:10 - "**Be still, and know that I am God. I will be exalted among the nations, I will be exalted in the earth!**" We have all heard these words so frequently they don't even beg the question in our minds - ***why does knowing God automatically result in Him being exalted in the earth?***"

There is only one answer to that question, and it has everything in the world to do with our theme of prayer. As people really come to ***know*** God they will know what God wants. And they will also ***trust*** in His power to accomplish His purposes as we pray. Truly, getting ***still*** - knowing God deeply - will result in Him being exalted in all the earth.

6) PRAY WITH A HUMBLER HEART

Never enter serious prayer without a knowledge and understanding of your own heart. ***An inward look sets the heart at earnestness in prayer.*** It casts the soul more fully on Jesus Christ.

Psalm 19:12-13 - "Who can discern his errors? Declare me innocent from hidden faults. [13] Keep back your servant also from presumptuous sins; let them not have dominion over me! Then I shall be blameless, and innocent of great transgression."

Psalm 139:23-24 - "Search me, O God, and know my heart! Try me and know my thoughts! [24] And see if there be any grievous way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting!"

This is a different ***kind*** of praying, to be sure. It's not immediately intercessory in nature, but it still has incredible value. It ***starts*** the heart rolling in the direction of ***honesty*** with God. It breaks down the barriers of coldness and hypocrisy. In this way it ***paves the way*** for other forms of prayer to be formed on a foundation that is pleasing to God and effective. No ***other*** types of prayer will accomplish anything worth while until this house-cleaning praying is done.

Richard Baxter - "But when men are willful strangers to themselves, and never seriously look backwards or inwards, to see what is amiss and wanting, nor look forwards, to see the danger that is before them, no wonder if their hearts be dead and dull, and if they are as unfit to pray, as a sleeping man is to work."

Remember, prayer is God's chief means to keep men's hearts pure. If men don't fully and carefully sense the depths of their own need of cleansing, they will not pray long. And they certainly will never be accompanied by the presence and power of the Holy Spirit in their prayer lives.