

Going Deeper

WITH

A LIFE THAT MATTERS



Making Prayer Come to Life

BY RON HUTCHCRAFT

MAKING PRAYER COME TO LIFE

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For a lot of Christians, prayer is a word that doesn't come with very much excitement. People often find praying to be dull and difficult, and yet prayer is the most personal and important aspect of a Christian's life with Jesus Christ. Of all the things we do as Christians, prayer is the key that unlocks all the riches of life's most important relationship. "For the eyes of the Lord are on the righteous and his ears are attentive to their prayer" (1 Peter 3: 12).

Misconceptions About Prayer

Most people have very little understanding of what prayer really is, which leads to many misconceptions. It is important to know the truth. The following are some common misconceptions about prayer:

- **Prayers are "said."** A prayer is not a religious quotation that is repeated each time someone prays. When a Christian talks to God, the words at that very moment should come from their heart, making each prayer lifted up to God unique.
- **There is a special language for prayer.** Sometimes when people start to pray, something happens to their voice and they use vocabulary they don't use any other time. When you've talked to them a hundred times in the past, they've never said words like that. Prayer is not out of reach, it does not require a new language, a new tone of voice, or a new posture. Prayer should be very natural.
- **God is the Cosmic Genie.** A lot of people feel that God is there to call upon like a genie in a bottle when they need a wish granted, need a mess cleaned up, or need a problem solved. They underestimate the power of prayer, and it's no wonder they aren't interested in a prayer group or a prayer meeting if God is only a cosmic genie to come to solve their problems. Our prayer life should not be centered around us.
- **Prayer is a religious duty.** People put prayer in a category with many things they feel are religious duties. People have a problem with reading their Bible and sharing Jesus with others, and they put prayer in the category of "I've got to do it." When you feel like you're required to do something, it tends to lose its excitement.

Knowing the misconceptions about prayer will help you begin to make prayer come to life.

Diseases That Afflict Prayer

There are many diseases that afflict prayer. Prayer often gets sick from the disease of generality. It's interesting how our prayers often don't aim at anything very specific. "Lord, bless the missionaries." "Lord, give us a blessing." "Lord, help our church." Help our church what? Bless which

missionary? What in the world is a blessing anyway? Perhaps your prayers have died of generality and people have listened to your prayers and said, "It's a useless exercise. When I hear them pray, they don't say anything."

Another disease that can afflict prayer is predictability. Maybe some people would say, "If you have heard one prayer, you have heard them all." Maybe sometimes while sitting in prayer meetings your heart isn't where it should be. Maybe you're listening cynically saying, "Ah ha, here's old mister so and so." You know what he will pray before he even prays it because he always prays it. Plow new ground in your prayer constantly so that it won't become routine and meaningless.

Prayer can be afflicted by smallness. It's easy to ask God for little things so we won't be disappointed in case He doesn't give it to us. Maybe there's no risk in your praying or no adventure in it, and you don't ask God for things that are beyond your reach. You just ask Him for the little things. In fact, sometimes you couldn't even tell if He answered the prayer anyway. Is it any wonder that that kind of prayer is boring when it's that small?

The other thing that prayers die of is dishonesty. Sometimes we put on a mask when we pray and we're not praying about who we truly are. It isn't how we usually sound, and it isn't what really concerns us. We're not praying about what we really feel. Prayer is sometimes a masquerade party where we never get close to people. A prayer meeting ought to be a place where you get deeply in touch with the other lives in that room. Is that what prayer meetings are, or is it where we listen to each other's speeches to God?

Get away from the diseases that afflict prayer and help your prayers come to life.

Why We Pray

Prayer comes to life when you realize that it is the act of consciously entering the personal presence of God through His Son, Jesus. The issue is not what you're asking for; the issue is who you're with. Before you pray, take a little time for silence to mentally prepare to enter the Throne Room of the King. Clear your mind and picture yourself with God...with Jesus. Our Heavenly Father wants to hear from you. The good news is that He's listening!

Prayer is not meaningful primarily because you have a request on your mind. It's meaningful and important because it's your opportunity to go to the Throne Room of the King, climb into His lap, and have a conversation with Him. Your time of prayer should be reverent because He is King, but it is intimate because as a believer, He is your Father. The beginning of prayer coming to life is to realize who you are spending time with. When you are in prayer, you are spending time with Jesus—your rescuer.

The following are some reasons why we pray:

- **To give God a green light.** Prayer is the process by which we give God a green light to come into an area of our life. God operates on an

"invitation only" basis in your life. Prayer is not to tell Him about your feelings, your needs, or your problems so that He'll learn about them. It is rather that prayer is the green light that says, "God, I am opening this up as territory for You to come into."

- **To see things God's way.** As you talk to God about your deep personal feelings, do you know what changes? Not the situation...but you. The answer to prayer turns out to be that He changes your response to the situation instead of changing the actual situation. The purpose of prayer is that as you spend time with God, you start to see things His way.
- **To unload our burdens.** When you carry around the needs of a growing family, financial concerns, and the needs of many other people, sometimes you feel like you could collapse under the load. 1 Peter 5: 7 says, "Cast all your anxiety on Him because He cares for you." Prayer is the process of giving everything you care about to God.
- **To make our relationship with Jesus more personal.** Reading the Bible gives you His promises, you represent Him as you share Him with others, and going to church helps you learn about Him, but through prayer you are with Him. Without that personal contact through prayer, Christianity becomes very impersonal and cold.
- **To look for God in our life.** Sometimes God is answering a prayer and you don't know it because you're not looking for it. Your time with Him in prayer sensitizes you and helps you to go out in this world looking for His intervention.
- **To affect the outcome.** There is a connection between your asking and His doing. Your praying affects the great sovereign plans of God.

It's amazing how some people depersonalize prayer. They say, "I'm struggling with it. I'm not sure I believe in it anymore." Christianity isn't an it, it's a He. They are actually saying, "I don't believe Him anymore. I'm struggling with Him." Prayer is what makes Christianity personal. Pray, because there can be no relationship without that personal time with Jesus.

Things We Think We Shouldn't Talk to God About

Sometimes there are things we think we shouldn't talk to God about. We don't talk to God about things we think are too big, too small, or too dirty. Sometimes the things in our life are so big and out of control we forget the obvious, we forget to talk to God about it. Sometimes we say, "Oh, this is nothing. God is out there working on a galaxy somewhere. He's not going to have time for my little problem."

Luke 12:7 of God's Word says, "The very hairs of your head are all numbered. Don't be afraid; you are worth more than many sparrows." You don't even care about or know the numbers of hairs on your head. God cares and He knows. There's nothing too small and nothing too big to pray about. Often

when we have something we're ashamed of because we have done something wrong, we run from God and make the same mistake Adam and Eve did. When you do something wrong, don't run from God; run to Him!

You can come to God with your honest and specific feelings. Sometimes we feel that if we came to God and said "God, I am really angry," we would be hit with lightning or something bad would happen. Actually, He already knows your feelings. Prayer is what allows Him into that part of your life; that's the green light and the open door. "Lord, I'm disappointed. Lord, I'm discouraged. Lord, I don't feel like You're there anymore. Lord, I feel like You've forgotten me. Lord, I'm so excited about this opportunity. Lord, this is so good that I'm afraid it isn't going to really happen. Lord, I'm scared to death of this."

Tell Him how you really feel. Is it you that's praying or some caricature of you? You can be yourself when you talk to Him. Be open before Him with your thoughts, fears, and desires. You can talk to God about anything!

What to Pray About

Many people don't know what they should talk to God about. Prayers can be very different, but they're all prayers going into the presence of our Heavenly Father. It's an exciting thing to begin to see prayer as talking to God on behalf of your own needs and the needs of others.

When you're with someone, you try to think of what you have in common with them and what you should talk about. When you're with an athlete, you talk about current sports headlines. When you're with a mechanic, you ask them a car question or talk about the car that you wish you had. When you're with someone who is interested in current events, you might talk about politics. What do you talk to God about?

These four sentences make up the heart of what God is waiting to hear from us:

- **"Thank You God."** Philippians 4:6 says, "With thanksgiving, present your requests to God." You get the proper perspective on the needs that haven't been met by starting out by saying, "Thank You."
- **"I'm sorry."** Throughout the day, we often do things that aren't pleasing to God. Prayer is saying, "I'm sorry, God, for the things that made You unhappy today."
- **"I love You."** You might not understand Him, know why He has allowed something to happen, or know what He is doing in your life, but wrap your arms around Him and say, "I love You, Father."
- **"Please God."** Offer your requests to God after you've said "Thank You", "I'm sorry", and "I love You." Bring your personal requests to God as well as requests on behalf of other people.

If you find it hard to honestly tell Him you love Him, remember why we should love Him. Love Him because He first loved us and gave His Son's life for us to have a forever relationship with Him. In your prayers, thank Him, tell him what you are sorry for, tell Him how much you love Him, and then bring your needs and the needs of others to Him. God wants to hear from you.

The Importance of Praying in Jesus' Name

Maybe you've always been told to pray in Jesus' name, but you're not really sure why or what that means. Jesus says in John 14:13-14, "I will do whatever you ask in my name, so that the Son may bring glory to the Father. You may ask me for anything in my name, and I will do it." We're told that when we come to Him, we should come in Jesus' name. Do you even think about it when you do it? Most of us don't even think about it. We just say, "In Jesus' name, amen."

When you pray, the beauty or the agony of the prayer isn't what matters. It's never good enough for a Holy God. The name of Jesus brings heaven and earth together because He lives there, but came here. In essence when you say "in Jesus' name", you are saying "Father, this is a prayer from Your child, with Jesus' signature."

As you pray and you say "Thank you", "I'm sorry", "I love you", and "please", wrap all that up in Jesus' name. Praying in Jesus' name is also what gives you authority. When you pray, it ought to be "in Jesus' name" because at the name of Jesus every knee shall bow. That's why prayer is exciting!

Make specific requests to God in Jesus' name. When's the last time you asked God to do something only He could do? That's living dangerously to go out on a spiritual limb and say, "God, I'm throwing everything I've got on You. You're the only One who could do this and I'm expecting it to happen. I've come to You in Jesus' name."

Start to come into your Father's presence and trust God for things only He can do, and then watch when those things start to happen. Make prayer come to life.

Answers to Prayer

There are three possible answers a father can give to the requests of his children. One is "Yes," one is "No," and the other is "Wait." There are times in life when we're ready to make a decision and go for it. We say, "God, this is what I want" and have no idea where that decision would lead us. God says, "No. Someday you'll understand."

You will get an answer to your prayers, and the answer you receive really depends on the following:

- **God's perfect timing and will.** God knows what is best for you in each season of your life. He knows your future.

- **Keeping at it.** God wants you to continually be in prayer and to present your requests to Him. He knows your thoughts and your needs, but He wants you to talk to Him about them.
- **Getting sin out of the way.** If there is sin between you and God, that may be why your prayer hasn't been answered. Ask God to reveal anything that might be hindering your prayers.
- **A consistently growing relationship with God.** As you grow in life's most important relationship, you will learn more about God through His Word and see His direction in your life.
- **Clearing up misunderstandings with other Christians.** Before you come to God and present your requests to Him, make sure that things are right between you and others in your life.
- **Expecting God to do it.** Expect prayer to be a method of getting things done and for things to change. As Ephesians 3:20 says, God "is able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine, according to His power that is at work within us."

Is prayer meaningful and exciting to you, or just a matter of repeating words? Make prayer come to life by knowing the misconceptions about prayer, diseases that afflict prayer, why we pray, things we think we shouldn't talk to God about, what to pray about, the importance of praying in Jesus' name, and the answers to prayer. Of all the things we are asked to do in our relationship with God—read our Bible, share Jesus with others, and go to church—prayer is the most personal ingredient.

About Ron Hutchcraft

Ron Hutchcraft is committed to communicating the Gospel of Jesus Christ to the lost in their language and to motivating and equipping believers to communicate Christ to the lost in their world. In all he does, he seeks to reach the lost and the young with the life-changing message of Jesus Christ.

As President of Ron Hutchcraft Ministries, Ron and his team specialize in developing authentic, relevant, and creative tools to reach people with the message of Jesus. A veteran of over 48 years of youth and family work, Ron has presented the Gospel across North America and around the world. Mr. Hutchcraft is also involved in work with Native Americans, and is founder of the On Eagles' Wings® Native leadership program.

For more information about Ron Hutchcraft Ministries, visit www.Hutchcraft.com.

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