

# LET'S TALK



## FAITH : BELIEVE GOD

*Below are the contributions that came in this Sunday's meeting and part 3 of the notes on prayer.*



## CONTRIBUTIONS FROM SUNDAY

### Words from Sunday's Meeting

Colossians 2:1

My goal is that they may be encouraged in heart and united in love, so that they may have the full riches of complete understanding, in order that they may know the mystery of God, namely, Christ,

Saw a picture of a dad playing with his kids and felt such a release of joy and fun as he tickled them, threw them up in the air and caught them, playing games with them. Just felt God wants to infuse us with joy and freedom in him... where we are safe to let our perfect Father love on us the way he longs to do.

I was reminded of the old way of starting a fire, when it takes time and effort if getting the spark then fanning the flame and eventually the fire is lit. We are so used to a quick strike of a match to create a fire. I felt that God was saying we need to go back to the basics like prayer and the word, things will take time and effort but the end result is a amazing fire.



## Part Three

### Considerations in Praying

There are a number of things we need to consider when it comes to praying. Here are several important considerations taken from Wayne Grudem's Systematic Theology.

#### 1. God's will

We spoke a bit about God's will in the previous part and now we will expand on this point. We see the example of Jesus in Matthew 26:39

*"My Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from me; nevertheless, not as I will, but as you will."*

And Jesus does teach us to pray in **Matthew 6:10** "Your will be done".

#### **But how can we know God's will when we pray?**

There are a few aspects to consider when it comes to praying the will of God.

**Firstly**, we affirm that God does have a will. Then, not only do we acknowledge that He has a will, but we acknowledge that we would rather have His will done than ours. This is praying, "God do it your way, do it the way that is best according to you, not what seems best to me."

**Secondly**, we can sometimes know what God's will is. The Bible reveals a lot about God's will on many points. Pray that what God says He wants to be done will, in fact, be done and you will see Him answer.

**Thirdly**, there is the notion that there will be times when we won't know what God's will is. God knows certain things we don't know, in this case we may well say at the end of our request: *"If this pleases you..."*

At this point praying for wisdom is also warranted.

**James 1 : 5 - 8** *“If any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask God, who gives generously to all without reproach, and it will be given him. But let him ask in faith, with no doubting, for the one who doubts is like a wave of the sea that is driven and tossed by the wind. For that person must not suppose that he will receive anything from the Lord; he is a double-minded man, unstable in all his ways. We should not discount personal relationship in this regard.”*

The Holy Spirit may well change our heart or show us an aspect of a matter we never realised before and we come to pray with more clarity.

## **2. Faith**

Mark 11 : 22 - 24 *“And Jesus answered them, “Have faith in God. Truly, I say to you, whoever says to this mountain, ‘Be taken up and thrown into the sea,’ and does not doubt in his heart, but believes that what he says will come to pass, it will be done for him. Therefore I tell you, whatever you ask in prayer, believe that you have received it, and it will be yours.”*

This teaching from Jesus is both wonderful and deeply challenging. The first question we would have here is certainly, “How do I get faith to a level where it gets everything it asks?” Faith is a simple yet complex subject. The biggest problem is not understanding what it is but *actually having it*.

Jesus’ first sentence gives us a clue to this momentous promise. He doesn’t tell us to have faith alone, as if He were telling us to get a mystical pouch of faith from the realm of spiritual things and when we get it things will begin to happen. He is teaching a fundamental principle of faith and praying. The principle is: “Talk to your Father when you are talking and keep in mind and heart exactly what that means.”

You are talking to GOD. He keeps His promises, He is majestically powerful... and so on. Jesus says Have faith in God. Believe in God, trust God, don’t trust your prayer ability, trust the one who told you to ask and promises to listen and act. Trust God, not promises or prayer.

Let’s look more closely to verse 24. Jesus says, *‘...believe that you have received it’* not *‘will receive it’* as some translations put it. Clearly this is not something we can muster up or work up, we will be simply lying to ourselves.

How can we really know we have received it? The answer is when He tells us that we have. Many devoted Christians speak of God at times giving a sense of assurance that he has agreed to grant our request. So we must remember that Jesus isn't saying that we need to have something that seems impossible. This is not the case. When God tells you that he is going to answer it, it is answered and you will receive it. Believe Him and it will happen as He said.

### 3. Obedience

**Psalm 66 : 18** *If I had cherished iniquity in my heart, the Lord would not have listened.*

**1 Peter 3 : 12** *For the eyes of the Lord are on the righteous, and his ears are open to their prayer. But the face of the Lord is against those who do evil.*

Displeasing God will hinder prayer. Prayer is enjoying a personal connection with God and displeasing Him will hurt progress.

Notice the merciful words in this Psalm, like the word 'cherished'. We do not need to be sinless and perfect before we can pray and expect answers to our prayers. If this were the case no one other than Jesus could have prayer answered. (And in any case, as believers we are 'in Christ'.) A person who still sins but doesn't want to and wishes it would happen less and less can expect to have their prayer listened to. If you love sin, don't want to leave it and find it pleasing, God says He will not answer your prayer. Put positively, the more we live like God wants us to, the more we will see answers to prayers.

### 4. Confession

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

We don't need to ask for forgiveness of sin every time we pray in order to get to heaven one day. For the Christian, confession of sin is for keeping our day-by-day relationship with God real and alive. A person certainly cannot commit obvious sin and carry on relating to God as if He doesn't see and doesn't care. We are to tell him we were sorry and ask Him not to hold it against us knowing that Jesus provides the means for forgiveness every time we ask.

**1 John 2 : 1 - 2** *My little children, I am writing these things to you so that you may not sin. But if anyone does sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the*

righteous. He is the propitiation for our sins, and not for ours only but also for the sins of the whole world.

Sometimes we may even pray like David in **Psalm 19:12**

*“...cleanse thou me from secret faults” (KJV).*

## 5. Forgiveness

**Mark 11 : 25** *And whenever you stand praying, forgive, if you have anything against anyone, so that your Father also who is in heaven may forgive you your trespasses.*

As with forgiveness of sin, Jesus does not have initial salvation in mind here. If we view things in terms of our relationship with God, this makes sense. When we come to pray and relate with God we are asking Him to hold nothing against us. But if we hold bitterness or have a desire to harm anyone in our heart, prayer will become difficult because God will withhold the experience of sweet fellowship from us until we forgive those we are harbouring something against.

## 6. Humility

**James 4 : 6** *But he gives more grace. Therefore it says, “God opposes the proud, but gives grace to the humble.”*

Anyone who wishes to have any close relationship with the God of the Bible needs to know that God is the only God. He tolerates no rivals and never will. Humility is essential for effective prayer because pride displeases God.

## 7. At the right time

When God takes His time over issues it can be difficult for us. God does not live by the clock as we do. He does know more than us and doesn't have any hidden agendas. He will give us what is right, when the time is right, and only then. When He knows the time is right, it is right, no matter how we perceive the situation. All facts considered (and we don't know all the facts) God takes the right amount of time, every time.

- Genuine prayer may pray the same thing more than once:

**Mark 14 : 39** *“And again [Jesus] went away and prayed, saying the same words.”*

- Prayer may be asking more than once for the same thing:

**2 Corinthians 12 : 8** *“Three times I pleaded with the Lord about this, that it should leave me.”*

- Prayer is an ongoing privilege

**1 Thessalonians 5 : 17** *“...pray without ceasing,”*

You may have heard the saying “P.U.S.H.” – Pray Until Something Happens. This is true. But there is also a concern here. Prayer is not a mechanical begging and pleading with a tight fisted, frustrated God who when pestered enough will relent and give us reluctantly what we ask for. If this comes to mind when you think of P.U.S.H., it’s wrong.

God will answer when the time is right. He is a patient, perfect, and lavishly generous Father who simply knows more than we do.

Scripture presents the principle that the Father welcomes prayer over and over again even in the same words and for the same thing. When the time is right, He will answer or act.

## 8. Earnestness

**Hebrews 5 : 7** *In the days of his flesh, Jesus offered up prayers and supplications, with loud cries and tears, to him who was able to save him from death, and he was heard because of his reverence.*

You can almost feel Daniel’s passion and tension in **Daniel 9:19**

*“O Lord, hear; O Lord, forgive. O Lord, pay attention and act. Delay not, for your own sake, O my God, because your city and your people are called by your name.”*

When we truly begin to see and understand what God sees it will only be natural to sometimes pray with intense emotion. If this emotion isn’t ‘worked up’ by ourselves, it can be a sign of a real work of the Holy Spirit in helping our prayers.

Emotional intensity in prayer should not be faked. An outward show carries no power in prayer. Emotion is not a sign of power, just as no emotion is also not a sign of power. The important emphasis is on relationship and you working out your own prayer with the Holy Spirit.

## 9. Waiting

**Psalms 27 : 14** *Wait for the LORD; be strong, and let your heart take courage; wait for the LORD!*

Wayne Grudem gives this illustration in his book, Systematic Theology:

*“If I wish to invite someone for dinner there are various ways I can do so. Firstly, I can issue a vague, general invitation: “It would be nice to have you come over*

*for dinner sometime". Almost no one will come to dinner based on this kind of invitation alone. This is rather like the vague general prayer, 'God please bless all my aunts and uncles and all the missionaries, Amen'.*

*"Secondly, I could make a specific but hurried and impersonal kind of invitation, 'Fred, can you come to dinner Friday?'- but as soon as the words are out of your mouth you rush away, leaving Fred rather confused and puzzled with little time to respond. This is like many of our prayer requests. We simply speak words to God as if the very act of voicing the words without any heart involvement in what we are saying will bring an answer from God. But this kind of prayer forgets that prayer is a relationship between two persons, God and me.*

*"There is a third kind of invitation, one that is heartfelt, personal and specific. After waiting until I am sure I have Fred's full attention, I can look him directly in the eye and say, 'Fred, Margret and I would really love for you to come to dinner at our home on Friday night at 6. Could you come?' – and then, continuing to look at him, wait patiently while he decides how to answer. He knows from my tone, demeanour, timing and general attitude that I'm talking to him as a friend. My waiting for an answer shows my earnestness, my sense of expectancy and my respect for him as a friend. This is the kind of prayer of an earnest Christian who comes before God, gains a sense of His presence, earnestly pours out a request before Him and waits for a sense of assurance for an answer."*

This is not to say that hurried prayer is wrong. Some situations in the Bible show a hurried prayer may well be answered, but that would be the exception.

## **10. Privacy**

Examples and teaching in Scripture encourage us to pray alone or in a place where we are free from 'onlookers', distractors and distractions.

**Luke 5 : 16** *But [Jesus] would withdraw to desolate places and pray.*

Prayer in this way is allowed to be totally honest, free from pretence and hypocrisy.

## **11. With others**

There are numerous examples of people praying together in Scripture. The Lord's Prayer is mostly in plural language, "Give us our daily bread, forgive us our trespasses".

Praying with others can be wonderfully liberating and powerful. We can also learn from those who pray with us.

In talking of the church's authority being expressed, Jesus says,

*“Again I say to you, if two of you agree on earth about anything they ask, it will be done for them by my Father in heaven. For where two or three are gathered in my name, there am I among them.”* **Matthew 18:19–20**

This text alone should make all Christians want to pray with others. For many, praying aloud with others is scary. Overcoming fears and concerns about praying aloud can be done. The worst is when we let our fears drive us from entering the blessing of a group or church prayer meeting. Just remember, even though prayer may be with others, it is still God you are talking to. Those who do it for a show have lost God's intention for this.

## **12. Fasting**

The New Testament does not specifically require that we fast or set definite times to fast, but Jesus assumes we will – “And when you fast” (Matthew 6:16). There are also many examples of prayer being linked to fasting.

### **Judging from the Scriptures there are a few reasons for fasting:**

1. You long to have a closer relationship with the Lord.  
Fasting can bring a deeper connection with God.
2. You wish to give more focussed time to prayer.
3. A situation has so affected you that you cannot think of eating and simply want to talk to God about it, forgetting about food. This is a common reason for fasting in the Old Testament.

### **A few other comments regarding fasting:**

1. It is by no means a way to ‘twist God's arm’ to get an answer quicker.  
God won't be manipulated, even with good intentions.
2. Not everyone can fast. Medical reasons may prevent some from doing so.
3. You may fast things other than food.
4. The blessing you receive from fasting may not happen immediately.

It is good for every Christian to develop in this area of prayer.

### 13. Unanswered prayer

We will have to realise that as long as God is God and we are people, there will be some unanswered prayers.

This subject takes up the pages of many books on prayer. A few comments will suffice for this study.

1. Have you ever considered how terrible it would be if God did answer all your prayers? Who would you have married? That car may have put you into serious debt; and fame at the wrong time would kill you. Actually... thank God for unanswered prayers!
2. An unanswered prayer is in fact as deliberate an answer to prayer as an answer. It may very not be the answer we were hoping for, but is an answer nonetheless. Consider Paul's answer to asking to have his problem removed in **2 Corinthians 12:9** *"But he said to me, "My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness."* In other words – "no."
3. By leaving a prayer unanswered, God is doing other work in the background in our lives, that while we may not know what it is, it is valuable beyond measure. In his book on Prayer, R.T. Kendall gives the example of Lazarus and Mary and Martha. He says that Jesus was clear in **John 11:14-15**:

*"Then Jesus told them plainly, "Lazarus has died, and for your sake I am glad that I was not there, so that you may believe."*

Jesus didn't respond to their request because He was going to teach them an invaluable lesson in faith, which was that we must believe without seeing.

Would they believe what Jesus had already said in **John 11:4**: "This illness will not end in death" without seeing it happen the obvious way?

Would they still believe His words?

*"Unanswered prayer is the greatest thing that could happen to us. This way we get what God says we need. It is always better than what we thought we wanted."*

R.T. Kendall.

It's not always the major things that help us a great deal when it comes to prayer. A true thought here or there can help a great deal for someone on the journey of learning to pray more effectively. These points will mean something to those who are trying. In the end, there is only one way to grow in prayer and that is to pray.

