

## Session 4 - Intercession: Partnership with God

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### 1. Defining Prayer

- a. One of the issues with the subject of prayer is that its size and sheer vastness has made it ambiguous and hard to define. Sometimes the most basic ideas and concepts are actually the hardest to give clear definition to.
- b. If you were to ask most people they would define prayer as simply “talking to God” or possibly as “asking God for things”.
- c. My issue with each of these definitions and many others like it is that they are extremely vague and almost mysterious. They do not lead anyone into an actual understanding of what prayer is, what takes place when we pray, and what is required to actually engage in prayer.
- d. While these definitions do communicate the general idea of prayer I don't believe they effectively communicate the core realities of prayer.
  - i. Think about all the people you talk to in a day. Your spouse, your kids, your coworkers or your boss. What about your sibling, an old acquaintance that you randomly run into, or the barista at Caribou.
  - ii. You talk to all of these people on any given day but surely you talk to them completely differently. The conversation you have with the random person at the grocery store is completely different than the one you have with your spouse. Both are conversations, both involve talking, but they are nothing alike when you go just an inch below the surface.
  - iii. This is my main contention with defining prayer as “talking to God”. Are you talking to the barista or your spouse? By using such a simplistic definition of prayer we are left wondering what exactly is supposed to take place.
- e. There are two main purposes in prayer that will lead us to a simple yet more nuanced definition to what prayer is and what is required to pray.
  - i. Knowledge of God - The first priority in prayer is quite simply growing in the knowledge of God and love for Jesus. As we pray we grow deeper in our understanding of who He is and what He is like. This is why the knowledge of God and the revelation of Christ are the foundation of prayer.
  - ii. Getting Answers - Secondly, we pray to receive things from God. We need healing, deliverance, or grace in a particular area of life. We pray so God will bless us with His grace or pour out His Spirit on someone that we care about.
- f. We also know from previous sessions that prayer primarily takes place through speaking words. We take what God has said and revealed to us and we speak them back to Him through either singing or simply with our speech.
- g. Put together we can come up with a deeper richer definition to what prayer is that will help us grow in prayer by giving us a better target to shoot for.

h. I define prayer as the following:

*“The connecting and exchanging of hearts between God and man primarily through the speaking of words.”*

- i. This may not be the single best definition of prayer ever written, however I do believe that it encompasses much of what prayer is.
  - i. What happens when we wrongly define prayer we will subsequently wrong approach prayer.
  - ii. As long as we think of prayer as primarily about getting things we need or want from God rather than thinking of prayer as our way to connect with the Person Of Christ we will end up becoming frustrated, burnout, and bitter at God.
    - 1. Prayer must be primarily about the connecting of hearts and not the receiving of things. Most people know of a child whose father is too busy for him so he buys his child anything he or she wants.
    - 2. The child gets anything and everything they want. But all of their receiving of gifts is void of real relationship with their father.
    - 3. No one esteemed that father as a someone to emulate or look up to. No we loath that person and feel sorry for the child. We don't think of that man as a good father but the exact opposite; universally he is considered a terrible father.
    - 4. Yet this is how many think of prayer. They want God to be that father that lavishes gifts and desires on them regardless of the heart connection.
    - 5. While that child will have fun with their toys and gifts for a while they will ultimately become depressed and growing bitter at their father but in all their getting they didn't get what their heart truly ached for, relationship with their father.
    - 6. And this is how so many Christians burnout in ministry and in prayer. Although they receive many gifts their hearts remain disconnected from God and a few years down the road that empty feeling in their heart sets in and they realize that all they really wanted and needed this whole time was God Himself.
  - j. When I examine how great men and women of Scripture and history prayed a number of things jump out at me that speak to what prayer is comprised of. Focusing on these core realities helps remove some of the ambiguity when trying to define prayer.
  - k. E.M. Bounds spoke of these two elements of prayer the best when he said:

*“Prayer has to do with the entire man. Prayer takes a man's whole being, mind, soul, and body. It takes the whole man to pray, and prayer affects the entire man in its gracious results.”*<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> E.M. Bounds: *“The Essentials of Prayer”*.

*“Tis not enough to bend the knee, and words of prayer to say; the heart must with lips agree, or else we do not pray.”<sup>2</sup>*

## 2. Heart Connection (Knowledge of God)

- a. The first thing and maybe the most important dynamic to prayer is the connecting of our heart with the heart of God.
- b. Without this connection the essence of prayer is really lost. It becomes nothing but a mundane, routine, spiritual discipline that is dreaded by most.
- c. This connection is the foundation of what all prayers, petitions, and intercession is built upon. This heart connection is the ultimate goal of the Holy Spirit. His primary job is to usher our hearts into divine interaction with the heart of God.
- d. It was the lack of connection that caused Jesus to rebuke the Pharisees when He began to teach on prayer.

*“And when you pray, you shall not be like the hypocrites. For they love to pray standing in the synagogues and on the corners of the streets, that they may be seen by men. Assuredly, I say to you, they have their reward. But you, when you pray, go into your room, and when you have shut your door, pray to your Father who is in the secret place; and your Father who sees in secret will reward you openly. **And when you pray, do not use vain repetitions as the heathen do. For they think that they will be heard for their many words.** Therefore do not be like them. For your Father knows the things you have need of before you ask Him.” - Matthew 6:5-8*

- e. The Pharisees were speaking the Scriptures over and over. Declaring them, praying them, speaking them to God. The rituals and prescribed methods of prayer were very strict in that day. They prayed the Torah, asking God for blessings, deliverance, and the salvation that was promised.
  - i. It is entirely possible to speak the words of Christ in prayer without ever actually connecting to God on the heart level in a way that leads to true and powerful prayer.
  - ii. What is the difference between a man saying "I love you" to his wife and a parrot who can repeat what it has heard? The difference is the heart connection we are talking about.
  - iii. Even parrots can speak empty words but heart connection only comes through relationship.
- f. But they especially cried out for the promised Messiah, the Son of David, who would restore the Kingdom of God to Israel. Yet Jesus, who was the answer to their prayers, rebukes them openly. Why?
- g. Although they said the right things, declared the right promises, and surely had faith in God for the Messiah to come, their hearts were cold and distant from God. They spoke nothing but empty words and vain babblings into the air.

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<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*

- i. Again this is why we must think about prayer as more than simply speaking to God. Devout first century Jews were far more rigorous in their prescribed prayers and had a far richer understanding of the Scriptures than most of us today do.

*“You search the Scriptures, for in them you think you have eternal life; and these are they which testify of Me. But you are not willing to come to Me that you may have life.” - John 5:39-40*

- h. Jesus also emphasized His desire for heart connection calling it the “first” and the “great” commandment in His kingdom. A heart alive in love is His first priority in your life and it is also how He defines success and greatness within His kingdom.

*“Jesus said to him, ‘You shall love the Lord your God **with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind.**’ This is the first and great commandment.” - Matthew 22:37*

- i. Just like a father longs to connect with his child’s heart so our heavenly Father yearns to connect with ours. He longs for something much more than a superficial relationship.
- j. The very death of Christ upon the cross speaks to the fact that He wanted much more than words from our lips, He wanted the hearts of men and women to be fully alive in love. The cross was a display of God’s love for us that was meant to wound our heart in a such a way that we would give our heart back to God.

*“Now hope does not disappoint, because the love of God has been poured out in our hearts by the Holy Spirit who was given to us. For when we were still without strength, in due time Christ died for the ungodly.” - Romans 5:5-6*

*“Now may the Lord direct your hearts into the love of God and into the patience of Christ.” - 2 Thessalonians 3:5*

- k. This connection is the soil in which our knowledge of God grows. This heart connection is the difference between an old wrinkled married couple sitting across from each other simply staring into each other’s eyes not having to speak a single word to express the depths of their love and between two strangers looking across that same table with bewilderment and confusion running through their minds.
- l. Although that old wrinkled couple in their 50th year of marriage is silent in the moment those fifty years are speaking loud and clear through their steady gaze. They need not say a single word to have the deepest and richest conversation in the whole room.
- m. What makes this possible is their heart connection, the connection that has formed over the decades through thick and thin, in sickness and in health, for richer or for poorer. That heart connection rooted in deep knowledge of each other and is the foundation for their entire relationship.

- n. Prayer works the exact same way. It is entirely possible to be in a time of prayer or in a prayer meeting and not actually be in prayer because true prayer has its roots in the soil of the heart.

*“I know your works, your labor, your patience, and that you cannot bear those who are evil...Nevertheless I have this against you, that you have left your first love.” - Revelation 2:2 & 4*

- o. Words by nature are simply the expression of what already exists in the heart and mind. Enjoyable prayer, which is sustainable prayer, is not found in saying the right phrases but in receiving ongoing revelation of the Bridegroom God who burns with jealous love and responding back to Him through His written word.
- p. But it starts not in the phrases we speak but in the movement of the heart. If we are to become men and women of prayer and raise children in the context of prayer we need to learn to put our roots down in the soil of His love and abide in that place. As we abide and receive revelation, and as we are filled with the language of God the flowers of prayer will naturally blossom.

*“Abide in Me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself, unless it abides in the vine, neither can you, unless you abide in Me. I am the vine, you are the branches. He who abides in Me, and I in him, bears much fruit; for without Me you can do nothing...**If you abide in Me, and My words abide in you, you will ask what you desire, and it shall be done for you.** By this My Father is glorified, that you bear much fruit; so you will be my disciples.” - John 15:4-5, 7-8*

### 3. “Exchanging” (Getting Answers)

- a. The next word that is vital to understanding prayer is “exchanging”. It is not only about connecting our heart to God’s but the exchanging of self in love, intimacy, and friendship.
- b. Verbal conversation is not the ultimate goal of prayer, the connecting of hearts in love is. Conversation is simply the avenue through which we best and most easily express what is going on in our heart. Meaning that our words to God are really the overflow and expression of the movements of our heart.
- c. When we experience one of the many attributes of God (love, mercy, forgiveness, graciousness, power, holiness, etc.) we express that movement by speaking or singing words back to Him. These words are what we label prayer. But the words are only the fruit of what is going on beneath the surface.
- d. The exchange of love and friendship happens at a much deeper level before it is every expressed into words.
  - i. The relationship between this exchange and our words is dynamic. You only speak what already exists on the inside of you yet it is only when the Word of God gets inside of you (eating the scroll) that our hearts are truly able to connect with God in a way that we can speak His Word back to Him.

- ii. In truth you cannot speak the movements of your heart without the Word abiding in you however you can speak the correct words without the heart's involvement.
- iii. This is why, as I stated in Session 2, that the ability to hear the Word and abide in it is the single most powerful thing that can happen to your prayer life. As you receive your heart will become alive and when you go to speak the movements of your heart back to God what will come out is that which went in, His Word. This will only deepen your heart connection and fuel your prayer life even more.
- e. John, as well as others, talked much about this exchange of love in his letters.

*“And we have known and believed the love that God has for us. God is love, and he who abides in love abides in God, and God in him...We love Him because He first loved us.” - 1 John 4:16 & 19*

*“He who has My commandments and keeps them, it is he who loves Me. And he who loves Me will be loved by My Father, and I will love him and manifest myself to him.” - John 14:21*

*“As the Father loved Me, I also have loved you; abide in My love.” - John 15:9*

- f. Over and over we read about this God that is madly in love with us and actually interacts with us by revealing His emotions for us and asks for nothing in return but the love of our heart.

*“Jesus said the him, ‘You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind.’ This is the first and great commandment.” - Matthew 22:37*

- g. This exchange takes on many different forms, all which qualify as prayer. Although God does not work in formulas and structures below is the typical flow from connection (receiving revelation from God) and our responding back to Him.
- h. Within each of these stages there is the ability to both receive and respond back to God so we should view this as very fluid rather than a rigid formula or strict progression of some kind.
  - i. Meditation - reading, thinking, and pondering the Word of God is one of the primary ways we can receive from God and then respond back to Him.
  - ii. Worship - although we are not asking God for anything or petitioning His throne in any sort of way worship is maybe the most powerful mode of exchanging love with God. In worship God pours out His love on us and we in turn sing our songs of adoration back to Him.
  - iii. Prophetic Revelation - One of the most important parts of intercession is when the Lord reveals His intentions and plans to us. These plans are the expression of His heart and how He will accomplish what is on His heart to do. Not only does prayer involve the exchanging of love but also the exchanging of plans, intentions, and wills.

1. As we stated in our definition prayer is more about the exchanging of hearts than the exchanging of words.
  - iv. Intercession - Once God has revealed both His heart and His plans then we get to join Him through the ministry of intercession. As we partner with His plans and tie our heart to His we speak the purposes of God into existence here on the earth.
    - i. This exchange is something that far supercedes words. True prayer encompasses the entire body, soul, and spirit. It is the giving of self away and the receiving of God.

*“Prayer has to do with the entire man. Prayer takes man's whole being, mind, soul, and body. It takes the whole man to pray, and prayer affects the entire man in its gracious results.”*<sup>3</sup>

*“Tis not enough to bend the knee, and words of prayer to say; the heart must with lips agree, or else we do not pray.”*<sup>4</sup>

- j. When Christ reveals His heart to us and we willingly join ourselves to His heart in partnership we have entered into intercession.
- k. Once we have received His love and given our love back to Him we are able to receive His plans and will in a way that His will is now our will and His plans now become our dreams which we fight for.

#### 4. The Ministry of Intercession

- a. True and powerful intercession comes through partnership with the revealed heart of God. Like any spouse or friend God makes known the desires and intentions of His heart to those that He is closest to.
- b. As we grow in our knowledge of God and as our connection with His heart is deepened and strengthened He will invite us to partner with Him in bringing His plans and purposes to pass.

*“But God has revealed them to us through His Spirit. For the Spirit searches all things, and yes, the deep things of God. For what man knows the things of a man except the spirit of the man which is in him? Even so one knows the things of God except the Spirit of God. Now we have received, not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit who is from God, that we might know the things that have been freely given to us by God.” - 1 Corinthians 2:10-12*

- c. When desiring to grow in intercession many people want to know what to say, what Scriptures to pray or how to do this or that. However the key to powerful intercession, as we have seen and will continue to see, is not necessarily in praying the correct verse it is found in the exchanging of hearts and joining of wills between God and man.

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<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*

- d. This exchanging between God and man rests entirely upon our willingness to surrender our wills to the Holy Spirit so that He can give us His will. But without surrendering first how can God give us His will? Can a man have two wills that drive his life? Surely not! A man can only live by one will, either his own or the Lord's; but not both.

*"Can two walk together, unless they are agreed?" - Amos 3:3*

- e. Paul addresses the relinquishing of self numerous times in his letters to the early church.

*"Or do you not know that your body is the temple of the Holy Spirit who is in you, whom you have from God, and **you are not your own**? For you were bought at a price; therefore glorify God in your body and in your spirit, which are God's." - 1 Corinthians 6:19-20*

*"I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that you present your bodies **a living sacrifice**, holy, acceptable to God, which is your reasonable service." - Romans 12:1*

- f. James also links our ability to receive any answers to prayer with the surrendering of our wills.

*"If any of you lacks wisdom, **let him ask of God**, who give to all liberally and without reproach, and it will be given to him. But **let him ask in faith**, with no doubting, for he who doubts is like a wave of the sea driven and tossed by the wind. For let not that man suppose that he will receive anything from the Lord; he is a double-minded man, unstable in all his ways." - James 1:5-8*

- g. Doubting here is more than simply not having enough faith, it is not being in agreement with God's revealed nature and character. If you are in need of healing and you have received the revelation that God heals then you must surrender your heart, mind, and body to that revelation in order to receive anything from God.
  - i. Surrender is primarily an issue of trust and trust is the cornerstone of faith. Therefore when we refuse to surrender our lives to God in any situation it is a statement that we do not trust Him and because we don't trust Him we refuse to give Him our life and/or situation.
  - ii. Again this goes back to why the knowledge of God is the foundation of prayer because you cannot trust (or surrender) to a God you do not know.
- h. This exchange between God and man takes place primarily in the arena of our will. It is the will that determines everything else in a person's life. They act, talk, and live according to the will. Therefore if we are going to exchange all that we are for all that God is then we must start by surrendering our will.
- i. We have already said that prayer takes the whole man. Nothing can be withheld in our hearts or hands if we are going to enter into the depths of intercession. This "whole

man” is speaking about the will of a man; for the will of the man contains his entire being.

- j. There is nothing that we are, have, or desire to be that is not connected to our will. The essence of intercession is the exchanging of our will for the revealed will of God. Christianity in general requires that we surrender our lives for the sake of Christ but even more so if we are going to join Christ in the ministry of intercession.
- k. This is what Jesus told all of His disciples:

*“For whoever desires to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for My sake will find it.” – Matthew 16:25*

- l. Obedience and surrender are the keys to effective intercession. It is only when we heed the words of Christ and submit to His will that He will heed our petitions and give us our will.
  - i. It is the consecration of the man that lends him useful to God in prayer more than the eloquence of His speech.
  - ii. Many worry about saying the right words, quoting the correct scripture, and using some sort of pithy phrase that makes them sound intelligent and profound. Christ cares about no such things.
  - iii. Christ is looking for a partner not a speech. Intercession is about joining Christ’s labor and work by joining your heart to His and surrendering your own will so that you can receive His.

*“Likewise the Spirit also helps in our weaknesses. For we do not know what we should pray for as we ought, but the Spirit Himself makes intercession for us with groanings which cannot be uttered. Now **He who searches the hearts** knows what the mind of the Spirit is, because He makes **intercession for the saints according to the will of God.**” - Romans 8:26-27*

- iv. Words can be powerful but they can also be nothing more than vain babblings.

*“And when you pray, do not use vain repetitions as the heathen do. For they think that they will be heard for their many words.” - Matthew 6:7*

- v. It is the righteous man, the pure man, with clean hands and a pure heart this is allowed to ascend those steep slopes which lead to the presence of the Lord where we stand in prayer.

*“The effective, fervent prayer of a **righteous man** avails much.” - James 5:16*

- vi. It is the consecration of the man that sets him apart to God and qualifies him for the ministry of intercession that brings forth results. Think of all of the great intercessors in Holy Scripture, each lived a life of amazing consecration:

1. Moses spent 40 years in the wilderness of preparation
  2. David had a heart after God
  3. Samson, Samuel, and John were all Nazarites from birth
  4. Daniel refused to eat the king's meat
  5. Jesus was sinless even though He was tempted in every way
- m. This is the reason for many unanswered prayers. We pray, asking God for breakthrough in a certain area, yet at the same time do not submit our lives fully to His will.
- i. It should be noted here perfection is not that same as consecration nor is it the same as submission. Perfection demands results outwardly while both consecration and submission deal with the sincere reach of the heart.
  - ii. We can go down the list of the names mentioned above and all of them (except Jesus of course) lived consecrated lives but they did not live perfect ones.
  - iii. There was a sincere reach in their hearts to obey God, walk in His ways, and follow Him but weakness and immaturity still allowed sin to be present.
  - iv. Therefore when I say that submission and consecration are the keys to intercession I simply mean that there is a real, sincere, full hearted reach and effort to obey God within your soul. And when you fail you get right back up, confess your sin, make things right, and continue on the journey.
  - v. Wholeheartedness is not about all of the things you say no to in life it is about the one thing, Christ, that you say yes to with all of your being.
- n. Prayer is not a substitute for obedience, they are companions. Both obedience without prayer and prayer without obedience will lack fruit.
- o. The Apostle John echoed this truth in plain language to the early church in his first letter.

*“And **whatever we ask we receive** from Him, **because we keep His commandments** and do those things that are pleasing in His sight.” – 1 John 3:22*

- p. Again, this is the reason for much frustration in the place of prayer. We bring before God our own wills, our own desires, and our own words without being fully submitted to His will, His desires, and His words.
- q. Submission and obedience (the sincere reach for wholeheartedness) are the keys to receiving all that you ask for. The Lord's Prayer Jesus tells us that the first thing we are to ask for is *His* kingdom to come and for *His* will to be done.

*“Now it came to pass, as He was praying in a certain place, when He ceased, that one of His disciples said to Him, ‘Lord, teach us to pray, as John also taught his disciples.’ So He said to them, ‘When you pray, say: Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name. **Your kingdom come. Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven.**’” – Luke 11:1-3*

- r. God loves the process of submission and obedience. Every great man and woman of

God went through the process of submission and death before they received mighty things from God.

- i. Abraham waited 25 years.
- ii. Joseph was sold into bondage and spent years in prison.
- iii. David lived for years in caves hiding from Saul while having a promise from God.
- iv. Daniel had to endure 70 years in Babylon before he received the answer to his prayers.
- v. And Jesus had to go through the Garden of Gethsemane and the Cross before He could receive His will and desire from God.

*“Then Jesus came with them to a place called Gethsemane, and said to the disciples, ‘Sit here while I go and pray over there.’ And He took with Him Peter and the two sons of Zebedee, and He began to be sorrowful and deeply distressed. Then He said to them, ‘My soul is exceedingly sorrowful, even to death. **Stay here and watch with Me.**’ He went a little farther and fell on His face, and prayed, saying, ‘O My Father, if it is possible, let this cup pass from Me; nevertheless, **not as I will, but as You will.**” - Matthew 26:36-39*

- s. The exchanging of self, the process, and death that we have spoke of are all different expressions of the same reality and that is, *“Your will be done”*. It is His will not ours, His plans not ours, and His life not ours that we are to submit to.
- t. This is the basis for all intercession. All intercession is summed up in this single phrase. If we are going to become intercessors we must learn what it means that it is not our wills, our plans, or our lives that are to be the basis of our prayers but His.
- u. He is the center, the beginning point, and the reference point for all of our prayers. We must bend in some areas, break in others, and completely abandon others yet; we must exchange all that we are for all that He is.
- v. When, and only when, we abandon our own lives and partner with His heart will we enter into the depths of intercession and the power that awaits us there. Intercession is more about friendship and partnership than it is about a particular set of verses or warfare strategies.

*“I saw Him as a Person apart from flesh and blood, and He said to me, ‘As the Saviour had a body, so I dwell in the cleansed temple of the believer. I am a Person. I am God, and I come to ask you to give your body to Me that I may work through it. I need a body for My temple, but it must belong to Me without reserve, for two persons with different wills can never live in the same body. Will you give Me yours? But if I come in, I come as God, and you must go out. I shall not mix Myself with your self...One thing He reminded me of was that He had only come to take what I had already promised the Saviour, not in part, but the whole.”<sup>5</sup>*

<sup>5</sup> Norman Grubb: *“Rees Howells: Intercessor”*