

SERIES: 40 DAYS OF PRAYER
Spiritual Growth Campaign
PART 2: A PRIMER ON PRAYER

Good morning (afternoon) CVCHURCH. We are a multicultural and intergenerational church. Welcome home to part 2 of our exciting 40 Days of Prayer spiritual growth campaign. If you missed our first week last week, please go to our website and watch that teaching. It is foundational for all that we're doing. I talked about ARE YOU WILLING TO GROW UP? This is the leading question when it comes to growth in any area but especially our spiritual life.

I must admit that prayer is one of the most vital and important subjects for every Christian and for any person who desires to talk with God. I went on Amazon and typed the word prayer and over 100,00 came up. I was so impressed that the first book they listed was Prayer, by Dr. Timothy Keller. I have been a pastor for 30 years, and I have experienced a lot in prayer. There are two observations I have noticed over my life, and I want to begin our time with these thoughts. **#1. I've learned that we are wired for prayer.** Your Creator designed you in a way that prayer seems natural. Most people in the world pray. Buddhists pray. Hindus Pray. Muslims pray and Jews pray. Christians pray and secular people pray. I wouldn't call this prayer, but when an atheist or agnostic hurts themselves you will hear them yell, "Jesus," or, "Oh, God." This has always intrigued me that people who say Jesus or God doesn't exist and yet they use His name so often, although it is used in an inflammatory and defaming way. I never hear a person scream, "Oh, Buddha"—"Oh, Mohammed," when they hurt themselves.

Prayer is in every culture. Now, who they pray to, what they pray to differs, but there is this internal propensity in every human being to pray. You are created in God's image, and that means He has wired into your DNA to be able to talk to God and to hear God talk with you. Ecclesiastes 3:11 says, **"Yet God has made everything beautiful for its own time. He has planted eternity in the human heart, but even so, people cannot see the whole scope of God's**

work from beginning to end.” What this means, friends, is that you can never be completely satisfied with earthly pleasures and pursuits, because you are created in God’s image. This means you have a spiritual thirst and that you have eternal value, and nothing but the eternal God can truly satisfy your thirst and hunger. God has wired us to look for Him, and He has wired us to talk to Him. We are naturally wired to pray. Everyone prays at some point in their life. **#2. The second thing I have learned is that we’re not very good at prayer.** Most people I talk to about prayer feel inadequate and insecure. I hear sentences like, “I don’t really know what to pray. I don’t know how to pray. I don’t know how to say it. I don’t feel real confident.” This is one of the transformations I see in all of our small groups. When people first start coming some have refused to pray. Then, after settling in for a few months, they start trying to pray. Some of the most powerful prayers I have heard in our small group are from people who have started praying by saying, “I don’t know what to say, and I feel insecure.” And I respond, “Just start talking to God.” When they’re done we are all blown away.

Luke 11:1 says, **“Once Jesus was in a certain place praying. As He finished, one of His disciples came to Him and said, ‘Lord, teach us to pray.’”** The disciples learned that as they lived with Jesus day in and day out that prayer, listening to the Father and talking to the Father, was at the very heartbeat of Jesus. The Gospels teach us that many times Jesus would start His day in prayer or end His day in prayer, or Jesus often times would pray all through the night. It is okay that you feel uncomfortable or awkward with prayer at this time in your life. This is why I believe this is the perfect time for us to focus for 40 Days on Prayer, because your ability, desire and willingness to talk to Jesus and listen to Him is the key to experiencing all of the breakthroughs we all desire and desperately need. To experience a breakthrough means to overcome or penetrate through an obstacle, barrier or something that is restricting God’s purposes and plans in your life. We just read through the book of Luke in our daily devotions. There are 11 references to Jesus’ prayer life. He either was prayed up before a huge day of ministry, or, after an exhausting day of healing people and driving demons out of people, He would pray. Why? Because prayer is a leading key to experiencing a lifestyle of breakthrough where you successfully tear down and overcome

those situations and forces that desire to thwart God's goodness and faithfulness in your life. #3. The third thing I have learned is that:

Our frustrations with prayer are caused by our misconceptions about prayer:

- **Prayer is not a magic wand**

Prayer is not like the wand that Harry Potter would wave and all of a sudden the situation would change. God is not our genie in a bottle, friends. Prayer is not made up of secret words and incantations or a chant or spell that if you know the right words then you get your own way all the time.

- **Prayer is not a fire extinguisher**

There are signs in buildings where there are extinguishers that say, "Break glass only in case of emergency." Many people treat prayer like that. They only pray when they're in pain or a crisis.

- **Prayer is not a tug of war**

Some people think that God doesn't really want to answer our prayers; that He doesn't really want to listen to us and you have to wear Him down if you're going to receive anything from Him at all. You don't have to bribe, beg, barter or bargain with God. He wants to answer your prayers. He has enlisted every believer to pray for God's Kingdom rule and reign to be accomplished here on earth in every area of our lives as it is in heaven.

- **Prayer is not a ritual to relieve guilt**

Some of us have been taught that when you sin, especially if it is a big sin, you must say a number of prayers before you would be forgiven. That simply is not in the Bible, friends. Prayer is not a punishment for your sin. Prayer is not penance for your sin. The Bible says that prayer is a privilege, not a duty. It is a joy, not some responsibility you've got to pay back because you did something wrong. This puts prayer in the wrong light and is a leading reason

why more people don't have a vibrant and dynamic prayer life. Let's turn our attention to...

Four foundational truths about prayer:

I. God loves for me to talk to Him

This is hard for some of us, because, most likely, you might have had a father who didn't talk much to you. He was either absent because of work or dysfunction in his own life, or he was distracted with work. But the truth is God wants you to talk to Him about the seven key areas of your life that are represented by the acronym we used here at CVCHURCH: **SERFVIP. It stands for your Spiritual, Emotional, Relational, Financial, Vocational, Intellectual and Physical aspects of your life.** Because God loves you so much and His purpose and plans for you are only good, He desires to have you talk to Him about each one of these areas and to pray for Him to give you His strength, wisdom, understanding, and insight in how to proceed in each area and with all of the people you interact with. God is interested in what interests you because He gave you those interests. There is nothing He is not willing to discuss with you. A loving parent is interested in what their child is thinking, feeling and wanting to do with their lives. I love listening to Whitney and all of the things she is working through and processing. I want to know what she is feeling about herself, me, her mother, brother. I am very interested in our son and his wife and Kathe. God loves you more than anyone else in your life. Psalm 103:13 says, **"The Lord is like a father to His children, tender and compassionate to those who fear Him."** This is key in learning how to pray, friends. Our God is always pleased to hear your voice and to listen to all of your concerns, victories, goals, fears, hurts, habits and hang-ups. No one is more interested in what you are thinking, feeling or doing than your Father God. 1 John 5:14-15 says, **"And we are confident that He hears us whenever we ask for anything that pleases Him. ¹⁵And since we know He hears us when we make our request, we also know that He will give us what we ask for."** First, notice John, who was called the disciple Jesus loved, says twice, **"We're confident that He hears, and we know that He hears us, so we can be assured He will give us what we ask for as we**

pray according to His will.” Friends, this is where your daily reading of God’s Word as we work through our Bible bookmark is essential. The more you know God’s will by knowing what His Word says about things gives you confidence that you can know how to pray. You pray with confidence, certainty and assurance that God loves you and wants to hear your voice in prayer.

- **Prayer is a conversation, not a ceremony**

A ceremony by nature has rules, restrictions and regulations you have to abide by, or it won’t work. I have a friend who planted a church in Nagasaki, Japan, and he was invited to a tea ceremony. This event took five hours. They have strict rules on how you sit, how you turn, what you do, how you pour the tea, how you strain the tea. Incredibly elaborate and you could spend years learning how to do a tea ceremony properly. What a profound burden. Jesus is more concerned that you make the time to spend with Him and talk to Him about your life and about His purposes and will for your life. Stay away from wasting your time thinking you’re not doing it right. Just start.

- **Prayer is a relationship, not a ritual**

Prayer is about getting close to God and becoming more intimate with Him. Prayer is about partnering with God to see His desires, will and agenda accomplished throughout this earth. One of the greatest examples of prayer we have is Jesus in the garden of Gethsemane. In Luke 22:42 Jesus says, **“Father, if You are willing, please take this cup of suffering away from Me. Yet I want Your will to be done, not Mine.”** The Bible says He was praying so fervently, because He knew what was about to happen to Him, his sweat fell to the ground like great drops of blood. There was no protocol for Jesus to follow other than simply humbling Himself before the Father and pouring out His soul. Vs. 43 says after this significant act of intercession an angel appeared and strengthened Him. First foundational truth about prayer. God loves me and loves for me to talk with Him. Prayer is a conversation, not an elaborate ceremony, and it involves my relationship with Jesus, not a ritual and protocol I must labor through to be heard.

II. God listens to prayers that are sincere and simple

God wants us to come to Him in humility, transparency, honesty, genuine, unaffected and whole heartedly. Prayer is not about trying to impress God. It is telling Him what you are going through, and then you taking time to be quiet and listen to what He wants to say to you. You don't have to sound like you really know what you're doing. You don't have to sound super spiritual. Just be real, gutsy and sincere. Just say what you want to say. Please write this down. **Longer is not necessarily stronger.** Simple, sincere, authentic kinds of prayers that God answers. Longer is not stronger. Just get to the point. Jesus had a lot to say about this kind of praying. Follow along as I read Matthew 6:5-6. **“When you pray, don't be like the hypocrites who love to pray publicly on street corners and in the synagogues, where everyone can see them. I tell you the truth, that is all the reward they will ever get. ⁶But when you pray, go away by yourself, shut the door behind you, and pray to your Father in private. Then your Father, who sees everything, will reward you.”** The Pharisees were perverting the true intent of prayer. It is not for showing others how spiritual you are, but to make a true spiritual connection with your Father and to pray according to His will so He will answer your prayers and see Kingdom of God results. This doesn't mean you can't pray with others. You see this in the book of Acts. There is personal private prayer and public and together praying. You don't need to convince God. He knows what you need, but He wants you to bring your needs, your family needs, your CVCHURCH needs and the needs of your neighbors and community and culture. He is just waiting for us to pray sincere and simple prayers. The first foundation or pillar of prayer is God loves me, and He wants me to talk with Him and bring my prayer concerns and desires to Him. Second, God listen to prayers that are sincere and simple.

III. God likes to show His grace by answering prayer

Our God is a good God. He is a faithful God. He's a gracious, compassionate and loving Father. Our Father God loves to answer our prayers, because He gets to show what He's really like. Everything in the universe comes from the generosity of God. No one is more generous than God. When you pray and you ask for something in prayer, you make a request or a petition—this is one

of the words the Bible uses for prayer—it gives God the opportunity to demonstrate what He's really like. Did you know that over 20 times in the N.T. we are commanded to ask God, and it shall be given? Seek and you will find. Knock and the door will be opened. You have not because you ask not. If you ask anything in My name... Over 20 times, if you are a child of God, you're commanded to ask

God for His involvement and/or intervention. God answers every prayer you pray. God is the ultimate perfect parent. If He gave us everything we asked for, it would ruin us. There are many reasons why God doesn't say yes to everything you ask for. You may not understand why, or you might disagree with how He answered, but He always answers. Sometimes God says no for our protection. Sometimes God says no for our direction. Sometimes God says no for our correction, to correct us on course. Sometimes God says no for our perfection, to help us grow in our character. Sometimes God says no for our inspection, He looks inside of us and helps us see what we couldn't see before. God loves you too much to say yes to everything. God says, "I didn't say I'd answer it every way you want it, but I will answer." People say, "God, You didn't answer me!" And God says, "Yes I did. I just said no." That was an answer. No. There can be at least three ways God answers our prayers. Yes. No. Not Yet. Isaiah 55:6-7 says, "**Seek the Lord while you can find Him. Call on Him now while He is near. ⁷Let the wicked change their ways and banish the very thought of doing wrong. Let them turn to the Lord that He may have mercy on them. Yes, turn to our God, for He will forgive generously.**" God says, "My heart is towards you. Now is the time to seek Me and call on Me in prayer. I want to answer your prayers." Matthew 7:11 Jesus says, "**So if you sinful people know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your heavenly Father give good gifts to those who ask Him.**" As we begin this focus of 40 days of prayer I want you to be convinced that God's Word says it is God's heart to demonstrate His grace, love and power to you by answering your prayers. Your job is to be praying.

IV. God longs to be close to me

Listen to this incredible invitation from God for you to enter into a close and intimate relationship with Him. Isaiah 30:18 says, "**So the Lord will wait for**

you to come to Him so He can show you His love and compassion. For the Lord is a faithful God. Blessed are those who wait for His help.” Isn't this just amazing. He wants to be close to you, and He is waiting for you to develop the habit of spending time in His presence so He can show you His love and compassion. The Bible gives us plenty of examples of people who had a close relationship with God. Enoch had a close relationship. The Bible says Noah found grace in God's sight and was close to Him. Job had a close relationship. David had a very intimate relationship with God. God longs to be close to you, friend. Listen to the passion that God expresses to His people Israel that had become unfaithful and disloyal to Him even though He had been faithful to them. Hosea 6:6-7 says, **“I want you to show love, not offer sacrifices. I want you to know Me more than I want burnt offerings. ⁷But like Adam, you broke My covenant and betrayed My trust.”** You see, spiritual rituals are only helpful if they are carried out with an attitude of love for and obedience to God. If a person's heart is far from God, ritual will simply become an empty mockery of God. God didn't want the Israelites' rituals, even though He had commanded them to do them. What God really wanted was their hearts. This is exactly what Jesus Christ wants in a relationship with you. He has given you His all, and He wants you to give Him your all. Your whole heart. Jesus said the # 1 commandment in all of the Bible is to love God with all your heart, all your soul, and all your mind.

Friends, for these next 40 days there is nothing more important in your life than for you to have a deep intimate relationship with Jesus. A lot of people know about God, but He becoming your best friend is totally different. I have waked with Jesus for well over 50 years. He is my best friend. I want you to know Him in such a way that you can say Jesus is your best friend. How do you get closer to Jesus in these 40 days? You do two things. You choose to desire Him, and you make time for Him. That is the only way you will get closer to Jesus. Psalm 25:14, **“The Lord is a friend to those who fear Him. He teaches them His covenant.”** To fear Him means to respect and value Him, and you do that by making time for Him. The entire purpose of our 40 Days of Prayer spiritual growth campaign is to help you deepen your friendship with Jesus. If you don't have a relationship with Jesus, we want to help show you how to do that. You need to know Jesus better, and you need to know Him

closer. He is waiting for you. He is longing for you to get to know Him. He is waiting for you to talk to Him about everything that concerns you and that interests you. Let me pray for you. Father, I pray a simple and sincere prayer; I want all the people here to know You better, more intimately and closer. I want them to grow deep in love with You the way You love them. I ask that You take these words today and to touch their hearts and cause them to burn with a deep love for You, in Jesus' name.

COMMUNION

“As they were eating, Jesus took some bread and blessed it. Then he broke it in pieces and gave it to the disciples, saying, ‘Take this and eat it, for this is My body.’ And He took a cup of wine and gave thanks to God for it. He gave it to them and said, ...‘Each of you drink from it, for this is My blood, which confirms the covenant between God and His people. It is poured out as a sacrifice to forgive the sins of many.’” (Matthew 26:26-28)