

## SERIES: 40 DAYS OF PRAYER

*Spiritual Growth Campaign*

## PART 3: You Need to Know Who You're Talking To

Welcome back home to your CV family and to our third week of our exciting 40 Days of Prayer spiritual growth campaign. Please find and take out your teaching notes for the day in your bulletin. There is one thing that really irritates me—when people call and they don't identify themselves and then they assume you know who it is and they just start talking. This happens a lot to me when people text me and their name doesn't come up on the screen. Have you noticed when you don't know who is on the other end of the phone or a text it affects your conversation a lot? You're not quite sure what to say. You become more guarded. You're not sure what tone of voice to use. Is this the Pope or the Pizza Guy? You don't know how to address them properly. When you don't know much about the person you can tend to be more formal. I can often tell who is from CVCHURCH because I will be walking along and the person will say, "Hi, Pastor Scott." But when someone calls me Reverend, that means they really don't know me that well. Proximity and relationship determines how you talk to someone. What you know about another person influences your conversation. This is especially true when it comes to your prayer life and conversation with God. Please look at the top of your outline. I have written, **"Understanding who God is truly shapes everything else in your life, especially your prayer life."** The truth is nothing impacts your life more than how you view God. There are many misconceptions in the world that people have about God. I wrote down a list I want to share with you. Some people think God is an angry, vindictive, retaliatory, grumpy, cranky God. He is upset all the time and there is no way you could ever please Him. Some people think of God as the crouching tiger God: He is ready to pounce on you when you make a wrong move. Some people think of God as a flaky, irresponsible father-like God. He is too moody, and He changes His mind continually. Some people perceive God as the cosmic cop, and that His sole motivation in life is to make you keep the rules. I could see why no one would want to talk to this kind of god. Some think of God as a ruthless dictator, always demanding more and more and it's never enough, or they think of Him as the Santa Claus God where's He's

making a list and checking it twice to see if you're naughty or nice. Some people perceive God as what I call the Play-Dough God; you can make Him into any form you want. Loved ones, God is very concerned that you know who He really is and what He is like. It's extremely important that you know the real God of the Bible. If you have a misconception about whom God is, prayer is going to be a duty, a drudgery. It's going to be boring and will simply feel like another thing I have to do. Prayer then becomes an obligation and drudgery and then prayer becomes nonexistent in your life. For many Christians prayer feels like something they have to do. I've got to. I should pray. I must pray. The problem is that guilt motivation doesn't work. I don't know about you, but I don't want anyone relating to me out of guilt. I would rather you not relate to me than to think you're doing me a favor. Guilt is a very toxic motivation and it is fueled by hurt, guilt and selfishness. Guilt simply means I don't know who God really is yet.

This is why you must have the right concept of who God is and what He is like and how He thinks, especially about His purposes and plans for your life. A.W. Tozer wrote, **“What comes to your mind when you think about God is the most important thing about you, because it affects everything else in your life.”** So what is God like? In Theology, which is the study of God, these traits about God are called His attributes. God is all knowing which means He is omniscient. God is all powerful which means He is omnipotent. God is everywhere at once which means He is omnipresent. The Bible also tells us that our God is holy. God is just. God is kind. God is loving and faithful. But today I want to look at the GOODNESS of God, because it is the goodness of God that is the basis for all prayer. If God is not a good God, you have no reason to pray. The only reason there's any good in the world is because God is a good God and God is the creator and His goodness is in the universe. You can't spell “good” without God. If there is no God, there is no good. There is no right or wrong, good or bad.

Psalm 100:5 says, **“For the LORD is GOOD. His UNFAILING LOVE continues forever, and His FAITHFULNESS continues to each generation.”** Psalm 119:90 says, **“Your FAITHFULNESS extends to every generation, as enduring as the earth you created.”** I want to lay a strong foundation for you

so you will know why to pray and you will know personally the character and the attributes of your Father God who you are praying to in Jesus' name. **Since God is always good:**

## **I. God's plans for my life will always be good**

God's plans for my life will always be good because God is always good. People will sometimes ask me, "Is there anything God can't do?" I always say yes. The Bible says God cannot lie. God can't deny Himself. God cannot be evil. God is good, so by nature, He cannot do evil. His plans for me are always good. Let's look at what Scripture has to say about God's goodness towards us. Jeremiah 29:11-12 says, **"For I know the plans I have for you,' says the Lord. 'They are plans for good and not for disaster, to give you a future and a hope.' <sup>12</sup>In those days when you pray, I will listen."** You can see the intimate connection between purpose and prayer, between God's plans for your life and prayer. Loved ones, regardless of the context of your birth, you are no accident. There are accidental parents but there are no accidental children. Your parents may not have planned you, but God did, and He wanted to present you to the world. God didn't have to have a plan for your life, but He does because He is purposeful in everything He does. God has a plan for your life because He loves you. The more you pray, the more you're going to understand God's plan for your life. In Jeremiah 29 God says to you personally, "I have good plans for you, not plans to hurt you, but to give you a good future; when you call to Me and pray to Me, I will listen to you.

Psalm 31:19 says, **"How great is the goodness you have stored up for those who fear You. You lavish it on those who come to You for protection, blessing them before the watching world."** Notice the Bible says God has stored goodness for you if you have surrendered your life to Him. This means that God has thought about it. It means God is intentional thoughts of goodness to you in advance. God has already planned the many different blessings He has for the rest of your life. Why? Because He, at the very core of His nature, is good. This is one of the reasons that we're hosting this 40 Day of Prayer Spiritual Growth Campaign. I want God to bless your life before the watching world. But you can miss those blessings they're not automatic. The

Bible says, "You have not because you ask not." You've got to learn to ask, and you do that through learning to pray. It is through prayer that God reveals your purpose and plan. Friends, I have said this to you many times. We live on a broken planet because of sin. Everything on this planet is broken because nothing is perfect and nothing works perfectly. Your body is broken. Your mind is broken. The weather is broken. The economy is broken. Relationships are broken. Nothing is perfect. God didn't say, "I promise you perfection." That is called heaven. In the middle of all of this brokenness, God says, "I have a good plan for your life and I want to lavish My goodness on all of you who come to Me for protection." God says, "I can even take your bad choices, because I'm greater than your choices and fit the unwise decision you've made into my good plan for your life." What a God! He can turn a crucifixion in to a resurrection. Romans 8:28 says, **"And we know that God causes everything to work together for the GOOD of those who love God and are called according to His purpose for them."** Notice this verse says specifically that we know God causes everything to work together for the good for people with two things on their side: 1) They love God. They have received Jesus Christ, God's Son, as their Lord and Savior, and they are committed to living their lives for Him. 2) They commit to fulfilling God's purposes and plans for their lives. God has the ability to take all that is bad and bitter in our lives and turn it to work out for our good as we trust Him and pursue His purposes. One of the best examples of this principle of how God's plans for our lives are always good is demonstrated beautifully in the life of Joseph. God has revealed what He would do through Joseph, and when he communicated this to his brothers and his father, his father doubted him because it sounded so arrogant, and his brothers, who were filled with hubris (overbearing presumption and pride), plotted to kill him and settled on selling him into slavery. In the end God honored Joseph's allegiance, love and loyalty to Him and raised him up to be the 2<sup>nd</sup> most powerful person in the world next to Pharaoh. He was able to save his father and brothers lives as well as countless millions of other people. Joseph demonstrates his understanding of God's purpose being the controlling force and influence in his life after his father died and his brothers sent the message to their brother, the prince of Egypt, begging him to forgive them for the cruelty and evil they brought on him. In Genesis 50 we're told that when Joseph read their letter, he broke and wept. Then his brothers came and threw themselves down at his feet

and admitted, “We are your slaves.” Listen to Joseph’s response in verse 19-20, **“But Joseph replied, ‘Don’t be afraid of me. Am I God, that I can punish you? 20 You intended to harm me, but God intended it ALL FOR GOOD. He brought me to this position so I could SAVE the lives of many people. No, don’t be afraid. I will continue to take care of you and your children.’ So he reassured them by speaking kindly to them.”** These truths will absolutely transform how you see God and release you into a prayer life that will be dynamic and life and culture changing. As we learned in our small groups—and if you’re not in a small group it is not too late yet; you can sign up today on your Friends Cards—that God deeply cares for us, He is close to us, He is consistent in our lives and He is competent to fulfill what He says He will do, just like He did with Joseph.

## **II. God always gives me what I need, not what I deserve**

This is God’s grace and mercy in action towards you and me every day. If you and I got what we truly deserved, we wouldn’t even be here this morning (afternoon). Psalm 103:10-13 says, **“He does not punish us for all our sins; He does not deal harshly with us, as we deserve. For His unfailing love toward those who fear Him is as great as the height of the heavens above the earth. 12 He has removed our sins as far from us as the east is from the west. 13 The Lord is like a father to His children, tender and compassionate to those who fear Him.”** Isn’t this precious? The Bible says that Jesus Christ paid for all your sins and all your wrong doings. He has done for you what you cannot do for yourself. Friends, you’re only fooling yourselves if you think you can repay God for the incredible ransom He paid so that the power of satan, sin and your selfishness could be broken. God forgives you, not because you’re good, but because He is good, and because He deeply loves you and He believes in you and values you and believes that as you turn to Him and abandon your own selfishness and leadership of your life and trust Him that you discover just how Good He is, and as you grow in your prayer life you begin to pray like He taught us to pray, “Father, give us today the food that we need, and forgive us our sins as we have forgiven those who sin against us.” You being to live a life of faith that, by your actions, you demonstrate your faith and belief in God’s goodness, and that He will provide for you and give you what

you need not based on what you deserve. There is a secret that God knows about every one of us, and I have learned this about all of us, too, after 63 years of living. One of our deepest fears is the fear of rejection, and you'd do almost anything in your life to avoid it. You don't want to be rejected by anyone. You want everyone to like you and love you. Years ago when I was an assisting pastor at Faith Center in Eugene, Oregon, I read a book entitled "WHY AM I AFRAID TO TELL YOU WHO I AM? The answer is because if I tell you what I'm really like and you don't like it, I'm up a creek without a paddle because I'm all I have. We spend most of our lives wearing masks, pretending to be people we're not, because if you really let people see who you really are, you're afraid they will reject you. It's one of your deepest fears. Please hear me, because the Bible declares that our God is a good God, He will never, never, never, never, never, never reject you or abandon you when you sin against Him. He always wants you to come back to Him. That is what it means to repent. I turn away from doing what I think is best, and I follow His plans, purpose and path for my life. The Psalmist writes in Psalm 119:35 says, **"Make me walk along the path of Your commands, for that is where my happiness is found."** Because God is good and because He always gives me what I need, not what I deserve, He always welcomes me back into His warm, accepting and approving embrace. Always. Psalm 27:10, 13-14 says, **"Even if my father and mother abandon me, the Lord will hold me close. <sup>13</sup>I am confident I will see the Lord's GOODNESS while I am here in the land of the living. <sup>14</sup>Wait patiently for the Lord. Be BRAVE and COURAGEOUS. Yes, wait patiently for the Lord."** The Bible admits that there will be bad parents. Yes, some of us have been abandoned by our parents. But notice what God's Word says. Even if my parents abandon me or parent abandons me, God will hold me close. He does this in so many ways. By giving you a loving CVCHURCH family where you can **BELONG, BELIEVE AND BECOME.** Where you can go through our LD seminar series so you can grow in your ability to be loved by God and love God through worship. Serve God by serving others. Sharing God in sharing your faith in Jesus with others. By growing in God by getting close to other brothers and sisters through fellowship in your small group. Grow in God through your own personal Bible study and by learning to pray. These are the different ways that God holds us close. Notice David's faith. I am confident I will

see the Lord's goodness. He exhorts us that we must wait patiently, but God is there for us because He is good.

### III. God exchanged my evil for His goodness

Because God is good at His core, in Jesus Christ, He put your good above His own. The book of Hebrews 12:1b-2 says, **“Let us run with endurance the race God has set before us. <sup>2</sup>We do this by keeping our eyes on Jesus, the champion who initiates and perfects our faith. Because of the joy awaiting Him, He endured the cross, disregarding its shame. Now He is seated in the place of honor beside God’s throne.”** The word for “disregard” is the word scorn. It means to treat someone or something as if he or it had little or no value. Jesus put your good over His own, loved friends. The shame of the cross, being crucified naked before His family, friends and the religious leaders Jesus treated as insignificant or of little consequence. Why? Because of the joy that awaited Him. He would be crowned King of kings and Lord of lords by His Father. He would be rewarded by being seated on His own throne on the right hand of God. His death and resurrection was giving birth to a new class of people called the Church—sons and daughters of the living God. Jesus took your place, and He exchanged your evil by taking it on Himself on the cross so you could receive His goodness, tenderness, love, acceptance, and forgiveness. How is that for a big hug? John 10:14-15 says, **“I am the GOOD shepherd; I know My own sheep, and they know Me, just as My Father knows Me and I know the Father. So I SACRIFICE My life for the sheep.”** This is the true definition of love. That Jesus loved us so much that He was willing to sacrifice His life for you and me. That is how valuable you are. This is why when you pray you must be aware of Whom you’re praying to. He gave His life for you. So of course He wants to hear your voice, and of course as you pray His will He is going to answer you. Jesus says, “I am your good shepherd. I died as God’s lamb for His flock.” Jesus says in John 15:13, **“There is no greater love than to lay down one’s life for one’s friends.”** Romans 4:25 says, **“He was handed over to die because of our sins, and He was raised to life to make us RIGHT with God.”** Jesus was handed over to the authorities to die for our sins. Our failures. Our rebellion and self-centeredness. He took my evil to give me His goodness. You and I, when you confess Jesus as your Lord

and Savior, are declared in right standing. God doesn't see your sin, He sees what Jesus did for you and you are now His son and daughter. One of the most powerful verses in the Bible on this issue is 2 Corinthians 5:21, "**For God made Christ, who never sinned, to be the offering for our sin, (to become sin itself) so that we could be made right with God through Christ.**" This is what is called the **substitutionary atonement**. In other words, God treated our sin as Jesus' sin. He took our sin so we could be given the goodness that belongs to Jesus. We could not earn it, but it was given to every one who puts their faith in Jesus Christ and surrenders their lives to Him. 1 Peter 2:24 says, "**Jesus personally carried our sins in His body on the cross so that we can be dead to sin and live for what is right. By His wounds you are healed.**" You can trust the one to whom you're praying because He gave His life for you and exchanged your evil for His goodness.

#### **IV. God does not say "Yes" to every request**

Friends, there is nothing in the Bible that says that everything you ask for that you're going to get it. God will not say yes to everything I pray right away. His yes can take some time to answer. No loving parent would ever give a child everything they ask for. You're not a vending machine. God is not your genie; He's not your magic wand. But you might say, "What about the things that I think are good for me, and He says no to." Please write these words down. When the request is not right, 1) **God says no**. Most likely God has said no to a lot of your prayers, and He doesn't owe you the answer you're looking for. No is an answer. When the timing is not right, God says it's a good request, but not yet. 2) **God says slow**. Slow means I intend to give this to you, but not yet, the timing is not right. **There's a big difference between a delay and a denial. No and not yet are not the same thing.** You know if you're immature spiritually or not when you get a no or a slow and you pout and you get angry at God and you say, "Then I'm not going to go to church. I am going to quit reading my Bible. I am going to quit my small group or I am not going to go to a small group. I am going to stop giving to my church." Sometimes your request is right and it is good timing, but you're not in the right place and God wants to do something in your life before He gives it to you. You're not ready to receive the answer because His answer's bigger than you can handle. When God wants to

give you your request and He's waiting on you: 3) **He says grow.** This means you want to focus on your own growth and spiritual maturity. Waiting gives us a chance to allow our patience and endurance to keep growing. Now when the request is right, it's not some self-centered focus and the timing's right, then 4) **God says go.** Jesus says in Luke 11:11-13 **"You fathers—if your children ask for a fish, do you give them a snake instead? 12 Or if they ask for an egg, do you give them a scorpion? Of course not! 13 So if you sinful people know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to those who ask Him."** There are times we are asking God for things that we don't really understand what we're asking for like James and John's mother asked Jesus in Matthew 20:21-23, **"In Your Kingdom, please let my two sons sit in places of honor next to You, one on Your right and the other on Your left.' 22 Jesus answered, 'You don't know what you are asking! Are you able to drink from the bitter cup of suffering I am about to drink? 23 You will indeed drink from My bitter cup. But I have no right to say who will sit on My right or My left. My Father has prepared those places for the ones He has chosen.'"** Jesus makes it very clear that there are times there is no way all of our requests will be met. In this case Jesus tells their mother, "This is a request that only My Father can answer." I find this incredibly liberating. God loves us so much that **He will either say no to me or go slow or He says before I answer that prayer you will need to grow up in one or more areas of SERFVIP (Spiritual, Emotional, Relational, Financial, Vocational, Intellectual, Physical or He will say yes, go.**

I think you will agree with me our city, community, state, culture and nation needs a spiritual awakening. A reviving and renewal when it comes to Jesus then we have ever had before. Hear me, church, good things happen when God's people pray.

Here are four things I am asking you to do.

1) **As you receive breakthroughs to your prayers please send me and Roberta Rea your testimonies.** On our last Sunday of 40 Days of Prayer, which is March 18<sup>th</sup>, I will teach on that day an entire teaching entitled WHEN

GOD SAYS NO. You won't want to miss that. Then that evening on March 18 we will combine our celebration of what God has done in our midst with our Worship Night. Our team will select some of our testimonies to be either videoed or shared publicly. You won't want to miss that. So please email me [Scott.Wood@cvchurch.com](mailto:Scott.Wood@cvchurch.com) or our Small Group Facilitator [Roberta.Rea@cvchurch.com](mailto:Roberta.Rea@cvchurch.com).

**2) Sign up on a clipboard to pray with us for our City and Community for 24 hours. Take a least one 30 min spot. It will be held at CHRISTIAN LIFE CHURCH, 3013 MONTROSE AVE.**

**3) May 3<sup>rd</sup>, Join us here with your CVCHURCH family for our annual National Day Of Prayer.** There will be an exciting format and the most helpful way for us to pray for our nation together.

**4) I ask that you pray three things every day this week. This is based on Lamentations 5:21 "Restore us, O Lord, and bring us back to You again! Give us back the joys we once had!" Here are the three things to pray for. RESTORE MY HEART. RESTORE MY SMALL GROUP. RESTORE OUR CVCHURCH FAMILY.**

Let's pray. "Father, You are a good, good, good Father. There are many people here in pain. You're still a good, good Father. We've all had prayers that weren't answered the way we want them to be answered. You're still a good, good Father. Help us to remember that Your plan for our lives is always good, so we choose Your plan, not ours. Help us to remember that You always give us what we need, not what we deserve. Thank You for that. And thank You that You not only forgive us, but You pour Your goodness into us. That You're not mad at us, that You're mad about us. Thank You that You amazingly put our good above Your own good, and You did that through the cross, dying for us, Your sheep. You didn't spare Your own Son, so You certainly give us what we need. And Father, even though we don't always understand it, we thank You that You don't say yes to all of our requests. Your goal is not to make our lives easy, but for us to mature and to grow us up. We realize that Your thoughts are not ours, Your ways are higher than ours and there is just a lot of stuff we don't understand,

and we won't understand until we're with You in eternity. Lord, I want to accept Your gift of forgiveness. I want to accept Your gift of a new life. Jesus Christ, I want a relationship with You. So I ask You to be the Lord of my life right now. I surrender my life to You. I repent of living for myself, and I now choose to live my life for You and for Your honor and glory.

Father, I pray for all of us here at CVCHURCH, that You will restore our hearts, restore our small groups and that You will restore and revive our CVCHURCH family. Only changed and transformed people can change the world. I pray this blessing in the name of the Father, and the Son and the Holy Spirit." And everyone said yes. I love you and can't wait to be with you next week and to keep hearing the stories of the breakthroughs you're having as you meet together in your small groups, as you read your devotions every day and as you're memorizing the weekly scriptures in the front of each of your chapters. Next week I am going to teach on the subject PRAYING IN FIVE DIMENSIONS. You won't want to miss it.