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The Church God had in Mind: Dangerous Prayers

by Matt Hook

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The passengers were fully aware the airplane was losing altitude rapidly. The copilot was speaking over the intercom to the passengers, letting them know there was difficult weather and difficulty ahead. But after a minute of silence – the kind that lets you know things are critical and people are working and concentrating so hard that they can't talk at the moment, the copilot came back on and with these two words: "Commence prayer."

Two words. Why is it that we can't think about prayer until we become so desperate we can't think of anything else? Why do we wait?

It actually reminds me of the cartoon Popeye. As a kid, I thought Popeye had to be the dumbest guy around. First of all, he was always after Olive Oyl, which I could never figure out, and second, he would never take his spinach until he was in someplace terrible, like being trapped underwater tied to an anvil with an octopus squeezing him inside out. But then, at the last minute, his spinach falls out of his pocket and he gets what he needs to save the day, beat Bluto, and win back Olive Oyl. I could never figure out why he didn't just eat the spinach first. Don't you think God looks at us in the same way? Why do we wait? Why is prayer such a chore?

For doers, prayer is a chore. It is "wasted time." Even for Christians, it is often difficult! Even for people who are more contemplative, prayer is a challenge. So much of the time I catch myself saying "Lord, I'm too busy to pray. I can't take "time out" to just sit there with you. There are too many things I have to do! Or I let myself get caught up in everything and don't do more than throw an occasional "Thanks, God" when things go my way. The truth is, you're too busy NOT to pray.

Why? Because when we work, we work. When we pray, God works!

God can accomplish more in 5 seconds than we can accomplish in a lifetime of ministry!

So, church, commence prayer. Don't wait until the end. Because I believe if we start now, God will not only change your situation and my situation, but he will change our church's situation. God has been preparing Dexter and this whole area for transformation, and I'm not talking about farms into neighborhoods! But it begins with a concert of prayer. And by the way, the pilots were able to control the descent, and the plane landed safely.

Prayer is a Breath of Spiritual Air

Matthew 6:6 *"But you, when you pray, go into your inner room, and when you have shut your door, pray to your Father who is in secret, and your Father who sees in secret will repay you."*

1. You can let God into your innermost being.

- (Psalm 121:7 *He will keep your soul.*) Nothing else will do. A lot of things fight for your soul, but only the Lord can take it and make it better.
2. You'd better get him in there, into your secrets.
 3. The inner room of our hearts.
 4. Do you literally have a place or space?
 5. Many believers have a literal place they call their prayer closet.
- Mark 1:35 (After healing) *“And in the early morning, while it was still dark, Jesus arose and went out and departed to a lonely place, and was praying there.”*
 - Mark 6:46 (After the feeding of the multitudes) *“And after bidding them farewell, Jesus departed to the mountain to pray.”*
 - Luke 5:15-6 *“The news about Jesus was spreading even farther, and great multitudes were gathering to hear him and to be healed of their sicknesses. But Jesus himself would often slip away to the wilderness and pray.”*
 - Luke 6:12 *“And it was at this time that Jesus went off to the mountain to pray, and he spent the whole night in prayer to God.”* (Then he chose the 12 disciples out of his disciples).
 - Luke 9:18 *“And it came about that while he was praying alone, the disciples were with him and he questioned them, saying “Who do the multitudes say that I am?”*

We think of being in a closet as stifling, but perhaps that is where we go to open up the window for a breath of spiritual air. Prayer is a breath of spiritual air.

Things Happen When We Pray

Acts 4:29-31 Just after being arrested and put before the rulers of Jerusalem, Peter and John returned home and together with the other believers prayed *“And now, Lord, take note of their threats, and grant that your bond-servants may speak your word with all confidence, while you extend your hand to heal, and signs and wonders take place through the name of your holy servant Jesus.”* And when they had prayed, the place where they had gathered together was shaken, and they were all filled with the Holy Spirit, and began to speak the word of God with boldness.

Prayer is a daily relationship.

If you're daily about it, when the really hard times come, you already have that relationship and routine. Matthew 26:39 *“And he went a little beyond them, and fell on his face, and prayed, saying, “My Father, if it is possible, let this cup pass from me; yet not as I will, but as you will.”* That was Jesus, facing his own death. When you're a regular with God, you can even know God will see you through life into death.

Entering the Spiritual World

Romans 8:26-27 *“And in the same way the Spirit also helps our weakness; for we do not know how to pray as we should, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us with groanings too deep for words; and he who searches the hearts knows what the mind of the Spirit is, because he intercedes for the saints according to the will of God.”* When you pray, you don't even have to have just the right words, or any words. But you need

to let the Holy Spirit in. If you have never trusted Jesus Christ for your salvation, the Holy Spirit can't intercede in the same way.

If you don't know where to begin, look to Jesus and his example of the Lord's Prayer. We talk about ACTS as a model for prayer: Adoration, Confession, Thanksgiving, and Supplication, but another way to look at the Lord's Prayer is as a prayer with five steps:

1. **The Tune in Step:** (Like a radio)

Concentrate on who he is, and what he's done. (God, Jesus, Spirit)

2. **The Cooperation Step:** God's will be done

Thy kingdom come, thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven.

3. **The Petition Step:** faith-sized request. Pray step by step.

Give us this day our daily bread.

4. **The Forgiveness Step:** healing. Forgiveness keeps us from getting sick. An ounce of prevention = a pound of cure.

And forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive those who trespass against us.

That's the really dangerous part: Asking God to forgive like we forgive others. That only leads us to more prayer!

5. **The Victory Step:** Praying God's Promises of Victory for those who seek him.

Not like "Hail to the Victor's" type of victory, but God's victory, which begins with humility. (And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil, for thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory forever. Amen).

1 Peter 5:5-7 *"and all of you, clothe yourselves with humility toward one another, for God is opposed to the proud, but gives grace to the humble. Humble yourselves, therefore, under the mighty hand of God, that he may exalt you at the proper time, casting all your anxiety upon him, because he cares for you."*

- a. Humble ourselves – embrace the cross. Ask: Jesus, where next? The great exchange. Focus on self → focus on God.
- b. Submit ourselves – to others. The devil hates our love for one another.
- c. Cast your cares – Make a decision about your anxiety.
- d. Be self-controlled and alert – It's a war. Resist Satan. Keep up your guard.
- e. Stand firm in the faith – God wants to perfect us, if we let him. We have stand firm and rely on teamwork.

What are my prayers?

I've been here 9 weeks now. Do you want to know what my prayers are? Some are old, and some are new, but these are what I take into my closet with me:

1. Lord Jesus, have mercy on me.
2. Lord, I get so distracted, keep me in line – totally dependent on you.
3. Lord, I feel so incompetent. Help me to be the leader you want me to be. Help me to be the husband you want. Help me to be the father you want me to be.
4. Lord, help me lead our church...

Out of the bondage of financial indebtedness.

5. Into the community of unchurched and dechurched people who don't have a personal relationship with you, Jesus. That we may see your will for this area, to see your passion for the lost, to see your joy at every person who has come to know you, to see your God-sized dream for the west side of Ann Arbor.
6. Lord, help our church to encourage every person in this church who is struggling, who is trying to share your love with a friend, who is facing an especially uncertain future.
7. Lord, give me strength to walk alone with you, if necessary, because you're worth it.

E.M. Bounds, a writer on Christian prayer says "What the church needs today is not more machinery or better, not new organizations or more and novel methods, but men and women whom the Holy Spirit can use – men and women of prayer, men and women mighty in prayer!"

Jesus said, "*My house shall be called a house of prayer for all nations.*" (Mark 11:17)

John Wesley, founder of Methodism writes "God will do nothing on earth except in answer to believing prayer."

William Temple "When I pray, coincidences happen."

E.M. Bounds "Prayer can do anything God can do."

A.T. Pierson "There has never been a spiritual awakening in any country or locality that did not begin in united prayer."

In my office I have some pieces of the Berlin Wall and some chain link from the Iron Curtain separating Czech Republic from Austria. (Some of the high school youth group were looking at them, never having heard of the Berlin Wall.) I treasure them, for the reminder of my visits there, but mostly I value them for the Christians I met in old Eastern Germany and in Prague. They shared this story:

Joseph Stalin is quoted more than once as saying "When the babushkas (that is, the old grandmothers) die, Christianity in the USSR will be dead, and communism will have won." The Christian church in the former Soviet countries was terribly persecuted. Many pastors and active lay persons lost their lives. The church could not put anything outside their buildings, could not invite anyone to their church, or talk about it, else the government informants would hear and the person in question would be deported. The worship services were government sanctioned events devoid of most of their meaning.

But those babushkas, those old grandmothers, who faithfully went to the old churches, weren't just dusting off the altars. Those old grandmothers, most of whom were only little girls when communism took over, were praying. And those praying grandmothers were praying for a day when the church could once again openly share the good news of salvation through Jesus Christ. Well, in November of 1989 the Wall came down in Germany, and the Velvet Revolution happened in the Czech Republic (named "Velvet" because no

lives were lost). Stalin had long ago died, Communism fell, and those old, praying grandmothers kept right on praying. The churches, all together at noon, rang their bells that had been silent for decades. The minister of a small church put out the first sign he was ever allowed to hang, hand written, in front of his church in Prague: "The Lamb won. The Lamb won."

Can you see it? Do you see? Prayer isn't a last resort. Prayer isn't even preparation for the battle. Prayer is the battle. And the church God had in mind is a praying church, that we may declare the truth: The Lamb won. The Lamb won. The Lamb won. Amen!