



DEXTER UNITED METHODIST CHURCH

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Connection: Prayer

“Do you want me to put the kettle on?”

August 10, 2008

By Matt Hook

1 Timothy 2:1-4

“I urge, then, first of all, that requests, prayers, intercession and thanksgiving be made for everyone— 2 for kings and all those in authority, that we may live peaceful and quiet lives in all godliness and holiness. 3 This is good, and pleases God our Savior, 4 who wants all people to be saved and to come to a knowledge of the truth.”

What if we took prayer as seriously as the gymnasts I saw last night took the pommel horse? ☺. We’ve been talking about the spiritual disciplines God gave us to be close to Him; how Paul writes to *“Discipline yourself for the purpose of godliness.”* 1 Tim. 4:7. The Greek word he uses for discipline is *gymnazo* (gymnasium). But if praying were such an Olympic sport, I wonder how many of us could compete? Do I take my prayer life seriously? Do I even think about it?

The truth is, sometimes I wonder why I even bother praying. I pray for people to get better and they don’t always. I pray for peace and wonder why we still have so much war. I pray God will help me be a better husband and father, and I know I can do better. I pray for God to keep me totally dependent on Him, and I get so distracted. I mean, I *know*

Prayer is not bargaining or pleading. It’s not a matter of changing God’s mind or some magical influence or spell. Pagan religions worshiped Gods that could be charmed with incantations or offerings. But attempts to coerce God didn’t stop with ancient rituals. It exists today in America: “Name it and claim it” falls into that. God cannot be manipulated!

Prayer is not a get-rich-quick scheme. Prayer does not release powers of good fortune from heaven, filling your wallet or purse with cash. As difficult as it is to understand, God’s will may be for His people to live poor, *just as His own Son and the apostles who followed Him did.*

Prayer is not rubbing the lamp and presenting God with a wish list as though God were a genie.

Prayer is not trying to motivate God or impress God to gain what we want.

Prayer is not a substitute for action. Like praying “Lord help me on my test” without opening your book. Or “Lord, help me exercise” without doing anything. Or “Lord, help the poor people” without getting to know any poor folks, or participating in any of the social action, missions opportunities we do around here.

I *know* prayer is *not* supposed to be all that. But I *want* God to bless me, and I *want* God to bless those I care about and lift to Him in prayer. And I know God wants *good* for His people. So when it doesn’t happen, I wonder why I even bother praying. I bet *you’ve* wondered about that as well. So what is prayer and what’s its purpose then?

We say “Prayer is communication with God.” And the purpose of prayer is to connect with God in order to

transfer *God's* will into your life. When we work, we work. When we pray, God works! 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."

How can communication with God lead us to allow God's will to be transferred into our lives? Maybe the problem is understanding communication itself. A major breakthrough happened early on in my marriage that improved my marriage and has improved my life in all kinds of ways. It happened the first time Leigh and I sat down and she said "I want you to listen, and I don't want you to fix it." Whoa. At first, being a guy, I wanted to say "Then why bother to tell me?" But then I felt this great sense of relief. Even though what she was frustrated with *was* me – not being home when I said I would be. Early in our marriage Leigh would say "Let's talk." And I'd stop, and I'd say "Okay. What do you want to talk about?" And then she'd say "Just forget it." (I was so confused! "What'd I do!? I said 'Okay!') Then we heard a speaker at a marriage conference say "Men communicate for information. Women communicate for relationship." Let me repeat that. **Communication is for information *or* relationship.** So *now* when Leigh says "Let's talk." I say "Do you want me to put the kettle on? (Leigh loves tea), or do you want me to make coffee?" And then she's like "Ahh, he get's it." Communication for relationship is a way of looking at life from the same angle. Exploring life and seeing things side by side. And it *is* great. And it *is* different. And it *was* painful to learn those steps to take to get there. And there are all kinds of depths waiting for you there, especially for guys.

God must've known that we would need help. Look what Paul wrote to Timothy in 1 Timothy 2:1-4: "*I urge, then, first of all, that requests, prayers, intercession and thanksgiving be made for everyone— 2 for kings and all those in authority, that we may live peaceful and quiet lives in all godliness and holiness. 3 This is good, and pleases God our Savior, 4 who wants all people to be saved and to come to a knowledge of the truth.*"

Timothy was a young man that Paul had mentored. Sometime after Timothy became the pastor in Ephesus, Paul wrote him a letter, communicating the keys to the faith. He starts this section with the discipline of prayer, beginning with the words "*First of all...*"

That's it. That's our priority. Basically, Paul is saying "First of all, I urge you, I plead with you, Timothy, first pray. First, before you slide out of your bed. First, before you take a shower and start your day. First, before you make your way to work. First, before any appointment. First of all, pray, pray, pray. Ask yourself today, **what would happen if I pray first?**

Prayer was huge to the early church. According to Acts 2:42, the first Christians devoted themselves to 4 essentials: "*They were continually devoting themselves to the apostles' teaching and to fellowship, (we should be a church of hospitality. Invite someone over for lunch), to the breaking of bread and to prayer.*" This was a time of exploding growth for the church. But notice: this didn't stop the pressure from mounting *against* those early disciples. They began to be thrown in jail. Prayer went up for them. When they were released, their friends again "*lifted their voices to God with one accord*" Acts 4:24 as they prayed for the success of the gospel and the faithfulness of the church. Their first response to persecution wasn't panic, it was prayer. They interrupted their days to seek God's mind, to plead for His protection, to ask for His strength and sustaining grace. Even in the middle of the day.

That's what prayer does. It's radical. When your day is rolling along at its own pace and in its own direction, interrupt it with prayer. As your day builds toward a crisis, deliberately stop to pray.

The church kept growing, through persecution. In Acts 6 it was so large that the apostles could not meet all the needs. Some widows weren't getting the food they needed to survive. So they divvied up responsibilities, got more people to serve, and more people were able to be helped. The same is true today.

And then in Acts 7 a huge tragedy happened in the life of the first church. Enemies of the gospel dragged down Stephen, one of those taking responsibility for feeding the poor widows. After a mock court, they condemned him to death by stoning. As the stones crushed him, he prayed, "*Lord, don't hold this sin against them!*" Acts 7:60. And catch this...

Standing nearby, a young man held the robes of Stephen's executioners. His name was Saul, later called Paul. Saul had seen firsthand the results of prayer in building a movement he couldn't destroy. Stephen's prayer must have haunted him. Saul was enraged, and he multiplied his efforts to destroy every Christ follower he could find. But the Lord disabled him on the road to Damascus and made him the champion of the very movement he tried to wipe out—the movement built and sustained by prayer. Do you see? No wonder Paul told Timothy, "*First of all, pray!*" I believe the first window into God wasn't Paul's conversion encounter on the road to Damascus. It was here. It was witnessing Stephen's prayer. May that be each of us...

As wild as that is for a movement, let's make it personal. Before you get on with your day, you'll face a choice: between worry and prayer. Worry is an addiction. Some of us are so bad we worry about the fact that we don't have anything to worry about! Anxiety has become a favorite pastime that we love to hate. But Jesus said "Don't." Paul wrote the Christ followers in Philippi "*Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. And the peace of God, which passes understanding, will guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus.*" Philippians 4:5-7.

Worry about nothing. Pray first. Pray for everything. Let me say that again. Worry about nothing. Pray for everything. This isn't living in a state of denial. It's not "Don't worry, be happy." Your concerns, and people's needs, are serious. If you don't resolve some of them, the consequences will be huge. *When* it hits, *before* it hits, decide *now* that you will transform your worry into prayer.

This week, start your day with prayer and continue praying off and on through the day. Pray as you drive (eyes open). Pray as you work. Pray before your lunch break. Pray when you get that difficult phone call. Pray when you're disappointed. Pray when surprises come. Pray when you triumph. Pray in the midst of painful news. Pray without ceasing...literally.

Imagine a group of people as large as the group in this room, whose primary goal in calling out to God is *not* to make life easier or more enjoyable for ourselves. Imagine a group this large whose goal is intimacy, closeness with God, by praying first? When we sense God wants to talk, we essentially ask Him in return, "Do you want me to put the kettle on?"

Study Guide

Monday— Read Luke 9:18. Where do you go to get alone with God? Cultivate that spot: your car, your room, a favorite chair. Ask Christ to meet you there each day this week. Get Him into your secrets; the inner room of your heart.

Tuesday— Reread your sermon notes. Read 1 Timothy 2:1—6. Before every "encounter" of your day, before every new event of your day, before every activity or conversation, practice the presence of Christ. Ask God in prayer "Make me your instrument, Lord, right here, right now."

Wednesday—Read Mark 1:35, Mark 6:46, Luke 5:15-16, Luke 6:12. Each of these times Jesus' prayer were marked by big times in His ministry: after a healing, after feeding the multitudes, before he chose His 12 disciples. Can you look back and see big times in your life when you needed to pray? Now look ahead and see big times ahead when you need a blanket of prayer. Begin now.

Thursday— Read Matthew 6:6. Read Psalm 121. Focus in on verse 7. "He will keep your soul." The Psalmist is saying nothing else will do. Your soul is so precious, a lot of things vie for your soul, but only the Lord can take it and make it better. What does that mean for you today? Seek God's eyes to help you see.

Friday—Read Romans 8:26-27. When you receive Christ into your life, His Holy Spirit, God Himself, is in you. Even in groans, or sighs, the Holy Spirit intercedes for you. 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 done this, pray that Christ would take your sins and weaknesses, fill you with His Spirit, and trust Christ for eternal life.

Give Him all you know of yourself, trusting that He will deliver you, heal you, and be your God. And pray through Romans 8. Pray in silence. Heave some breaths, sighs, groans, or cries, and trust God's Holy Spirit for all the meaning you need. Allow God to minister to you as you live for Him in each moment.