

A People Connected with God's Heart

Part 3 – A Vision for Prayer

I. Review: The Need for a Vision for Prayer

1. It is God's deepest desire: a people connected with His heart. He is longing that we would be joined with Him even as God is joined with Himself in perfect unity of heart within the Trinity (**John 17:20-26**).
2. It is our soul's underlying need: we were not made to function apart from that connection with our Creator. Independence is an American idol – it was never part of God's plan for man. We were made for the free will exercise of dominion over the earth (**Genesis 1:26,2:16-17**), but we were made to exercise that dominion and free will through intimate relationship with God. When Adam chose independence death entered just as promised – man was cut off from God (**Genesis 3:8-10,23-24**). Jesus came to restore us to life – to that connection with God (**John 17:3**). **Romans 5:17** For if by the one man's offense death reigned through the one, much more those who receive abundance of grace and of the gift of righteousness will reign in life through the One, Jesus Christ.
3. It is the world's desperate cry: a world without hope and without God is in desperate need of a people filled with hope and connected with God. Nothing will impact the world as much as the power released through prayer and through the heart transformed through prayer (**2 Chronicles 16:9, Matthew 9:17**). We need to touch God and be touched by God so that when we touch the world it brings that breakthrough touch of God.
John 17:20 “I do not pray for these alone, but also for those who will believe in Me through their word; 21 that they all may be one, as You, Father, are in Me, and I in You; that they also may be one in Us, that the world may believe that You sent Me. 22 And the glory which You gave Me I have given them, that they may be one just as We are one: 23 I in them, and You in Me; that they may be made perfect in one, and that the world may know that You have sent Me, and have loved them as You have loved Me.”

II. A Right Motivation

1 Chronicles 28:9 “As for you, my son Solomon, know the God of your father, and serve Him with a loyal heart and with a willing mind; for the LORD searches all hearts and understands all the intent of the thoughts. If you seek Him, He will be found by you; but if you forsake Him, He will cast you off forever. 10 Consider now, for the LORD has chosen you to build a house for the sanctuary; be strong, and do it.”

1. Having a right motivation for why we pray goes miles towards sustaining a life of prayer that truly touches our hearts and accomplishes all that God intended. Our motive shapes the fruit we are looking for as we pray and the methods we use as we pray. It shapes our mindset and heart posture every time we come in to the place of prayer.
2. With a wrong motivation it's possible to spend time in prayer but never really connect with the heart of God and in fact come out more cynical and hard-hearted than ever (ie the Pharisees: **Luke 18:9-14, Matthew 6:5**).

3. We must have a vision for prayer: for its value – that our weak words truly do move heaven and earth – but even more importantly for its purpose – to draw us closer to God.
4. We want our vision for prayer to align with God's vision for prayer. The central purpose of prayer in God's eyes is not just government, but specifically government through intimacy. Prayer is the most unnatural, awkward means of establishing God's kingdom and authority that anyone could have thought up, but it is the most beautiful, perfect means of drawing us deeper into relationship with Him that anyone could have thought up.
5. Prayer was never meant as a means to an end, but as the end. The house of prayer is not here until revival comes – it is the revival. We have to have a vision for prayer that goes beyond just being a means to an end no matter how good that end is. The purpose of prayer is to draw us near to God, and that is a purpose that will go on for all eternity.
Isaiah 56:7 For My house shall be called a house of prayer for all nations
6. Prayer is fundamentally different from every other ministry in that the highest objective of prayer is not to accomplish things for ourselves or even for God – our objective *is* God: to seek His face, to seek His heart and to minister to Him. There is an endless list of good things that will flow out of that, and we want those as well, but God Himself is the one thing needed.
Luke 10:41 And Jesus answered and said to her, “Martha, Martha, you are worried and troubled about many things. 42 But one thing is needed, and Mary has chosen that good part, which will not be taken away from her.”
Psalms 27:4 One thing I have desired of the LORD, That will I seek: That I may dwell in the house of the LORD All the days of my life, To behold the beauty of the LORD, And to inquire in His temple.
7. Our reward as an intercessor has to be primarily vertical – we're in it to connect with God, not to see the breakthrough or to get anointed. Those things are good, and they will come, but one of the primary reasons God requires us to pray is because in the process our focus shifts to Him rather than the breakthrough and so our hearts are protected when the breakthrough does (or doesn't) come.
8. The heart that comes to the place of prayer desiring friendship with God as its primary reward is unoffendable. If our reward is a bigger ministry or a more comfortable life, we will ultimately become offended at God's ways when it comes to answering prayer.
9. We must see prayer first and foremost as a ministry to God, and secondarily to those we are interceding for (including ourselves). This is how God sees the priestly ministry of prayer.
Luke 2:36 Now there was one, Anna, a prophetess, the daughter of Phanuel, of the tribe of Asher. She was of a great age, and had lived with a husband seven years from her virginity; 37 and this woman was a widow of about eighty-four years, who did not depart from the temple, but served God with fastings and prayers night and day.
10. The ministry of intercession, like the priestly ministry of the Old Testament is a declaration about who God is: His holiness that demands nothing less than that He be fully glorified in all His creation; His goodness that offers man acceptance and relief from himself, and His mercy that provides a means to reconcile the two.

III. Prayer Objectives

1. Enjoyable prayer
 - a. God enjoys prayer – He wouldn't have created it otherwise. It is fully His intention that we would enjoy it as well.
Isaiah 56:7 I will bring to My holy mountain, And make them joyful in My house of prayer.
 - b. God created prayer as a place of encounter for the human heart, a place of receiving our great reward – Him. Though there is a real labor to it, prayer is drawing near to the One we love and we want to go about prayer in such a way that it brings delight to our heart in His presence and causes us to love Him all the more.
2. Sustainable prayer
 - a. In numerous places, the Bible talks about ceaseless prayer (**Mal 1:11, Isa 62:6, Lk 18:7, Rom 12:12, Eph 6:18, 1 Th 5:17**). Prayer is more than a response to circumstances, it is the core of our relationship with God. We must be able to stay engaged in the place of prayer all the days of our lives – in the good, the bad and the mundane.
Luke 18:7 And shall God not bring justice for His elect who cry out day and night to Him
 - b. Prayer, while taxing to our flesh (physically, emotionally and mentally) is meant to be fuel for our spirit. We want to engage in prayer in a way that refuels us with a deeper passion for God and for the place of prayer even as we're pouring out in intercession.
2 Corinthians 4:16 Therefore we do not lose heart. Though outwardly we are wasting away, yet inwardly we are being renewed day by day.
3. Accessible prayer
 - a. Prayer is intentionally weak in nature so that it is available to all of God's children wherever we may be at.
Psalms 8:2 Out of the mouth of babes and nursing infants You have ordained strength, Because of Your enemies, That You may silence the enemy and the avenger
 - b. Prayer has no prerequisites. Knowing God's heart and gaining revelation into His nature and His purposes is the reward of prayer, not the prerequisite for it.

IV. Prayer Values

Matthew 6:9 In this manner, therefore, pray: Our Father in heaven, Hallowed be Your name. 10 Your kingdom come. Your will be done On earth as it is in heaven.

1. God-centered Prayer - "Hallowed be Your name"
 - a. God is the center of all of His creation, prayer certainly being no exception.
Romans 11:36 For of Him and through Him and to Him are all things
 - b. We want God (as opposed to us, our problems, our enemies, the enemy, or anything else) to be the central focus of our prayers. It's what causes our spirit to come alive. Rather than weighing ourselves further down with all the negative thoughts and emotions that come to mind at our problem we feed our spirit on the compassion, mercy and justice of God.
 - c. Our chief reward as intercessors is not that we have been given authority over our enemies or solutions to our problems, but that we are given access to the King.

- d. Any theology of prayer (and there are many) that does not focus on God misses the entire purpose of the place of prayer. It leaves our spirit starving and dull, and it denies God His reward in the whole process – our attention and affection.
- e. God-centered prayer is not just a good general practice – it is prayer. Focusing upon God and directing our thoughts and requests to Him is what differentiates prayer from wishful thinking, frustrated venting or just thinking out loud.
- f. One of the most helpful exercises when spending time in prayer is to begin and then routinely return to the place of focusing our gaze on God – the Father on His throne, the Son interceding for us on the cross or at the righthand of the Father, the Spirit within.

2. Intimate Prayer - “Our Father in heaven”

- a. Prayer is about relationship. It exists because God desires relationship and it functions around the reality of relationship. As we focus on “our Father in heaven” in prayer a number of wrong mindsets that we are liable to bring in with us fall away. It removes feelings of shame and unworthiness knowing that we are indeed weak but He loves us anyway. It removes our attempts to get God's attention knowing that we already have it.
- b. Our relationship as sons of God invites us to come to the place of prayer with a position of authority as heirs to the kingdom.
Romans 8:14 For as many as are led by the Spirit of God, these are sons of God. 15 For you did not receive the spirit of bondage again to fear, but you received the Spirit of adoption by whom we cry out, “Abba, Father.” 16 The Spirit Himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God, 17 and if children, then heirs—heirs of God and joint heirs with Christ, if indeed we suffer with Him, that we may also be glorified together.
Matthew 7:11 If you then, being evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father who is in heaven give good things to those who ask Him!
- c. Our relationship as the bride of Christ invites us to pray from a position of intimacy as dearly beloved of God.
Esther 8:4 And the king held out the golden scepter toward Esther. So Esther arose and stood before the king, 5 and said, “If it pleases the king, and if I have found favor in his sight and the thing seems right to the king and I am pleasing in his eyes, let it be written to revoke the letters devised by Haman, the son of Hammedatha the Agagite, which he wrote to annihilate the Jews who are in all the king’s provinces. 6 For how can I endure to see the evil that will come to my people? Or how can I endure to see the destruction of my countrymen?”
- d. Prayer based on intimacy removes a great deal of potential for offense. We are not there to use God for what we want Him to do and neither are we there for Him to use us as a means to do what He wants to do. We're there because He wants us there – because He enjoys our company and enjoys involving us in all that He is doing.
John 17:24 “Father, I desire that they also whom You gave Me may be with Me where I am
Song 2:14 “ O my dove, in the clefts of the rock, In the secret places of the cliff, Let me see your face, Let me hear your voice; For your voice is sweet, And your face is lovely.”
- e. A helpful practice in prayer times is simply to step back and recognize what we're doing and then spend a while just expressing love to the Father for having brought us near as children of God who have access with confidence to His holy presence.

3. Heavenly Prayer - "Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven"
 - a. The issue in prayer is not so much about us conveying our problem to God – He already knows.
Matthew 6:7 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. 8 "Therefore do not be like them. For your Father knows the things you have need of before you ask Him.
 - b. The issue is God conveying to us His solution – He wants to make known His will and so makes prayer contingent on it.
1 John 5:14 This is the confidence we have in approaching God: that if we ask anything according to His will...15 we know that we have what we asked of Him.
 - c. Scripture is central to effective prayer – it reveals God's will, and so teaches us how to pray. Rather than trying to figure out for God what we want Him to do, we seek to figure out from God what He wants to do and then partner with Him through prayer. Praying from Scripture not only brings us into unity with the heart of God, it increases our faith, knowing that what we're asking is in God's heart to give.
 - d. The Apostolic Prayers of the New Testament make a great guide to give us insight into the heart of God and all that He's desiring to do in every situation. They're God-breathed and therefore in His heart to do, and they give us a heavenly perspective that keeps us focused on the true spiritual issues where men most need a breakthrough and where God most longs to break in.
Colossians 3:1 If then you were raised with Christ, seek those things which are above, where Christ is, sitting at the right hand of God. 2 Set your mind on things above, not on things on the earth. 3 For you died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God.
 - e. Our objective in prayer is to bring heaven's perspective to earth's situations (or put another way heaven's solutions to earth's problems). We are ambassadors of heaven – we live on earth and our assignment is its affairs, but we belong to heaven and our identity, values and agenda come from heaven.
4. Positive Prayer - "Your kingdom come"
 - a. Jesus and all of the apostles set a clear example for our focus in intercession – inviting the kingdom of light and life and truth to break in.
 - b. Very little shifts in heaven or on earth when we call the darkness dark and the dry bones dead. The power of intercession lies in partnering with the God of Genesis and of Revelation in His creative and redemptive purposes – speaking light to the darkness and life into the dry bones.
 - c. We do not need to convince God of the extent of our problem – doing so generally leads to complaining and/or finger-pointing. We occasionally need to convince *ourselves*, but never God. The great news is God cares about even our little problems, so we don't have to tell Him how big they are.
 - d. God's solutions are exceedingly, abundantly above and beyond all we can ask or imagine (**Ephesians 3:20**) and the difference between that and where things sit now is what we want to drive us to urgency.

V. Effective Prayer

1. Effective prayer means more than just accomplishing what we asked – it means accomplishing God's purpose for prayer. The fruit we of a life of prayer cannot be judged exclusively by our results. Jeremiah was called by the Lord to a life of intercession and spent his whole life crying out for mercy for Israel when God had already told him that Israel was too hardened and He would not relent. Was his prayer ministry unsuccessful?
2. We want a life of prayer to cultivate God receiving all the glory as He answers, and our heart finding its reward in knowing Him.
Jeremiah 9:23 Thus says the LORD: “ Let not the wise man glory in his wisdom, Let not the mighty man glory in his might, Nor let the rich man glory in his riches; 24 But let him who glories glory in this, That he understands and knows Me, That I am the LORD, exercising lovingkindness, judgment, and righteousness in the earth. For in these I delight,” says the LORD.
3. We want a life of prayer to lead to our hearts sharing in His joy as we faithfully partner with Him using what He gave to bring Him glory.
Matthew 25:20 “So he who had received five talents came and brought five other talents, saying, ‘Lord, you delivered to me five talents; look, I have gained five more talents besides them.’ 21 His lord said to him, ‘Well done, good and faithful servant; you were faithful over a few things, I will make you ruler over many things. Enter into the joy of your lord.’
4. We want a life of prayer to produce a growing love for the God who hears prayer
Isaiah 64:4 For since the beginning of the world Men have not heard nor perceived by the ear, Nor has the eye seen any God besides You, Who acts for the one who waits for Him.
Psalms 65:1 Praise is awaiting You, O God, in Zion; And to You the vow shall be performed. 2 O You who hear prayer, To You all flesh will come.