

“THE POWER OF A SIMPLE PRAYER”  
Proverbs 3:5-10, Matthew 7:7-11, I Chronicles 4:9-10  
November 16 & 17, 2019

“In Hugh Price Hughes’ story, the “City of Everywhere,” a man arrived in a city one cold morning. As he got off the train, the station was like any other station with the crowds and redcaps, except that everybody was barefoot. They wore no shoes. He noticed the cab driver was barefoot. ‘Pardon me,’ he asked the driver, ‘I was just wondering why you don’t wear shoes. Don’t you believe in shoes?’

“Sure we do,’ said the driver. ‘Why don’t you wear them?’ ‘Ah, that’s the question,’ came the reply. ‘Why don’t we wear shoes? Why don’t we?’

“At the hotel it was the same. The clerk, bell boys, everybody was barefoot. In the coffee shop he noticed a nice-looking fellow at a table opposite him who was also barefoot. He said, ‘I notice you aren’t wearing any shoes. I wonder why? Don’t you know about shoes?’

“The man replied, ‘Of course I know about shoes.’ ‘Then why don’t you wear them?’

“Ah, that’s the question. Why don’t we? Why don’t we?’

“After breakfast the man walked out on the street in the snow but every person he saw was barefoot. He asked another man about it, and pointed out how shoes protect the feet from cold. The man said, ‘We know about shoes. See that building yonder? That is a shoe factory. We are proud of that plant and ever week we gather there to hear the man in charge tell about shoes and how wonderful they are.’

“Then why don’t you wear shoes?’ ‘Ah, that’s the question.’

Another question comes to mind; “Don’t we believe in prayer? Don’t we know what it could mean in our lives? Then Why Don’t We PRAY? Ah, that’s the question... Why don’t we?”<sup>1</sup>

For many of us we find it inconvenient to pray because we have Too Many DISTRACTIONS in our lives. For many young families, the children gobble up all the available time during the day; diaper

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<sup>1</sup> (Robert J. Morgan, *Stories, Illustrations and Quotes*, [Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 2000] pg. 632-633)

changes, day-care, preschool. Or maybe it's getting them up and off to school; getting them to practice, or getting their homework done; getting meals ready and then getting them to bed. For others it's the husband's or the wife's demands, helping them get through their day. For some it's the demands of the job; answering the phone, getting the press set up, making sure the employees are doing their work. For others it the phone in their hand or the music in their ears or the movies on their iPads or the Books from Amazon or the emails, or snap-chats, or Facebook, or Instagram's. For some it's the TV; the latest soap or drama, or the newest recorded show, or news cast, or any other program to veg out in front of. And there are the pets; cats or dogs that need attending to, walking, feeding, cleaning up after, paying attention to or shopping for. And for some, it's just the daily chores that get in the way; laundry, grocery shopping, vacuuming, dishes or floors! We have so many distractions that Satan puts in our way that we think we just "don't have time to pray."

Actually it's that we just don't make time to pray. Did you know you can pray while you drive to work or to school? Or as you're taking a shower? Or while you're working out at the gym? Or as you're cleaning the house? Or as you're standing in the Starbuck's line for your coffee? Or as you're feeding the pets or chasing the kids, or at any other time of the day? We have all the time in the day to pray, but why don't we? Ah, that is the question. Why don't we?

Then we find that we may have Too Many **WORRIES**. We worry about the kids, about the gas prices, about the troubles in Iran, or China, or North Korea. We worry about what we'll have to eat when the family comes home for Thanksgiving or Christmas. We worry about the taxes, or the house payment, or how that dilemma with the electric company will work out. I don't know what you worry about, but those worries completely absorb all our attention so that we don't pray. There's too much stuff to worry about that we don't take the time to stop and give our worries over to God who can take care of them. We're so busy worrying that we forget we have One who can answer and resolve all our worries.

And we may even have Too Many **BLESSINGS** in our lives and that keep us from praying.

When we have such an abundance in our lives, we come to think that we have it all made and we don't NEED to pray. Why pray when we have all we need? We even come to believe that we don't need to pray - until everything comes apart at the seams, we begin to lose it all, and we become so panicked about everything leaving that we are consumed with trying to get it all back again. Then we feel we don't have time to pray because life becomes about the things in our lives rather than the One who has supplied them all to us in the first place.

Why don't we pray? Just count the ways that we are distracted, or worried, or blessed that we feel it's not important enough to spend time praying. A while ago Bill Hybels wrote a little book entitled, "Too Busy NOT To Pray!" Boy did he have it right. The busier we are, the more we NEED to pray so that God can use us in the right-now-moments of life.

But it all comes down to the question WHERE DO WE PUT OUR TRUST? Where do we turn when life gets turned up-side-down? Where do we turn to for advice? Where do we go for guidance and direction? Where do we go for financial help? Do we turn to friends? Do we turn to family? Do we turn to the folks at the job? Do we turn to the government to solve all our problems? When we look at Proverbs 3, we see in verse 5 these very wise words just for us, "*Trust in the Lord with all your heart. Never rely on what you think you know.*" Who are we supposed to turn to? (The Lord.) Who are we not supposed to trust? (Ourselves.)

You see GOD IS the source of all wisdom and knowledge. He is the One we can turn to in order to find the answers to our questions, the relief from our worries, and the calm from our distractions. Verses 6-8 says it straight out, "*Remember the Lord in everything you do, and He will show you the right way. Never let yourself think that you are wiser than you are; simply obey the Lord and refuse to do wrong. If you do, it will be like good medicine, healing your wounds and easing your pains.*" It is the Lord who we are to put our trust in so that HE can bring about the solutions to all our problems. If we try to do it all on our own, we end up relying upon our own strength, our own wisdom, our own knowledge, and our own resources, and those are only limited. Why not turn to the One who has it all?

Proverbs 3:9-10 gives us this great example of what can happen when we turn to the Lord in prayer for His help. *“Honor the Lord by making Him an offering from the BEST of all that your land produces. If you do, your barns will be filled with grain, and you will have too much wine to store it all.”* When we turn to the Lord and let Him become a valuable part of our life, when we give Him the best of all that we have, He sees our hearts and He determines to reward us with much more. God’s not going to let us become destitute if we give to Him our best! No He will continue to bless us over and over again, and it is amazing the abundance that the Lord has for us when we offer Him our best.

Our world today thinks that if you give away your best, it’s gone, never to come back to you. The world thinks in terms of our resources having a limit to them – we give what we have and when it’s gone, that’s it. But that’s not the way that God works. When we give to the work of the Lord, He sees our hearts, and He rewards us. We give to Him, and He returns it to us (maybe not in the same thing that was given by us, but He will meet our needs and add even more.) And the promise of Proverbs 3:10 is that the Lord will return so much to us that there will not be enough room for us to hold all the blessings we get back. Imagine that!

So we are invited to **LET PRAYER BE THE FIRST THING ON YOUR MIND** when you get up in the morning, and the last thing on your mind when you go to bed at night. Jesus calls us to pray so that we might come to understand what the Lord our God can do for us and through us. In Matthew 7 we hear Jesus tell us, *“Ask, and you will receive; seek, and you will find; knock, and the door will be opened to you...”* (7:7). And that means praying, my friends. Prayer is putting our requests before the LORD. Big or small, God delights to meet our daily needs and bless us abundantly. Let’s explore each of these a little deeper.

First, what happens when we find ourselves lacking in what we think we need? Well, **We do not HAVE** because we do not **ASK**. Jesus said, *“Ask, and you will receive...”* If we don’t ask, how can we expect to receive? True, God knows our needs even before we ask, but He wants us to ask BEFORE we receive His blessings in abundance.

“Evangelist John R. Rice once wrote, ‘I once imagined I was in Heaven. Waling along with the Angel Gabriel I said, ‘Gabe, what is that big building there?’ ‘You’ll be disappointed,’ he answered. ‘I don’t think you want to see it.’ But I insisted, and he showed me floor after floor of beautiful gifts, all wrapped and ready to be sent.

“‘Gabriel, what are all these?’ ‘Rather sadly he replied, ‘We wrapped these things, but people never called for them.’”<sup>2</sup> If we don’t ask, we don’t receive.

And then, all too many times We SEEK the answers from all the **WRONG PLACES**. We turn to human resources first and we forget about the God of the Universe who created everything. We turn to false religions, or teachings of other people who we think are wise and learned, or at worst, follow the teachings of the Enemy who would deceive us and destroy us, Satan. When we seek the answers to all our problems in anything else EXCEPT the Lord God, it is useless to us. Oh, there are some who pray to Satan, and He gives them riches or pleasures galore, but only to turn them away from the Lord God. And we see that in the lives of many people today who boldly reject God, but seem to do very well – even abundantly! But look at their end, the way they live their lives, and the results of their living. When we seek ANYTHING or ANYONE else other than the Lord God, our lives are miserable, deprived of blessings, and full of hardships and worries and distractions, and we come to horrible ends.

And then, Without **KNOCKING**, no one **KNOWS** we’re there. Ever go to visit someone and when you get to their doorway you just stand there? You don’t knock or ring the doorbell – you just stand there on the front porch waiting for someone to come let you in. How long would you be standing there? You might be visited by the local police if the neighbors see you standing there at the door of that house. But unless someone happens to go past the front door and notice that someone is outside, the ones in the house will never know you are standing at their front door. To gain entry into another person’s house, you have to knock to get their attention. Otherwise they will never know you are there at their door needing something from them.

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<sup>2</sup> (Robert J. Morgan, *Stories, Illustrations & Quotes...* pg. 630-631)

Unless we ask, we will never receive. Unless we seek, we will never find. If we never knock at the doors of Heaven, they will never be opened up to us so that the storehouses of God may be delivered to us.

But let me tell you this, God **DELIGHTS** to give us many good things, if we would but ask. And Jesus makes that very clear to us in Matthew 7:9-11, “*Would any of you who are fathers give your son a stone when he asks for bread? Or would you give him a snake when he asks for a fish? As bad as you are, you know how to give good things to your children. **How much more, then, will your Father in heaven give good things to those who ask Him.***” So, why don’t we pray? Ah, that is the question.

So let’s look at the results of someone who dared ask of the Lord. Here is THE **POWER** OF A **SIMPLE PRAYER** as found in the middle of 1 Chronicles 4. Listen to the prayer of a man named Jabez. (READ 1 Chronicles 4:9-10).

The first 9 chapters of 1 Chronicles is list upon list of names of the families of the people of Israel. There is a little dialogue about what is happening in the lives of these folks, but it is very dry reading. But there are only 2 times in these 9 chapters that we find individuals calling out to the Lord in prayer, here in chapter 4:9-10 and then in chapter 5:20. Both times, God answered their prayers and gave them their request.

But let’s look at Jabez. Bruce Wilkinson says it like this. “Right in the middle of the roll call for the tribe of Judah, the historian suddenly stops mid-drone, clears his throat, and then lifts up a particular person. ‘Ah, wait a minute!’ he seems to interject. ‘You just gotta know something about this guy named Jabez. He stands head and shoulders above the rest!’ What was the secret to the enduring reputation of Jabez? You can search from front to back in your Bible...and you won’t find any more information than we have in these two brief verses: 1) Thing started badly for a person no one had ever heard of. 2) He prayed an unusual, one-sentence prayer. 3) Things ended extraordinarily well. Clearly the outcome can be traced to his prayer.”<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> (Bruce Wilkinson, *The Prayer of Jabez*, [Sisters, OR: Multnomah Publications, 2000] pg. 14-15)

Here is An absolute “nobody” who receives God’s BLESSINGS. Out of the middle of nowhere, the author puts in this little prayer of unknown Jabez, and we see that not only does God hear his prayer, but “...*God gave him what he prayed for*” (4:10). Simply amazing! But why would God listen to something from one so unknown and delight in answering his prayer? Well, we’re told in the Good News Translation of the Bible that he “...*was the most respected member of his family*” (4:9). In the New American Standard Bible it says he “...*was more honorable than his brothers.*”

Ok, so we have an honorable man who is a stand out in his family, but Why did he ASK what he asked? Well we see that he has a problem. He has a name that constantly reminds not only his mother, but everyone around him, that he caused pain at his birth. The name Jabez means one who caused pain. Think about having to live with that name for the rest of your life! Everywhere you go, people would be wary of you just because of your name. They didn’t want to be influenced by this man because he brought pain. It was a tough name to endure, so Jabez desperately wanted to live in such a way as to demonstrate that he was not what his name said he was. His honorable life was testimony to his great desire to no longer cause pain. But who wants to deal with anyone who causes pain? So Jabez asked for the mercies of God to bless him so that he would not cause pain, but bring blessing instead.

And What did he SEEK from the Lord? More than just to increase his belongings and property, Jabez sought the Lord’s presence to be with him in all of his ways and to keep him from doing anything that was evil.

I like the way that Lance Wubbels and Terry McDowell put it in their book, *Bible Nobodies Who Became Somebodies* [Shippensburg, PA: Destiny Image Publishers, 2004, pg. 126]. “God was pleased by Jabez’s request to come under the Lord’s blessings and presence and to have his territory enlarged! God was pleased that the young man would request His presence and the strength of His hand to be with him and to keep him from harm. It is obvious from the fact that God granted these specific requests to Jabez that there was nothing of selfishness mixed in with the prayer. It is God’s delight to fulfill all that is in the heart of His people when it comes to blessing the world.”

Where did Jabez **KNOCK**? He didn't turn to his family, or his friends, or his employer, or even the leaders of the country. Jabez went to the One he knew would be able to grant his request. Jabez goes to the Lord God, the Creator of the universe. He knocks at the door of heaven, convinced that God would help him to outlive his name in order to make a difference to those around him.

And of course we can ask, What was God's **RESPONSE**? Simple – "...*God gave him what he prayed for.*" God saw the heart of Jabez, heard his prayer of sincerity and purpose, and rewarded his faith with the abundance that he requested. Again, it was not out of selfishness that Jabez asked for God's blessing and the increase of his territory. Jabez wanted to make something of himself in order that his life would dramatically oppose what his name meant. And that was it; no other mention in all of the Bible of anything else about Jabez. A nobody praying desperately to the Lord, and God blessing Him.

So let me ask you this, HOW WOULD IT LOOK IF WE **PRAYED** LIKE THAT? Simple, diligent, deliberate, desperate prayers put out to the Lord God for the glory of His name? How would God respond to us "nobodies" if we were to but pray in such a way as this?

When I stop and think about it, The possibilities are **ENDLESS** to what God would provide for us if we pray from a sincere and contrite heart. "With Jabez as our example, we are assured that anyone may come before the Almighty, and speak out all their heart, and receive promises of continual guidance and defense from the living God. If we could realize the certainty of this sacred communication as between earth and heaven, our whole life would be lifted to a noble level, and instead of laboring in weary prayer we should be filled with the Spirit of triumphant thankfulness and praise. It lies with our power to give a whole lifetime to God" [Wubbles & McDowell, *Bible Nobodies...* pg. 126-127).

So I invite you to consider What might our **CHURCH** look like if we but prayed? What might our families look like? What might our nation look like if we but took the time to pray to God for the desires of His heart for us here on the earth? It is marvelous to even consider it. Let us pray.

Father, what a delight it is for us to have gathered here in this place to worship You. How

wonderful and marvelous it is to experience Your presence with us. Let Your Holy Spirit move in each of us today so that we might feel the power of Your presence. Oh God, we also pray the simple prayer that Jabez prayed to you. “Oh, that You would bless us, O God, and increase our territory for Your glory. Be with us and keep us from anything evil, so that we do not cause pain,” but bring healing and comfort and assurance and faith. Move us Lord God to be honorable people diligently seeking Your guidance, Your truth, Your Salvation, and Your great love, so that we might live for You, every day of our life, in the name of Jesus Christ our Lord. AMEN.