

## Victory of the Lamb – March 10, 2016

### 1 John 5:14, 15 - Let's Be Real – I'm Not So Sure About Prayer - Pastor Bill Limmer

Paul Eichmann was my Hebrew professor in college. He was a true Hebrew scholar. He was one of those guys who was a no-nonsense let's get to down to business but he actually did it in an inviting and comfortable way. Most of our classes would just start right into Hebrew but every now and then he would begin his class with a very brief story that everybody could relate to. One class he began by simply asking us, "have you ever gone a week or more without praying? You got so busy, were so distracted, were doing important things, you got so caught up in the day to day that you didn't pray? And now you are in a bind and you realize you haven't prayed in about a week. And now you need to go to God. What do you think God thinks about that? Do you sheepishly go to God in prayer wonder if we will listen to you? Do you think God says to you, "well it's about time." You know what God says when that happens and you return to him in prayer: He says, "It is so good to hear your voice. I have missed you!" Today we are continuing our series Let's Be Real and we are going to get real about prayer and why so often it's a struggle for even the most devout of Christians and what is at the heart of prayer.

This is going to be our working definition of prayer, "**Prayer is a heart to heart talk with God.**" How is your prayer life? How much time would you say that you spend on an average day in prayer? 1 hour or more, 30 minutes, 15 minutes, 10 minutes, 5 minutes, 1 minute, few seconds, or it has been weeks or I am not really into it.

Some of you, whether you are a Christian or not, are familiar with some of the prayer passages in Scripture like James 5:16 **the prayer of a righteous person is powerful and effective.** Or the one that is found on a lot of coffee mugs 1 Thessalonians 5:17 "**pray continually.** And let's be real if you are a Christian you are going oh man what a failure I am. I pray and nothing happens to I must not be righteous. You hear pray continually, and you are going did I even pray today – oh yeah Pastor Bill prayed before he started the message so I'm good to go.

Let's dive in and be real.1) One of our stumbling blocks to prayer is we aren't convinced that this prayer thing actually works. We wonder if prayer works because we pray for something, and the opposite happens. We wonder if prayer works because sometimes we wish for something, never pray about it and it happens. We wonder if prayer works because we pray for something and it happens and we wonder was it going to happen anyway. We wonder if our prayers kind go up hit the ceiling and then bounce back down. We struggle with prayer because we think the answer is always supposed to be yes.

2) The other issue that we often have with prayer, is that it takes time. The church reformer, Martin Luther said, he was often so busy that he had to pray all morning long. What? We are so busy. My I-phone is a lot like yours. It is a really accurate tattle tale. There is this thing on my phone and likely yours that tells me how much time I have spent on my phone. When I checked it on Wednesday it told me that I had spent 1:57 on it which was 10 minutes more than usual. Thursday it said I had spent 53 minutes on it. And for those of you who track your time on your phone, you are in awe that I spend so little time on my phone. But let me ease your conscious, I did those time checks on my tattle tale friend mid to late morning. And it is usually mid to late evening when I really get going. Our phones can be and often are

useful but not always. Our lives are overscheduled, so full of stress, so full of anxiety that to stop and pray seems counter-productive.

3) The other misconception prayer is that we think for it to be a good prayer, for it to count it has to be spoken with, if not flowery words at least eloquent words. And so we get caught up trying to figure out the right words to use and we get stuck before we get too far. And our minds start chasing rabbits: everything from what's for breakfast to today's to do list, to thinking about interacting with someone at work, or listening to the kids, or to the song, or tv show in the background.

So here is the bad news, but before I get to it, I want you to promise to stick with me because by God's grace we are going to be able to turn this whole prayer thing around. Really, The bad news is our lack of prayer is not a prayer problem. It is an idolatry problem. Lack of prayer usually demonstrates one of two things: pride or lack of faith. And it usually involves both. We fail to pray because we have too much pride or entitlement to realize we need God, or to unbelieving to grasp God's willingness to help. Let's be real, if you are not praying, then deep down you are thinking that your time, talent and money is what is getting you by in life or all you need in life. And so, you will consistently be too tired, too busy, too forgetful to pray. But if, like Jesus, you realize you can't do life on your own, then no matter how tired you are, how busy you are, you will find time to pray.

Most approaches to guide our prayer life skip over this heart issue. And so the answer to our struggling prayer life is behavior modification – in other words living under the law. And that often sounds something like this: You should pray in the morning before you get out of bed, you certainly should give prayers of thanks before breakfast, lunch and dinner, prayer before you got to bed and you really should keep a prayer journal. They are mechanical and legalistic solutions that may work for a bit but they won't win your heart. Only the good news of Jesus Christ can win your heart.

Here is the good news. Prayer is not about doing it is about being, being in a relationship with God. Here is what I mean. The disciples come to Jesus and say to him: **Lord, teach us to \_\_\_\_\_, teach. No. teach us to preach. No. teach us to do miracles. – No. teach us to pray. And Jesus loves them and says when you pray say, "Our father . . . : The word Jesus used for father is the Hebrew word that means: daddy or dada. Alexandra was the college student who really modeled this for me. We met at Qdoba because that is great place to meet and she asked if she could pray: and she began her prayer "Hey dad." Love it. When my mom was hospitalized and in her last hours my heart called out to prayer to God so much of the time was "Oh dad, oh dad," and what was in my heart – "take care of my mom." "Oh dad, oh dad, I love my mom." My heart to God's. Sometimes prayer is so hard for us because we think it is a thing we are supposed to do instead of relationship we have because God reached down to us first and he is with the one who loves us the most. Prayer is about spending time with God not because you have to but because it is awesome to.**

**1 John 5:14-15 This is the confidence we have in approaching God: that if we ask anything according to his will, he hears us. <sup>15</sup> And if we know that he hears us—whatever we ask—we know that we have what we asked of him.** We can pray in confidence because prayer is about being a kid and going to your daddy who loves you. I know that some of you have had dads that are or have been or are absent, abusive, but God is not like any earthly father. He is even way better than the greatest earthly fathers because he has no flaws. As a two-year old comes walking in with toy in his hand that he can't figure out and hands it to his father to fix so we can go to our father and hand him all of struggles, issues, hurts, dreams all of ourselves in trust. Jesus says: *(Please place all of Matthew 7:7-11 on the screen at this*

*time and hold it there for the next two paragraphs and highlight the specific verse as it is mentioned.)*

Matthew 7:7-11 **Ask and it will be given to you; seek and you will find; knock and the door will be opened to you.** <sup>8</sup> **For everyone who asks receives; the one who seeks finds; and to the one who knocks, the door will be opened.** The verbs ask, seek and knock are in the present tense which means keep on asking, keep on seeking, keep on knocking. So prayer is not like college basketball for a lot of the good players – one and done. It is an ongoing action. Kind of cool little thing but if you take the first letter of the words Ask, Seek and Knock you get the word ASK.

<sup>9</sup> **“Which of you, if your son asks for bread, will give him a stone? We can pray confidently because our daddy he will not give us something that is unhelpful no more than you or I would give our child a stone to eat instead of food.** <sup>10</sup> **Or if he asks for a fish, will give him a snake? We can pray confidently because our daddy will not give us something that is harmful.** <sup>11</sup> **If you, then, though you are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father in heaven give good gifts to those who ask him!** We can pray confidently because our daddy will only give us what is best for us. Our daddy is not a genie in a bottle where we get whatever we wish for because not everything we wish or ask for is good for us. God is way too loving for that.

Does God know our prayers before we pray? Yes. So why pray? Because prayer is relationship. The blessing of prayer is spending time with God. Adding another to do (prayer) seems like another stresser. But when we think about spending time with the one who loves us so much, it brings us calm and peace in the middle of the storm and stress. In Paul Miller’s book *A Praying Life* he says, “Learning to pray doesn’t offer us a less busy life (because if you love people you will be busy) it offers us a less busy heart . . . By spending time with our Father in prayer, we integrate our lives with his, with what he is doing in us. Our lives become more coherent. They feel calmer, more ordered, even in the midst of confusion and pressure.”

Here is one last thing I would like to share with you that I personally think is so cool. Do you know that God is praying for you? John 17 on the night on which Jesus would be the innocent victim of arrest, knowing the crucifixion was coming he prayed: **I pray also for those who will believe in me through their message.** God was praying for you before you were ever a twinkle in the eye of your parents. When you are in a rut, when you are hurting, when you are stuck this is what happens: **Romans 8:26 In the same way, the Spirit helps us in our weakness. We do not know what we ought to pray for, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us through wordless groans.** How comforting is that. How loving is that. Let’s be real: God knows that prayer is about relationship with you!