

FIRST BAPTIST CHURCH, 1-12-14 PM NOTES
"DIAGNOSING A SICK PRAYER LIFE" (PART 2)
VARIOUS SCRIPTURES

"We have no right to expect to be believed as long as we can be explained."

—Adrian Rogers

- I. Are You Praying in Right Relationship to God?
- II. Are You Praying From Clean Hands and a Pure Heart?

- III. Are You Praying in Right Relationship With Others?

Horizontal conflicts cause vertical problems.

- A. Is There Someone You Have Wronged That You Have Not Sought Forgiveness From?

Romans 12:18 (NKJV) "If it is possible, as much as depends on you, live peaceably with all men."

Matthew 5:23-24 (NKJV) ²³ Therefore if you bring your gift to the altar, and there remember that your brother has something against you, ²⁴ leave your gift there before the altar, and go your way. First be reconciled to your brother, and then come and offer your gift."

- B. Is There Someone Who Has Wronged You That You Have Not Forgiven?

Mark 11:25-26 (NKJV) ²⁵ And whenever you stand praying, if you have anything against anyone, forgive him, that your Father in heaven may also forgive you your trespasses. ²⁶ But if you do not forgive, neither will your Father in heaven forgive your trespasses."

The Bible makes a distinction between relationship forgiveness (our standing with God) and intimacy forgiveness (our walk with God).

Matthew 18:27 (NKJV) "Then the master of that servant was moved with compassion, released him, and forgave him the debt."

Matthew 18:29-30 (NKJV) ²⁹ So his fellow servant fell down at his feet and begged him, saying, 'Have patience with me, and I will pay you all.' ³⁰ And he would not, but went and threw him into prison till he should pay the debt."

Matthew 18:34 (NKJV) "And his master was angry, and delivered him to the torturers until he should pay all that was due to him."

Hebrews 12:15 (NKJV) "looking carefully lest anyone fall short of **the grace of God**; lest any root of bitterness springing up cause trouble, and by this many become defiled."

C. Are Your Family Relationships Right?

1 Peter 3:7 (NKJV) “Husbands, likewise, dwell with *them* with understanding, giving honor to the wife, as to the weaker vessel, and as *being* heirs together of the grace of life, that your prayers may not be hindered.”

IV. Are You Praying From an Abiding Life?

John 15:7 (NKJV) “If you abide in Me, and My words abide in you, you will ask what you desire, and it shall be done for you.”

A. Are You Abiding in Christ (John 15:7a)

Galatians 2:20 (NKJV) “I have been crucified with Christ; it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me; and the *life* which I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself for me.”

B. Is Christ’s Word Abiding in You?

1 John 5:14-15 (NKJV) “¹⁴ Now this is the confidence that we have in Him, that if we ask anything according to His will, He hears us. ¹⁵ And if we know that He hears us, whatever we ask, we know that we have the petitions that we have asked of Him.”

“You can do more than pray after you have prayed, but you cannot do more than pray until you have prayed.”

—John Bunyan

FIRST BAPTIST CHURCH, 1-12-14 PM
“DIAGNOSING A SICK PRAYER LIFE” (PART 2)
VARIOUS SCRIPTURES

What does a praying church look like? I’m not sure I know the definitive answer to that, but I know that prayer will permeate everything the church does and that prayer will never be the last resort, but it will be the first response. One reason that it is so hard to describe what a praying church looks like is that there are so few models today. It is almost as if we have technology, education, material resources, and business knowledge and we don’t seem to think that we need prayer – except in rare cases. Our primary problem is not **unanswered** prayer; it is **unoffered** prayer. That explains why there is little that is unexplainable in the church in America today. I say that with grief. What is there that is unexplainable about our church? I am haunted by a line I heard years ago from Adrian Rogers: “**We have no right to expect to be believed as long as we can be explained**”. Most churches that are growing can be explained. Most have adopted the business model. The Preaching Pastor of one of the largest and fastest growing churches today said that if Jesus was speaking here today, He wouldn’t call the leader of the church “Pastor” (which means “shepherd”); He would call him CEO. This was in a context of his encouraging Pastors to act more like CEO’s.

To find a model of a praying church, we can always go back to the book of Acts. Here was a group of converts who were not people high in the social order or influencers in society. There was little wealth and since the church was new, they didn't have experience to lean on. All they had was the Holy Spirit within them, the Apostles' doctrine to show them God's will, and prayer to accomplish what God sent them to do. They were devoted to prayer because that was their connection to God and they had no clue about what to do apart from God's guidance. In reality we are in the same boat they were in; the problem is that we just don't realize it and we continue to trust in our own wisdom rather than be devoted to prayer.

Here is the premise of this series: Before we become a church of prayer, we must become individuals who pray. If several hundred people who have sick prayer lives come together to form a prayer ministry, it will be a sick prayer ministry. If we are going to become a praying church, we must become praying individuals. The Puritans called Pastors "The Physicians of the Soul". I'm going to do some diagnosis of what ails us when it comes to our prayer life. This 7 or 8 part series is simply some questions to help us diagnose what could be making our prayer life sick. I have divided the questions into three groups: An Examination of Our Life; An Examination of Our Prayers; An Examination of Our Persistence. Last week we looked at two questions as we examined our lives:

I. Are You Praying in Right Relationship to God?

II. Are You Praying from Clean Hands and a Pure Heart?

Today we are going to ask two more hard questions as we look at the life that can pray.

III. Are You Praying in Right Relationship with Others?

While prayer is a vertical relationship (between us and God), it is drastically affected by our horizontal relationships. To put it another way, horizontal conflicts cause vertical problems. A barrier between you and another person becomes a barrier between you and God when it comes to answered prayer. There are three horizontal areas that we must examine as to conflicts that cause us to have a sick prayer life.

A. Is There Someone You Have Wronged That You Have Not Sought Forgiveness From?

Let me give a disclaimer right up front. There are some horizontal barriers that you can't tear down. The Bible says in **Romans 12:18 (NKJV)** "If it is possible, as much as depends on you, live peaceably with all men." That verse implies that there may be situations where you seek forgiveness, reconciliation, restoration of a relationship and the offended party refuses. We are responsible to do "our part" to deal with the wrong done. Having said that, we are not responsible for the other person's response; we are responsible to seek reconciliation, as much as is possible on our part. Let me tell you how important that is to the Lord. Jesus said in **Matthew 5:23-24 (NKJV)** "²³ Therefore if you bring your gift to the altar, and there remember that your brother has something against you, ²⁴ leave your gift there before the altar, and go your way. First be reconciled to your brother, and then come and offer your gift." The picture here is a person performing an act of worship and coming under conviction that there is something that he has done to wrong a brother. He doesn't make a note that says, "At first opportunity when I run into my brother I will try to make this right". He gets up from his prayer and worship at the altar and goes to find his brother to seek reconciliation. I wonder what would happen tonight if before we took the offering and sang and prayed, everybody who had someone they needed reconciliation with left the building, got in their car and took off to find them? For some, it might mean just going to someone else in this room! What if the musicians said, "I can't offer this gift of music to the Lord until I make things right with the person I have wronged"? I wonder what would have happened to the crowd? It might be 10:00 or so tonight before the service started back up after they came back, but I bet it would be a service that we would remember for years to come!

Let me lead us in an investigation time. Is there anyone alive today who could truthfully point their finger at you and say, "You wronged me and you never sought to make it right"? Maybe you've justified it by saying, "Well, it was partially their fault". That may be, but you are responsible for your part even if you think it was a small percentage your fault. It may be that you think, "Well I'm sure they wouldn't even talk to me". That may be true, but Remember **Romans 12:18 (NKJV)** "If it is possible, as much as

depends on you, live peaceably with all men.” The thing that you dread; the thing that always seems to come up when you examine yourself and you rationalize it away is the thing that would liberate you and open the prayer line between you and our prayer answering God.

B. Is There Someone Who Has Wronged You That You Have Not Forgiven?

An unforgiving person cannot pray with power. I know that I say it so often, but it needs to be said even more. I do not think that we really comprehend how much an unforgiving heart costs us. One thing that it will cost you is your prayer life! **Mark 11:25-26 (NKJV)** “²⁵ And whenever you stand praying, if you have anything against anyone, forgive him, that your Father in heaven may also forgive you your trespasses. ²⁶ But if you do not forgive, neither will your Father in heaven forgive your trespasses.” Do you understand what Jesus is saying? He is saying that if you refuse to forgive one who has wronged you, your prayers will not be answered! This passage is not teaching that God withdraws your salvation. The Bible makes a distinction between relationship forgiveness (our standing with God) and intimacy forgiveness (our walk with God). Unforgiveness on our part doesn’t cancel our relationship or change our standing with the Lord, but it does cancel our intimacy and detour our walk with the Lord. When we refuse to forgive there is a barrier between us and God that can only be removed by confession and then forgiving the person who has wronged us.

It sounds so easy to say, “Just forgive those who have wronged you”. What is easily said is only supernaturally done. It is one thing to forgive someone who has slighted you, made a disparaging remark about you, or hurt your feelings in a similar way. What about when the offense was life changing or scarred your life in a horrible way? Actually even the seemingly “minor” offenses require the supernatural grace of God to forgive, but we are more aware of the need for grace when the offense was life scarring.

Jesus gave us a parable to help us see the necessity of forgiving others and to see why refusing to forgive is such a serious matter to God. In Matthew 18:23-35, Jesus tells us about a man who owed a king a huge amount of money. It was an amount that could never have been repaid. The debt was 10,000 talents. Let me explain how huge that was. One talent was worth about 6,000 days of work. It would have taken this man 13 years working 6 days a week to repay 1 talent. Remember that he owed 10,000 talents! He would have to live 130,000 years working 6 days a week and giving every penny he earned to the king to repay the debt that he owed. The king was going to put the man and his family in slavery and confiscate all that he had for the debt. The King, however, was a compassionate man and we read in **Matthew 18:27 (NKJV)** “Then the master of that servant was moved with compassion, released him, and forgave him the debt.” Wow! Don’t let that slip by you. What a gracious gift! What an act of grace and mercy. What happens next must have really shocked the disciples. This servant who had his debt forgiven found another servant who owed him (not the king) 100 denarii. That was the salary for about 3 months work. What was the response of the forgiven servant when the servant who owed him 100 denarii asked for patience so he could repay the debt? **Matthew 18:29-30 (NKJV)** “²⁹ So his fellow servant fell down at his feet and begged him, saying, 'Have patience with me, and I will pay you all.' ³⁰ And he would not, but went and threw him into prison till he should pay the debt.” Think about it. The first servant owed the King a debt that would have taken him 130,000 years working 6 days a week to repay and he was forgiven. Now he finds a fellow servant that owes him a debt that would be worth 3 months of work to repay and he has him thrown in prison. When the King found out what this ungrateful servant had done, what was his response? **Matthew 18:34 (NKJV)** “And his master was angry, and delivered him to the torturers until he should pay all that was due to him.” What is the point that Jesus is making? Those of us who have savingly believed on Christ have been forgiven all of our sin. Our sin is treason against the king and creator of the universe. The greater the one sinned against, the greater the penalty. Our debt was even infinitely greater than the servant's 130,000 years of hard labor. The magnitude of what we have been forgiven for is beyond calculation. Yet we are forgiven as an act of God’s mercy and grace. How then could we then go to one who has wronged us and owes us a debt and say, “You must pay it all”? When we harbor unforgiveness in our heart, who do we identify with in Jesus’ parable? When we refuse to forgive, we render our prayers of confession ineffective and cut ourselves off from that intimacy forgiveness from God. We forfeit the inner peace, spiritual power and all spiritual growth when we refuse

to forgive. Perhaps the greatest cost of our refusal to forgive is that we forego the answer to our prayers. Is holding onto that unforgiveness worth all of that?

Your unforgiveness is not making the offender pay for your hurt. The comedian Buddy Hackett said, "I've had a few arguments with people, but I never carry a grudge. You know why? While you're carrying a grudge, they're out dancing." There's a lot of truth to that. You are the one in chains and they are walking free. I also believe that if a person continues in bitterness as a pattern of life there is good reason to believe that they never had a relationship with God.

I've done many messages on forgiving those who have wronged you. I don't want to turn this painful grace enabled process into a flippant little formula, but I believe that there is a discernable process. The process begins with a decision to look to God's enabling grace and choose to forgive the offender. **Hebrews 12:15 (NKJV)** "looking carefully lest anyone **fall short of the grace of God**; lest any root of bitterness springing up cause trouble, and by this many become defiled". That verse says that it is only by God's enabling grace that you can forgive the offender. That is not the end of forgiveness. That grace enabled decision to forgive is followed by a grace enabled process. The process is more like a daily battle. It involves not bringing the offense back up to the offender, to others or even to yourself. Every time the offense comes to your mind, you remind yourself that this has been turned over to the Lord to deal with and it is no longer yours. It also helps to spend some time praising God for the magnitude of the forgiveness that you have received from Him. The final stage of healing is to pray for the offender if he is still alive. It is hard to be filled with bitterness toward someone you are praying God's best for.

The third area of horizontal conflict that must be dealt with to cure a sick prayer life is really a sub-category of the second, but because it is so common, I wanted to consider it separately.

C. Are Your Family Relationships Right?

We read in **1 Peter 3:7 (NKJV)** "Husbands, likewise, dwell with *them* with understanding, giving honor to the wife, as to the weaker vessel, and as *being* heirs together of the grace of life, **that your prayers may not be hindered.**" Since Peter has just finished giving instructions to wives in verses 1-6, I think that it is safe to say that the wife's prayers are also hindered when she is not treating her husband as Peter lays out in verses 1-6. What does that word "hindered" mean in verse 7 as it applies to the husband and the wife's prayers? That word literally means to break up a road so the army cannot go through. In warfare at the time this was written, one of the tactics was for soldiers to block the road with trees, rocks, or other debris that would keep the enemy from advancing. Peter is saying that when there is a faulty relationship between husband and wife they are putting up barriers on the road that will hinder their prayers from being answered. I think that a summary of what Peter is saying is that the way you treat your spouse is the way God will treat your prayers.

Looking at 1 Peter 3:7 we see that the husband is to be considerate to the wife's needs and feelings. He is to demonstrate chivalry in the home and treat her as a "delicate" vessel. He is to share all of life with her as they are heirs together of the grace of life. When the husband is harsh, inconsiderate, self-centered then his prayers will be hindered or blocked. The wife on the other hand is to be submissive to the husband and allow him to be the leader. When she is not leading a godly life, her prayers are hindered. If your prayer life is sick, perhaps you should examine your home life.

IV. Are You Praying From an Abiding Life?

John 15:7 (NKJV) "If you abide in Me, and My words abide in you, you will ask what you desire, and it shall be done for you." If your prayer life is sick, check out your abiding. This abiding life has two parts.

A. Are You Abiding in Christ (John 15:7a)

What does it mean to abide in Christ? First, abiding speaks of our union with Christ. Just as a branch is in union with the vine even so at salvation, we are placed in union with Christ. We are baptized into Christ and the New Testament sees us as being "in Christ". We are to abide in Christ like the branch abides in the grape vine. It is the life of the vine that produces fruit on the branch. The branch cannot produce fruit; it simply bears the fruit; the branch is a fruit hanger. Even so, we cannot live the Christian

life in our strength. We allow Christ to live His life through us. **Galatians 2:20 (NKJV)** “I have been crucified with Christ; it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me; and the *life* which I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself for me.” We are in union with Him and we trust Him to produce the fruit and we bear it. The branch (us) stays in a yielded position to the vine. If the branch had a theme song, it would be “I need you oh I need You; every hour I need You...”

It is when we are abiding in Him that our prayers have power. If we are trying to live the Christian life in our own power, our prayers will not be answered.

B. Is Christ’s Word Abiding in You?

Christ’s word abiding in us means that our lives are saturated with His word. Our prayer lives are always going to be sick until we are abiding in, saturated with His Word. When you look at biographies of great men and women of God, you will see that they had Word saturated lives. The pioneer missionary to China, Hudson Taylor once remarked to his son that he had just finished reading through the Bible for the 40th time! The Greek word translated “word” means a specific passage or promise. As we are saturated with God’s Word, He brings specific passages to mind to guide and empower our prayers. As we are saturated with the Word of God, we begin to see everything from God’s perspective and that guides our prayers to be in the will of God and the promise is in **1 John 5:14-15 (NKJV)** “¹⁴ Now this is the confidence that we have in Him, that if we ask anything according to His will, He hears us. ¹⁵ And if we know that He hears us, whatever we ask, we know that we have the petitions that we have asked of Him.” That spells the end of a sick prayer life.

CONCLUSION

The Baptist Puritan, John Bunyan said, “You can do more than pray after you have prayed, but you cannot do more than pray until you have prayed.” If your prayer life is sick, you’ve got some medicine to apply tonight. Are you praying in right relationship with others? Are abiding in Christ and is His word abiding in You?