

**Prayer Can Change Your Life: How To Pray About Your Problems, Perry J. Fruhling,
St. Mark's Lutheran, 6/25/06**

Grace to you and peace...June 15th Marlys and I celebrated our 21st wedding anniversary. Well, I can't really say we celebrated...it was the first time in our marriage that we weren't in each other's presence to celebrate our wedding day. She was with a group of about 23 members of St. Mark's attending a worship conference at Willow Creek in Chicago, IL. You know what someone asked me? They asked if it was the best anniversary I ever had! My response..."No, but it was probably the best anniversary Marlys ever had!" Well look...our relationship with God is a little like that...there is so much in our lives to celebrate, to share, to talk to God about...maybe especially our problems, our needs, our struggles...but if we aren't in God's presence, how can we share them? Today, we're going to talk about how to talk to God, specifically about our problems...

1) We need to **confess our need for help**...one of the most important things we can do in prayer is to recognize our need for God...

a) Because he gives us all things; and

b) Because of our helplessness without him. Prayer is the path that develops our relationship with God. Prayer is the way that God opens the door for him to work in our lives. **Prayer is not about getting presents...it's about experiencing God's presence**...it's about developing our relationship with God so that we are ready to receive God's answers to our problems, our needs, our struggles. Let's say I was to say to you, "I love you," and that is true. I love our church. But that is a general word to a large group of people. My wife's sitting over here in the front row and she's part of that group and when I say, "I love you," does that include my wife? Yes. But it didn't do anything for her. It's a general word to everybody. However, if I were to walk over to my wife, lean down close and whisper, "I love you," all of a sudden I get a different reaction. Her eyes light up, her heart starts pounding (I hope). All of a sudden something general becomes personal. I didn't say anything different. I said, "I love you". Was she included in the first one? Yes. But all of a sudden, it got personal and took on new meaning. God wants us to experience that personal "I love you" that you hear about all the time at church...we hear "God loves you," but in our personal relationship with Christ we hear him say it to us...and prayer is the path where that relationship begins and deepens...

There are several **hindrances to confessing our need for help** from God:

a) **Self-sufficiency**... This is the particular temptation of the strong, for as long as one has good health, a congenial and lucrative job, social standing, and a fine family, one is apt not to think much about needing anything from God. But it can also relate to self-righteousness – oh most of us are willing to admit we have some faults, but we come to be satisfied with our own integrity and think we are good enough because we are better than others. In reality, this breeds cynicism, strength of will, and contempt for others, while leading us further from God; The Bible says in **Proverbs 3:5-6**, **"Trust in the Lord with all your heart. Lean not on your own understanding; in all your ways acknowledge him, and he will guide your paths."** If you have experienced great need, it begins by moving beyond yourself...and recognizing your

need for something more than what you can provide.

b) **Scarcity of confidence** in prayer – for some it is intellectual doubt, for others it might be frustration over what is perceived to be unanswered prayer, and still for others a lack of knowledge about prayer that takes away any confidence that God will answer...and so why pray? **Hebrews 4:16 says, “So let us come boldly to the throne of our gracious God. There we will receive his mercy, and we will find grace to help us when we need it.”**

c) **Spiritual Dryness**...a condition that can overcome the spiritually mature...when prayers of the heart seem to go no further than the lips and suddenly the once close companion is unable to pray as once before. David, who went through some spiritually dry times said in **Psalms 139, I can never escape from your spirit! I can never get away from your presence! If I go up to heaven, you are there; if I go down to the place of the dead, you are there. If I ride the wings of the morning, if I dwell by the farthest oceans, even there your hand will guide me and your strength will support me. I could ask the darkness to hide me and the light around me to become night – but even in darkness I cannot hide from you. To you the night shines as bright as day. Darkness and light are both alike to you.** I once went through a particularly difficult time during college...spiritually dry, I was looking for answers, struggling with difficult questions and couldn't pray and didn't know what to do...someone suggested to me during that time to just read the Psalms...and they became my prayers...a book of prayers able to be the prayer I could not pray...it was admitting that I had a need...a need to even get in touch with God. In these times the best thing to do is simply wait on God...an Austrian mystic once said, “if you climbing a mountain and a storm arises, the best thing you can do is find a shelter, and wait out the storm until the weather is right for climbing again.” Our faith is no different...it is in waiting for God, hiding in his Word where find hope in the spiritual dryness of a season...

2) After we acknowledge our need, secondly, you need to **cast your care upon him...1 Peter 5:6-7 says: “So humble yourselves under the mighty power of God, and in his good time he will honor you. 7 Give all your worries and cares to God, for he cares about what happens to you.”** Prayer unleashes God's power so that he is able to work in our behalf. Prayer is how God accomplishes the things that he wants to see happen in our lives. Prayer opens new doors of opportunity for God to move. One of the most important things to remember here is to focus on God, not on the problem. It's so easy for us to get so caught up in our needs, that we miss the real hope of prayer...God's desire for us. Here are four questions to ask ourselves as we tell God what we need:

1) Is what I'm praying for in God's Will? Or is it superfluous? How can I know? If it conflicts with the will of God as we discover it in Scripture, we've probably lost our focus.

2) Am I willing to accept God's answer? The question gets at whether we are submitting to God's will and accept whatever God's plan is...

3) If my prayer is answered will it honor God? Am what I am asking for pleasing to God? Will God delight in it?

4) Will it further my spiritual growth and others' spiritual growth? Will what I pray for bring me closer to God? Will it harm anyone else? When we can answer these four main questions affirmatively, we know that what we are asking with faith, obedience, and patience...that's all that God asks of us as we turn to him...

Dietrich Bonhoeffer is one of the most well-known theologians of all time. Born a German, his life and faith was intersected by Nazi Germany during the 1930's and 40's. Not long after Hitler became Fuhrer of Germany, Bonhoeffer began to denounce Hitler's policies. In 1943, Bonhoeffer's record of resistance and his involvement in smuggling Jews out of Germany safely into Switzerland got him arrested. After two years in prison, it was learned that he played a part in a failed Hitler assassination attempt. He was executed by special order of Heinrich Himmler on April 9, 1945 at the age of 39, just a few weeks prior to Hitler's death and the end of World War II.

A witness said the Bonhoeffer died led all those who were hung in worship and prayer and that he died "brave and composed." Nine years earlier, he wrote; "When Christ calls a man, he bids him come and die." It was through communities of prayer that Bonhoeffer was able to stand up against the troubles of his life. In his book, "Life Together," Bonhoeffer warns of two extremes: "Let him who cannot be alone beware of community," and, "Let him who is not in community beware of being alone." Prayer, he said, is important in communal life, but also in an individual's life.

3) Commit the Decision to Christ... Philippians 4:6-7: "Don't worry about anything; instead, pray about everything. Tell God what you need, and thank him for all he has done. 7 If you do this, you will experience God's peace, which is far more wonderful than the human mind can understand. His peace will guard your hearts and minds as you live in Christ Jesus." It's at this point after expressing your need for help and telling God what you need, that you commit the decision on the outcome to Christ. What happens if you hang on to it throughout your day...you worry...the Bible says that instead of that...pray...turn it over and then thank him...for what? There are many things you can already give thanks to God for, even before you receive an answer: That he loves you; that he promises to help you; that he's concerned for you; that he will see you through this trouble; that he has the power to solve the problem; and that you can come anytime to tell him about it. You can begin thanking God in advance that he will answer your prayer and that you are excited about that day coming!

Prayer is more than just saying the right words and praying a certain way...it's giving to God the outcome of the decision of the problem we are praying for...it is the real thing...not just an empty thought or idea. I once had a member of a previous church that was undergoing some pretty difficult procedures at Mayo Clinic...while there a study was under away for patients in the cardiac unit. It was attempting to test the affects of prayer on patients. Some of the patients would be prayed for, while others would receive the placebo (or no prayer). The patients were asked if they cared if they received the placebo or the real thing...he said it didn't matter since he knew that he had many people praying for him at his home church...I want to say to you today...don't take the placebo...when it comes to this important part of your life...life is fragile...we need to handle with prayer...our needs are too great for us to handle on our own and ultimately prayer builds the relationship with Jesus that we so desperately need...his word of love for us...

One of the enduring pieces of our family's life has been our morning devotions and evening prayers together. Since Chantal was first able to put some words together into a sentence, Marlys began the tradition of bed time prayers...we follow this acronym of P.A.R.T. You can do your PART in prayer:

- **Praise**
- **Admitting our sins,**
- **Requesting help, and**
- **Thanksgiving to God.**

But from the earliest of days Marlys always sung with the kids the song, "Jesus Loves Me This I Know." Time has marched on...we have a teenager...kids are older...but that song we still break out now and again...now with harmonies being sung by the kids...as a reminder of what we've just been doing...hearing that Jesus loves us and died for us so that we might know him personally and have our broken relationship with God restored.

Some of you are facing big problems right now...at work, in your marriage, in your business...God wants you to bring to him the problems you are facing...it may begin with you admitting your attempts at self-sufficiency: saying God I'm a sinner and need your grace and your help...to come with confidence knowing that God will answer. As you ask him for help, put yourself in line with his desire for your life...ready to accept the answer he gives...bringing honor to his name. And finally to turn the decision over to him...let go, and let God handle it...let's pray now that God will bring this home into your heart...

