

Elements of Successful Praying 3 - Out of Right Relationships



How to Pray and Get What You Pray For (Part 8)
by Derek Prince

It's good to be with you again. I'm continuing today with the theme of "How to Pray and Get What You Pray For." In my two previous talks this week, I've explained two important elements of successful praying. First, that we pray with confidence, and that means without condemnation. Second, that we pray for the right motive, and the right motive is for God's glory.

Today I'm going to deal with the next important element of successful praying; that is, that we pray out of right relationships. This is one aspect of prayer that Christians often tend to overlook. Nevertheless, the Bible has much to say about it.

Let's begin in the Sermon on the Mount, which is a kind of charter for Christian living. In Matthew 5:23-24, Jesus says this:

> "If therefore you are presenting your offering at the altar, and there remember that you brother has something against you, leave your offering there before the altar, and go your way; first be reconciled to your brother, and then come and present your offering." (NAS)

Now of course, that's couched in the terminology of Old Testament sacrifices but it has an application in the New Testament. We don't go, normally, to a literal altar but we go to God's presence and we kneel there. And so Jesus is saying, "If you're on your way to pray to God and you suddenly remember on your way that your brother has something against you, that there's something you've done that has wounded or offended or harmed your fellow believer and you haven't been to him about it, you haven't put it right. Then Jesus says, "Leave your offering there before the altar (and your offering includes your prayer). Don't go on praying but go back to your brother first, put the matter right with him and then come and present your offering (that is, your prayer)." This clearly indicates to me that we cannot expect

God to hear our prayer if we pray out of a wrong relationship with some other believer. If we want our prayer to be heard, first of all, we've got to go back to that other believer and put that relationship right.

Now, I've proved that within my own experience more than once. I've seen how, as I was seeking God in prayer, the Holy Spirit would bring to my conscience something that I'd said or done and I had to go back and put that right.

I remember many years ago one of our daughters, when she was about 12 years old, did something that annoyed me and I scolded her. But I got unreasonably angry and I went far beyond what her offense justified. And I remember for the next 24 hours, every time I tried to pray, all I could think about was what I'd said to my daughter. And eventually I had to humble myself and go to my own daughter and say, "I'm sorry I got so angry with you. It really wasn't justified. Please forgive me." And after that I had such wonderful liberty in prayer. So remember, don't come with your gift to God's altar if there's something between you and one of your fellow believers. It could well be a member of your own family.

Paul brings out the same point in 1 Timothy 2:8. Speaking about prayer, he says:

> "Therefore I want the men in every place to pray, lifting up holy hands, without wrath and dissension." (NAS)

Notice two requirements. First of all, that we lift up holy hands. The word "holy" indicates that our hands have not been stained or corrupted by evil acts or practices, that our daily living and the way we earn our living is something that's acceptable to God. But then Paul goes on to speak about our relationships. He says, "without wrath and dissension," without anger, without quarreling, without strife. One thing I'll tell you, it's very hard to pray the kind of prayer that God will answer out of a home that's full of quarreling and strife, or out of a church that's full of quarreling and strife. Alas, too many times there's so much wrath and dissension, even in churches, even amongst the members of the church board, and then they turn to God and they pray. But nothing happens in answer to their prayer because, as Paul says, first of all we've got to put way wrath and dissension. We've got to pray out of peacefulness and right relations, reconciliation and harmony.

In 1 Peter 3:7, this is applied specifically to the husband/wife relationship. Peter says:

> "You husbands, likewise, live with your wives in an understanding way, as with a weaker vessel, since she is a woman; and grant her honor as a fellow-heir of the grace of life, so that your prayers may not be hindered." (NAS)

Notice, if there's a wrong relationship between husband and wife, it's very possible that their prayers will be hindered. God will not move in answer to their prayers until that relationship has been adjusted and primarily God puts the responsibility on the husband to do it. He says, "Live with your wives in an understanding way." Remember, the wife is the weaker vessel. Now, in the world when people meet someone who is weak, they tend to treat them with contempt or to keep them under or to suppress them, but the spirit of the gospel is totally different. Paul says, "Just because she's the weaker vessel, grant her that much more honor and remember that she's a fellow-heir of the grace of life, a co-heir." As I understand it, according to the law that applied in those days, if two people were co-heirs of a certain inheritance, neither of them could claim the inheritance apart from the other. And I believe that's how it is when a husband and wife are both Christians. They have a wonderful inheritance in God which is theirs to claim, but neither of them can claim it apart from the other. Each of them is dependent upon the other to enter into the inheritance. That means they've got to claim it out of the right relationship with one another.

How are we going to achieve this kind of right relationship that I'm speaking about? I believe one key word is the word "forgive." So many times, the first thing we have to do in coming to God is practice forgiveness of other people. This is built right in to the Lord's prayer, that pattern prayer for all of us as Christians. Matthew 6:12, Jesus tells us to pray this way:

> "...forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors." (NAS)

Notice we are not entitled to claim from God forgiveness above the proportion in which we have forgiven our fellow human being. If we have totally forgiven all others, we can claim total forgiveness from God. But if there are some whom we have not forgiven, or there are some things we have not forgiven, then we cannot claim full forgiveness from God. And as long as we don't have full forgiveness from God, there may be much that will hinder our prayers.

Now in the prayer itself, Jesus speaks about debts and debtors but when He comments on that prayer a few verses further on, in Matthew 6:14-15, He says this:

> "For if you forgive men for their transgressions, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. But if you do not

> forgive men, then your Father will not forgive your transgressions." (NAS)

So debts include but go beyond merely financial debts. They include all the various obligations of our lives. If somebody has been obligated to us and failed to carry out that obligation and we do not forgive them, if in some way or another they've transgressed against us, but we hold that against them, then our Father also does not forgive us our transgressions and so we cannot come to Him with a clear conscience and a full assurance of faith to receive the answer to our prayers.

Now, upon whom does God place the obligation to forgive? He places it upon the one who's going to pray. You may say, "Well, I want to pray and I know I have resentment against others and if they would come to me and ask me for forgiveness, I would forgive them." But that's not how it works. You have to forgive them even if they don't come to you, even if they don't acknowledge that they've offended you. If you want God to answer your prayers, you have to begin by forgiving those people.

Listen to what Jesus says in Mark 11:25:

> "And whenever you stand praying, forgive, if you have anything against anyone; so that your Father also who is in heaven may forgive you your transgressions." (NAS)

Jesus says, "Forgive, if you have anything against anyone." That leaves out nothing and no one. And He puts the obligation to forgive squarely and fairly upon the person who's praying. And He says, "If you forgive, your Father will forgive you. If you don't forgive, your Father will not forgive you."

In another place Jesus has a parable about a servant who owed his master ten thousand talents (which is equivalent maybe to six million dollars) and he couldn't pay, and so he plead with his master for mercy and his master forgave him that whole debt. But then he went out and met a fellow-servant who owed him a hundred pence (about seventeen dollars) and he demanded payment of that debt. And even though his fellow-servant plead for mercy, he refused to give him mercy but cast him into prison. When the master heard about this he was angry with the unforgiving servant and said, "You wicked servant," and he cast him into the prison and said, "You will not come out till you've paid the uttermost farthing." Well, that's a parable. Each one of us has a debt to God that's astronomical. It goes far beyond six million dollars, but if we plead with God for mercy, He'll forgive us, but on one condition: that we go out and forgive our fellow-servant. But if we hold against our fellow-servant that which he owes us, then God reserves the right to hold against us that which we owe Him. It's a question of tearing up I.O.U.'s.

I remember once I was preaching on this theme and I said, "You may be a woman, your husband may owe you much that he hasn't paid you, the I.O.U.'s are legitimate, but God has got a lot of I.O.U.'s from you in His hand. God says, "If you'll tear yours up, I'll tear mine up, but if you hold on to yours, I'll hold on to Mine." The end of that particular message, a lady came up to me and her face was beaming. A smart, well-dressed lady, probably in her early 30's. She said, "I just want to tell you, Mr. Prince, I've just torn up about thirty thousand dollars worth of I.O.U.'s!" and her face was radiant.

So remember, if you're going to come to God and pray successfully, you may have to tear up a whole lot of I.O.U.'s.

Well, our time is up for today but I'll be back with you again tomorrow at this time. Tomorrow I'll be speaking about the next main element of successful praying which has to do with being directed by the Holy Spirit.

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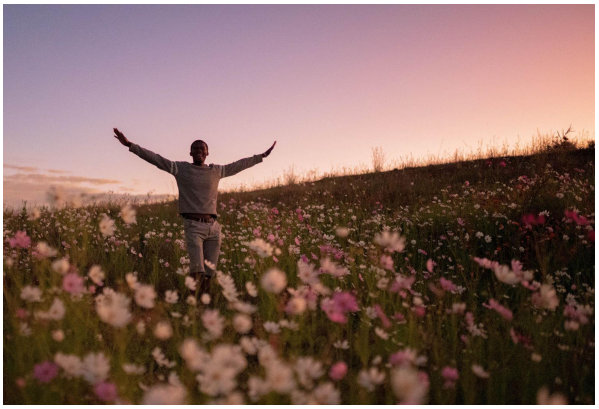

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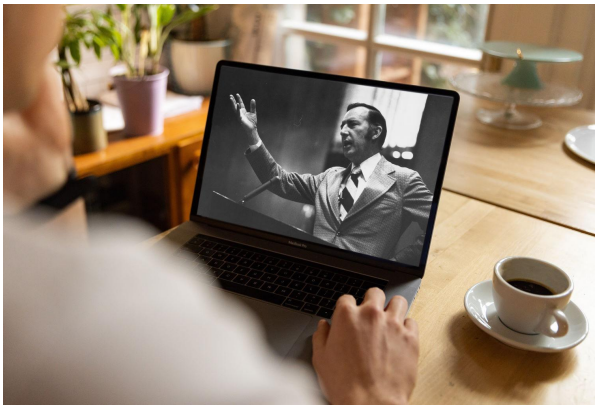

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