

## **Pray Thankfully**

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This week I heard something in seminary that stood out, it got my attention, and had me captivated for the rest of the evening.

I want to share it with you today.

The moment I heard it, it rang true.

It was an ah-ha moment.

A million light bulbs going off over my head.

It was so obvious, but so significant, I don't know why I didn't think of it before.

My professor said, that American culture is obsessed with *production*.

*Our capitalist society has inbred in us a deeply held value for production.*

American's are focused on production. We like being productive, we admire productive people, and we read productivity books because we feel guilty about not being productive enough. We even download apps on our smart phones to help

us be more productive, which I am pretty sure isn't actually productive at all. Just being honest. I heard once that when computers were invented some of the great minds behind them thought that one day our work weeks would fall to 20 hours because we were just so gosh darn productive thanks to computers. And while our productivity has raised, our hours at work have too. Because we're obsessed with being productive.

I think we take this same value for productivity into our prayer lives. Sure in church we listen to the flowery poetic prayer, but often when we're praying and there isn't a room full of people listening to us our prayers are more like this: Oh God, Help me with this, help them with that, I need this, I want that, Come oh Jesus Come, Amen. We do a laundry list of needs and then we get out of there, it's efficient, which is a key piece of productivity.

When I think about this attitude towards prayer I think of Colossians 4:2, Paul says ““***Devote*** yourselves to prayer, being ***watchful*** and thankful.” That's some strong language. ***Devote. Watchful.*** There is sense that we need to do it right, we need to be focused, we need an app on our phone to help us pray with devotion. Being watchful.

These are intense words. These are words that might lead to worry, wringing our hands, biting our nails, and pacing nervously back and forth in doubt of the ultimate outcome. Did we do it right? Are we going to get results?

*Prayer is serious business.* After all, James told us, “You do not have, because you do not ask.” Meaning, if we fail to ask, we probably will not receive.

But this truth has to be held carefully, because there is another biblical principle at work here. God’s sovereignty. The Bible tell us, *and I believe*, God will succeed in all of his purposes. Paul tells us that He “works out everything in conformity with the purpose of his will.”

And this is why Paul insist that we pray alertly, but that we should do it thankfully. Why? Because praying thankfully instills confidence in us. It removes the uncertainty as we pray. Paul is telling us to be faithful and dedicated in our prayers, but to remember that God is always faithful and he’s in control. He sits on the throne. The battles that we’re fighting, are not ours – they’re his battles and he has won them on our behalf.

***Let’s pray with that gratitude infused into all of our prayers.*** Because if we can pray thankfully that he’s God, that’s he’s in control, that he’s going to win our battles, that he’s working everything for our good, we will never lose hope or fall into despair or live in fear that he has abandoned us when we need him.

When we pray thankfully, we can live into the truth of the verse that Karen read, “Do not be anxious about anything.”

but in every situation, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God.” – Philippians 4:6

I know this is easier said than done. I know how painful that “every situation” can be. I have sat beside parents when their children were in serious trouble. I stood vigil in my grandfather’s hospital room as he lay dying. And I lay with my father in his hospital bed after his stroke. I know the deep pain and anguish that comes from those “every situation” moments. And I know what a struggle it is to find anything to be thankful for when your world is falling apart.

Sometimes, the “every situation” does not go the way we want it to. I told you that God is good and he wants what’s best for us. But he knows what’s best for us, in ways that we might question or disagree with.

Surely, Paul and Silas had to wonder how being thrown into prison would help their missionary journey. We’re told that Paul and Silas sang psalms in the prison—songs of praise to God when they had bleeding backs and shackled feet. And we’re told that through the thankful testimony of Paul and Silas their jailer found salvation.

I was reminded of this passage just this week. We have a brother who has found himself in one of those “every situations.” A missionary in the Philippines,

who is supported by Westgate Church, was falsely accused of some horrible crimes, and he's in jail now, and there has been a great deal of worrying about his health and safety. In fact his health is so poor that he could be released from jail, but he told the doctor to leave him in at least one more day. ***Why? Because revival has broken out among the prison and many prisoners and guards have come to faith in Jesus!***

That man's name is Tom Randall, I encourage you to say a prayer for Tom, his wife Karen, and their family today. But be thankful for what God is doing through this pain.

In every situation, Do not be anxious about anything, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your request to God.”

I think of Joseph, who was abused by his brothers, sold into slavery, falsely accused, imprisoned, found himself looking at his brothers saying, “You intended to harm me, but God intended it for good to accomplish what is now being done, the saving of many lives.”

What redemptive power comes out of that thanksgiving. When you can look at your tragedies and see how God has used them for blessing, and out of the deepest pain... *be thankful...* wow.

James tell us to “Consider it pure joy, . . . whenever you face trials of many kinds,” It’s hard, but if you can hold onto the smallest joy, or even the promise of future joy, those trials are lessened. Pray thankfully.

**Be grateful that God is actually there.** He is present with you. He doesn’t leave you. He’s not preoccupied with the productivity app on his smart phone. He’s preoccupied with you because he loves you.

Be grateful because he hears you when you speak. The prophet Isaiah assures you, “The LORD longs to be gracious to you; therefore he will rise up to show you compassion.

For the LORD is a God of justice.

Blessed are all who wait for him!

People of Zion, who live in Jerusalem, you will weep no more. How gracious he will be when you cry for help! **As soon as he hears, he will answer you.**” *God loves to listen to you and he loves to be gracious towards you.*

And God isn’t just there, he doesn’t just love you, he doesn’t just hear you, he is able. Ephesians 3:20 says he “is able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine, according to his power that is at work within us.”

God is not weak. God is all powerful. And God delights in giving good things to those who ask.

It's hard to be fearful when you're obsessed with being in gratitude.

Thankfulness focuses us on God, and away from our self. It helps us to see the bigger picture.

Brothers James and Joel Beeke wrote in their book *Developing a Healthy Prayer Life*: We can pray thinking that God is limited, rather than unlimited. They say this is the difference between an emergency phone number and that of a friend. "The one you call only when you must, when you have no choice, only in times of emergency. But the other you love to call-when things are going well as well as when things are going badly."

Let's examine this principle at work in the gospel of Luke, Chapter 17, verses 11-19.

"Now on his way to Jerusalem, Jesus traveled along the border between Samaria and Galilee. As he was going into a village, ten men who had leprosy met him. They stood at a distance and called out in a loud voice, "Jesus, Master, have pity on us!"

When he saw them, he said, "Go, show yourselves to the priests." And as they went, they were cleansed.

One of them, when he saw he was healed, came back, praising God in a loud voice. He threw himself at Jesus' feet and thanked him—and he was a Samaritan.

Jesus asked, “Were not all ten cleansed? Where are the other nine? Has no one returned to give praise to God except this foreigner?” Then he said to him, “Rise and go; your faith has made you well.”

When Christ healed the ten lepers, 9 used the emergency number for God because they only wanted to be healed. But only one used the number of a friend. He returned to Christ, with a heart full of love, communion, and praise. The joy that followed the priest’s pronouncement that he was clean was the joy of his heart being full of love for Jesus. Full of thankful love for Jesus.

The brothers James and Joel Beeke, write “True thankfulness brings us close to the heart of God, to His love and grace. True thankfulness realizes that anything short of hell is grace. True thankfulness serves as a corrective lens—a lens through which we see God’s grace in all things.”

“True thankfulness realizes that anything short of hell is grace.” Have you stopped to ponder the offensiveness of your sin? I always come back here because it’s ... amazing. We can talk about this truth every Sunday our entire lives and it will never cease to amaze me. Our sinfulness is vile before a holy God. When we go before him we’re covered in guilt, and shame. But because of the the amazing grace that Jesus showed us... what he did on that cross to forgive us of our sins. He defeated the power of death for us. We can stand before a holy God and when he sees us, he sees us as holy as he is, because of the work of Jesus. We failed that



test, but because of Jesus we're scoring 100%. We deserve the death penalty, but because of Jesus we're walking free. We should be shunned and outcast, like Adam and Eve, but because of Jesus we have a friendship with God. What an amazing thing to be grateful for. And it's yours, you just have to decide to call Jesus your friend. When we stop seeing Jesus as an emergency number, but start loving on Jesus like a friend, going to him with both the bad and good, we're going to find a tremendous amount of peace.

Friends, in Jesus, our attentive, powerful God, who makes good things out of bad, who offers us salvation: we have so much to be thankful for! Will you pray with me?