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#1364

Confessions of a Pastor
I Have An ADD Prayer Life

There's a web site called the "ADD Forums." Its subtitle is "The Ultimate World Online Resource Center For ADHD." In these forums you'll find all kinds of people's questions, and then other people's answers, to issues involving Attention Deficit Disorder. In the Meditation and Spirituality section there are people who just open up and and are crying out for help with prayer.

I can identify with those questions because ADD really describes my prayer life.

This is week three of a series we're titling "Confessions of a Pastor." In these weeks I'm trying to be open with you about my spiritual struggles, not because I want to make excuses or lower your expectations of your pastor, but I want you to know that you're not alone in your spiritual pilgrimage.

It's real easy for me to come here with my "Christian" mask on. In fact it's a whole lot easier for all of us to put up a false front than it is to be honest. But I believe we'll never be what God wants for us to be as a church if we're not candid enough to admit that living for God isn't easy. In fact, as we saw a couple of weeks ago, it's a spiritual battle.

I personally believe that prayer is the ground zero of that battle. If we prayed like the Bible describes prayer we wouldn't be veering off the path that God has for us. If we prayed like the Bible describes prayer we wouldn't have as much trouble with temptation. If we prayed like the Bible describes prayer we would be a lot more aware of the presences of God in our everyday lives.

No wonder prayer is at the heart of the battle.

Now I've heard a few rumblings that I'm not being detailed enough in my confessions. In fact, this week someone said to me "Hey, I thought this was supposed to be confessions of a pastor. You keep talking about us!"

That's right. I'm talking about us and that's really been our goal from day one. The first goal is to admit somethings are difficult to live out, and then then the second is to search for the biblical solutions together.

Today as we look at the subject of prayer I'd like us to begin with this consideration...

I. Prayer Is A Challenge

Maybe you're one of those atypical Christians for whom prayer just comes naturally. If that describes you, I'd ask you to have compassion on the rest of us.

For me, prayer is a challenge. I can sit down to pray and within minutes my mind is on to the next thing I have to do that day. Before long I've diverted my thoughts to a list of responsibilities and the prayer is forgotten

All of a sudden I'll realize, "Hey, I'm supposed to be in the middle of a prayer. How'd I get so far off track?"

Actually, who's got time to pray when we have all these things to do!

Now, that ADD thing used to happen to me when I was new in my faith and I figured it would get better as time went on. Wrong. Focused prayer is something I have to constantly work at.

Is that better, for you people who wanted more specific confessions? Here's another. I read in the Bible that I'm to bring all things in prayer to my heavenly Father. That makes sense. He's the Lord. He's the one who brings things to pass. He's the one who can take our limited abilities and do mighty things through us.

I know all that. And yet, so many times I'm off to the next project and half way into it before I think, "Gee, I should be praying about this."

David Jeremiah, pastor of Shadow Mountain Community Church in San Diego. Has a book titled the Prayer Matrix. In it Jeremiah says, "Prayer is so difficult for me that I am always in the process of reading a book on prayer BECAUSE I find prayer so hard."

Prayer is a challenge for me and I know it is for most of you too. Why is that?

Because it's hard work and it goes against our human nature to be still and admit we're dependant on anyone, even God.

That's the point of contention for us from the very beginning. The Bible says that each of us is a sinner deserving of God's wrath.

For there is not a just man on earth who does good And does not sin. Ecclesiastes 7:20

That's all inclusive. We like to think of ourselves as not so bad. We're as good as the next guy. Maybe a little better. But here's what the Bible says, *But we are all like an*

unclean thing, And all our righteousnesses are like filthy rags; We all fade as a leaf, And our iniquities, like the wind, Have taken us away. Isaiah 64:6

If you compare your life with people around you, you might feel you're pretty good. But when you compare yourself with Almighty God, you'll immediately see that you are not as perfect as God. Nobody is.

One of the New Testament words the Bible uses for "sin" is *hamartano* in the Greek, and means to "miss the mark." We miss the mark of God's perfection no matter how hard we try.

That sin, according to the Bible has earned us eternal death. *For the wages of sin is death...* Romans 6:23a.

The payment for sin is death. Sin isn't paid for by good works, penance, church membership, water baptism. Sin is paid for by death. God doesn't hate sinners, but He does hates sin. He hates sin because it separates us from Him.

Sin mars the creation. So God delt with our sin. He died the death sin demands through Jesus Christ. At the cross the sin price was paid in full.

That's why forgiveness and being born into God's family isn't about what we do. It's about what He's already done. That's why the Bible makes such clear statements.

Turn to Ephesians 2 page 1038 Read verses 8-9

There's no bragging in heaven because salvation isn't by works. The only boast is our boast in God. He's the focus of our worship because He's the Savior.

Then good works can follow in the right order. **Read verse 10**

Good works honor God, they don't buy forgiveness.

Now see how humbling all this is. Here's what keeps some people from becoming believers. They don't want o admit they can't do it on their own.

It's the same with prayer. We become Christians by trusting God and we pray because we're still trusting God. But just like it can be a hurdle to humble ourselves for forgiveness it can be a hurdle for us to keep admitting we need God every day.

I. Prayer Is A Challenge

II. Prayer Is Communication

Here's one uncomplicated thought that can revolutionize our whole prayer life. Prayer is simply communicating with the God who forgave us through His Son.

What is communication? To quote Craig Groeschel, "Communication is transferring a thought, feeling, emotion, or idea to another person. Prayer is giving God my thoughts, feelings, emotions, and ideas by whatever means works. It doesn't have to be formal. It doesn't have to be dry and long. It's simply communicating."

If you've been living on less than adequate prayer, that can change. It changes when we start by thinking about prayer differently. Don't just think of prayer as some formal deal where you're on your knees, your eyes are closed, and you're speaking with some special religious terms.

Prayer can happen that way, but it doesn't have to.

For the Jewish people of the Old Covenant God was often viewed as someone far off. To them God dwelled in the inner part of the Jewish temple. Even the high priest could only go in there once a year.

Everything is radically different for us. **Turn to Hebrews 4 page 1064**

Read verses 14-16

Even the Jewish high priest had to bring a sacrifice for his own sins. But we have a high priest who faced temptation and never sinned. His name is Jesus and He knows what it's like to have to deal with the pressures, the disappointments, and the pains of life. He's merciful to us. Therefore we can come boldly to God's throne. It's a throne of grace.

We don't have to be afraid. God's not too busy running the world to hear us. Any time or any place we can communicate with God.

Hebrews 10 Read verses 19-23

Prayer is actually coming to the God of the universe on an intimate level. It's communication with our Father in heaven.

John MacArthur put it this way. "We come into the presence of an infinitely holy, awesome, majestic God, with the feeling that we're not only welcome, but that He longs to have us there. Prayer is an absolutely essential part of our Christian

experience.”

Think about some of these reasons why we must make prayer a priority.

1.) It's commanded *Take up the whole armor of God...praying always with all prayer and supplication.* Ephesians 6:13 & 18

2.) It's a sin not to pray *Far be it from me that I should sin against the LORD in ceasing to pray for you.* I Samuel 12:23 God expects us to pray for one another. In fact in James 5:16 God gives a straightforward, outright command for us to *pray for one another.*

3.) Prayer gives glory to God In John chapter 11 Jesus is outside the tomb of His friend Lazarus and He prays this: *Father, I thank You that You have heard Me. And I know that You always hear Me, but because of the people who are standing by I said this.* John 11:41 Jesus was fully human as well as fully divine and in His humanity He totally depended on the Father. He didn't need to pray out loud but He did it so everyone would glorify the Father.

Lazarus is raised from the dead and Jesus says to Lazarus' sister Martha, *Did I not say to you that if you would believe you would see the glory of God?* John 11:40

Life isn't about us and our glory. When we pray we're turned back to worshipping Him.

4.) Prayer lines us up with God's purposes In the Lord's prayer Jesus gave us a beautiful pattern. *In this manner, therefore, pray: Our Father in heaven, Hallowed be Your name. Your kingdom come. Your will be done On earth as it is in heaven.* Matthew 6:9-10

If our prayer are, "God I'll do this for you if you do that for me," we're going to totally miss the point. Prayer is about, "Lord help me to know what You're doing and to get my self lined up with Your purposes."

How about this one:

5.) God answers prayer *Now this is the confidence that we have in Him, that if we ask anything according to His will, He hears us. And if we know that He hears us, whatever we ask, we know that we have the petitions that we have asked of Him.* I John 5:14-15

That is absolutely amazing, isn't it? The Lord of all Creation hears and answers our prayers according to His will.

Prayer is communication and when you really think about it, there's no greater privilege than to communicate with God.

Have you ever had a sick pet at your house? We didn't have cats and dogs, we had lizards, hermit crabs, turtles, and a hamster.

The hamster was vicious. Kids would come over and say, "Aw, he's so cute." Then they'd stick their hand in his cage and he'd take a bite out of their finger. Suddenly he wasn't so cute anymore. But my daughter loved him.

Eventually the hamster came down with some ailment. I think he had tumors, if I remember correctly. Anyway, we took the hamster to the vet. Other people there laughed at us, but we took the attack hamster to the vet and spent money on him. Why? Because my daughter cared for him.

What mattered to her mattered to her mother and me. God is like that. He cares for you. He cares about what you care about.

That's why you find passages like Philippians 4:6 **Turn there page 1044**
Read verse 6

God never says, "Just pray about the big things in your life and don't bother me with the small stuff." I Peter 5:7 says, *casting all your care upon Him, for He cares for you.*

If it matters to you, it matters to God because you matter to God. There's no directive in the Bible that says, "Pray about the big, important sounding things." The Bible says, in everything pray. Cast all your care on Him.

Pray about everything because God cares about everything. Your leaky faucet, your broken toe, or your burned dinner. God cares. Prayer is communication. Talk to God about your day just like you'd talk to anyone else you really loved.

Are you feeling lonely? Talk to God. He's promised to be with you but ask Him to allow you to sense His presence. Are you stuck and don't know what decision to make? the Bible says, *If any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask of God, who gives to all liberally and without reproach, and it will be given to him.* James 1:5. Allow Him to guide you step by step.

Do you know someone who needs help but you don't know where to start? Appeal to God! Watch Him work in ways you can't even fully understand.

Communicate about whatever concerns you. Anything. When everything is on the table your prayer life can take off like a rocket. Here's some examples:

God give me the words to say to this person.

God, give me the ability to see the situation Your way.

God, bless her and meet her needs.

God, use me to encourage him.

God, show me if I should buy this, or I should do this, or I should say this.

God, help me to see them as you do.

God, help me to show her Your love.

Just communicate with God about everything.

I. Prayer Is A Challenge

II. Prayer Is Communication

III. Prayer Should Be Expressed In A Variety Of Forms

I can remember the night like it was yesterday. Our family, along with my mother-in-law and Sandy's aunt and uncle had made our way through a tightly packed crowd to watch fireworks on the 4th of July.

It was going to be a while until the show started so I took my son Ben, who was 8, to a playground. All was well until he walked in front of a kid swinging on a metal swing.

The edge of the seat caught Ben right in the head. He had a nasty gash that started bleeding profusely. We made our way through the tightly packed crowd, Got all the relatives together and headed out. I got them home and headed for the emergency room. We were there for hours but as it turned out he didn't have a concussion and just needed stitches.

You know, that whole time I never stopped praying. I'm sure every parent has similar stories. Some are much more intense than mine.

There's a crucial lesson in my response. I knew I needed God. I was helpless to do anything. And just as I needed God for the moment when Ben was covered with blood, I need God every moment of my life. And so do you.

We can't keep our own heart beating. We can't manufacture our own oxygen. We need God way more that we ever realize.

How do we stay conscious of that need? I believe an understanding of the prayers of king David in the book of Psalms will do more to expand our understanding of prayer

than anything else.

David was described by God as *a man after My own heart*. Acts 13:22 And David not only had a heart for God he had the most varied and inventive prayer life. He was creative.

Look at Psalm 13 page 486 Read verses 5-6

Have you ever sung to the Lord? David did. He communicated with God through singing.

Psalm 20:5 The word translated “rejoice” is the Hebrew word *ranan*. It means “to shout joyfully.”

Psalm 55:17 Sometimes David’s prayer was a cry for help.

Psalm 108:1-3 David communicated with God through instruments.

Psalm 141:2 Sometimes David’s prayer was a quiet act of worship.

If there’s one thing that strikes me about David’s communication with God it was his creativity. David prayed in all different types of situations with all different forms of prayer.

Creativity will put a different face on prayer for us. It will energize our prayers and make our prayer life more natural like God intended it to be.

Turn to I Thessalonians 5 page 1050 Read verse 17

Wow. Here I am admitting that I have a problem with prayer and the Bible says “Pray all the time. Don’t quit.”

What’s that? It sounds impossible, doesn’t it?

It’s interesting but the word translated “without ceasing” doesn’t mean one long continuous prayer without a break. That would be physically and spiritually impossible.

What it does mean is “incessantly.” It’s only used twice in the Greek New Testament but outside of the Bible it was a very common word. *Adialeiptos* is used to describe

things which are continuously done - uninterrupted necessary payment of taxes, continual uninterrupted cough, repeated military attacks, continual failing of a military effort, regular and consistent production of fruit. Josephus the historian used *adialeiptos* for the incessant attacks of the Romans and for the continual hammering of a battering ram against the walls of Jerusalem.

What God's telling us here is that our prayers ought to be regular and continuous.

If we think that the only prayers God wants to hear are the ones we pray on our knees, with our eyes shut and hands folded in a very formal manner, we're missing the point of prayer. Not only that, but we won't pray nearly as much.

You can't close your eyes when you're driving your car. You can't kneel in the middle of a busy office. You can't fold your hands when you're riding your bike or shoveling snow. But you can pray in each of those environments.

There's a time and a place for kneeling in reverence before God. Folding our hands and closing our eyes can keep us from distraction. Those are all good and appropriate postures for prayer. But they're far from the only ones.

Here's some ways that we can all put a different approach to prayer.

- 1.) Write out prayers. Write a thank-you letter to God. Write out your questions for God. Do this reverently, but file a complaint once in a while. Remember, prayer is communication.
- 2.) Pray while you're on the MARK train commuting. Pray while you're working out at the gym. Pray while you're walking, jogging, or cutting the grass. Turn common activities into uncommon time with your Heavenly Father.
- 3.) Pray in different places. If you usually pray at the kitchen table over a cup of coffee try in bed before you get up. Change your location and it will help invigorate your prayers.
- 4.) Pray with different posture. One time, pray sitting. Another time kneel reverently. Still another time stand with your arms up to heaven joyfully. It's even biblical to pray facedown on the floor.

Jesus fell on His face in the Garden of Gethsemane praying in agony. A Samaritan leper was healed by Jesus and fell on his face in thankfulness. In I Corinthians 14 a man falls on his face in worship.

5.) You can even pray by listening. In Psalm 46:10 God says *Be still, and know that I am God*. If prayer is communication sometimes we need to be quiet long enough to hear from God.

Sometimes we just need to get alone with no radio, TV, or computer to distract us. God speaks through the Bible. He speaks through creation. Sometimes He speaks through others around us. As long as what we're "hearing" can be backed up with solid truth from the Bible, we can listen and God will speak.

Do you feel insecure about your faltering prayer life? Do you get discouraged because you're so easily distracted? Do you feel shame at times because your prayer life doesn't line up with what you say you believe about God?

Maybe it's because when you're talking to God you're not really talking to your Heavenly Father. Jesus said that every one of us first needs to be what He called, "born again."

We need to come to that place in our spiritual life where we recognize that we've sinned against a holy God and that that sin has separated us from His life. And then we need to receive His forgiveness by trusting in Jesus alone.

To be born again is to have a new spiritual birth into the family of God. Then we can claim the prayer promises God made in the Bible.

If you have trusted Christ as Savior and your prayer life still seems flat I have good news for you.

God wants to hear from you. Even if it's been a long time, God wants to hear from you.

Pray. Pray creatively, openly, honestly. Pray long prayers. Pray short prayers. Pray joyful prayers. Pray emotional prayers. Let your attitudes, thoughts, energy, focus, attention, desire, and love be directed to the personal God who loves you intimately. Make prayer a way of life.

You say "I feel so awkward. it's a bit uncomfortable, even embarrassing, to not always know what to say or even how to pray. I feel like I'm uncoordinated self-conscious."

Remember when you first learned to tie your shoes, ride a two wheeler, drive a car? Remember how unskillful you were?

I bet today you can do any of those things while carrying on an in depth conversation

with someone else and it's so natural that you hardly even think about what you're doing.

That's kind of the way prayer can be. It will become so natural and intuitive to pray that you won't stumble over the words or feel like you're doing something out of the ordinary.

You will be doing something out of the ordinary. You'll be talking to Almighty God, but it will feel natural like breathing air.

So here's our goal: to allow moment-by-moment fellowship with God to become a way of life.

I don't know about you but I can't say I'm totally there yet. But I can say this, I have an awareness of God's presence in my life that has just grown over the years. And it's grown into something so unique and so beyond human understanding that I know it's totally a God thing.

So pray. Communicate. Share your heart with God. He's a Father who's arms are always, always open to His children.