

Pruning through Prayer

Matthew 6:5 through Matthew 6:13 (NKJV)

⁵“And when you pray, you shall not be like the hypocrites. For they love to pray standing in the synagogues and on the corners of the streets, that they may be seen by men. Assuredly, I say to you, they have their reward. ⁶But you, when you pray, go into your room, and when you have shut your door, pray to your Father who *is* in the secret *place*; and your Father who sees in secret will reward you openly. ⁷And when you pray, do not use vain repetitions as the heathen *do*. For they think that they will be heard for their many words.

⁸“Therefore do not be like them. For your Father knows the things you have need of before you ask Him. ⁹In this manner, therefore, pray:

Our Father in heaven,
Hallowed be Your name.
¹⁰ Your kingdom come.
Your will be done
On earth as *it is* in heaven.
¹¹ Give us this day our daily bread.
¹² And forgive us our debts,
As we forgive our debtors.
¹³ And do not lead us into temptation,
But deliver us from the evil one.
For Yours is the kingdom and the power and the glory forever. Amen.

During the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus takes time to teach on prayer. Traditionally we call this prayer the Lord’s Prayer. I believe that it may more accurately be called the Model Prayer because it is an example of how to pray.

The prayer that the Lord actually prayed is found in John 17. There he prays for the disciples and the church. It is a prayer that includes his disciples in this time also. But the Model Prayer gives us everything we need to be successful in our prayer lives. It reveals the recipient of our prayers, the purpose of our prayers, and much more.

For the five Sundays in May, we will use the Model Prayer as a backdrop for our discussions on prayer. Our goal is to help every believer strengthen their prayers and grow in their relationships with God. In the first week we began with the Dynamics of Prayer. During the second week, we discussed the Purpose of Prayer. In week three, Rev. Jackson shared the Provision of Prayer. Today, we will learn about Pruning through Prayer.

Jesus instructs us to pray in verse 12 by saying

¹² And forgive us our debts,
As we forgive our debtors.

We are a work in progress.

Do you remember your salvation? Sometimes people can tell you the day, the time, the location, or the circumstances. I know for myself it was a Wednesday night at Ebenezer Baptist Church in Auburn. For some of you, it may have been right here at Greater Friendship on a Sunday morning like this one.

Do you remember how you felt? Did you have unspeakable joy? Did you have an overwhelming sense of peace? Maybe you felt the love of God and just knew you were saved.

Then what?

Well, salvation is not just a one time event. Salvation occurs in three parts.

First of all, we are saved from the penalty of our sins. Before we accept Jesus Christ as Lord of our lives and Savior of our souls, we are enemies of God. We are guilty of the sins of our lives and are already condemned to spend eternity in hell. Only the confession of faith and belief in the gospel message can save us from this situation.

Colossians 2:11 through Colossians 2:15 (NKJV)

¹¹In Him you were also circumcised with the circumcision made without hands, by putting off the body of the sins of the flesh, by the circumcision of Christ, ¹²buried with Him in baptism, in which you also were raised with *Him* through faith in the working of God, who raised Him from the dead. ¹³And you, being dead in your trespasses and the uncircumcision of your flesh, He has made alive together with Him, having forgiven you all trespasses, ¹⁴having wiped out the handwriting of requirements that was against us, which was contrary to us. And He has taken it out of the way, having nailed it to the cross. ¹⁵Having disarmed principalities and powers, He made a public spectacle of them, triumphing over them in it.

If we are in Christ, he has forgiven us for our trespasses and nailed the legalistic ordinances of the law to the cross. Our salvation was paid for in full. Our redemption was covered in a blood payment by Christ. In the future, we will ultimately be saved from the presence of sin. When we get to glory there will be no sin. Sin can't stand in the presence of God.

But right now between our initial salvation and our glorious salvation, we need to be saved from **the power of sin**.

When we come to Christ, we are new creatures. We are born again. But just as new born babies have to learn to walk, we must learn to walk in newness of life. Our old lives are still with us. Our old habits may still have power over us. So we must learn new, Godly habits that remove the sin from our lives.

Many times we fail to communicate this point to new believers. People come to church and believe they have to be instantly perfect once they join. That's not true. Seekers sometimes want to come to church but believe they have to get themselves cleaned up before they can come to Christ. That's not true either. Every Christian is a work in progress. We are all under construction. We are all allowing God to mold us into his image.

Philippians 1:3 through Philippians 1:6 (NKJV)

³I thank my God upon every remembrance of you, ⁴always in every prayer of mine making request for you all with joy, ⁵for your fellowship in the gospel from the first day until now, ⁶being confident of this very thing, that He who has begun a good work in you will complete *it* until the day of Jesus Christ;

Paul tells the church at Philippi that he is confident God is completing them from the first time they heard and received the gospel, until the day Christ returns. How does the work of completing us take place? It takes some pruning and accountability.

Accountability with God.

How many of you have ever struggled to change a habit or turn away from a sin? Have you ever wondered how to overcome inner struggles and obstacles? Well, think about this:

Some people have a heavy foot and drive beyond the posted speed limit. We push it to the limits to see how far above the limit we can drive without getting a ticket. Every once in a while we may see an officer sitting on the side of the road. What do we do?

Sit up straight, apply the brakes, ask everyone in the car if they have on seat belts, and look as innocent as possible. Why? It's because the presence of the officer and the laws he or she are commissioned to enforce hold us accountable. We may not feel like the officer's motive is accountability. We may feel like they are out to get us.

The truth is, law enforcement officers work for us. We pay taxes to provide salaries and materials to them for the purpose of protecting and serving. If we are out of line, they issue tickets. Speeding tickets are a form of correction for our bad behavior.

Dallas Police Example:

When I lived in Dallas, Texas I remember listening to the radio during rush hour traffic and being amazed. They would actually broadcast to the public the places where speed traps were set up.

Why would the Dallas Police department advertise their speed trap locations? They did it to protect and serve. School zones, streets with a high number of accidents, difficult interchanges, etc. The police protect you and I from speeding drivers who may cause accidents with their reckless driving. Those people get stopped, pulled over, and served a ticket.

They sometimes protect other drivers from us too when we are speeding by giving us tickets. They also protect us from hurting ourselves when we are driving beyond the safe operating speed limit. Police officers hold us accountable to the laws and ordinances that we voted on and determined we would live by as a society.

Prayer has that same kind of accountability, but it's voluntary. When we pray, God is not out to get us. When we sin, God is not out to get us. What God wants to do is correct us and put us on the right path. But we must go to him.

1 John 1:8 through 1 John 1:9 (NKJV)

⁸If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. ⁹If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us *our* sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.

God desires that we seek him. He desires for us to acknowledge our sins and confess them to him. And he will not condemn us. Instead, he is faithful and just to forgive us and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. Our ability to confess our faults to God is a mark of spiritual maturity. It means we are beginning to line up with God's will for our lives. It means we are concerned about our growth and development just as he is. Don't forget, God wants us to be holy just as he is holy.

We are all called into relationship with God who is full of love. He is full of mercy and full of grace. Because of this it's easy to pray and ask for things. We pray for blessings and goodness and daily bread all the time. But it's hard to be open and exposed right in front of God. It's hard to talk to God about our wrong. We would rather ignore the sin or neutralize the sting of our own sins by saying "the Lord knows my heart".

Yes, he does know your heart, but he also knows what you did, when you did it, where you did it, who you did it with, and your plans to do it again. God knows that you are wrong just as much as you know you are wrong. Even though you may feel like you are okay with other people because they don't know your faults, you don't have any idea of where you stand with God. Without accountability there is no intimacy. Without intimacy there is no fullness of joy. We must have full disclosure when we pray.

Freedom of confession.

2 Corinthians 7:8 through 2 Corinthians 7:12 (NKJV)

⁸For even if I made you sorry with my letter, I do not regret it; though I did regret it. For I perceive that the same epistle made you sorry, though only for a while. ⁹Now I rejoice, not that you were made sorry, but that your sorrow led to repentance. For you were made sorry in a godly manner, that you might suffer loss from us in nothing. ¹⁰For godly sorrow produces repentance *leading* to salvation, not to be regretted; but the sorrow of the world produces death. ¹¹**For observe this very thing, that you sorrowed in a godly manner: What diligence it produced in you, *what clearing of yourselves, what indignation, what fear, what vehement desire, what zeal, what vindication!* In all *things* you proved yourselves to be clear in this matter.** ¹²Therefore, although I wrote to you, *I did not do it* for the sake of him who had done the wrong, nor for the sake of him who suffered wrong, but that our care for you in the sight of God might appear to you.

Some of us won't ever be free from sin until we are open with God. We won't change until we become diligent. The people at Corinth became diligent to pray and overcome their sin. They worked hard to clear their names of wrong and even became indignant toward their sins. They exhibited fear, and zeal, and vindication. Their very attitudes toward sin was changed.

It's interesting to note that some believers have refrained from some sins only because they know they will get caught. But deep inside they see nothing wrong with the sin and even desire to do it again.

Conclusion:

God wants to make us better and he does it through addition and subtraction. He does it when he adds to our faith and when he removes our sins. God wants to prune us so we can produce more fruit. He has to cut us back so we can focus on building strength. Pruning is painful especially when it's the pruning of our hearts. Incorporate confession into your prayer life and watch God work to make you a better believer.