

MOODY DISTANCE LEARNING

Talking to God, Part 2

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Greg Wheatley: Welcome to Radio School of the Bible. This program is a ministry of the Center for External Studies at Moody Bible Institute in Chicago. I'm Greg Wheatley, your host for these broadcasts and each quarter of Radio School of the Bible is devoted to a different topic or sometimes a book of the Bible study. Now this quarter we're talking about God's will for your life. Our instructor for the course quarter is Dr. Bill Thrasher, Professor of Bible and Theology at the Graduate School of Moody Bible Institute.

Well, speaking of God's will, we have been talking about walking in fellowship with God as Christians, how to study His Word, and now most recently we've been talking about prayer and the importance in our lives. So let's continue this study today with Dr. Bill Thrasher.

Dr. Bill Thrasher: Thank you Greg. We reminded ourselves that prayer starts with God. God is the one who gives us the command to pray and has opened up the privilege of praying to the Lord Jesus Christ, shedding His blood that we can have communication with God. And that God is a kind God. He yearns to work and we've said, how does God work?

When God wants to do something, He lays a prayer burden on someone's heart. That person responds to that prayer burden and that's how the work of God is set in motion. Of course, the question, you know, is, "Is my heart open to the Lord?" Am I willing to say, "Lord, I'm willing to receive any prayer burden that you'd wanna give me."

You know the great freedom is that understanding the truth of the dynamics of prayer, because you know I owe in my own life, I owe a lot, so much to my mother in regard to her disciplined life and God used her to build discipline in my life. I owe a lot to a college roommate I roomed with whom I observed, and he had a very disciplined prayer life. And so I remember reasoning, okay Lord, I guess that's what a Christian's supposed to do. I guess they're supposed to pray. Guess they're supposed to brush their teeth every day. I guess they're supposed to pray. At least that's what this guy does. He knows more about it than I do.

And so I sought to develop the discipline of prayer in my life. But you know over a number of years my prayer life bogged down. It was; I believed it was important. I was doing it. It was disciplined in it but it bogged down.

In fact really it became a great burden to be honest with you. It became a burden to the extent that I said, "Oh God, the greatest thing you can do is just take this burden off my back," I remember telling the Lord one day. And I think what had happened is I lost a sense of expectancy in prayer and I think a person has to ask himself this: if you're praying and you're not expecting anything to happen, why pray? So that's where I was. And so I needed to learn something more in a sense about prayer in regard to the dynamics of prayer.

I know one thing that helped me was that one of the problems I was running into (and I tried to pray for everything that I thought was important to pray about in regard – someone would say pray for this) until I discovered you know that everything, every prayer burden is not mine to carry. I can sometimes try to put things on my own heart that I needed to trust God. I remember reading in a book, these may not be the exact words but a person says something like this: They said, you know I tried to pray for everything with equal intensity and my prayer life got nowhere until I discovered that God wasn't asking me personally to pray for everything needed to be prayed for. But I needed, he said, I needed to trust God to set the agenda of my prayer life. I don't know if those are the words he used but those are the words I've used.

The idea to trust the Lord to set the agenda of my prayer life. And this has helped me, that the Spirit of God, that's part of praying in the Spirit, trusting the Spirit to motivate and empower and to help me pray my heart to the Lord. Now one way that also I'd like to maybe develop today is what I call the help of our need. A number of years ago I heard a Christian leader talk about this principle of first fruits and he said, "You know, this principle of first fruits has really been a blessing to me in relationship to the times. I give the first part of a day to the Lord and I give the first day of the week to the Lord and even as I've learned to give the first of the year to the Lord."

Well I remember hearing I think it was April when I was hearing that. I said, well I never, I guess I've thought about to some degree and had a little bit of a practice of giving the first part of the day to the Lord and the first day of the week to the Lord. But I never forgot about giving the first part of the year to the Lord and I didn't know exactly what that meant. But I remember jotting down, that was April - okay when January comes around I'm gonna do that. Well, I remember doing that. I think it was something like 1983 the first time I did that and I had preconceived ideas of what that would mean and none of those preconceived ideas were how it worked out.

But one thing I did do, as I was just reading through some notes at the beginning of that year and really I do in my academic schedule have a few days of the year before school actually starts. But I came up with reading through notes sorta three themes that sorta emerged and I said, "Lord, I'm gonna go into this year trusting you for these three specific things." And that was a glorious year in regard to God working that out. So I said, "Lord next time the year comes around, I'm gonna do the same thing. I'm gonna discover what are three things that you want me to trust you for over that year."

Well I remember one year trusting God for this. One of those things was, "Lord, may I be used of you to you to raise up prayer among your people." And so as I, and I write, "Okay, Lord, I'll write then any insights you give me throughout this year. I remember all that year basically God showed me one thing and I would say certainly if our listeners or you would do that, maybe you would come up with a lot of things, but and the one thing was just tell God's people how to make sure of their needy moments. You know one very wise individual defined prayer this way. He said, "Prayer is helplessness plus faith."

And then I think he even helps us further. He says, "Faith is just coming to Jesus with our helplessness." It's not having everything figured out. It's not being able to tell God exactly – sometimes you just have to hand the situation over to the Lord in prayer. I mean, you're not even wise enough to know what to tell him what to do.

Greg Wheatley: What to ask for.

Dr. Bill Thrasher: Exactly. But prayer is helplessness plus faith. Now but taking your needy moments and turning those over to God, now, I know you're probably saying okay, be specific and that's a legitimate request. Okay, well let's say your times of fear. It's very healthy to be in touch with the fears of your life and the Psalm, it says, "I sought the Lord and He delivered me from my fear." So when you're fearful to talk to God about your fears, you know this is awful but you know there would be in my discipline of prayer it took me a while to learn this.

I would be praying and then something would be sorta bothering me on my heart. And I would say oh, I just say if I didn't have time to really pay attention to that. I'd just sorta tried to keep praying. Now what I discovered was this; that at that moment prayer died. Oh I was still praying, but what it, prayer died because see, prayer is sharing your heart with God. I had to learn to put down in a sense my preconceived agenda, as wonderful as I thought it may be and to talk to God from my heart even if it meant trusting the Lord to pray for be prayed for.

Greg Wheatley: Yeah. And that's why it's sometimes probably a lot of people can relate to this. The experience is when you have felt the most close to God have been those times of your deepest need. Where there was no agenda in prayer, no list that you had, as good as lists are but it was a crying out in sometimes in desperation from the very bottom of our hearts right?

Dr. Bill Thrasher: That's exactly right and you know, it's a wonderful work of God to help us pray our hearts to God. You know certainly prayer if we can identify praying in group prayer that sometimes we don't really pray our hearts. Lord deliver us from it but if we ever pray something that we make sure is acceptable or something rather than pray our hearts. And I'm not saying it's appropriate in every instance of group prayer to be totally transparent. But certainly you know we can even in private prayer sometimes what, be going through the motions and really not pray our hearts to God.

So that is a work of God and so the Lord gives us sometimes providential circumstances. In fact He tells us that every time we're tempted to be anxious, He says, "Be anxious for nothing but talk to me about what's causing you to be anxious and tell me what you want me to do about it." So it's taking those moments of anxiety and we live in a very anxious world, we'll always be tempted by anxiety until we get to heaven. The Lord taking those and turning those into prayer. When we're struggling with anger, we're frustrated; we're hurt, talking to God about our hurt. It's not that necessarily we feel godly in those times, but it truly, I find in those times, in times of temptation, it can be a great help in a sense of using those and turning those into conversations with God.

Greg Wheatley: Well, and isn't it true that the Psalms are a great model for that? Because it seems like the Psalmist was so honest with God and with himself, both the upside and the downside. You read it all here.

Dr. Bill Thrasher: Yes, yes. And what a help I think God's given us to aid us in our own communication with God. I remember one time going through the Psalms and just trying to collect passages that help me communicate my heart to God. And it was very helpful. Still remember some of those. You know Psalm 86:4 and 5, what a better way to ask God to encourage you than, "Make glad the soul of your servant. For to you I lift up my soul for thou art good and ready to forgive in abundant and loving kindness."

Or what God, better way to ask God to protect you than, "Hide me in the shadow of your wings. Keep me as the apple of your eye." So God's given us that because He knows we need in a sense that pattern that help, that stimulation to pray.

I remember a pastor; I appreciated his honesty. He said at the end of a day and he was feeling, well he was trying to pray but he wasn't, he was having a hard time praying cause it'd been a very difficult day spiritually and he thought to himself, "Lord, you know if I – I'd spent several hours in your Word today. If I'd led a couple people to Christ, I have no problem praying. You know that wasn't the kinda day, I had a horrible day." And he wasn't trying to cover sin in his life but he was just very discouraged. He felt very inadequate, very unworthy.

And it was like the Lord rebuked him. Saying you know your problem is you want to pray in your name and not in Jesus' name. And I think you know certain times that can trip us up when you feel unworthy or feel inadequate. I think that's when it's important to learn that we pray in Jesus' name. When Jesus shed His blood on the cross, He earned for us the awesome privilege of being able to talk to God from our hearts. So to pray in Jesus' name.

I've discovered this and I think it's very true scripturally and I think it'll also be true to your experience. It certainly has been true to mine, that before, many times before God wants to do something special, it is preceded by a difficult time. Before there was the resurrection there was the tomb and things looked hopeless when looked like the enemies of righteousness had triumphed. Before important events in my life many times, before God was gonna do something special in me or through me it was preceded by a difficult time. So I'm telling that to our listeners, sometimes I lose sight of that. But that's very true.

Greg Wheatley: Easy to lose perspective isn't it?

Dr. Bill Thrasher: Yes it is. You know one final thing I would say, that try to say briefly, that would be a help. And that is not original to me, but there was a pastor on the west coast leading a number of people to Christ from a variety of difficult backgrounds. And after they came to Christ they were tempted to go back in some of those wrong choices. Here's what he told em Greg, he said, "here's what I want you to do. I want you to think ahead of time of a prayer request that you're gonna pray every time y you're tempted to go into that wrong choice.

And I want to be a prayer request if God were to answer it, it would damage Satan's kingdom. May be the salvation of a key person, God would really grab a hold of someone's heart. And you know he mentioned the enormous help that was. The incredible way of taking that temptation and turning it into a prayer target for someone else.

Greg Wheatley: Well what a great privilege we have in prayer and I hope that today's lesson in Radio School of the Bible has been helpful in encouraging you, maybe prodding you towards a renewed prayer life. Our instructor in Radio School of the Bible this quarter is Dr. Bill Thrasher, Professor of Bible and Theology in Moody's Graduate School. I'm Greg Wheatley and we'll look forward to seeing you next time in Radio School of the Bible.

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