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## If My People Pray

2 Chronicles 7:14

Before I start, I want to ask have you ever prayed for something but didn't get what you wanted? Why is that? Did you pray in the wrong way? I remember when my daughter Ruth prayed really hard to have a baby sister. But instead of getting one, she got 3 more brothers after her she was born. So that makes 4 boys total in our family & only one daughter. / Ruthy was upset for about a day or two and got over it quickly after she saw how cute her baby brothers were. But she said next time.....next time....not that there's going to be a next time. But if there was, she would pray for the opposite thing, a boy, thinking God would give her a sister if she did. Maybe she could try some reverse psychology on God. I don't know if you guys ever thought like that.

I think we've all considered praying in a similar manner thinking that there's some magical formula to pray. But as you'll see through today's passage, prayer is just an intimate conversation with God. It's not a list of demands you have but it's more about spending personal time with your heavenly Father. And while there is no magic formula to prayer, you'll see there is a pattern in which you can pray to get God' attention.

So as we go through today's passage, let's learn the secret of how you should pray and what it is you should really pray for. May you grow in your prayer life and learn to come to your heavenly Father with any problem going on. Most of all may you be changed through your prayers as you talk and walk with the Lord each day.

So on that note, let's pray.

Today's passage takes place during the times of King Solomon who reigned around 970-931 BC. He was the second child of King David through his wife Bathsheba & was the last king before Israel was divided into two nations. Solomon was known for having great wisdom, wealth and power beyond other kings throughout Israel's history.

But what he was probably most well known for was building the first temple of God. It had actually been his Father, King David's dream to build such a temple for the Lord. But because of all the fighting and bloodshed that David had done during his lifetime, his hands were not clean. So they were not allowed to erect such a building for God until his son Solomon ruled.

So when this temple was finally finished, there was a great dedication ceremony in which thousands of animals were sacrificed. And the whole nation of Israel celebrated this event with a feast lasting several days. The first 5 chapters of 2 Chronicles detail the building and furnishing of the temple. Chapter 6 and the beginning of chapter 7 tell us about the dedication and prayer for the temple. But today's passage is when God finally appears before Solomon and speaks to him directly to bless him for all his hard work.

So let's start by looking at verse 13-14 to see how God addresses Solomon and also offers him a special promise. <sup>13</sup> "When I shut up the heavens so that there is no rain, or command locusts to devour the land or send a plague among my people, <sup>14</sup> if my people, who are called by my name, will humble themselves and pray and seek my face and turn from their wicked ways, then I will hear from heaven, and I will forgive their sin and will heal their land.

In these verses, God is responding to Solomon's prayer & gives him 4 conditions in which to receive God's blessing. These conditions in verse 14 also teach us about the how to pray and the true nature of prayer.

So let's take them apart slowly so you too can share in God's blessings. It says in verse 14 that God's people must first what? Humble themselves.

So why does God start with this condition? Well it is because humility is the first step when you come before the Lord. Especially when you pray, what are you doing? Well you're basically lowering yourselves, right? You are acknowledging you need God in your life. You need his help. You need his guidance in this world and in every decision you make whether big or small. God is the one who is king of the universe, so you have to acknowledge him and come before him with holy fear and humility.

Also there is something naturally **humble** in true prayer because through it, you recognizes that the answers to life are not found in you. Rather they are found in God. So God promises something special, something wonderful, to people who are **humble** enough to come to him in prayer.

Now my second point of the morning is that prayer also includes seeking. Verse 14 says that God's people are to pray and to seek his face. Now this may seem kind of odd or at least redundant. Because if you're praying for something, aren't you seeking something out already? Why does God mention seeking as another condition & how does that relate to prayer? Well it shows that pray is not passive..... Let me repeat that. Prayer is not passive. It's an active thing that you do.

Let me give a story of how that is. There were once 2 farmers who owned land. During a season of drought they had not received rain for months. So they both prayed to the Lord that he would provide for their needs. But guess what? Only one of them went to prepare the land for rain. He went and tilled the soil, leveled the land and planted seeds.

So of these 2 men, which of them do you think was trusting the Lord in his prayers? ...The one who prepared the land, right?

So prayer is not a passive thing you do. It's an active one. You still seek and pursue the things you're praying for. You keep studying for classes, practicing for your games or applying for jobs. But you do it with trust, believing God has already answered your prayers. You're preparing the fields in your lives and getting ready for the great things God is going to do for you and your future. So that's how you seek when you pray.

Now there's one other point I want to draw your attention too in verse 14. So it says that the thing you are to ultimately seek in prayer is what? Well it says to seek His face.....to seek God's face. So prayer is also not only about seeking what you want in this world and what you can get from God. It's about seeking the Lord. It's about wanting more of him in your life. Prayer is basically talking to your heavenly Father and developing a deeper love relationship with him through it.

These days my little kids....well, they're not so little anymore. My oldest just turned 13 and my daughter is close to being a teenager too. My other 3 children aren't teenagers yet but they sure like one sometimes. But I still love them. They're the apples of my eye. But they're starting to become independent and want to hang out with their friends more than with mommy and daddy. Do you guys have teenagers like that? Yeah? So you know my pain. It's really heartbreaking. So sometimes I have to force them to hang out with me. Daddy's not cool as he used to be. So ill say stuff like: "Don't you love your Dad? Don't you care about your father? Im getting old and Im going to die someday. You're not going to have me forever. So you gotta enjoy this time with me now. Otherwise you're going to miss me when im gone."

And then they'll be like: "Ugh, ok dad? Let's hang out. What do you want to do? Where do you want to go?"

But that's not what I really want from them. I want them to genuinely desire spending time with me. I want them to seek me out instead of their friends or doing screen time other less important things. I want them to love being with their father and desiring to have a love relationship with me.

And it's the same with God through prayer. If you're only praying to God when you're in trouble or when you need something from him, that's not really seeking God's face. That's not really desiring to have a real relationship with him.

It's ok to seek after what it is you're praying for & as long as it's in line with his will. But may you desire to seek God more not through a passive but an active prayer life. May your heart burn for him and to chase after him more than the junk of this world. And most of all may you know when you seek his face, God is far more beautiful & far more glorious than anything else you can obtain in this life.

Now third, another condition of God's blessing is prayer. Now I know I've been talking a lot about prayer already & I'll continue to do so in my sermon because it's very much intertwined with the other 3 conditions. Not to mention it's the main theme of my sermon this morning.

But let me talk about the person who showed us the best example of how to pray, that is none other than Jesus. When he wasn't preaching, teaching or healing the crowds, the Bible said Jesus was always trying to escape to a quiet place. And why is that?..... So he could pray. He was longing to get back to spending time with his heaven Father. And no one had to twist his arm to or force him to pray. He wanted to pray and keep praying at all times. Jesus was so into prayer he was really living in 2 worlds at the same time: the spiritual realm and physical realm. And that's how it is when you really get into your prayer zone. You're spending time with God, you're just enjoying his presence, you're being lavished in his love. So you're not really bothered by what's going on in the world around you. And it's because you're in this heavenly realm. You're in the presence of almighty God, the creator of the universe. And so you're in awe of being in his presence that you don't really want to leave him. This is something that the people of this world know nothing about....while people who really really pray can truly understand.

Also when you pray like this, it has REAL power! It has real authority and control over your situation. So let me tell you a medical study that was done several years ago to prove my point. It was done by a cardiologist at the University of San Francisco. This physician did what we call a randomized double-blind study with about 400 patients. He had half the patients prayed for by a church every day. But he just gave them names of the patients, and nothing more. Also it was a double-blind study meaning that neither the patients nor the doctor knew who was being prayed for. And you know what the results were? The results were that those who were prayed for were 5 times less likely to need antibiotics. 3 times less likely to get complications like pulmonary embolisms. And none of them needed life support while the other group did.

And significantly less people died among those who were prayed for versus those who were not. (3 deaths vs 30-40 deaths).

So this was an amazing study because there was no placebo effect either. The patients who did better didn't know they were being prayed for. So it showed something spiritual, something supernatural was affecting their physical condition and that prayer really works. So prayer has the power to change your circumstances when you actually do it.

But that's not all prayer does. As I mentioned, prayer has power and it can your situation and even change the mind of God. But prayer doesn't end there. It is meant to also change You as well.

So that gets me to the last condition and point of the morning: which is that prayer requires repentance. Let me repeat that. Prayer requires what? Repentance.....We don't like to hear that word. Sounds kind of scary, right? But in the Greek repentance translates as "Metanoia" which just means "changing one's mind." Therefore repentance is really a change of thinking that leads to a change of living. It's recognizing the bad things in our lives, asking God for forgiveness and turning away from them as we turn to Jesus. So when we pray, it helps us through this process of turning away from our wicked desires and BACK TO GOD.

And I believe God does this especially when you wait on the things you pray for. So some people ask, why doesn't the Lord answer my prayers right away. Why doesn't he give me what I want it and when I want it. And the answer is it's because God wants to give you so much more than what you're praying for. He wants to change your hearts through the process of prayer and to make it more like his.

For example you may be you're struggling with health issues right now. And you're praying for healing in your body, but maybe God wants to give you healing in your soul as well. Maybe you're praying for a future job or a nice spouse, but God may want to purge you of idolatry and help you to love him more than those other things. You may be praying for a friend or family member to come to Christ, but maybe he wants you to come to him in a new way as well.

So the ultimate purpose of prayer is not only to get what you want or to change your situation. It's also to change YOU from the inside out. It's to turn your hearts and your minds from the wickedness of this world and back to him and his glorious kingdom in heaven. It is shed your desires of your flesh and to help you grow in the beautiful image of Christ everyday. But it is only possible when you come to God through repentant prayer.

Then when you do so, a change comes about not only in you, but also those around you. So look at the end of verse 14 to see what I mean. It says: then I will hear from heaven, and I will forgive their sin and will heal their land. So this is a collective promise not only for Solomon, but also for his people and his country. It starts with him but it reaches to the whole nation of Israel.

Therefore another reason you need to pray and what you should pray for..... is for others, especially your nation...your country. So I don't know if you've heard some of these stories and statistics but since the pandemic has started depression, suicide and substance abuse has increased by 40% in America. That's a lot of people. Not to mention it's highest among college students and young adults.

Our nation almost went through what seemed like a civil war this past election. Racial, religious and hate crimes are at an all time high. And church attendance has dropped by 60 percent in our country since COVID-19 started.

So if there's ever been a time to pray for your nation, it is now.....especially today, July 4th the birthday of our country. So let's start this healthy habit of praying and praying diligently for America. May he heal us from this pandemic as well as our spiritual disease of sin. And may he make America a Kingdom of Priests and Holy Nation once more....Amen? Finally as we finish up this morning: let me ask you a few questions:

How active is your prayer life? Are you coming to God humbly each day and seeking more of him through your prayers? Or do you only pray to him at church or when you are in need? Are your prayers only centered around you and your family OR are you also praying for others especially your nation as well as the world?

I would have loved to say that King Solomon ended his life well. But in the book of 1 Kings it tells us he failed to keep his promise, committed idolatry & missed out on God's blessings. But you don't need to fall into the same trap as he did if you keep a strong and active prayer life.

Let's learn from Solomon's mistake & ask God to forgive us of our sins & turn from our wickedness ways. May you learn to come to the Lord in humble prayer acknowledging that he has all the answers to life's questions. I pray that you may seek God's face more than the petty things of this world. And most of all may your prayers change not only your situation but may they change you as well.