

## ***TITLE, PSALM 103:10-14***

Does Prayer Make a Difference? #5

◆**Intro:** One father of the bride, as was usual, made very sure I was going to make it from the ceremony to the reception. Someone had to open with prayer, and could I handle that? (He seemed quite shaken.) I had to think for a minute, but eventually decided that , yes, I could do that. He was relieved! When it came time to begin, one of the attending men stood, and invited the hall to bow in prayer. I had been clearly fired, much to the embarrassment of the Father of the bride. He was clearly upset that it hadn't gone according to form. Frankly, I was glad about it. It helps spread the concept that *we* get to relate to God. The pastor isn't the only one.

◆We have some strange rituals when you think about it. 1) We race alone at 5-7 mph over the speed limit, but drive the speed limit when the cops are out. 2) We speak like a sailor until we see a member of the clergy approaching. Then suddenly we're more concerned about it. Lets call it ritual morality. Know the problem with ritual religion? We start to think consciousness of God(or law) is for the professionals (officers and pastors). We stop realizing that we ourselves are invited to keep company with God.

◆In this series we're looking at the life of prayer. How can we develop a prayer life, a moment by moment relationship with God? For many, prayer amounts to a need list. And when a group decides to pray together the only things they tell God about are their requests. Are there things we can do to go deeper?

◆**1. Learning to pray, requires being open to God myself, a willingness to reveal what's inside me.**

◆A. I can't really get to keep company with God without openness about myself. Remember the fifth level of communication we talked about earlier

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in this series? Conversation that's higher than cliché, higher than facts, further than opinions, all the way to my own *feelings*? This is openness that leads to closeness with someone, including God. We call this authenticity. It is impossible to know someone closely who is inauthentic and evasive. That person is doomed to live alone inside his/her head.

◆**B.** Here are some examples of things in ourselves that when we are honest about them in prayer, lead to wholeness and becoming in tune with God.

◆1) Confessing my guilt brings me freedom and greater experience of God. You know, lots of folks assume the opposite: that admitting guilt damages your self-esteem and drags you down. Avoid it. Be politically careful. Say things like “mistakes were made” and “I never claimed to be better than the next guy” or “I did what I had to do.” instead of ever saying, “I was wrong. I’m sorry.” Each of these is lame and we all know it. We’re pretending. In reality, most of us trust and respect a politician *more* if he or she says, “I did the wrong thing. I’m sorry.”

◆Last week Jonathan Capehart, columnist of Washington Post did that very thing. He had written and supported the media propaganda of “Hands Up; Don’t Shoot” in the Ferguson shooting of Michael Brown, who the media has made out to have been defenselessly shot out of police racism. But then Capehart, an Afro-American himself, read the DOJ’s full investigation report and went on air to say he was completely wrong, and the whole mantra of Hand’s Up; Don’t Shoot was a

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media lie that needed to be admitted. Something about that garners our respect, doesn't it? How much more so is God pleased with us when we face the truth and come clean?

◆“He who conceals his sins does not prosper, but whoever confesses and renounces them finds mercy.” Proverbs 28:13, NIV.

◆“*If we claim to be without sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness.*” 1 John 1:8, 9, NIV.

◆Now, just in case you were wondering, repressed truths do not go away. Take a person you know and work with. Let's suppose you have hurt their feelings or disappointed them. You pass each other and live on the cliché conversation level. “How's it going? Good, you?” You're civil. But you're not friends, until you address what's between you. Don't expect it to be anything different with God. You can ask him all kinds of questions. Recite all kinds of lengthy prayers, but you won't *feel* his presence, the warmth of his face. [cf v10, 3] He still loves you, wants a relationship, but your guilt is keeping it at arms length.

◆“*If I had cherished sin in my heart, the Lord would not have listened; but God has surely listened and heard my voice in prayer. Praise be to God, who has not rejected my prayer or withheld his love from me!*”  
*Psalms 66:18-20, NIV.*

◆Here's an interesting corollary: the healing that follows confession extends beyond just me.

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◆“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 will I hear from heaven and will forgive their sin and will heal their land.” 2 Chronicles 7:14, NIV.

◆Did you know that less than 50% of Christians voted in the last election? It's time for God-followers everywhere to repent of soaking in the wealth and freedoms that our forefathers attained for us and put our faith into action and words for the betterment of our country today! If we repent of our lazy selfishness and seek God for our country, he will hear us, and heal our land!

◆2) Expressing my hurts opens me to seeing more of God. This includes things like, worries, anxieties, concerns, questions, secrets. This is part of being authentic with God. A lot of us play the self-reliant American who gets punched in the emotional vitals and can still jump from roof tops. That's TV. Anything that is unreal will keep me from relating. The biblical writers are different. They let it all out with God.

◆Habbacuck complained that God didn't listen and tolerated really really mean people!

◆The pray-er in Ps.86 flat out demands “give me a sign of your goodness.”

◆The pray-er of Ps.17 cries about people “diss'n” him. Jeremiah crabs about the unfairness he sees.

◆And David, well, read the Psalms. He does plenty of lamenting.

◆Listen, scripture says that my every thought occurs in God's presence. It is not new data he's waiting for. Healthy prayer includes my being willing to

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look at my dark emotions with God involved! When you pray, talk to God about what you are feeling and why. Secrets and hurts hold power over you until they are given expression, brought into the light, and dealt with. That's what the counseling profession seeks to help you do.

◆ "...God is light; in him there is no darkness at all. If we claim to have fellowship with him yet walk in the darkness, we lie and do not live by the truth. But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship with one another..." 1 John 1:5-7, NIV.

◆ Tell me if this isn't true: we really don't feel close to people who are always "doing just fine." And do you know why? Because that is not the real human life that most of us experience. Our days are not always "just peachy". The human life we know has unanswered questions, bitteresses, anxieties, griefs over losses, exhaustion. People who are always "just fine" are either way out of our league, or just not willing to let us close to them. Applying this to your prayer life, don't pray to God what you think looks good to him. Pray to him what is, and he will then make good out of it. Phillip Yancy put it like this: "Self-exposure is never easy, but when I do it I learn that underneath the layers of grime lies a damaged work of art that God longs to repair.

◆ **2. A right image of God makes it a lot easier to pray to him!**

◆ A. I can't really be open without understanding a true image of God. For various reasons we carry numerous **distorted images** of God that keep us from ever getting close enough to hear him, or see his answers. So, to deepen your prayer life, it will help to have a true image of the God you are talking to. Here are some unfortunate ones we easily slip into.

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- ◆1) The Policeman image supposes God is all about telling me what I do wrong and giving me a citation. Not exactly a feature that draws one in. As long as you view God as a policeman, you will tend to experience him in terms of guilt and fear of being caught.
- ◆2) Mr. President image imagines that lowly peon me, could never address him, God. I must say the proper thing, or get a more religious person to say the proper thing for me. I better spell his name with a capital letter, etc.
- ◆3) Absent Landlord image thinks that God isn't really interested in the tenant's life, my thoughts, what I spend my day doing. He'll show up for a crisis (the apartment floods, gets smoke damage). Otherwise he's content to let you live in the house however you chose. Besides being flatly unbiblical (since God counts our hairs, and names each star) thinking like this will never get our relationship with God far beyond the boring ritual.
- ◆**B.** The true nature of God is that of a Loving dad and Dedicated mom.
  - ◆*"Can a mother forget her nursing child? Can she feel no love for a child she has borne? But even if that were possible, I would not forget you! See, I have written your name on my hand."* Isaiah 49:15, 16, NLT.
  - ◆*"As a father has compassion on his children, so the LORD has compassion on those who fear him;"* Psalms 103:13, NIV.
- ◆Our text describes God as a compassionate father. Jesus teaches us to call him "papa". Jesus modeled prayer using the term Abba. (Not the singing group from the seventies). And while many translations render it

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“father”. It is not “father”, it is the diminutive form of “Ab”/father in Hebrew. That is, it’s the way a kid would say it. Not Dad, but Dadda, or Daddy. All of which is teaching us that God is the one person we can really be safe telling it all to! Like a Papa who loves us, God is far more than a cop, or landlord, or city official. Good prayer is learning to talk with your good Dad.

### ◆**Conclusion:**

◆ Recall earlier in this series when we learned that the primary purpose of prayer is to get to know God, to line up with him, see him in action and hear from him. Our topic today, keeping company, or being real in prayer will lead us to this faster. Without leveling with God -about bitterness, hates, questions, griefs, guilt, doubts, joys, delights, aspirations, hopes...-I can keep up the ritual, but I won’t be keeping company. But getting nearer to God is much better.

◆ Here’s an idea or two if you’d like prayer to be more than a tired ritual you feel obligated to go through: 1) Make a list of your secrets, your fears, and anxieties. Then talk to God about them. These are the things we keep close to the vest like a poker player hiding his cards, so talking about them with God is an exercise in being open. Ask him what he thinks about them. Don’t fret too much in the process. It’s not like you will be telling him anything he doesn’t already know. 2) Read a Psalm and try writing it in your own words. Psalms are mostly prayers to God about a great many things. They can teach you to pray differently, openly. CS Lewis said “we must lay before him what is in us, not what ought to be in us.”