

The Agony of Victory – Part V
Overturning Hindrances to Effective Prayer
Colossians 2:1- 4
Reality Carpinteria - Pastor Britt Merrick
March 5, 2006

Pastor Britt's Opening Prayer:

Lord, thank You so much for the privilege and the honor that You've given us this morning to come into Your presence and to hear from You. Thank You, Father, that You have preserved Your word. We know that the Word that is before us today is inerrant; it is infallible; and accurate in its authority. Thank You, Father, that it is living and active, and able to deal with the very depth of who we are. We ask that today, Lord, You would deal with us. That You would deal with us wonderfully. That you would draw us by Your loving kindness. That You would teach us and train us for righteousness. That You would correct us and rebuke us. That You would make us adequate; ready for every good work that You would lay out before us, for Your kingdom and Your honor and Your glory.

We ask, Father, that You would send the Holy Spirit to instruct us now; and that You, Lord, would author my thoughts and my words. That we would not hear from man, but that we would hear from the Living God through His Living Word. Please do that today, in Jesus' name. Amen.

Numbers 9:22 "Whether it was two days or a month or a year that the cloud lingered over the tabernacle staying above it, the sons of Israel remained camped and did not set out; but when it lifted, they did set out."

- The Lord is leading the children of Israel through the desert into the Promise Land and into the promises that He has for them.
 - God used a cloud by day and a pillar of fire during the night to lead them.
 - They knew they had arrived to a certain spot when the cloud or pillar of fire would stop. They pitched their tents, got everything ready and camped.
 - No matter how long it was, they didn't dare move from that place, where the Lord had them, until the cloud moved once again and they would continue following the Lord.

The Lord has us, as a Church, "camping out" on this theme of prayer.

- God has been leading us as a church through the Book of Colossians, into the promises that He has for us, and now the cloud has stopped. It has stopped on this topic of prayer. The Lord is dealing with us on this issue, and we dare not get anxious. And we will camp here until the cloud moves.
- The reason the Lord has us here is because there are wonderful things He wants to do for us in our midst. There are amazing promises that He wants to deliver.

Pastor's Note:

I believe the Lord for more on this coastline. Not that I'm ungrateful for what the Lord has done. But, wouldn't you agree that if this is all that the Lord ever did, and if this is as far as we ever go as a church, then we'd be left going, "Wow, Lord I believe You for so much more. It seems, Lord that there's so much more that You could do. So much more power than we can see; so much more salvation, so much more grace, so much more healing and renewal and refreshing and restoring. Lord, more!" And I believe the Lord wants to do more.

- The Lord wants to teach us and draw us into a new depth of prayer.
 - Prayer is the channel through which the blessings of God flow.**
 - God wants us to pray more because He wants to bless our community and us more. He wants to do something in our midst. Not because He wants to lord it over us, but because He is our Father and we are His precious children.
 - **Revelation 5:8**, tells us that the prayers of the saints are as golden bowls full of incense before the Lord.
- Do you/do we have everything that the Lord wants us to have? Church, we do not!**
- There are some blessings which come to us simply because we are children of God.
 - Other blessings require that we grab the tree by the trunk and shake them off the tree.

- We should feel **honored** that the Lord has us camped out in this subject of prayer. There should be an overwhelming sense of gratitude from us, thanking God for calling us to pray, thanking Him for calling us to intercede.
 - The Lord looked for someone to stand in the gap and He has found some people among us, because He is camping out with us here!

**God has us camping out on this subject of prayer because He wants us to call on Him more!
He wants to give us more!**

In **Joshua 3:5**, before a great battle, Joshua said to the children of Israel, "...consecrate yourselves, for tomorrow the LORD will do wonders among you."

- We're also in that place where the Lord is going to do wonders in our midst. Not for wonders' sake, but for His glory; for the furtherance of His kingdom; for the repairing, healing and refreshing of His people.
- The word consecrate means to dedicate, devote, set apart, and remain separated.
 - **Romans 12:12** states that we are to devote ourselves to prayer. This is to be a season in our lives, individually and corporately, where we are consecrated in the area of prayer and where we are devoted to prayer.

Prayer is a Command to the Church

In Paul's letter to Timothy, he writes (**1 Timothy 2:1-8**), "**First of all, then, I urge that entreaties and prayers, petitions, and thanksgivings, be made on behalf of all men... Therefore I want the men in every place to pray, lifting up holy hands, without wrath and dissension.**"

- In this first letter to Timothy, Paul is telling his young pastor how to run a church. Paul strongly urges Timothy that the most important issue that needs paramount attention is prayer, on behalf of all men.
- This is the word of God speaking to all men: **God wants the men in every place to pray!**
 - God doesn't ask that prayers be eloquent, or long or impressive. He just wants men to pray and to lift up their hands in prayer, sending prayers to the Lord and receiving back from the Lord.
 - We have holy hands because the blood of Jesus has washed them.

There should be a sense in your life now, the sense that prayer is a primary occupation!

- We **will** fall short, but God is looking to see if we are **willing** to make prayer a priority.
- In the church, both corporately and individually, there ought to be the continuous aroma and attitude of prayer.

Prayer, in its simplest form means to come to God.

NOTE: Prayer is simply coming to the Lord, speaking to Him and listening to Him. Yes, it is something into which we can grow and become more proficient, but there should never be the sense of "I don't know how to pray". It's very simple. Just come to the Lord and tell Him what's on your heart. He already knows what you need. He wants you to ask Him. He wants to hear your voice. He wants to speak to you.

Jesus gave an invitation to pray in **Matthew 11: 28-29** "Come to Me, all who are weary and heavy-laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn from Me, For I am gentle and humble in heart; and YOU WILL FIND REST FOR YOUR SOULS."

- Jesus says, if you have problems, if you are weary, if you're heavy laden, if you need rest, or are stressed out, the Lord says, "Come to Me".
 - We should not let our problems drive us away from the Lord.
- In the King James Version, Jesus says, "**Learn of Me for I am gentle and humble in heart and you shall find rest for your souls.**"
 - This is an incredible invitation to prayer.
 - When we come to Him in need, we can expect to find Him gentle, humble, kind and merciful. We love that about Jesus!
 - We come to Him in need and we expect this kindness, gentleness, mercy and grace.

Hebrews 4:16, "Let us therefore draw near with confidence to the throne of grace, that we may receive mercy and may find grace to help in time of need."

- We understand and know that we don't deserve His mercy and grace. We all have the sense that we've failed the Lord, we've sinned and we've blown it.
 - By it's definition we don't deserve mercy. If we deserved it, it wouldn't be called mercy.

- By definition, grace is undeserved. Grace is undeserved, unmerited favor. We've done nothing to deserve it.
- But, the invitation of the Lord is to come boldly to the throne of grace.
- It is when we draw near to the Lord in prayer that grace, mercy, and the power of God are brought into a situation.
 - **Exodus 32**, God was going to come against Israel in judgment and Moses prayed for mercy.
 - **Mark 9**, there was a demon-possessed boy, whom the disciples couldn't help. The Lord said it was because of a lack of faith and their lack of prayer. Prayer would have released what was needed in that situation.
 - **James 5:16**, "Confess your sins to one another and pray for one another that you might be healed..."

We all need God's grace, mercy and power

Because most situations are beyond us, and the conduit is PRAYER!

- Gentle, Humble Jesus has all the grace, mercy and power that we need.
 - Jesus touched the lepers. No one in Israel touched the lepers, who had to announce their presence before the people, "Unclean, unclean!" Jesus didn't just say, "Be cleansed and go away." He touched them at a time when no one in Israel would ever have dared to.
 - Jesus saw the widow weeping because her son died and so He raised him from the dead.
 - Jesus scooped the children up in His arms.
 - Jesus had compassion on the multitude and fed them when they were hungry.
 - Jesus heard the blind man cry out, "Have mercy on me, Son of David!" And Jesus healed him.
 - Jesus healed the legs of the lame.
 - Jesus forgave and cleansed the prostitute.
 - Jesus had mercy on the woman caught in adultery.
 - Jesus stood over Jerusalem and wept for her.
 - Jesus allowed John to recline on His chest in the Last Supper.
 - Jesus met Peter on the beach, restored him, and blessed him, even after Peter had denied Jesus three times.

This is Jesus!

These are the things that Jesus does!

This is He who is inviting us to come to Him when we are weary and heavy-laden.

A Different Picture of Jesus

- But there is one more picture of Jesus we mustn't forget. That is the picture of Jesus responding to **prayerlessness in His house**.
 - It isn't gentle and it isn't humble. But, it is right and it is warranted.
 - It is an act of judgment from the Lord against prayerlessness.
 - Jesus displayed this act of judgment in the temple, not once but twice!
 - Once at the beginning of His ministry and again at the end of His ministry.
 - In this act of judgment, Jesus destroys for a moment that picture of the gentle, humble, merciful Jesus that we love to come to.
 - Jesus acts with violence and judgment, right and true.
- This picture of Jesus is so important and profound that it is in all four Gospels. The only other things that are in all four gospels are the cross and the resurrection.
- **Mark 11:15-17**, "Then they (Jesus and His disciples) came to Jerusalem. And He entered the temple and began to drive out those who were buying and selling in the temple, and He overturned the tables of the moneychangers and the seats of those who were selling doves; 16 and He would not permit anyone to carry merchandise through the temple. 17 And He began to teach and say to them, "Is it not written, 'MY HOUSE SHALL BE CALLED A HOUSE OF PRAYER FOR ALL THE NATIONS'? But you have made it a ROBBERS' DEN."
- Jesus is quoting **Isaiah 56:7**. The Lord has declared from the beginning of time, that His house (His Temple then, His people now) should be a house of prayer. Anything else won't do. Anything else falls short. Anything else is a perversion of its purpose.

NOTE: Remember that in the time of the Old Testament, everyone needed a sacrifice if they wanted to come to the Temple. According to the law of the Old Testament and the rabbinical standards, their sacrifice had to be perfect, blameless and without blemish. Some people did not have an animal so they had to buy a sacrifice from the priests. Others would bring an animal, but the priests would turn away their sacrifice because of a blemish, so they would have to buy another animal.

There was all sorts of currency used in the land. There was Roman, Greek and Jewish money. However, none of that was accepted at the Temple. The corrupt priests set it up so that you could only use priestly money. The animal sellers would sell you the perfect sacrifice (at an exorbitant rate), but first you had to exchange your money, which also carried a huge exchange rate. This corruption was taking place in the outer court known as the Court of the Gentiles. This is where people from many tongues, tribes and nations would be allowed to come near to the House of the Lord and experience God, His power, presence and love; and be able to present their sacrifice to Him and receive His mercy.

The corrupt priests and businessmen had crowded up that area with their crooked commerce, business and busyness. They had perverted a place that was supposed to be sanctified and holy. This court was supposed to be for prayer and available to anyone!

Jesus saw this place and could not tolerate what was going on. There is no indication in the gospels that Jesus reacted calmly.

- The first time Jesus cleansed the Temple, it gives us an idea of the heart and mindset of the Lord.
 - **John 2:15-16**, Jesus *made* a whip. Therefore, He intended on *using* it. He told the people, "Take these things away. Stop making My Father's house a place of business." Get them out of here. Clear this space, clean this space and free this space!
 - In **Mark 11:18**, "The chief priests and the scribes heard this, and began seeking how to destroy Him; for they were afraid of Him, for all the multitude was astonished at His teaching."
 - Those who are sincere and seek the Lord had no problem with Jesus' reaction. The pure in heart knew that it was an absolutely appropriate response.
 - "Thy rod and thy staff, they comfort me." (**Psalm 23**)
 - Those who were perverted, corrupt, and whom Jesus called on several occasions "hypocrites", were afraid.
 - The Lord knows when to come with a whip and when to come with a hug. He knows just what we need and when we need it.
- In this present day, our hearts represent the Temple of the Lord.**
- **1Corinthians 6:19-20**, states that **we** are the temple of the living God. We have been bought with a price.
 - Today, the Temple of Jerusalem is not there. In the time of Jesus, the Shekinah Glory was not at the Temple.
 - When you become a Christian, the Bible declares that the Lord comes and takes up residence in you.
 - **Revelation 3:20**, states that Jesus is knocking at the door of our hearts and if we open, He will come in and fellowship with you.

**What is in the House of the Lord that needs to be cleansed today?
It is our hearts!**

Yes, the church needs to be cleansed today, but the church is made up of people. The church is not a perfect parallel to the Temple. The Lord will meet you in any church, but He takes up residence in you.

Is there anything in the outer courts of your heart, which should be reserved for praying for others?

Is there anything in your heart that needs to be put away, overturned, or whipped, so that it may return to the purpose of prayer?

**"My Father's House Shall Be A House of Prayer For All the Nations!"
There ought to be the aroma and the attitude of prayer
Seeping from the heart of the Christian with regards to prayer.**

**What is overcrowding your heart? What is not allowing this to happen?
What needs to be cast out, whipped and overturned?**

For the past few weeks, God has been dealing with our:

- Laziness
- Selfishness
- Self-reliance – are you saying you don't need God; that you can bear up and take care of the situation?
 - We are not okay on our own. We need the Lord!

- In our weakness, His strength is made perfect. **2 Corinthians 12:9**
- Idolatry
 - Maybe its a person, possession or passion.
- Entertainment
 - We are conditioned in this culture to believe that we need to be entertained at every single moment.

**God created us for HIS pleasure, and not that He might entertain US.
He made us for His Good Pleasure.
To experience His kindness and to glorify His Name!**

Four Specific Areas That Must Be Dealt With In Our Hearts TODAY For An Effective Prayer Life

1. A Lack of Faith

2. Disobedience

3. Wrong Motives

4. Our Will

- It has got to be consumed by His.
- It has to be subservient to His.
- It has to be committed to His.
- "Nevertheless, not our will be done, but YOURS, Lord."

1. Lack of Faith

- **James 1:5-6** 5 "But if any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask of God, who gives to all generously and without reproach, and it will be given to him. 6 But he must ask in faith without any doubting, for the one who doubts is like the surf of the sea, driven and tossed by the wind.
 - Because of radical statements like this one, there are some who have said that the Book of James and Revelation should not even be in the Bible!
- **James 1:7-8** 7 For that man ought not to expect that he will receive anything from the Lord, 8 being a double-minded man, unstable in all his ways."
 - In **Matthew 13:58** we are told that Jesus "did not do many miracles there because of their **unbelief**."
 - Not that "He could not". He did not do many miracles there because of their unbelief! They refused to have faith in the Lord, so He let them have their way. So they did not receive all the blessings that could have been theirs.
 - **Do not** believe in the heresy that states that if you just have enough faith, you can make God do anything.
 - This heresy is taught by the Faith Teachers of the Faith Movement and the Prosperity Movement. ***This is a false doctrine!***

**God does not answer your prayers based on your faith or lack of faith.
This is not what the Bible teaches!
However, faith is a necessary component of prayer.
When we come to the Lord, we must come with faith.**

- It is safe to say that no one in human history had the faith of the apostle Paul. He had a thorn in his flesh (some kind of ailment). He asked the Lord three times to remove it, but God responded that His grace was sufficient for Paul.
 - It is ludicrous to think that Paul was not healed because of his lack of faith; or that if he only believed, he would have been healed; or that he brought it upon his self and it was his fault!!!
 - If you see this on TV, turn it off. If you hear it from a pulpit, leave! This is not what the Bible teaches. This is a destructive heresy.
- The Bible teaches that we need to have faith. Without it, we should not expect much.
 - **Faith honors the character of God.**
 - **Hebrews 11:6**, "Without faith it is impossible to please Him."
 - He, who comes to God, must believe that He is and that He is the Rewarder of those who seek Him.
 - When we honor God with this attitude, the Lord will give to us liberally.

Lack of faith is an insult to God!

For example, in all good faith you tell someone that you want to do something nice for them and they stand there and tell you verbally, or with their attitude, that they don't believe you. If you had a record for being a liar, then they'd be right to say that. But, if not, you'd be insulted! And so it is that your lack of faith is an insult to God!

The Lord is not a man that He should lie.

The Lord has been faithful to every generation.

The Lord has never failed anyone and He won't blow His reputation on you!

It is **wrong** and an insult to God not to believe in His promises, His character, His goodness and ability.

- In **Luke 18:8**, Jesus tells His disciples that He wants to bring justice to them speedily, "...However, when the Son of Man comes, will He find faith on the earth?"
- **Matthew 14:31**, "Immediately Jesus stretched out His hand and took hold of him, and said to him, 'You of little faith, why did you doubt?'"
 - This is about Peter, who in an incredible moment of faith had walked on water. But, when Peter saw the wind in the waves, he got his eyes off the Lord and onto the circumstances and began to sink. And Jesus asked him, "Why did you doubt?"
 - Jesus pulled Peter up as he was sinking in the water because of his lack of faith.
The Lord is faithful even when we are faithless.
- **Mark 11:22-24** "And Jesus was saying to them, 'Have faith in God. 23 Truly I say to you, whoever says to this mountain, 'Be taken up and cast into the sea,' and does not doubt in his heart, but believes that what he says is going to happen, it will be granted him. 24 Therefore I say to you, all things for which you pray and ask, believe that you have received them, and they shall be granted to you.'"
 - Notice that Jesus says to have faith in God, and not have faith in **faith**.
 - In order to do this, 1.) We should be walking in obedience; 2.) Have the right motives; and 3.) Ask in accordance to God's will. God will not do something that is against His nature just because we think it is wise, or a good idea.
 - Our faith should be in God, who is absolutely faithful.
- Jesus said in **Matthew 17:20** "If you have faith the size of a **mustard seed**, you will say to this mountain, 'Move from here to there,' and it will move; and nothing will be impossible to you."
 - A mustard seed is tiny! But, like any other seed, it is alive. Jesus did not ask that we have a ton of faith, but to have faith that is alive. Active faith that seeks the Lord. It asks, seeks, and knocks.

Is there any unbelief in your heart that must be overturned today?

That which must be whipped out, cast out, and chased out and overturned by the Lord.

Is there any unbelief in your life that you need to repent of?

Maybe you've given up hope. Maybe you aren't trusting the Lord for a situation; you've turned your back and walked away . . . Don't do that. Let the Lord restore your faith today.

2. Disobedience

Mark 11:25-26 25 "Whenever you stand praying, forgive, if you have anything against anyone, so that your Father also who is in heaven may forgive you your transgressions. 26 But if you do not forgive, neither will your Father who is in heaven forgive your transgressions."

- Verse 26 is not in all the ancient manuscripts so some Bibles have it and others don't. The King James and the New American Standard have it; the NIV doesn't. However, if Jesus didn't say that here, we know that He said it in His Sermon on the Mount for it's in there.
 - Don't sweat it. More than likely, you're more convicted by verse 25.
- This is not talking about the forgiveness of sins for salvation.
- This is talking about the forgiveness of sins for intimacy with the Father.
 - **1 John 1:9**, "If we confess our sins He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness."
 - This is not a salvific verse, meaning it doesn't have to do with salvation.
 - When we've done wrong, we know we need to confess our sins to the Lord.
 - When we do, intimacy is restored.
 - When we don't we are like David, in Psalm 32. We feel like our very "life juices" are drying up, just dying in that conviction.
- Without mincing words, Jesus tells us that for our prayer lives to be effective there's got to be obedience.

NOTE: None of us is perfect.
However, do not live like hell and expect to receive all the blessings of heaven!
God will not be mocked!
We will reap what we sow.
We cannot expect to sin and simply shout "Oh God, bless me! Do this, that, and the other!"
It does not work that way.

- **1 John 3:22-23** 22 "And whatever we ask we receive from Him, because we keep His commandments and do the things that are pleasing in His sight. 23 This is His commandment, that we believe in the name of His Son Jesus Christ, and love one another, just as He commanded us."
- **John 15:7** "If you abide in Me, and My words abide in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be done for you."
 - Tied to the effectiveness of our prayer life is the general tenor of our obedience.
 - If you are walking in disobedience, you cannot expect the Lord to pour out all the blessings that He has for you.

Note: as parents, you know that when your own children disobey you, it's not likely that you'll be giving them that new dirt bike or surfboard they want.

- **Judges 10:10-14** 10 "Then the sons of Israel cried out to the LORD, saying, 'We have sinned against You, for indeed, we have forsaken our God and served the Baals.' 11 The LORD said to the sons of Israel, 'Did I not deliver you from the Egyptians, the Amorites, the sons of Ammon, and the Philistines? 12 Also when the Sidonians, the Amalekites and the Maonites oppressed you, you cried out to Me, and I delivered you from their hands. 13 Yet you have forsaken Me and served other gods; therefore I will no longer deliver you. 14 Go and cry out to the gods which you have chosen; let them deliver you in the time of your distress.'"

Pastor Britt's Note: If you're anything like me, you know you have some business to do with the Lord. He has us camped out in prayer. We might as well make our prayers effective. This requires faith and a degree of obedience in our lives. Not that everything is works-based. Remember, it is a throne of grace. **But, God will not be mocked!**

- **Psalms 66:18**, "If I regard wickedness in my heart, the Lord will not hear me."
- **James 5:16**, "...the fervent prayer of a righteous man is effective and accomplishes much."

We have **positional** righteousness because we are saved, but don't confuse it with **practical** righteousness.

- **Proverbs 15:8**, "The sacrifice of the wicked is an abomination to the LORD, But the prayer of the upright is His delight."
- **Proverbs 15:29** The LORD is far from the wicked, but He hears the prayer of the righteous."
- **1 Peter 3:12**, "FOR THE EYES OF THE LORD ARE UPON THE RIGHTEOUS, AND HIS EARS ATTEND TO THEIR PRAYER, BUT THE FACE OF THE LORD IS AGAINST THOSE WHO DO EVIL."

You cannot expect to live like hell and receive all the blessings of Heaven.
It is not biblical.

Is there anything in your life that needs to be overturned, cast out, whipped out?
Church, let the Lord do it. The cloud will not move until that happens.

3. Wrong Motives

James 4:1-4, 1 "What is the source of quarrels and conflicts among you? Is not the source your pleasures that wage war in your members? 2 You lust and do not have; so you commit murder. You are envious and cannot obtain; so you fight and quarrel. You do not have because you do not ask. 3 You ask and do not receive, because you ask with wrong motives, so that you may spend it on your pleasures. 4 You adulteresses, do you not know that friendship with the world is hostility toward God? Therefore whoever wishes to be a friend of the world makes himself an enemy of God."

- Ask the Lord to refine your motives.
- **Jeremiah 17:9** states that the heart is desperately wicked and full of deceit. Who can know it?
 - You may think that you are praying for the right reasons, but if you're totally honest about it you realize that it's difficult to tell.
 - We need to ask the Lord to refine our motives. God is faithful to do it. He wants to answer prayer. If He answers "No" it's often because our motives are wrong and it most likely is a

selfish request. It may make a lot of sense to you at the time, but our prayers may not be answered because of the wrong motives.

- God can help us discern the situation.

4. Our Will

- **1 John 5:14**, "This is the confidence which we have before Him, that, if we ask anything according to His will, He hears us."
 - We know and understand this to be true. We know we are not smarter than God. We cannot make Him do something that is contrary to His character and His ways. But, sometimes His ways are acceptable and correct in bringing judgment on some people or to extend mercy.
 - In the Old Testament we've seen that in one of those times, the only thing that made a difference was that a man **asked**.

God always wants to extend mercy, but will we ask?

Will we ask in *faith*?

Will we walk in *obedience*?

Will we let the Lord refine our *motives*?

When we ask according to His will, we will see God do things that are unbelievable, beyond us. More than we ever thought to ask, the Lord will do! He is longing to bless us! **"Come to Me if you are weary and heavy laden."**

The conduit for all the blessings of God is prayer.

Homework:

Meditate on these last four points.

Confess, share, and encourage others.

Pray and talk about your faith, your motives and God's will.

Talk with others about your obedience. And God will deal with us richly.

See the Lord God more clearly in your worship and watch your faith go through the roof! Watch how obedience will not be such a problem. God will refine our motives because of His holy presence.

Experience the holy presence of God and your heart will cry, "Your will, God. Always Your will! For Your Person and Your Church!" Amen!

Pastor Britt's Closing Prayer:

Lord, thank You. We ask You, as we worship You, that You would be honored and blessed in our praises. That You would inhabit the praises of Your people. And, that You would reveal Yourself powerfully, Lord. We need more of You and yet You are asking for more of us! You are calling us to come to You in prayer, in a new way, in a fresh dimension, deeper than ever before. I am reminded of the scripture, "Draw near to the Lord, and He will draw near to you." Lord, we want to do that now. We ask that You would snap every heart to attention with the glory of Your presence. Holy Spirit, come now. Work in us and on us, that You might powerfully work through us, for Your glory.