

HOW TO PRAY FOR DAD, YOURSELF AND OTHERS

Introduction

If you've been in church at all or been around church people you've heard this request, "Please pray for me".

Sometimes you get more details, sometimes you don't. Whether you know the whole situation or not you certainly feel for the person.

Honestly though, you may not be sure what to pray, especially if the request doesn't come with specifics. Even if it does, you might feel like something more is needed in terms of prayer, but you're just not sure what it might be.

We know the bible tells us to "pray without ceasing and to be devoted in prayer". We might be able to recite the Lord's Prayer, but truth be told, most of us feel deficient in prayer. If we're honest we'd be embarrassed to admit how much or how little we pray. We feel like God is looking down with a bit of a frown as He looks at our prayer life. It's a struggle.

On top of that today is Father's Day, and we know we don't have it all together as a dad or maybe you feel strained in your relationship with your dad- and that might be for a very good reason.

I want to propose a way to bring together the struggle in prayer with the joy or sorrow of Father's day by offering some biblical input on "how to pray for Dad, yourself AND others.

Whether you view your dad, yourself or someone else as a friend or an enemy, Jesus tells us to Love and pray for our friends and our enemies. But how? What can we pray for them?

If you're here as a visitor or as one who really isn't into church I want you to know that we recognize that the whole "prayer thing" seems a bit weird. Are we just talking to ourselves or is there a God who is really listening. Let me explain that we pray because Jesus invites us to pray. The bible tells us that Jesus rose from the dead and we've seen our lives changed by him so we tend to go with what he says.

In Eph 6 Paul gives some insight and instruction about what kingdom living looks like in the matter of prayer:

Eph 6: 18-20

[17] and take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God, [18] praying at all times in the Spirit, with all prayer and supplication. To that end keep alert with all perseverance, making supplication for all the saints, (Ephesians 6:17-18 ESV)

Paul mentions the Christian armor and toward the end of the list he mentions the 'sword of the Spirit, which is the Word of God.' Then he moves directly to talking about praying at all times in the Spirit and being on the alert with all perseverance and petition for all the saints. If we are to pray in the Spirit, then we need to use the sword of the Spirit – the Word – in our prayer. How is this cultivated in our lives? How is anything cultivated in our lives????

To borrow from Dallas Willard I would say, ...

"The answer is actually rather simple. One must intend to do it, and then one must sensibly implement the means. Praying at all times with perseverance is something we must do, empowered by the Holy Spirit. Stepping out in faith with appropriate action is the key. True, as Jesus said, "Without me you can do nothing." (John 15:5) But it is also true that if we do nothing it will be without him.

The path of spiritual growth in the riches of Christ is not a passive one. Grace is not opposed to effort. It is opposed to earning. Effort is action. Earning is attitude. You have never seen people more active in prayer than those who have been set on fire by the grace of God, empowered by the Holy Spirit of God.”

One way we see how this relationship between effort and grace works in scripture is that “God is opposed to the proud, but gives grace to the humble.” So when we humble ourselves in prayer we can expect to receive grace. **Biblical prayer is humbly acknowledging our need for God and his work and it is humbly resting in His Fatherly providence in our lives.**

I offer some biblical ideas which, if applied, I believe will enrich your own prayer life as you pray for your Dad, yourself and others.

About 25 years ago I read a short blog devotional from Piper talking about how to pray. I’ve developed & expanded those devotional thoughts over the years as I’ve tried to pray this way for myself and others. The ‘whatever it takes’ part is something I read as I was preparing this (Jon Bloom)

Begin the prayer with **“whatever it takes Lord”**.
That is a faith oriented way to pray.

Bloom writes, “I use the phrase because it tests my heart. How much do I want God and all he promises to be for me in Jesus? Do I really want true joy enough to ask for my Father’s loving discipline to wean me from joy-stealing sin? And how much do I trust him? Do I really believe that what He gives me is what I need for my growth in Christ likeness?

“Whatever it takes” prayers help us press toward and express childlike trust in the Father.

1- Whatever it takes, Lord, the first thing my soul needs is an inclination to God and his Word. Without that, nothing else will happen of any value in my life. I must want to know God and read his word and draw near to him. Where does that “want to” come from? It comes from God. So **Psalm 119:36 teaches us to pray, “Incline my heart to Your testimonies and not to gain.”**

The word ‘testimonies’ is one of several words used to refer to the instruction of God – law/ commandments/ precepts/ rules/ testimonies.

This idea of the inclination of the heart is foundational because it speaks of the default mode of the heart, its trajectory, its bent, its true orientation.

Just as a tree grows toward the light – it bends or whatever it takes to get to the light, so our hearts are inclined toward God or toward something else?

Our hearts LEAN TOWARD SOMETHING. Something is going to pull our hearts into its orbit; something will be our directional North Star, the spoke of the wheel.

EX: Charles DeGaulle airport Red Dot – point de repere – it’s what gives you your sense of direction and perspective. It’s the center or the hub

EX: the marker on the square outside of Notre Dame Cathedral – that determines how far you are from Paris.

What is your marker? Your North Star? What is the ‘light’ to which your heart bends? (If you don’t know, ask a friend).

Is it God, as He is revealed in His Word or is it something else?

If Ps 119:36 the contrast of “testimony” is “gain/ coveteousness”. That’s a familiar theme in the Bible – you can’t serve God and money.

Maybe our sense of gain isn’t from money, but from approval, or a relationship, or a position at work or in school, or it’s pleasure, or respect, or being seen as a successful competent person, or being seen as an independent – I’ll do it my way – kind of person. There are many varieties of “gain” that can be the North Star of our hearts.

So the FOUNDATIONAL prayer for Dad, yourself and others is that our hearts would be inclined to God and His Word.... Whatever it takes!!

What this passage and all of the Bible is saying is that God can’t be an add-on, an accessory in our lives.

If a 6000 lbs elephant enters the room isn’t an add-on. She pretty much takes over.

God is so much bigger and greater than any elephant.

Honestly, a generic ‘God’ apart from the Bible won’t do. We must know God through His Word

APPLICATION:

How do you view the difficulties you are now facing? Angry, frustrated, bitter?

Maybe this is God’s way of getting your heart inclined to Him – embrace Him and the trial – James 1:2– consider it all joy WHEN you encounter various trials. This applies to the mundane trials as well as the life changing trials.

When are hearts are INCLINED toward God and His Word then we are in the right trajectory for growth; we’re in the right orbit for our souls – our souls are revived, we are made wise, and our hearts are restored

2. **Whatever it takes, Lord, next I need to have the eyes of my heart opened**, so that when my inclination leads me to the word I see what is really there and not just my own ideas and I need to perceive glory in your Word and not just interesting facts.

Who opens the eyes of the heart? God does. So **Psalm 119:18 teaches us to pray, "Open my eyes, that I may behold wonderful things from Your law."**

Ps 19: 7-14 speaks of commandments of the Lord pure, as enlightening the eyes

We need to have a sense of the glory of God on the heart... a sense of the weightiness and significance of God’s Word on our souls. There is a difference between having a sense of something and admitting the truth of something.

EX: eating a delicious summer peach – we can admit it is there and probably tastes good, but when we eat it we have a sense of it – we feel it and taste it and smell it.

We need to ‘taste’ and see that God is good. That comes from the work of the Holy Spirit, but we can ask for it.

We can study that God is good or we can have a sense of it on our souls – we experience the goodness of God as moving, as beautiful. Or we read the truth of God’s word and we might go “ouch, that stung – the sword pierced my heart – the spirit convicted me by His word”.

THAT IS SENSING THE WORD.

EX: 1976 beach project “Seek Ye First” – I was seeking first a letter from M.H.

That’s the difference between a real Christian and a nominal Christian, says Edwards. The difference between one who knows the inner working of the Holy Spirit and one who is going through the religious motions.

“It’s not so much WHAT THEY BELIEVE ABOUT THE TRUTH. It’s whether or not Holy Spirit has shown them the glory of it. Whether their heart is caught up with its glory.”

APPLICATION:

Do we respond to circumstances out of fear or with the eyes of faith – thanking God for the invisible things we can't see and what He'll do.

3. **Whatever it takes, Lord I long for my heart to be united for You.** There is a real concern that my heart is fragmented and that parts of it might remain in the dark while other parts are enlightened. Where does that wholeness and unity come from? From God. So **Psalm 86:11 teaches us to pray, "O Lord, I will walk in Your truth; unite my heart to fear Your name."**

Is your heart pulled in different directions?

EX: you know you need to apologize or forgive someone and you feel torn. You need a unified heart. EX: as young believer needing to apologize for disrespectful things said to my mom. EX: several years ago facing a hard situation and needing to forgive

4. **Whatever it takes, Lord What I really want from all this engagement with the Word of God and the work of his Spirit in answer to my prayers is that my heart will be satisfied with God and not with the world.**

Where does that satisfaction come from? It comes from God.

Psalm 90:14 teaches us to pray, "O satisfy us in the morning with Your lovingkindness that we may sing for joy and be glad all our days."

Ps 94:19 "When my anxious thoughts multiply within me, Thy consolations delight my soul."

This is a trait of growing spiritual maturity – in the face of anxious thoughts you know how to delight your soul in the consolations of God. Maturity is not a life that is free from difficulty; it is knowing how to seek soul satisfaction and consolation in God rather than in circumstances.

EX: Paul and Silas in prison – beaten, chained and singing hymns at midnight
All of these requests require kingdom power for kingdom living.

5. **Whatever it takes, Lord, I want my satisfaction in Christ to bear good fruit in every good work** for others so that the glory of God will be seen in my life.

Who produces these good deeds? God does. **So Colossians 1:10 teaches us to pray, "That [we] will walk in a manner worthy of the Lord . . . bearing fruit in every good work and increasing in the knowledge of God."**

I hope you get the point that we are dependent on God in our growth. I also hope you see that the Christian life is not merely a passive life. We can't sit back and blame God because 'He hasn't produced this work in me so it's not my fault'. There are so many verses that tell us to discipline ourselves for the purpose of godliness, to press on, to fight the fight of faith, to stand firm, to act like a good farmer or soldier or athlete, BUT we must never rely on our own strength.

We walk by faith in the strength of His might and the chief exercise of faith is PRAYER.

We need our hearts inclined to God and His Word because the Word is the sword of the Spirit that we wield in prayer.

6. **Whatever it takes, Lord I want my happiness to be as full as possible for spreading and expanding for others. I want to be strong in joy.**

I don't just want to be happy in my own little private world with God. Being strong in joy will make us durable in the face of threats or adversity. Where does that strength and durability come from? It comes from God. **So Colossians 1:11-12 teaches us to pray, "...that we be strengthened with power according to His glorious might, for the attaining of all steadfastness and patience; joyously giving thanks to the Father, who has qualified us to share in the inheritance of the saints in light."**

For this to happen and for us to need this kingdom power we need to face circumstances that require supernatural resources for a supernatural response – a response that manifests faith, hope, love and the fruit of the spirit.

Notice that this approach to prayer is one that is not focused on external circumstances- it is focused on our soul's connection to God. **The Good news of the gospel isn't that we get a care free life; the good news is that WE GET God.**

If we had all our specific prayer needs met, but our souls didn't find their satisfaction in God then ultimately our prayer wouldn't be worth it. Our souls are created for HIM, so our prayer for ourselves and others should be oriented toward knowing and encountering Him.

I am the most confident that my prayers will be fruitful when my prayers are guided by God's Word. Not every request and need that comes my way is mentioned in scripture, so I pray for them, but beyond those specific things I pray ...

Let his heart be inclined to God and His Word

Let the eyes of her heart be opened to see glorious things in your word and have a sense of your glory on her soul.

Let his heart be united to fear Your name, o Lord

Let their hearts be satisfied with all that God is for them in Jesus

Let her satisfaction in Christ lead to fruit bearing good deeds and

Let him be strong in supernatural joy in the face of temptations and trials of life.

EX: Voice of Martyrs special issue 2013- woman in Nepal – Bhagaila

By outward appearances her life may have gotten worse after she came to know Christ – she was still poor and her husband was still a drunkard, and now he began to beat her because of her faith AND YET she says, “I am very happy to be a believer. Pray that I will be a strong believer so that whatever comes in my life I will not give up my faith.”

That's the voice of one whose heart is inclined toward Knowing God above all else