

Elements of a Typical Pastor's Prayer Life

Praying Pastor interviewed Larry Walkemeyer, co-author of *15 Characteristics of Effective Pastors*

Praying Pastor: At first, I was merely glad to see that prayer was included among the 15

characteristics because prayer is so often ignored in books for or about pastoring. However, realizing that prayer was one of the 15 that surfaced in an original list of 64 was even more impressive. Were you surprised that prayer was in the top 15?

I was pleased but not overly surprised for three reasons. First, I knew our panel were people of prayer. Second, I know most pastors give mental assent to the priority of prayer even if their practice of prayer does not evidence that. Third, I believed that God was using our research to help identify essentials of effective pastoral ministry. I was confident that prayer would certainly be a priority on His heart.

Praying Pastor: Larry, what do you mean by "The distance between prayer as a method and prayer as a lifestyle is deceptive"?

Prayer has often, even if inadvertently, been promoted on the basis of what it can bring to "my life" and to "my ministry." Prayer easily devolves into another task on a "to do" list. However,

if prayer is viewed primarily as a means to accomplish a personal desire, or as an activity to be accomplished, it falls far short of God's intended purpose. Prayer is a relational conversation that is meant to be woven into the fabric of everyday living. While there are certainly different forms of prayer--some involving the solidarity of traditional structure or others interceding for certain results--the aim of prayer is to be a manner in which one journeys through the day. The deception is when a pastor views a "personal prayer time" in the morning as the fulfillment of God's glorious gift of prayer, rather than engaging in a robust, vibrant conversation with God.

Praying Pastor: You identify 5 patterns of a typical pastor's prayer life. What are they and why are they ultimately powerless?

- 1 Be-good Prayers ...
- 2 Bargaining Prayers ...
- 3 Bellyache Prayer ...
- 4 Bless-me Prayers ...
- 5 Battle-on Prayers ...

These are the prayers that I as a pastor too quickly slip into. Most of them are a valid form of prayer if used at appropriate times in healthy proportions. But too often they form the bulk of a pastor's prayer life, or they define the essential heart of a pastor's prayer life.

“Be-good Prayer” are those prayers that focus on external behaviors instead of on the issues of the heart. They lack the honesty of inviting the Spirit to search the deep places of the heart to reveal and heal the root issues that give rise to wrong actions.

“Bargaining Prayers” happen when we view prayer as a “religious work” that is depositing a currency in God's bank that then somehow belongs to us. Prayer is used as a leverage to get an advantage on God. More “prayer time” equals more “right” to demand more “results.” This approach to prayer diminishes God to an investment principle instead of the transcendent person He is.

“Bellyache Prayers” are cathartic and are commendable when used as David did in his psalms of lament. Pastors, however, often use their prayer as a pessimistic time of complaining about the problems of the church. Their prayers never lift their eyes to the God who is able to do far above all they can ask or imagine. Their prayers explore their feelings but don't declare their faith.

“Bless-me Prayer” are prayers that arise more from "The Secret" than from the scriptures. They are prayers that are used much like good luck charms. Often they are formulaic prayers that have been learned from a book or that some "successful" preacher has taught will bring God's blessing.

Prayer is not the “abracadabra” we use to manipulate God. To authentically stretch out your heart before God to request his blessing and His hand upon your life is powerful; to recite your magic prayer of blessing is not.

"Battle-On Prayers" are far more prevalent in certain branches of the church. These prayers are usually grouped under the title of "spiritual warfare." While earnest and extended prayer against demonic principalities is often essential, if a pastor is not careful the words and tone of these prayers can become thick with emotion and thin on substance. Rather than an assault on principalities and powers, it becomes a venting for the pastors frustrations or simply another formulaic, albeit highly spiritualized, approach to prayer.

Praying Pastor" How do "effective pastors ... move beyond prayer as a means"?

Because prayer at its core is relational, the answer to this question is a journey, not a five step solution. There are both broad and very personal dimensions to this journey.

A few angles of approach could be suggested. Prayer moves beyond being a means, when it becomes dialogical. I think of Jesus's prayer at Lazarus tomb;"Father, I thank you that you have heard me. I knew that you always hear me, but I said this for the benefit of the people standing here, that they may believe that you sent me" (Jn. 11:41, 42). Jesus seems to look up to heaven and say, "Father we have already been conversing about this. You know what I want. For their sake I am going to ask aloud." Then out of that relational dialogue he gives the command "Lazarus, come out!"

Most pastors want to skip to the command without dealing with the interplay and attention that a relationship involves.

To envision this life of prayer, we must get a glimpse of it through what others have practiced.

Practically we need to learn from the great teachers on the subject . . . Brother Lawrence,

Thomas a Kempis, Richard Foster, Philip Yancy, Jack Hayford.

This move to lifestyle prayer will not be easy for it is resisted by our own sin nature, our consuming schedules, our society of external focus, our habits of neglect, our self-reliance, our self-absorption and Satan himself. Consequently, developing trigger points can prove beneficial.

A trigger point is something that when you hear it or touch it serves as alarm clock to awaken

the soul to prayer. For me some of those have been the hour beep on my wristwatch, my steeringwheel, my computer keyboard, the shower handle, my pen, even the toilet seat.

Praying Pastor: Explain the purpose of:

- Identity Prayer
- Integrating Prayer
- Intervening Prayer

Identity Prayer is to lay bare the inner workings of the human heart. As that vulnerability to God and to self develops, prayer is the means to addressing the issues that are discovered there.

This dimension of a prayer life examines motives and addresses fears, insecurities, weaknesses, hurts, offenses, unforgiveness, pride, desires, pleasures, and jealousies. It invites the life-shaping influence of the Spirit into those arenas of our lives. It aligns our self-image with God's truth. It reminds me that I am his beloved, made not for daily devotions, but for a wild adventure of a "love saturated life" with God.

Integrating Prayer is the means to centralize the disjunctive nature of our lives. It weaves together the disparate activities of a day and ties them all back to Jesus. It is the way we stay in the Spirit whether in the grocery line, the freeway back up, the pulpit, or the bedroom. It brings every act to God's throne and requests that it bring glory to Him, that it serves His purpose in us and through us.

Intervening Prayer is exercising the privilege and authority to impact the reality of my world by requesting God's intervention in people and circumstances. It is coming in alignment with what the nature of Jesus would desire and then asking for the kingdom to manifest in that way among us. As Moses stood on his hill and impacted the battle below him through his prayers, so pastors must stand with prayers extended to heaven to change the course of the battle in their corner of the world.

Praying Pastor: Why do you conclude with the story of a small church pastor who "was immersed in a life of prayer"?

Pastor Harold Taves was my pastor growing up and by most measures of success he would have been evaluated as below average. However, his life of prayer impacted the lives of many people who are in ministry today partly due to those prayers. The average pastor has a church of less than 100 people and feels less than effective. I wanted pastors to be encouraged that through prayer they can reach far beyond the "success" of numbers.

Praying Pastor: Larry, please write a prayer for pastors who want "a prayer life demonstrat(ing)beyond debate that the pastor's dependency rests on God instead of self."

Father, in the majesty and safety of your love I come openly into your presence. Your love is better than life and I delight myself in you. You are my joy, my breath, my song, my laughter. There is none like you. By the work of the cross I dance freely before your presence with only the robe of Christ righteousness covering my nakedness.

Father, I confess how quickly, how often, and how thoroughly I depend on my own personality, efforts, and resources to try to do your kingdom work. Lord I am often self-conscious, self-promoting, self-reliant, self-centered. Forgive me for Jesus sake.

Father, I choose afresh this day to focus my attention on Jesus who is my hero and my helper. I commit myself to carry on a conversation with you today. Remind me when I get busy and consumed and forget you. Assist me to exercise the authority you have given me as your partner in kingdom building. Holy Spirit breathe your life into me and through me for I can do nothing apart from you. I declare before angels and demons, that my dependency is upon the Living God.

Father, I thank you in advance for what you are going to do as I depend on you. I thank you that right now your ears are tuned to my voice and your eyes are focused on my needs. May my failures be covered in your mercy and my successes bring only glory to your name. For it is in Jesus name and for His sake that I pray. Amen.

For resources that will help in your personal prayer life , [click here](#).