

April 12, 2015

SCARY PRAYERS

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There are certain parts in all of our prayers that tend to sound similar. We give thanks for our daily bread. We pray for those we know who are ailing, traveling, or facing difficult times. We pray for safe travel for those who need it. We might ask God's blessing and guidance on the nation and world authorities.

While all of those issues of prayer are important both because we need to share those concerns with the Father and because His Word has shown us that we need to bring those matters before Him, our prayers should always be more than just those words. As we can know what things are important to children by looking at their Christmas list, so we can know what's on our hearts and minds the most when we look at the requests we ask of God. Therefore, spiritual matters should always be an integral part of our prayers. But, I have to admit something that I'm sure I'm not alone in saying... Sometimes I'm scared to pray for those spiritual things. Why am I scared to pray for these things? Because God might grant those requests.

Three examples come to my mind, though I'm sure more might cross your mind.

In prayer it's not uncommon to ask God to remove a certain sin for our lives. But then we "make provision for the flesh" and make the kind of decisions that give us opportunities to step back into the sin. Are we scared to ask God to transform our desires and leave behind the sin that is so comfortable or enjoyable? To give one example, can we echo Jesus' words in *Matthew 6:12* that we are forgiving our debtors if we really want to hold onto grudges and look down on others? When sin is more desirable than God, we will always be too scared to let God go to work on rooting it out of our lives.

Or, we mention evangelism and ask that God would give us opportunities. But what happens when those opportunities are staring us in the face in the form of a person who needs to know God? If you're like me, sometimes you still back away from the opportunity for some fear-based excuse. So then we're tempted to decide it's "not our thing" and stop asking for opportunities, all because we're scared that God might answer the prayer again. But true faith isn't scared to let God answer the prayers that we know He wants us to pray. If we're doing God's will, we ask Him for an opportunity, and He gives it to us, why are we so quick to forget that He's going to give us the strength to handle that opportunity?

Or maybe you've gone through this process a time or two: Ask God for what you want, qualifying it with the disclaimer that you ultimately want whatever is best according to His will, only to then go about trying to control as much as you can to get what you want. Consider how Abraham had been promised a son, then tried to go about getting that son by telling God that his servant Eliezer would be his heir (*Genesis 15*) and then having Ishmael by Hagar (*Genesis 16*). He was scared that God wouldn't come through, so he took matters into his own hands, just like we do when we're scared that God's answers to our prayers won't look like what we want. As C.S. Lewis said, "We are not necessarily doubting that God will do the best for us; we are wondering how painful the best will turn out to be."

We often think that becoming more Christ-like is sinning less and doing more good as we grow older, and those attributes are important, but they are merely byproducts of true Christ-likeness. True Christ-likeness is submitting our will to the Father's in every way possible, just as Jesus did so famously in the garden (*Luke 22:42*) and throughout His ministry in general (*John 8:28-29*). Getting better at acts of obedience without growing in true mental and emotional submission tells God we're relying completely on ourselves.

If we really want to move away from shallow prayer into life-changing, unafraid prayer, we must turn our lives

fully over to God so that we can be clay in His hands. As long as we're hanging onto our desires and our comfort, we're going to be scared that God will actually answer our prayers. Ask God for wisdom (James 1:5) to trust Him, and then pray that He would break you out of the areas in which you've become too comfortable, no matter how scary or painful that process might be.

"Now to Him who is able to do exceedingly abundantly above all that we ask or think, according to the power that works in us, to Him be glory in the church by Christ Jesus to all generations, forever and ever. Amen." - Ephesians 3:20