

INTRODUCTION

A young man in college was visiting his girlfriend's hometown for the first time. We'll call him Tommy. It was a small town with only one drug store. Tommy stopped in and told the pharmacist he wanted to buy three boxes of chocolate: a small box, a medium box, and a large box. The pharmacist asked why he was buying three boxes. Tommy said, "Well, I'm going to my girlfriend's house for supper. If she only lets me hold her hand, I'll give her the small box. If she lets me give her a kiss on the cheek, then I'll give her the medium box. But if she lets me do some serious smooching, I'll give her the big box."

That evening at dinner his girlfriend's father asked Tommy to pray before the meal. Tommy proceeded to pray a long, sincere, intense prayer that lasted over five minutes. When he finally said, "Amen," his girlfriend said, "Why Tommy you never told me you could pray such powerful prayers!" Tommy said, "And you never told me that your father was the local pharmacist!"

The Bible has a lot to say about prayer. Jesus was such a powerful prayer warrior that the disciples asked Him, "Lord, teach us to pray." They never asked Him to teach them to preach, or to do miracles. But they coveted His prayer life.

In this message we're going to talk about "God's Prescription for Powerful Prayer." In Mark 11, we've been following the activity of Jesus during the week that will end with a crucifixion and an empty tomb. In the last passage Jesus spoke about mountain moving faith.

Mark 11:24-33 "Therefore I tell you, whatever you ask for in prayer, believe that you have received it, and it will be yours. And when you stand praying, if you hold anything against anyone, forgive him, so that your Father in heaven may forgive you your sins." They arrived again in Jerusalem, and while Jesus was walking in the temple courts, the chief priests, the teachers of the law and the elders came to him. "By what authority are you doing these things?" they asked. "And who gave you authority to do this?"

Jesus replied, "I will ask you one question. Answer me, and I will tell you by what authority I am doing these things. John's baptism--was it from heaven, or from men? Tell me!"

They discussed it among themselves and said, "If we say, 'From heaven,' he will ask, 'Then why didn't you believe him?' But if we say, 'From men'..." (They feared the people, for everyone held that John really was a prophet.) So they answered Jesus, "We don't know." Jesus said, "Neither will I tell you by what authority I am doing these things."

Jesus actually does answer the question about His authority by telling a parable which we find in Mark 12. That's our next lesson. Today we're going to learn about powerful praying.

My parents taught me to pray when I was a child. I can remember starting with the simple prayer, "Now I lay me down to sleep. I pray the Lord my soul to keep. If I should die before I wake, I pray the Lord my soul to take. Amen." Around the age of six I learned I could pray and

ask God for something and He would give it to me. I can clearly remember the first time I asked God for something.

We lived in South Alabama close to Ft. Rucker, where the Army trained helicopter pilots so dozens of helicopters flew over our house each day. I was fascinated with helicopters, so whenever I heard one I ran out and waved my arms for them to land and give me a ride. None ever did, of course, so I decided to try prayer.

So, one night, before I went to bed I got on my knees and I asked God to give me a helicopter. I told him I wanted a real one, not a toy. I went on to describe it in case God had never seen a helicopter. I asked Him to just have it parked in the field behind our house the next morning. I prayed so sincerely, the next morning I got up and got dressed to go flying. I truly expected to find a helicopter behind my house. I ran out back ... and would you believe it? One of the army helicopters made an emergency landing in the field! Not really. I just asked you if you would believe it. When I didn't find a helicopter I remember thinking, "This praying stuff isn't all it's cracked up to be. Where's my helicopter?" Since then, I've learned much more about prayer—and I'm still learning. I came to realize the reason I didn't have a helicopter was not God's fault; I just needed to learn more about praying. In this passage we are going to learn three principles about powerful praying.

I. WHEN YOU PRAY IN FAITH, IT RELEASES GOD'S POWER

Jesus said, "Whatever you ask for in prayer, believe that you have received it, and it will be yours." The thing about faith is that you must believe God before you see the answer to your prayer. In other words, when you ask God for something, you should begin to act like God is already answering that prayer. If you pray for rain, you should carry your umbrella, even if the sun is shining.

You may be thinking, "Well, I prayed for something and it didn't happen. God didn't answer my prayer. So how can I have faith?" God always answers prayer. Sometimes the answer is "Yes." Sometimes the answer is "No." (Remember the helicopter?) Sometimes the answer is "Wait." And sometimes God gives us something different or better that we didn't ask for. But God always answers prayer. You must BELIEVE without a doubt that God hears your prayers.

The book of James was written by the half-brother of Jesus; they had the same mother but different dads. James gives us this admonition about praying in faith: "If any of you lacks wisdom, he should ask God, who gives generously to all without finding fault, and it will be given to him. But when he asks, he must believe and not doubt, because he who doubts is like a wave of the sea, blown and tossed by the wind." (James 1:5-6)

Many of you have heard of George Müller of Bristol, a man of faith. Years ago, George Müller was on a steamship coming from England to America to preach in New York City, but the ship was immobilized for two or three days off the coast of Newfoundland, because the fog was so thick they could not move. The days were passing and George Müller realized he was in danger of missing his speaking engagement and he really felt like it was God's will for him to be there. The captain of the ship was a Christian and he knew Mr. Müller, so George went to the bridge

one morning and said, "Captain, I must go to New York City. I can't be late for this speaking engagement." The captain said, "Mr. Müller, I understand your desire to be there, but we can't move. We can't go forward in this fog or we might collide with another ship, or we could collide on rocks. We have to wait here until the fog is lifted." They had been in this fog for two or three days. So, George Müller said to the captain, "Captain, would you be willing to go below with me and pray God will remove the fog?" He could tell by the amused expression on the face of the captain that although the captain was a Christian, he wasn't used to praying for things like that. The captain said, "Sure, Mr. Müller. I'll pray with you." So, they went below deck. George got on his knees and prayed a prayer something like this. "God, I really think that you want me to speak in New York City and so I ask you to remove this fog so this ship can proceed. Thank you, God, that you have done this. In Jesus' name." Then the captain began to pray and George stopped him. He said, "No, captain do not pray." The captain said, "Why not?" Müller said, "For two reasons: number one, you do not really believe God will remove the fog, and number two, I believe he has already removed the fog." They went up on the bridge the sky was clear and the ship got underway—and George Müller made his speaking engagement.

We must pray in faith if we want to see God's power released.

II. WHEN YOU PRAY WITH FORGIVENESS, YOU RECEIVE GOD'S MERCY

Jesus said, "And when you stand praying, if you hold anything against anyone, forgive him, so that your Father in heaven may forgive you your sins." This is a misunderstood principle. Some people think they MUST forgive others in order to EARN God's forgiveness. That's putting the cart before the horse. A person who has truly been forgiven by God will have a spirit of forgiveness toward others. If you refuse to forgive someone it simply reveals that you have not fully received God's free gift of grace.

Forgiveness doesn't come easily. By nature, we are creatures of revenge. We want to extract an eye for an eye, and a tooth for a tooth. But Jesus came and taught that we are to love our enemies and forgive those who have wronged us.

For many years, Dr. William Willimon was the Chaplain at Duke University. He wrote this about forgiveness: "The human animal is not supposed to be good at forgiveness. Forgiveness is not some innate, natural human emotion. Vengeance, retribution, violence, these are natural human qualities. It is natural for the human animal to snarl and crouch into a defensive position when attacked, to howl when wronged, to bite back when bitten. Forgiveness is not natural."

Let me tell you what forgiveness *isn't* and then what forgiveness *is*.

A. Forgiveness is not absolving legal consequences

On the evening of June 17, a self-proclaimed white supremacist named Dylann Roof walked into a Bible study and prayer meeting at Emmanuel AME Church in Charleston. He was graciously welcomed into the circle and sat with them for the next hour. At the end of the hour he pulled out a gun and shot nine people to death. Roof later confessed that he was trying to start a race war. But when Roof appeared before a judge for a bail hearing, the relatives of the victims confronted

him. They refused to give in to hate. Instead, one by one, they told him, "I forgive you. May God have mercy on your soul."

Over the next few days, the Internet chatter was full of critics who said these relatives were too quick to forgive, and that the shooter didn't deserve forgiveness; he deserved justice.

That's grace. God gave us forgiveness when what we deserved was justice. The people who criticize these grieving relatives don't understand Biblical forgiveness. These relatives do not want Dylann Roof to go unpunished. But they realize it is the job of the government to punish criminal, not individuals. The Bible says in Romans 13 that the civil authorities bear the power of the sword. So it is possible to forgive someone personally, and still allow the justice system to deal with their crime.

B. Forgiveness is not forgetting

You've probably heard the expression, "Forgive and forget." But it's not that easy. Or perhaps you've heard someone say, "Well, I'll forgive, but I won't forget!" What they really are saying is, "I'm going to say 'you're forgiven' but I'm going to actively remember what you did to me and I'll remind myself of it every time I hear your name!" That's not real forgiveness.

Forgiveness is an active choice. Forgetting is a passive process in which a matter fades from our memory with the passing of time. We all forget things like names, telephone numbers, and birthdays. It's amazing how some men can forget their wedding anniversary but can remember the score of the 1983 Super Bowl! You don't have to make yourself forget something it just happens. And the older we get the more there is to forget!

Once an old elephant was drinking at a watering hold and spied a turtle. The elephant walked over and swatted the turtle across the pond with his trunk. A passing giraffe said, "Why did you do that?" The elephant said, "I recognized that turtle as the one who took a nip out of my trunk 47 years ago." The giraffe said, "Wow, you must have a great memory." The elephant said, "Yes, I have turtle recall."

The sad thing is when it comes to people who have offended us, we have total recall. Forgive them for Christ's sake, and let it go even if you still remember what they did. Forgiveness means that you don't go actively digging into your memory and dredging up their act whenever you see that person

C. Forgiveness is releasing someone from your desire for revenge

Our natural desire is to hurt those who hurt us. When someone insulted us in elementary school, we said, "The same to you and more of it!" Perhaps you've seen the bumper sticker that says, "I DON'T GET MAD; I GET EVEN!"

The Bible word "forgive" is *aphiemi*, which means "to send away; to release." It's a picture of you holding a person by the throat when you have a reason and the means to punish them for what they did to you. But instead of choking them, you release them. That's mercy in action.

But we seldom have the means or opportunity to grab someone by the throat, so what we continue to hang onto is a desire to hurt them. We have a stranglehold on resentment and a desire to hurt that person that hurt us. Forgiveness is letting go of that harmful urge.

How do you release someone who has hurt you? You forgive them. You don't do it for their sake; you do it for your sake. You don't forgive them because they ask you to forgive them; you do it because God has forgiven you. They may not every ask you to forgive them, but you can forgive them anyway.

One of my favorite Bible commentators is Warren Wiersbe. He writes: "The world's darkest prison is the prison of an unforgiving heart. Some of the most miserable people I've met have been those who would not forgive others. They dream about punishing the one who wronged them, and don't realize that they are only punishing themselves."

Corrie Ten Boom was imprisoned by the Nazis during World War II because her family provided a hiding place for Jews when they were being arrested. She and her sister Betsy were sent to Ravensbrück where horrible torture, rape, and death occurred on a regular basis. Betsy died in the prison camp, but Corrie miraculously survived. She became an effective Christian author and speaker. In 1947 she was invited to speak in Munich, Germany. That evening, she spoke on the topic of forgiveness—how God buries our sins in the depths of the sea. After her talk she was approached by a man who looked familiar to her. With horror she recognized him as one of the cruelest guards at the concentration camp. She remembered the shame of walking naked in front of this very man. Suddenly all the fear and hatred returned in a flash.

He said to her, "In your talk you mentioned Ravensbrück. I was a guard there. But since that time, I have become a Christian. I know that God has forgiven me for the cruel things I did there, but I would like to hear it from you as well, Fraulein." He held out his hand to Corrie and said, "Will you forgive me?"

Here's how Corrie describes that encounter in her own words: "It could not have been many seconds that he stood there, hand held out, but to me it seemed hours as I wrestled with the most difficult thing I had ever had to do. I stood there with the coldness clutching my heart. But forgiveness is an act of the will, and the will can function regardless of the temperature of the heart.

'Jesus, help me!' I prayed silently. 'I can lift my hand. I can do that much. You supply the feeling.' And so woodenly, mechanically, I thrust my hand into the one stretched out to me.

And as I did, an incredible thing took place. The current started in my shoulder, raced down my arm, sprang into our joined hands. And then this healing warmth seemed to flood my whole being, bringing tears to my eyes.

'I forgive you, brother!' I cried. 'With all my heart!' For a long moment we grasped each other's hands, the former guard and former prisoner. I had never known God's love so intensely as I did then. (*Tramp for the Lord*, pp. 55-57)

III. WHEN YOU PRAY IN JESUS' NAME, IT REVEALS GOD'S AUTHORITY

When we pray, it's important that we understand we have no authority of our own. Our authority comes when we pray in the name of Jesus.

Jesus said, "I tell you the truth, anyone who has faith in me will do what I have been doing. He will do even greater things than these, because I am going to the Father. And I will do whatever you ask in my name, so that the Son may bring glory to the Father. You may ask me for anything in my name, and I will do it." (John 14:12-14) Let's learn two things about spiritual authority.

A. Jesus ministered in God's authority

He told the disciples, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me." (Matthew 28:18) The Jewish religious leaders questioned Jesus' source of authority. They said, "Where did you get the authority to do these things?" They were still talking about when He ran the crooks out of the Temple courts. Jesus knew it was a trick question, so he answered their question with a trickier question about John the Baptist. Over the next few days, He would engage in a verbal duel with these religious leaders and He will win every bout. They cannot refute His wisdom because He was God in the flesh.

B. Jesus has given us authority to approach God

The Bible says, "Therefore, since we have a great high priest who has gone through the heavens, Jesus the Son of God...Let us then approach the throne of grace with confidence, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help us in our time of need." (Hebrews 4:14,16)

Praying in Jesus' name doesn't mean just ending your prayer by saying, "In Jesus' name we pray. Amen." It is praying with the confidence and authority that Jesus has given us. We have no right or authority to approach God on the basis of who we are or what we have done. But Jesus has gone before us and told the Father that we are His children.

CONCLUSION

I attended the East Texas State Fair with my grandkids this week and we had a great time. I loved seeing the joy on their faces as they ran from ride to ride. It reminded me of a story that I heard Ron Dunn tell. He was at a carnival with his son, and each ride required a certain number of tickets. So he would stand there and tear off the required number and hand them to his son.

After several rides, his son passed by and got his tickets, and then there was a strange boy who held out his hand to Ron to get tickets. Ron looked at the boy and said, "I don't know you. You can't have any of these tickets!" Then Ron's son turned around and said, "Dad, this is my new friend, and I told him that you'd give him the tickets." Ron said, "On the basis of what my son said, I was glad to give the tickets to his friend."

Ron said that when we approach God the Father, we have an advocate, the Lord Jesus Christ, who says, "Father, I told him or her that they could ask anything in my name and you'd give it to them." And that's what it means to pray in the name of Jesus. When you do that, you understand God's Prescription for Powerful Praying.

OUTLINE

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For the Joy...
Pastor David Dykes



*David O. Dykes, Pastor
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