

How to Develop a Powerful Prayer Life – Part VI

March 15, 2009

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Many of the thoughts here were gathered from the book by Dr. Gregory Frizzell, *How to Have a Powerful Prayer Life*

Getting Clean Before God “The Path to Holiness” – Part II

Last time we learned about the second in our list of the five basic types of prayer. We looked at what Bible says about *confession*. Last time we learned that confession is the time in your prayer when you ask God to search your heart and cleanse you from any sin that would hinder your power to pray. Confession is how we grow and allow God to conform us to the image of Christ (Romans 8:29; 12:1-2).

The five basic types of prayers are: Praise and Worship, Confession, Petition, Intercession and Meditation. After you confess your sins to God you can then begin to *petition* or ask Him for things and *intercede* for your loved ones who need God’s help.

It is very important that you get fully right with God before you start asking Him for things. James 5:16 reminds us of a crucial truth. “*The effective fervent prayer of the righteous avails much.*”

It is impossible to pray powerful, Spirit-led prayers if there is a rift between you and God. The psalmist said, “*Search me O God and know my heart; try me, and know my thoughts: And see if there be any wicked way in me and lead me in the way everlasting*” (Psalms 139:23-24). Some of us just say, “*Lord forgive me*” but God wants us to go through a process of confession not just to utter to Him a perfunctory, token cliché.

The psalmist asked God to search him, to know his heart, to try him, and to know his thoughts. Have you ever been so serious in your time of confession where you would ask God to search you, to know your heart, to try you or to know your thoughts?

Many people have little power in prayer because they fail to linger with God in meaningful confession on a daily basis. Many Christians make the mistake of rushing through their confession time so they can get down to the business of telling God what they want Him to do for them.

Shallow confessions will not bring about true cleansing and the filling of the Holy Spirit. Because of a lack of confession, many prayers are dry and powerless.

Last time we were introduced to the *Great Shantung Revival* that occurred in China in the early 1900’s. It was in China where group of Southern Baptist missionaries were expending enormous efforts to love and minister to the Chinese people. Yet, there was very little response.

The Chinese people showed almost no interest in the Good News of Jesus Christ though the missionaries were faithfully praying, witnessing, preaching and doing works of service for the people living in this area.

After many months, the missionaries became disheartened and began to ask God what was wrong. Despite all their hard work and activities, why was there so little spiritual power? God answered their prayers and impressed upon them that “there was hidden unconfessed sin in their lives and (as a result of this) they were not truly filled with the Holy Spirit.”

The missionaries agreed together to go separately into their “prayer closets” and ask God to show them anything that might be quenching His Spirit. Each missionary took a copy of the Bible, a pad of paper

and a pen to list their sins. They were to fully confess and forsake each sin. As they confessed their sins to God and each other, God began to work in their lives and in their midst.

What was the turning point in the ministry of these missionaries? The pivotal point has always been the same whenever a spiritual awakening begins in any area on the planet: When God's people were genuinely cleansed through deep confession of sins, *then* and only then does God fill them with mountain-moving power.

The missionaries became aware that they had hidden, unconfessed sin in their lives that was blocking the powerful and dynamic filling of the Holy Spirit. After they each spent significant time in prayer, confessing and forsaking each sin, God poured out His Spirit upon the missionaries and an awesome spiritual awakening filled the entire region.

God's people were genuinely cleansed through deep confession and then God filled them with mountain-moving power. You've got to first clean out the cup before you pour something into it to drink. This is the way that God has sent every great revival and spiritual awakening in history—He cleans out the vessel and then pours out His Spirit into their lives.

I can say without reservation that the only way to obtain genuine spiritual fullness and power in your life is through the confession of sins.

What is confession?

Last time we saw that the word "confess" comes from the Greek word that means, "*to say the same thing.*" The word translated "confess" is the Greek word, *homologeo*. *logeo* from which we get *logos*, which means "to speak."

The other part, *homo*, means "*the same.*" So to confess your sin is simply to say the same thing about your sin that God is saying. When the Christian confesses he or she says the same thing that God says about their behavior.

Some of us may remember that woman who had a sack of dirty clothes to be washed. This woman had taken her sack of dirty clothes to the riverside to wash them. But she was ashamed to open it for fear someone would see how dirty her clothes were; so she just lowered the whole bag into the water, plunged it up and down several times, and then took it back home.

A lot of people are like that woman. They have many sins that need to be cleansed, but they don't want to "take them out of the bag" and confess them one by one. They just say, "*Lord, forgive me*" and cover up all their sins, their thefts, and their lies, and their jealousies, and their hatred. Confession is bringing your sins out before God and confessing them—then and only then can they be cleansed.

Last time I gave you a toolbox that contained some tools to help us examine our lives. In this toolbox were five basic categories we can work through when confessing our sins. Let's briefly review them.

First Category: Sins of Thoughts and Attitudes

Sin begins in the area of the heart—sinful thoughts and attitudes come from the heart. Jesus said in Matthew 15:19, "*For out of the heart proceeds evil thoughts...*". In 2 Corinthians 10:5, we are commanded to "*take every thought captive to the obedience of Christ.*"

When you confess, ask God to reveal any pattern of attitude or thought that is sinful. Ask yourself—

- 1Are there any unclean or lustful thoughts that are connected with earthly pursuits?
- 2Are there any thoughts of anger or bitterness?
- 3Are there any unloving thoughts?
- 4Are there any thoughts of fear or doubt?
- 5Are there any attitudes of pride (“*I’m the best*”)
- 6Are there any attitudes of prejudice? (*I’m better*)
- 7Are there any attitudes of lukewarmness toward God? (“*God is not that important to me*”)

If you answered “yes” to any of these questions, immediately confess them and ask God to help you forsake them.

Second Category: Sins of Speech

God’s Word is clear about importance of the words that come out of our mouths. In Matthew 12:36 Jesus says, “... *every idle word that men shall speak, they shall give account thereof in the day of judgment.*” James 3:10 says, “*Out of the same mouth proceeds blessing and cursing. My brethren, these things ought not so to be.*”

In your prayer of confession, be specific when it comes to the sins of speech. Be aware of the fact that God will lead you to seek forgiveness from people you have hurt with your words.

Third Category: Sins of Relationship

Perhaps the most common place we grieve the Holy Spirit’s power in our life is found our relationships. Sins of relationship generally fall in five major areas:

1.) People you have hurt or offended.

In Matthew 5:23-24 Jesus says, “*Don’t approach God until you first get right with those you have offended!*” Many Christians don’t have any power because there are a whole lot of people in their lives that they have offended.

When you and I sin against our neighbor, whom we are commanded to love, we sin against God. When we sin against God, we grieve Him and quench His power in our life.

During your prayer of confession, ask God to search your heart as it pertains to people you have hurt and offended. When God reveals people to you, make the decision to go to them and ask their forgiveness.

Don’t just say, “*I’m sorry;*” that could mean several things. We must confess our wrongs in a way that demonstrates that we are taking full responsibility for our part in a conflict.

The Five A's of Confession:

- 1***Admit*** what you did wrong.
- 2***Apologize*** for how your choice affected the other person.
- 3***Accept*** the consequences.
- 4***Ask*** for forgiveness.
- 5***Alter*** your choice in the future.

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2.) *Bitter or Holding Grudges*

Not only are we to confess for the sins of hurting or offending someone, we are to confess to the sin of *holding a grudge* against someone who has hurt us.

In Matthew 6:14-15, Jesus says. “... *if you forgive men their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. But if you do not forgive men their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses.*” Are you holding grudges against people who have offended you? Are you harboring bitterness toward someone?

Ask God to search your heart and reveal any patterns of bitterness or unforgiveness against friends, family members, or even against God. Make a list of those you may have bitterness toward or hold a grudge against. Confess your sin of bitterness. Confess your sin of holding a grudge.

Last time we learned that “*forgiveness is a choice, not a feeling*”. Ask God to give you the power to choose to forgive.

3.) *Improper Relationships*

How you relate to people can quench the power of God from your life. This is why we must deal with these sins in our prayers of confession. Another Sin of Relationship that can put out the fire of God in your life is an *improper relationship*.

An improper relationship could be anything from sexual sins to simply being inappropriately close to someone.

Ask God to show you any relationships that are improper or out of balance. Ask God for the steps He wants you to take to get right with Him.

4.) *Neglecting regular fellowship and meaningful service through your local church*

Last time we ended our message by looking at the sin of neglecting regular fellowship and meaningful service through your local church.

In Hebrews 10:25, the writer tells us not to “*forsake the assembling of ourselves together as is the habit of some.*” This verse lets us know that all believers are to stay in genuine fellowship and close relationship with a local church congregation.

Today we have a lot of “popcorn” Christians. They have a habit of “popping in” and “popping out” of the church on their own terms. Many want to sit and be served by others but few want to get up and serve others.

I just want to say something to only the members of GraceWay Church: The only people who don't need to be concerned about doing anything at GraceWay Church is our *guests*. This is how we do things at home—we don't give our guests a mop and a bucket when they come over; do we?

I must also say that the first few times someone comes over to the Brooks' home they are our guests. After a few times of come over, they lose their guest status. If they want some coffee, I point them to the coffee maker.

If you come to GraceWay Church more than a few times—evidently, God is speaking to your heart about this assembly of believers and what He wants to accomplish through us. Evidently, God has blessed you to the point where you feel led to return and glean some more...and *“to whom much is given, much is required.”*

In seeking a church, our primary prayer should not be *“What can this church do for me?”* but *“What can I do for this church?”* Some Christians are not filled with the Holy Spirit because they are neglecting regular fellowship and meaningful service in the local church.

Are you a “popcorn” Christian? Do you just “pop in” and “pop out” and rarely get involved? Do you “pop in” late and miss worshipping God who alone deserves your worship? Are you regularly serving in a ministry; using your God-given gifts to serve one another?

Thus far we’ve examined Sins of Thoughts and Sins of Speech. From there we began looking at the Sins of Relationships that grieve the Holy Spirit and block His power in our lives.

- 1.) People you have hurt or offended.
- 2.) Bitter or Holding Grudges
- 3.) Improper Relationships
- 4.) Neglecting regular fellowship and meaningful service through your Church

This is where we stopped last time. But there is another Sin of Relationship that grieves the Holy Spirit and quenches His power in the Christian’s life.

5.) *Family Relationships that are Inconsistent with the Word of God*

Someone has aptly said, *“No one who is wrong with others can be truly right with God.”* One arena of relationship where family members frequently find themselves at odds with God’s Word is in the home. God has a lot to say about how people relate to one another in the home—after all, He created the family unit.

Let’s look at four relationships in the home where God’s Word speaks.

a) God’s Word Speaks to Husbands:

Ephesians 5:23 says, *“For the husband is the head of the wife, even as Christ is the head of the church.”* From this verse we see that God calls the husband to be the spiritual head of the home.

Husband, you lead your family in the things of God. You lead your family to worship. You are then one who raises and lowers the spiritual temperature in your home.

Ephesians 5:25 says, *“Husband, love your wives...”* The husband is commanded to love his wife. The husband is commanded to die to his own needs, his own agenda and to nurture and cherish his wife.

The Apostle Peter in 1 Peter 3:7 commands the husband to care for his wife and to be very sensitive to her needs—to know her desires and fears and anxieties. He is to know what makes her happy and what makes her sad. He is to be willing to take the time to listen to wife. He is to live with her in an understanding way and grant her honor as a spiritual equal and if he doesn’t do these things, his prayers will be hindered.

If you are a husband, in your prayer time, reflect on what God has called you to do and then ask yourself if you are taking this responsibility seriously. Humbly confess where you have failed and ask God to give you the grace to change. God will bless all that you do toward fulfilling your spiritual responsibility toward your wife.

b) God's Word Speaks to Wives and Mothers:

A husband loves his wife as Jesus Christ loved His bride the Church and gave Himself up for her.

Likewise, the wife's submission to her husband is patterned after the loving and willing submission the Church offers Jesus. Ephesians 5:24 and 33 states, *"Therefore as the church is subject to Christ, so let the wives be to their own husbands in everything...and the wife see that she reverence her husband."*

Many wives spend a lot of time in prayer begging God to change their husband. Sisters, the greatest way to see God change your husband is to bring yourself under God's pattern for a godly wife (1 Peter 3:1-2)

Most women spend a lot of time on the *externals*—looking nice. While this is important, God says, *"let not your adornment be merely external-- braiding the hair; and wearing gold jewelry, or putting on fine clothes; but let it be the hidden person of the heart, with the imperishable quality of a gentle and quiet spirit, which is precious in the sight of God."*

Is your attitude one of thankfulness and love or is it one of quarrelling and contention? Proverbs 27:15 says, *"A quarrelsome wife is like a constant dripping on a rainy day."*

If you are a wife, reflect on the Biblical responsibility of a wife to her husband and then ask God if you are doing all you can do to be in line with the pattern He has set for you in Scripture. Ask God to help you surrender completely to His pattern for your life.

c) God's Word Speaks to Parents:

Psalm 127:3-4 says, *"Behold, children are a gift of the LORD; the fruit of the womb is a reward. Like arrows in the hand of a warrior, So are the children of one's youth."* Proverbs 22:6 says, *"Train up a child in the way he should go, Even when he is old he will not depart from it."*

"Training up a child in the way he should go" is more about how we live before our children everyday than the occasional religious words we share with them. As kids grow up to be adults they will find they remember a parent's values and habits more so than they will remember our words.

According to Ephesians 6:4, fathers are to avoid provoking their children to anger (through their inconsistencies, hypocrisies and cruelties) but bring them up in the discipline and instruction concerning the things of the Lord. The father's priority is the spiritual nurture and training of his family.

If you are a parent, use your time of confession to ask God to reveal to you the ways in which you have not lived up to His expectations of you. As God shows you your failings fully confess your sins in this area and ask God for His grace to change you. There may be cases where you will need to ask forgiveness of your children.

d) God's Word Speaks to Children and Youth:

You don't have to observe television for long before you come across a sitcom or a movie that shows how society has completely reversed the principle of honoring one's parents. No longer are the parents fountains of virtue and wisdom but bungling fools—especially the fathers. On many occasions you will find the parents coming to children for advice.

Ephesians 6: 1-3 states, "*Children, obey your parents in the Lord: for this is right. Honor your father and mother; which is the first commandment with promise; that it may be well with you and that you may live long on the earth.*"

Disrespect toward parents is a very serious sin before God. You cannot be right with God if you are always disrespecting your parents. Did you know that the Old Testament law sentenced death for children who cursed or dishonored a parent? (Exodus 21:17)

If you are an adult, you too must ask whether you are honoring your elderly parents. Remember, no one who mistreats or neglects a parent can be fully right with God!

Are your family relationships consistent with God's Word? Husbands are you loving your wife. Wives, are you respecting your husband? Parents, are you rearing your children in a way that honors God? Children, are you honoring your parents?

Ask God to reveal any wrong feelings or actions you have toward those in your family and to help you to honor them.

Fourth Category: Sins of Commission and Transgression

A *sin of commission* is the sin of doing something wrong.

A *transgression* is "stepping over the line or boundary" and breaking God's law.

Examples of such sins are: adultery, fornication, stealing or dishonesty, assaulting someone, going to sinful places, watching adult rated movies, destructive habits (such as smoking, drinking, overeating or eating unhealthy foods), reading unclean literature, putting recreation or material things ahead of God, idolatry, financial dishonesty, cheating employers, etc.

The wonderful and amazing thing is that God's grace will cover them all! 1 John 1:9 says, "*If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and cleanse us from all unrighteousness.*"

On the basis of this promise, ask God to reveal anything in your life that may be offensive to Him and don't be afraid to own up to your sins. Ask God to help you confess and repent or turn away from each one of the sins He reveals to you.

Fifth Category: Sins of Omission

Sins of omission are the failure to obey Christ's commands; sins of omission are things you are omitting—the things you ought to be doing to honor Christ and His Word but don't. This sin is mentioned in James 4:17 "*To him that knows to do good and does it not, to him it is sin.*"

Some examples of sins of omission are: neglecting Bible reading and prayer, failing to witness, failure to tithe, neglecting regular worship, refusing to use your spiritual gifts in a local church, etc.

Ask God to reveal to you what sins of omission you are committing. Make a list as He reveals them to you. Then confess and repent from each of them.

Someone said once that unconfessed sin is like carrying a dead person around with you on your back. Everywhere you go the corpse goes with you. Eventually what happens is that the rot, filth and stench of that carcass infects every area of your life.

- Unconfessed sin will weigh on your *spiritual life*—it will impact the way you relate to God.
- Unconfessed sin will weigh on your *emotional life*—the guilt and shame of sin weighs heavy on you. The Psalmist says in Psalm 38:17-18, “*For I am ready to fall, And my sorrow is continually before me...I am full of anxiety because of my sin.*”
- Unconfessed sin will weigh on you *physically*. In Psalm 32:3-4 David says, “*When I kept silent about my sin, my body wasted away Through my groaning all day long. For day and night Thy hand was heavy upon me; My vitality was drained away as with the fever heat of summer.*”

Unconfessed sin will siphon the power and effectiveness away from a church. In Joshua chapter seven we learn that Achan took some of the spoils of war that were banned but “*the anger of the LORD burned against the sons of Israel.*” The children of Israel defeated the inhabitants of Jericho by the power of God but when they went up against the city of Ai, they were defeat—they difference between their victory and failure was sin in the camp.

Because God is holy, He chooses to work through holy vessels. Sin blocks the flow of God’s power through individuals and through His church.

- Sin is like the clot in your arteries—depriving your body of life-giving, nutrient-rich blood
- Sin is like the kink in your water hose or the rust that forms in your water pipes—it reduces the water pressure and you can’t get anything done.
- Sin is like the mucous that clogs your sinuses and lungs and affects your breathing when you have a cold—your feel tired and sluggish because you aren’t getting the regular flow of oxygen you need.
- Sin is like the dirt and sediment that clogs the gas line of the fuel system in your car—when you need to accelerate you have no power and have to stay in the slow lane.
- Sin is like the viruses and spyware that slows down your computer—it keeps you from getting your work done.

All these clogs in one way or the other rob you of power; they stifle your effectiveness; they hinder your success; they rob you of life.

God wants to cleanse you of your sin. He wants infuse you with His power.