

Wrestling in Prayer

Sunday, February 7, 2021

A couple of weeks ago, I began a new series entitled “Wrestling In Paryer based on

Colossians 4:12

*12 Epaphras, who is one of you and a servant of Christ Jesus, sends greetings. He is always **wrestling in prayer** for you, that you may stand firm in all the will of God, mature and fully assured.*

We said that, for the most part, we view it as a commendation about Epaphras’ prayer life. However, I said that I felt there may more to the phrase “wrestling in prayer.” Principles that we all have to contend with when it comes to our prayer lives.

Transliteration: *agonizomai*

The word itself can mean to labor or strive earnestly or to contend, struggle, with difficulties and dangers antagonistic to the gospel

We began by re-examining the teaching that Jesus gave his disciples when they asked him to teach them to pray.

Matthew 6:5-14

5 “And when you pray, do not be like the hypocrites, for they love to pray standing in the synagogues and on the street corners to be seen by others. Truly I tell you, they have received their reward in full. 6 But when you pray, go into your room, close the door and pray to your Father, who is unseen. Then your Father, who sees what is done in secret, will reward you. 7 And when you pray, do not keep on babbling like pagans, for they think they will be heard because of their many words. 8 Do not be like them, for your Father knows what you need before you ask him.

9 “This, then, is how you should pray: “Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name,

10 your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven.

11 Give us today our daily bread.

12 And forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors.

13 And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from the evil one.

14 For if you forgive other people when they sin against you, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. 15 But if you do not forgive others their sins, your Father will not forgive your sins.

To review, we began by wrestling with some of the most basic principles of prayer

- Prayer is first and foremost about relationship
- Prayer is believing in and understanding who God is
*“Our Father **in heaven, hallowed be your name,***
- Prayer is not a formula

7 And when you pray, do not keep on babbling like pagans, for they think they will be heard because of their many words.

One of the issues we must WRESTLE with in regard to prayer is the temptation to reduce prayer to some sort of a formula. A formula says, if I do this, this, and this then I am guaranteed to get a certain outcome.

- Prayer is not telling God what to do
9 “This, then, is how you should pray: “Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name, 10 your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven.

When I pray, I must keep in perspective that He is God, and I am not. He is my father, He is set apart, it is His kingdom, and He rules supremely.

Having said that, as an earthly father, I love it when my kids ASK me. I delight to give them what they (politely and with proper respect) ASK me for (as long as I believe it is their best interest and will not harm them or lead them in a wrong direction

- Prayer is not bribing or manipulating God

As he introduces this prayer, Jesus speaks of the prayer practices of the pagans...

7 And when you pray, do not keep on babbling like pagans, for they think they will be heard because of their many words. 8 Do not be like them, for your Father knows what you need before you ask him.

Not only did the pagans believe their many words would earn an answer to their prayers, but they also believed they could bribe their gods

So many times, in prayer we fall into the trap of attempting to bribe or manipulate God. One example of this is the foxhole prayer. "Lord, if you get me out of this, I will serve you the rest of my life."

While some may actually keep that vow, we must remember that the reason God answered the prayer had much less to do with the promise made to him and much more to do with his infinite grace and love.

- Prayer is not bringing God into conformity with our will but bringing our will into conformity with God's

10 your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven.

Here we see the struggle in prayer, perhaps greater than anywhere else. Jesus not only taught us to pray this way, He showed us how to pray this way...

Luke 22:39-44

39** Jesus went out as usual to the Mount of Olives, and his disciples followed him. **40** On reaching the place, he said to them, "Pray that you will not fall into temptation." **41** He withdrew about a stone's throw beyond them, knelt down and prayed, **42** "Father, if you are willing, take this cup from me; **yet not my will, but yours be done.**" **43** An angel from heaven appeared to him and strengthened him. **44** And being in anguish, **he prayed more earnestly, and his sweat was like drops of blood falling to the ground.

We too must wrestle in prayer until, like Jesus, our prayers reflect a desire for His Kingdom and His Will, not our own.

This morning I want to look at the next part of Jesus teaching to His disciples and see what it has to teach us about Wrestling In Prayer.

Verse 11 says...

11 Give us today our daily bread.

Immediately, Jesus words bring to mind one of the greatest miracles of Provision ever given to God's Children

Exodus 16:35

³⁵ The Israelites ate manna forty years, until they came to a land that was settled; they ate manna until they reached the border of Canaan.

When God brought the Israelites out of Egypt they immediately began complaining about their lack of food and how they would rather be back in Egypt. Slaves but fed, at least according to them. God not only made provision for their need but taught them the daily

importance of Seeking Him, Obeying Him, Trusting Him. Each day they were to seek what they needed, and each day God would provide. They were to go out in the morning and there on the ground would be this bread from heaven. Everyone would always have enough. If they tried to save it over it would go bad. If they tried to go out on the sabbath and find it, it would not be there, because he had already given them twice as much as the day before. It was daily bread, and it was an answer to their daily need for provision.

Jesus draws upon this lesson to remind us that part of wrestling in prayer is the fact that it is a daily need in our life. We so often want prayer to work in the sense of an event. We pray, the need is answered... All is well. But so much of our prayer lives will be on going. It will sustain us for the day, and we will need to continue to receive help and substance from our God to make it through.

Jesus taught us to wrestle in prayer by praying for our daily bread.

There are 4 things that we wrestle with in this type of daily prayer

Philippians 4:6-7

⁶Do not be anxious about anything, but in every situation, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. ⁷And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.

1. We Wrestle to move from FEAR to FAITH

Daily bread is important to our survival. Without it we can not live. I can understand why the Israelites became afraid so quickly. Yes, they were in slavery, yes they were mistreated, but they had learned how to survive. They knew there would be something to eat.

But now they had no idea where their sustenance was going to come from. This is how it is when we wrestle with matters of prayer. Fear says where is the answer going to come from. How is this ever going to work out. There is no way in the natural that the need could be met.

So, we wrestle in prayer (remember prayer is first and foremost relationship with God) to move ourselves from a position of fear to a position of faith. Faith says, I am not going to dwell on the fear but on my God. I don't know how this is going to work out, but I put my faith in Him and not in my own ability

Hebrews 11:1-2

11 Now faith is confidence in what we hope for and assurance about what we do not see. ²This is what the ancients were commended for.

2. We Wrestle to move from DOUBT to TRUST

When it comes to wrestling in prayer, it is easy to be overcome with doubt. Remember the words of the Father who brought his son to Jesus' disciples. I believe, help my unbelief. Each day the Israelites had to wrestle with their own doubts or their trust in God.

It's one thing to be filled with trust in the morning when you are freshly gathering your manna for the day... but what about later that night. Will it be there tomorrow. What about the day before the sabbath. Will the manna show back up again after being gone for a day. Will I have enough to make it through. And what about a year from now. Will it continue.

As we wrestle in prayer we move from doubt to trust. Trust in the Lord with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding. In all your ways acknowledge Him and He will direct your paths.

We wrestle with the doubt and seek to replace it in prayer with trust. Trust that He will always provide. Trust that He is our Good shepherd and we shall not want.

It's ok to acknowledge the doubt. But don't dwell there. Trust that God will supply your need and go to Him in prayer and petition asking Him for what you need

3. We Wrestle to move from COMPLAINING to THANKSGIVING

One of the things we wrestle with in prayer is an attitude of complaining as opposed to thanksgiving

Paul said do not be anxious about anything, but in everything with prayer and petition with thanksgiving... The Israelites gave in to complaining rather than focusing on Thanksgiving. Thanksgiving for what they had as opposed to what they did not. Thanksgiving that God was getting them through each day for forty years. Thanksgiving that what He provided was enough.

As you pray, pray with a heart of thanksgiving for the daily goodness and provision of our God... Even it is saying God, thank you for this last breath that I took. Thank you that you haven't forgotten about me. Thank you that you hear me when I pray.

Thank you that you are with me always. Thank you for this daily bread that sustains me so perfectly.

4. We Wrestle to move from ANXIETY to PEACE

Paul said do not be anxious... If only it were that easy... But as we wrestle in prayer we move from the anxiety of our fears, our doubts and our complaints to the peaceful protection of heart hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. Peace comes as we wrestle in prayer and we can rest in the assurance of His peace.

I want to walk back through these points of wrestling prayer by taking a look at one more passage of scripture and how a father had to walk through them as well

Mark 5:21-43

²¹When Jesus had again crossed over by boat to the other side of the lake, a large crowd gathered around him while he was by the lake. ²²Then one of the synagogue leaders, named Jairus, came, and when he saw Jesus, he fell at his feet. ²³He pleaded earnestly with him, **“My little daughter is dying. Please come and put your hands on her so that she will be healed and live.”** (he began moving from fear to faith) ²⁴So Jesus went with him.

A large crowd followed and pressed around him. ²⁵And a woman was there who had been subject to bleeding for twelve years. ²⁶She had suffered a great deal under the care of many doctors and had spent all she had, yet instead of getting better she grew worse. ²⁷When she heard about Jesus, she came up behind him in the crowd and touched his cloak, ²⁸because she thought, “If I just touch his clothes, I will be healed.” ²⁹Immediately her bleeding stopped and she felt in her body that she was freed from her suffering.

³⁰At once Jesus realized that power had gone out from him. He turned around in the crowd and asked, “Who touched my clothes?”

³¹“You see the people crowding against you,” his disciples answered, “and yet you can ask, ‘Who touched me?’ ”

³²But Jesus kept looking around to see who had done it. ³³Then the woman, knowing what had happened to her, came and fell at his feet and, trembling with fear, told him the whole truth. ³⁴He said to her, “Daughter, your faith has healed you. Go in peace and be freed from your suffering.”

³⁵While Jesus was still speaking, some people came from the house of Jairus, the synagogue leader. **“Your daughter is dead,”** they said. **“Why bother the teacher anymore?”**

³⁶ Overhearing what they said, Jesus told him, **“Don’t be afraid; just believe.” (Jesus encourages him not to give up to wrestle in prayer and move from doubt to trust)**

³⁷ He did not let anyone follow him except Peter, James and John the brother of James. ³⁸ When they came to the home of the synagogue leader, Jesus saw a commotion, with **people crying and wailing loudly.** ³⁹ He went in and said to them, **“Why all this commotion and wailing? The child is not dead but asleep.” (The people were proclaiming death, when Jesus wanted to proclaim life – Thanksgiving is often the key to the life of that which seems dead)** ⁴⁰ But they laughed at him.

After he put them all out, he took the child’s father and mother and the disciples who were with him, and went in where the child was. ⁴¹ He took her by the hand and said to her, *“Talitha kum!”* (which means “Little girl, I say to you, get up!”). ⁴² Immediately the girl stood up and began to walk around (she was twelve years old). At this they were completely astonished. ⁴³ He gave strict orders not to let anyone know about this, and told them to give her something to eat. **(What peace must have filled the house as Jairus saw his daughter alive and eating something)**