

STOP WALKING DEAD

DEAD PRAYER LIFE PT 1

LEAD OFF

An older lady frequented a church located in the heart of a sketchy neighborhood in the Bronx. This lady would pray the same simple prayer over and over again when ever people would sit next to her or be in a group. Her prayer of few words was, "O Lord, thank you Jesus."

Week after week she prayed the same prayer. Kids would start laughing every time she opened her mouth to pray because they knew what was coming and would repeat the prayer along side her. "Oh Lord, Thank you Jesus."

The pastor one day asked her, "Why do you pray the same little prayer?" She said, "Well, I'm just combining the two prayers that I know. We live in a bad neighborhood and sometimes we hear gang activity, street fights, and guns going off during the night. When I hear things, I say, "Oh, Lord." But when I wake up in the morning and I see that we are okay I say, "Thank you Jesus." When I drop my baby off at the bus stop, and she leaves I worry about her, so I pray, "Oh Lord." When she gets off the bus in the afternoon and I see that she's okay I say, "Thank you Jesus."

"So when I come to church, I combine the only two prayers that I know, Oh Lord Thank you Jesus."

WHAT IS PRAYER?

Prayer is a powerful thing! It's also something that we have a tendency to over-complicate.

Prayer is simple. It's communication with God.

- The best way to communicate is to have two lines open going both ways between both parties.
- Your marriage wouldn't be a very good relationship if only one person ever talked.
 - Your best friend probably wouldn't feel so bestie towards you without giving and receiving communication

In the situations of us communicating with God –

- We communicate with Him using prayer
- He communicates with us primarily using His Word
 - He can also speak to us through the Holy Spirit
 - This is communication that will always line up with the Word, but may be more specific for us
 - People "hear God's voice" in a number of ways.

- We have to be careful with this as you must be able to decipher between the voice in your heard and God's
- For me, God's voice often is much smarter and direct than mine
- I don't hear an audible voice, only feel an impression on my heart
 - I sudden strong desire to say or do something

PRAYER IS A PRIVILEGE – THE GREATEST ONE

Prayer is the way we activate our relationship with God... it invites the presence of God into our lives.

This hasn't always been so easy.

- **(PIC)** In the OT days, in order to enter God's presence, you had to be this place in the tabernacle called the Holy of Holies
 - This place was covered by a large veil
 - This veil represented the divide or barrier that existed between God and man because of sin.
 - God's presence dwelled in the Holy of Holies
 - And the holiness of God could not be accessed by anyone but the High Priest.
 - Even the High Priest could only access the Holy of Holies one day a year on what was called Yom Kippur, or the Day of Atonement.
 - Before entering he had to make sacrifices for his own sin before he could enter the Holy of Holies and make a sacrifice for everyone's sins.
 - He had to perform certain rituals
 - Wash himself a certain way
 - Wear certain clothing
 - Listen to a Kari Jobe worship CD (describe what a CD is)
 - Bring burning incense to let the smoke cover his eyes from making direct view of God
 - And bring sacrificial blood with him
 - If the High Priest had any sin that hadn't been atoned for... he would die, so they tied a rope on his foot, so they could pull him out if he was struck dead.
 - If there is anything that hasn't changed in the last 2000 years it's that nobody likes dead bodies in a church

How would you like a scenario, where the only way you had access to God was through these methods?

- I mean some of us get annoyed when the show intro plays during our Netflix binges
 - "So no one told you life was going to be this way. CLAP CLAP CLAP CLAP"
- Because of what Jesus did the veil came down (VERSE) literally
 - Matthew 27:50-51 - "When Jesus had cried out again in a loud voice, he gave up his spirit. At that moment the curtain of the temple was torn in two from top to bottom"
- We now have access to God anywhere and anytime through Jesus' name.
- Think about that.
 - It's one of the highest privileges we obtain when we become Christians.
 - God listens to us!

We no longer need the temple rituals and processes of sacrifice, because Jesus' death ratified that system.

- We now have access to God through Jesus.... anytime we want it.

THE TENSION IS... WHY DON'T WE UTILIZE THIS?

The tension here is then... why don't we utilize this?

- Why then... if most of us were honest in this room that our prayer lives are weak, on life support, zombie-ified, or dead?
- If prayer is one of the greatest privileges that were birthed out of Jesus' sacrifice, why don't we do it?

REASONS WE DON'T PRAY

There are all kind of excuses people make for the reason why they aren't good at praying.

- Intimidation
- Don't have enough time
- Don't know how
- Don't think God will listen
- Prayer will not be answered

People in general get intimidated by prayer, because they don't feel like they know how.

- I mean what if I start saying a bunch of stuff and all of the sudden my car stops working, a meteor crashes through the earth, or Vince McMahon starts up the XFL again?
- So there is fear associated with praying the wrong way.

So let's look into the Scripture where Jesus teaches us how to pray.

Jesus teaches us how to pray in Matthew's Gospel.

Matthew 6:9-13 NIV

"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.'

I want to break this down, because inside of it is the core to what it will take to revitalize our prayer life. That's the point of this series, is to bring to life these areas that have fallen dead.

Today, I want to start by covering the most important line of the whole prayer... the address to who you're talking to:

"OUR FATHER IN HEAVEN"

THE REALITY IS THAT A DEAD PRAYER LIFE IS NOT A TIME OR KNOWLEDGE ISSUE, IT'S A RELATIONSHIP ISSUE.

- We don't pray because we don't know how to approach Dad.
- We don't pray because we aren't confident in the relationship dynamics with the Father.

Hebrews 4:16 NIV

Let us then approach God's throne of grace with confidence, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help us in our time of need.

If you struggle in your prayer life, it's not because of the layers of excuses that we've developed, those are just symptoms.

- **The underlying cause is we don't understand who God is because we don't truly know Him.**
- **If we understood him better** or knew him, our prayer lives would be different.
 - We would understand that you don't avoid him during struggles, but you go to him.
 - We shouldn't avoid him when we screw up, but we should go to him.
- But instead we are **starved – dehydrated of the Father's presence in our lives...** like a marriage gone sour when the partners cease to genuinely communicate their heart

A DEAD PRAYER LIFE MATTERS, BECAUSE IT'S A SYMPTOM OF A RELATIONSHIP WITH GOD ON LIFE SUPPORT.

OUR FATHER IN HEAVEN

"Our Father in Heaven"

- I want to start here.
- The focus of prayer is not prayer, it's the Father.
 - If you simply this to having a conversation with a loving Dad, then it makes things easier.
 - Or does it?

- For some of you talking to a loving Dad, makes things more complicated.

I AM ONE OF THE PRIVILEGED PEOPLE THAT GREW UP WITH A GREAT DAD.

- My dad wasn't perfect, but he was a loving, benevolent, and attentive father.
- He had a stern hand that found the broad side of my tush, and had gentle voice as he sat me down to explain why I couldn't pull my brother's hair or pee on the neighbor's dog.

Here is what I also understand... people with my experience of having a good father is becoming the minority.

SOME OF YOU IN THIS ROOM ARE THINKING... COOL BRO.

- Glad your dad was great... mine was a real dumpster fire of a human being.
- Maybe your dad wasn't even around.

I don't know what your experience with an earthly father was or is... but what I do know is it has a way of distorting our ability to truly know THE father.

MODERN CULTURE VIEW OF DAD

- Our world is growing more and more confused.
- Look at how Dads are portrayed on modern TV shows and movies.
 - Long gone are the days of Leave it to Beaver and Danny Tanners
 - No more Carl Winslows or Andy Taylors
 - They've been replaced with Phil Dunphy's and Peter Griffins.
- Almost every version of a dad being played on TV is an embecel, moron, out of touch idiot, adulterer, abuser.
 - The dad is never the hero of the story, instead it's the kid or the pet.
 - These stories and movies are being written by a generation that grew up with father wounds.
 - The dad wasn't the hero, he wasn't the leader, and a lot of times he wasn't even there.
- Dads have been made into this caricature that is nothing but a cheap joke.

The way we see Dads have changed, because of the multitude of poor examples.

So when we say... Our Father.

- Many of you can't even get past that point.
- Because the word Father doesn't bring up a positive image in your head
- Whether you realize it or not, your perspective about who God is is skewed because of the lens of your experience.

HARSH AND DEMANDING FATHER

Maybe you grew up with a harsh and demanding father.

- A father that demanded good results, but never showed love and affirmation.

- Maybe a father that the only way you could get any attention was by playing sports.
 - Translate that into “Our Father”
 - And you see God with a tendency to focus on his judgement over grace
 - You rarely approach God for a relationship because you don’t see him as a Father that offers that, you only talk to Him when you need to **ask forgiveness**
 - **Not out of remorse, but fear of divine punishment.**

PUSH OVER DAD

Maybe you had a push over Dad that never or rarely told you no.

- A dad that was more concerned with being your friend or your friend’s friends.
- He never established guardrails and never prepared you for the sting of the real world discipline
 - You probably have a tendency to focus heavily on **God’s grace**, and ignore consequences
 - And now you only approach God to bail you out of situations where the absence of guardrails got you in trouble.

WORK A HOLIC DAD

Maybe you grew up with a workaholic dad. One that prioritized his job over you.

- And now you don’t approach God because you see him as too busy to have a relationship with.
- You develop a sense of **inferiority** because you’re not important enough.

EMOTIONALLY ABSENT DAD

Maybe you grew up with an emotionally absent father.

- We see a figure that is supposed to be a father, but there is no open shoulder to cry on or share your pain with.
- Now we only see an authority figure instead of a Father
 - **As Psalm 34:18 states: “Is close to the brokenhearted and saves those who are crushed in spirit.”**
 - **Find emotional comfort in others that at times have a tendency to open someone up to inappropriate relationships**

ABSENT FATHER

Maybe your dad wasn’t around at all.

- So to you, the existence of God is something you struggle with.
- This whole God thing is a façade.
 - It’s impossible for a Father to be good, to care, to love, to have grace... because I’ve never seen a father like that.
 - I’ll believe it when I see it.

OUR PERCEPTION OF HOW A FATHER OPERATES EFFECTS THE WAY WE COME TO GOD.

- We project our pain, our loss, our unmet expectations, and our disappointments from our earthly father unto our Heavenly Father.

You see... it's hard to get past even the first line.

- How can we come to the Father if we don't know who he is?
- How can we know who he is unless we take off the lens of our experience that has distorted the Heavenly Father into something he's not.
- **Despite all of the bad examples out there... it doesn't change who He is.**
- **We must know THE Father**

If we don't understand who he is, then we cannot approach the throne of grace with confidence, because we don't understand the relationship dynamics that are really there.

OUR GOD IS PERFECT IN EVERY WAY.

- He's gracious, forgiving, and pursues you.
- He wants nothing more than to have a relationship with you

THE REAL FATHER

"Our Father in Heaven."

- So let's lay aside what we've experienced, and let's step into a way of looking at this that may help us understand and see past our lens of experience.
 - Imagine you're watching a movie, and as the plot is unfolding you see a child that is an abandoned, abused, orphaned, and neglected. One day a loving, gracious man approaches this child and gets down on one knee. This man looks in the child's eyes and smiles really big.
 - See some of you in the room have already had your senses alarms going off saying... call 911 there is a man approaching a child.
 - But this man speaks to this orphan child, "Today I've chosen to adopt you. From this day forward you are my child. You will take my last name and you will inherit everything I have. You're being adopted into a large family. You have many brothers and sisters that can't wait to meet you and love you. I will never, ever give up on you. Nothing you do or say will make me love you less. I will always pursue you and forgive you. I'll never betray you, harm you, walk out on you, or give up on you.
 - That child who has lived a hard life will be skeptical to say the least. "Is this man trustworthy? Is he safe? What's the catch?" But over time the child realizes the Father is safe, loves with a love that forgives my greatest mistakes and never gives up on me. This is a Father that pays attention to me and wants to talk to me. This is a Father that gives me his full attention at a moments notice.

All that seems like the plot line to a really cool Hallmark movie.

- It's not... it's not a plotline.

- **It's God's reality for you.**

He's your dad. And you have his attention.

- **Some of you may say... well sure he's my dad, but he doesn't answer my prayers. We will get to that next week.**
- **This week... what you need to know is God is a Good Father.**
 - **We don't always know what that looks like, but it doesn't change who He is.**
 - **He really, really wants to spend time with you.**
 - **And for some of you, he really, really misses you.**