

November 13, 2011
How To Pray For Your Problems
How Prayer Can Change Your Life series (Part 3B)
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Last week we talked about how we need to have faith when we pray and how faith comes from hearing God's message to us which He sends through His word. We talked about the two words in the Greek language for the English word "word", *logos* and *rama*. The word of God becomes a personal message to us by the power of the Holy Spirit in our lives, transforming God's general word to all people into a specific word to us that helps us with a specific concern at specific times in our lives. As you read God's word, a verse jumps out at you and that message from God is just what you need to hear in order to face a particular problem. That personal word to us is God's gift to us to teach, guide and remind us. It is the work of the Holy Spirit to transform God's general word to all people (God's *logos*) into a specific word to us concerning a specific situation we are facing (God's *rama*). It is our job to read the Bible with an open heart - praying for illumination. When we listen, we hear God speak in a fresh new way and in that message there is a promise we can claim and use as we pray for our problems. The promises of God are the keys to answered prayer.

There's not a person in this room who isn't dealing with some kind of a problem that seems beyond your control. It may be a health issue, or a financial issue, or a relationship issue or a spiritual issue. It might be a behavioral issue - some bad habit or compulsive behavior that has a strong hold on you. Everyone is dealing with some struggle and that is why I want to give you **seven steps** when praying about a problem or a difficult decision. I guarantee that you're going to need these steps in your life because life is full of problems. So here are the seven steps to praying for your problems.

Step one is CONFESS any known SIN in your life. Confess that sin and restore the broken channel of communication with God that is caused by sin. God is a holy God. We cannot come into His presence clinging to our sin. We have to let it go. We have to leave it behind us and we have to come before God clothed in the righteousness of Jesus Christ. There is no other way. 1st John 1:9 says, *"If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness."* We've got to confess our sins and be made clean before we can hear God speak. It's the filth in our lives that makes us deaf to God.

Step two is COMMIT the DECISION to Christ. Now what does that mean? It means you give to God the right to decide the outcome of your problem. You place it in His hands. You lay it before Him saying, *"Here's my problem, Lord. I give it to you. Lead, guide and direct me in the way I should go."* We have to trust God with it. Proverbs 3:5 & 6 says, *"Trust in the Lord with all your heart. Lean not on your own understanding. In all of your ways acknowledge him and he will make your path straight."* Things seem pretty crooked and bumpy right now? - A little rocky and tough going? Commit it to Christ and allow Him to smooth things out. Put yourself in neutral gear. You don't have to be the driving force if

you're willing to trust God. Once you get your desires out of the way, then you can begin to hear God lead, guide and direct you.

Step three is ASK God to REVEAL His will by giving you a DESIRE. Once you have your desires out of the way, then you are open to receive a desire from God. Some people think that if they desire something it means God must not be for it. That's not true. If we read God's word with our desires out of the way, then God can give us the desire He wants us to have. When we desire something with a God given desire, that's a good thing. Psalm 37:4 says, *"Delight yourself in the Lord and he will give you the desires of your heart."* If you're trying to do what is right, then your desire will be in line with God's will. If you're not sure whether a desire is from you or from God, ask God for wisdom. James 1:5 says, *"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."* Pray, "Lord, give me the desire to do the right thing." And He will! Philippians 2:13 says, *"For it is God who works in you to will and to act according to his good purpose."* Once we have a desire concerning a particular problem, then we test it with the test of time. We pray, "Lord, if this is what you want me to do then make my desire stronger."

Step four is COMPARE your desire with SCRIPTURE. The Holy Spirit never leads us contrary to Scripture. If you don't know the Bible very well, then it will be hard to test your desire with Scripture. In the book of James, third chapter, verse 17 we are given **eight tests** for discerning if a desire you have is from God. It says, *"The wisdom that comes from heaven is first of all pure; then peace-loving, considerate, submissive, full of mercy and good fruit, impartial and sincere."* If you have a desire that is sinful, it's not from God. If you have a desire to stir up trouble, it's not from God. If you have a desire that is inconsiderate of others, it's not from God. If you have a desire that is bullheaded, it's not from God. If you have a desire that is full of judgment, it's not from God. If you have a desire that will bring a rotten outcome, it's not from God. If you have a desire that is showing favoritism and is insincere, it's not from God. Don't allow yourself to work against God. Give your desires the test of scripture.

Step five is LISTEN for God to give you a PERSONAL promise. Listen for God to speak to you personally. How He will do that is through the Bible. Many people never hear God speak to them personally because they never read God's word - they never open the Bible and read it, letting God speak to them. And you can't just open the Bible and point to a verse and expect that to be the verse God is speaking to you personally through. It doesn't work that way. You don't just randomly flip through the Bible and point to a verse and expect that to be the verse God means for you to claim as His personal word to you. Some people do that, you know. That's just too much of a short cut. You may end up like the man who prayed for direction. Then he opened his Bible and pointed to a verse and it said, *"And Judas went out and hung himself."* He thought, *"That can't be right."* So he tried again, randomly flipping through the Bible, pointing at a verse, and the verse said, *"Go and do like-wise."* The guy said, *"Whoa, that can't be right."* So he tried it again and the verse said, *"What thou doest, do quickly."*

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That's the kind of results you get when you try to take a short cut when reading the Bible. There is no substitute for reading God's word daily, working through a book, asking the Holy Spirit to give you the ability to see God's personal word to you for the problems you face. It really is amazing what the Holy Spirit will do when we open our hearts to Him - when we listen for God to speak - when we expect God to speak.

The *rama* of God, the personal word to you will come in a variety of ways. It might come through reading a verse and that verse just stands out on the page. It may come to you in a church service when you hear God's word in a song or in a sermon and it jumps out at you and sticks in your mind. That's a *rama* - a personal word to you from God. That's why it's so important to come to church for worship. It may come to you through a Bible study, maybe something someone in the group shared or something in the lesson. That's why it's so important to be involved in a Bible study group, reading the Bible with others. Rick Warren says, "**Your prayer life will never be stronger than your understanding of scripture.**" You've got to study God's word to strengthen your prayer life.

God may speak to you through a conversation with a Christian friend who isn't afraid to share how God has spoken to them. You may hear God speak to you through a sermon tape or music CD, maybe even through a Christian radio broadcast or TV message. You never know where a *rama* is going to come from. But God will send you one if you are listening and the foundation of that *rama* will be the Bible.

First you confess to God, then you put your desires in neutral gear. Then you ask God to give you His desire. Then you test that desire with Scripture. Then you listen for God's *rama* - His personal word to you. Do you know why 95% of Christians never hear God speak a personal word to them? Why is that? -Because they're too busy! They're too much in a hurry. We want God to speak to us now, but God wants to prepare us so that when we hear his word we'll be ready to do it. God speaks to those who are willing to take the time to listen. If you're in a hurry, then you've already made up your mind and you don't really want God's opinion. We've got to take time to listen to God.

Step six is CLAIM the promise with CONFIDENCE. When God speaks to your heart through His word, claim that promise to be fulfilled in your life. Go ahead and thank Him for what He is going to do for you with confidence, knowing it's on the way. It's like when our daughter call from college in Bristol, Tennessee, and she asks us to send her something she needs. The next day she may call again to see if we've mailed it yet. If we have, she says "**Thank you.**" Why does she say thank you when she hasn't received it yet? Because she has confidence that what she has asked for is on the way and it's just a matter of time before she receives it. That's the way we should pray - claiming the promise that God has revealed to us and thanking Him because it's on the way.

If we've confessed our sins we have open communication with God; and if we've honestly prayed, "Not my will, but thy will be done," about our problem; and if we've asked God to give us the desire He wants us to have; and if we've tested that desire with Scripture and if we've

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listened for God's confirmation - His personal word to us in the way of a promise, then we can **CLAIM THE PROMISE** as we pray with confidence.

Step seven is **WAIT** for God to **FULFILL** the promise. Don't try to make it happen on your own. In fact, don't move into action until God says, "**Go**." When God gives you an idea, He does it in **three parts**. **First**, He says what He's going to do. **Then** He says how He's going to do it. And **then** He tells us when. The biggest mistake people make is, we get the message of what He's going to do but we don't wait for the message of how He's going to do it, or when he's going to do it. We get an idea of what God wants for us and then we try to move forward without God, thinking He doesn't care how it's done or when. We try to force it and rush it rather than waiting for God's timing. We'll know its God's timing when things start to fall into place. When it's not working, we need to stop trying to make it happen and wait on God. If we keep trying to make something happen and God's not in it, it won't happen. We'll just be setting ourselves up for disappointment.

When God says, "**Go**", we have to take a step of faith and move out of our comfort zone and do what He leads, guides and directs us to do. Think of Peter. He never would have walked on the water if he'd stayed in the boat. If you want to walk on water, you've got to get out of the boat. You've got to take that step. You've got to take a leap of faith.

These are the steps to addressing the problems in our lives. Some of you are facing some very heavy problems right now. Those problems are weighing you down and robbing you of the joy God wants you to have as His people. Some of you are facing difficult decisions that are weighing heavy on your mind. There's a tendency to be afraid and frightened by the uncertainty. Listen to this verse. It's for you. 2nd Timothy, chapter 1, verse 7 says, "**God has not given us a spirit of fear, but of power and of love and of a sound mind.**" As you work through these seven steps God will remove your fear, He will give you His power, and you'll see that you are not losing your mind. Your thinking will be sound, resting on the solid foundation of God's word.

God wants to work in everyone's life. That's a *logos* - a general truth to everyone. God wants to work in your life personally. That's a *rama* - that personal promise to you.