



**Live Q&A on Prayer
Selected Scriptures**

GraceLife: December 10, 2006

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The following questions and answers occurred before a live audience.

I want to open our time up questions and answers on the whole matter of prayer, particularly related to the passage in Matthew 6:5-8. I'd invite you to turn there. Let me read that passage to kind of set it in our minds. Jesus said:

When you pray, you are not to be like the hypocrites; for they love to stand and pray in the synagogues and on the street corners so that they may be seen by men. Truly, I say to you, they have their reward in full. But you, when you pray, go into your inner room, close your door, and pray to your Father who is in secret; and your Father who sees what is done in secret will reward you. And when you are praying, do not use meaningless repetition as the Gentiles do; for they suppose that they will be heard for their many words. So do not be like them; for your Father knows what you need before you ask Him.

Just to kind of get everybody thinking in the same direction as we talk about this, one of the things that I tried to emphasize last week is that all of us to one degree or another are dissatisfied with the quality of our prayer lives. That's a common experience among Western society Christians I think.

My perception, right or wrong, is we usually try to address that lack in our prayer lives by making a greater commitment to pray. "I'm going to get up earlier; I'm going to pray longer; I'm going to try harder."

The more that you go down that road, sooner or later you realize it's a dead end. That road isn't leading anywhere. That effort, when it's just simply driven by, "I'm going to try harder," will usually lead you to discouragement or a sense of self-righteousness as the case may be.

What I believe we see in this passage – it's just very refreshing – is what Jesus does when He goes to teach on prayer. Look at the beginning of verse 5. He simply says "When you pray." He doesn't lay out a complicated schedule, time deadlines, or minimum time amounts that you are supposed to pray. It's very broad; it's very general; when you pray, this is what should be on your mind. Basically, He lays out two motivations for you to pray that are completely different from where normally our minds go on their own when we are thinking apart from the Scriptures.

First of all, Jesus says, you should go to prayer because of *the person of God*. Notice what He says in verse 6: “Pray to your Father who is in secret, and your Father who sees what is done in secret will reward you.” The character of God, the goodness of God, the omniscience of God, His promise and His grace to bless you as you pray are what Jesus says should motivate you to pray. You’re drawn to the person of God rather than putting more pressure on yourself to do more than you are already doing.

Secondly, you should go to prayer based on *the promise of God*. Look at the end of verse 8: “Do not be like them...” Do not be like those who pray long, meaningless repetitions in their prayer. Forget about them. Forget about that approach. He says: “Your Father knows what you need before you ask Him.” So there is this promise that He is going to bless you; He is going to reward you. Matthew 6:6: Your Father who sees what is done in secret will reward you.”

We’re drawn by the fact that prayer is not an arbitrary mechanical process that we have to go through to maintain favor with God. No—when we go to prayer with our hearts warmed by His character and we lay our hearts out before Him, Jesus says, “He will reward you.”

I don’t know about you, but that makes me want to pray and be drawn to this God who is good and who knows me and to this God who says your time in private prayer before me is never wasted; I’ll always reward that. That makes us want to pray a whole lot more and it makes us pray a whole lot differently than saying, “Okay, let’s get the watch out; I’ve got to do 45 minutes—go.” I hate that. I utterly detest that and that has never motivated me to truly pray. When my mind is focused on the character of God and that He wants to reward me for praying, that changes the whole dynamic and that’s what I want us to be able to kind of focus our questions and answers on this morning.

It would be a whole lot easier for you to ask questions if I would just stop talking; so I’m going to stop talking. There are some guys with microphones in the back and if you have a question, they will bring a microphone to you. Let me encourage you to ask. In a room of this size, there are no unique questions. If the question is on your mind, there are about a dozen other people who are thinking the same thing. There are no silly questions, dumb questions, or anything like that. We just want to be able to use this time.

Travis, I think you had a question to kind of get the ball rolling—didn’t you?

Q: The question that came to my mind is, when we look back to church history and we are all inspired by people who pray; we think about William Carey or William Wilberforce, or James who they called old camel knees because he spent so much time on his knees in prayer, how do we think about those people who did spend a lot of time in prayer as a motivation for our own prayer life, or should they be?

A: Well, that’s a good question, Travis; I’ve wrestled with that myself. I would say a couple of things. First of all, I think it’s just fair to remember that they were living in a

different kind of society; they were living in a different time of life; different social structures and things were a little different for them. So I'm hesitant to take a pattern from another time and place and immediately impose it upon this time and place as the obligation.

Also, whatever those good examples are in prayer; we still need to just go back to the Scriptures and realize that Jesus didn't make that the standard. Jesus said, "When you pray," whether you are praying for five minutes or ten minutes; if you are praying for four or five hours; whatever it is, this is what your prayer should look like.

My encouragement to you is to forget about praying longer. I know that's counter intuitive, but rather than making your focus praying longer, make your focus that you are going to pray *better*. You are going to pray with greater concentration, greater consciousness of the person of God, and greater consciousness that He is going to bless you. Pray better and then the length of your prayer is going to take care of itself. The more you pray focused on the character of God, approaching God in a consciousness of His goodness and His promise to bless, your heart is going to just want to naturally pray.

Al, we need to think beyond the block of time that we spend actually focused on prayer and recognize prayer as a lifestyle thing that goes on throughout the day. You take two minutes to pray when you are at a traffic light and not let those giants of prayer make you think about what your shortcomings in prayer. Let the words of Jesus and the character of God draw you into becoming something better in prayer than what you've been today.

Hello Hani. It's good to see you. How are you?

Q: I think prayer is very important to a person's life, but I'm intrigued by today's media and how they approach prayer and may be you could comment a little bit about the kind of this specificity when praying. Because folks will say, well if you want this, be specific with God and the more specific you are, because I think the Lord's prayer is in generality, but folks in the media today talk about if you want this, you pray specifically for that and God will reward your prayer or answer your prayer.

A: Couple of things come to my mind on that. If I can just restate your question, Hani, I state it like this. How specific do we get in prayer? Do we approach prayer as a "name it and claim it" kind of thing where we put the prayer into the vending machine of God and out comes what we asked for?

I was cured of that way of praying by the events early in my Christian life. I think ultimately that approach to prayer is again going to lead you to another dead end. There's no doubt in my mind about that because God answers prayer according to His will.

Let's say you've got two people with the same disease and they are both praying for healing. "I've got cancer. Lord, I pray that you would heal me." Sometimes God is

pleased to answer that prayer and grant greater physical life. But for the other person, the cancer takes their life; maybe into an eternal judgment; maybe into heaven.

But sooner or later, that prayer for healing is going to be answered “no” because Hebrews 9:27 says: “It is appointed for man to die once and after that to face judgment.” So sooner or later, if we are always praying for healing (just making an illustration of your point here), sooner or later, God is going to say no. So that means that we can’t make healing the focus of our prayer.

I remember the personal thing that I was talking about that cured me of praying--of insisting on certain result in prayer. It was when I was praying for my dad’s salvation. Then he died suddenly in a plane crash with no outward evidence that my prayers over five years or so had been answered.

I had to step back and kind of reassess what is it that I want out of prayer because I can’t know for sure what God is going to do in response to my prayers. I don’t want to set myself up for that kind of profound disappointment.

Secondly, I want God to do His will. And so as you look at Matthew 6:10 here, Jesus says: “Your kingdom come, your will be done.” Jesus teaches us to use prayer as a means to ask God to do His will. His will always is going to be better than mine. His ways are higher than mine. What He thinks and what He accomplishes in His perfect will is always going to be better than what I think up on my own—right?

(He is nodding “yes” for those of you that can’t see, so he is right with me. I like this.)

So the desire that I think we bring to prayer is, “God, I want to see your will done.” And so the prayer becomes the means of bringing our hearts into submission to what God’s will is and yielding ourselves in prayer. As we’re praying, God molds our heart in submission to His will. That’s the opposite of using prayer as a means to mold God’s will to mine.

I don’t want God to do my will. I really don’t. I’d rather have Him do His will since He is a whole lot smarter than I am and He knows what the long term plans on things are going to be. That frees me up from trying to figure out what it is I’m supposed to pray for; what do I want this situation to come out and be like. I don’t know. I don’t know what’s best.

Now with that said, turn also to 1 Peter 5 because that plays in here as well. 1 Peter 5:6-7. Peter said:

Humble yourselves under the mighty hand of God that He may exalt you at the proper time; casting all your anxiety on Him because He cares for you.

So there is this intimacy where all of the burdens of our heart; we come and we bring those and we lay them out before the Lord in prayer and we can be very specific on that.

But what I'm saying is as you are pouring out your heart in prayer, you are always doing it in the bigger context. There is a bigger context of who this good and great God is that I'm praying to and I'm asking Him to work out His will in the midst of those anxieties that I feel in my daily life. Does that help? Thank you for the great question.

Q: (a child): The people in the old days and sometimes these days, why didn't they get what they wanted?

A: Why didn't get what they wanted? Sometimes these days my own prayers don't work out the way that I think. That's a great question. I think the answer to that is that God answers our prayers according to what He thinks is best. That's even better for us than getting what we want in prayer because He is always giving us what is good and what is wise. So sometimes God says no even when we pray sincerely so that His will can be accomplished.

If you think about it, even Jesus, when He was praying, He said, "Father, if it is possible, let this cup pass from me, but nevertheless, not my will but thine be done." Jesus modeled for us the kind of submission to God that says, "God, here is what I want, but even more than what I want, I want what you want." I think that's always where we want to end up in prayer—okay?

He is smiling and happy, so I must have not done too bad on that one.

Q: I was kind of curious from my parenting perspective, how do you teach your kids to pray? Should we teach them to pray, particularly if we have a view that God doesn't answer prayers of sinners because they are not saved yet necessarily?

A: Everyone understand this? The question is what do you teach your kids about praying if God doesn't answer the prayers of the wicked? Psalm 66:18 says: "If I regard wickedness in my heart, you will not hear."

I think prayer is part of a bigger perspective on what you are trying to do in raising up your children in the nurture and admonition of the Lord. We've always wanted to teach our kids to pray from the very youngest time that they can form the earliest babble on their lips in order to teach them and encourage them and train them in the practice of going to God and establishing that pattern in their mind that they go to God with their needs; with their wants, and to worship Him.

As you go along, you are also teaching them that they are not Christians just because they are born into a Christian family; that they themselves need to repent and put their faith in Christ or they will never be saved. You kind of run those parallel tracks as you raising your children over a number of years.

The alternative to me, the idea of saying, "you can't pray because you're not saved," that alternative for some reason strikes me as unthinkable because what did Jesus do when there were little children and the disciples tried to shoo them off? He said no; "Let the

little children come to me.” He wanted to receive the children. He laid hands on them. He blessed them and all of that. He welcomes those children into His presence and I want my children to think of Him as one who receives them.

As they are growing and as they are getting older, you are simultaneously talking about the reality of sin and trusting the Spirit of God to work that out in their hearts according to the will of God. So that’s how we’ve tried to approach it over the years.

Q: How is it that we truly discern when a door is closed and when a door is open? I’ve been in times and situations I sometimes have the ability when I’m faced with the door to be able to; I mean obviously not when God does, but to be able to open it. I don’t know if you understand what I’m trying to get at. How do you discern when God doesn’t want you to proceed on something?

A: It’s a little more of a question of how we know the will of God in certain circumstances. I think the proverb that comes to my mind is: “The mind of man plans its way; but the Lord directs his steps.”

As we are going through life contemplating major decisions or minor decisions for that matter, we are committing those to God. We are evaluating them in light of what Scriptures would teach that would guide our thinking. Then we act upon the information that we have and make the best decision that we can according to our wisdom at the time.

If that doesn’t work out, well, I don’t think we have to go back and reevaluate was I sinning or anything like that. We just trust the fact that we make our decisions as God’s providence is unfolding in our lives. We trust Him to work all things together for good even if someone meant something for evil against me. God can use even that for good.

So I just trust in the greater overarching sovereignty of God and the intricacies of His providence; and that He is ultimately is going to accomplish what He intends for my life. That lets me make decisions from a position of confidence and trust that ultimately God is going to cause all things to work together for me for good because I love Him and I’m called according to His purpose. That takes the pressure off and you just act according to the best wisdom that you have at the time as your mind is filled with the Scriptures. As you are committing things to prayer, you let God work it out according to His plans. Is that helpful? Good, thank you.

Q: In Matthew 6:8, we’re reminded by Jesus when He teaches us that God knows our prayer requests or prayers even before they are asked. So why pray?

A: Great question. Why do you pray if God already knows the answer? I won’t try to be comprehensive in my response to that. But I would say at least two things.

If you go down a little bit further (and we’ll talk about this in the weeks to come), Jesus goes on and teaches us to pray: “Give us this day our daily bread...” One of the reasons that we pray is to acknowledge our dependence upon Him when we do so. We have this

need, whatever it may be, and God already knows about it. When we pray, we're acknowledging a whole lot just by the little action of prayer. We're acknowledging that we can't control our own circumstances; we're acknowledging our dependence upon Him; our trust in Him to be a loving and wise Father; to be able to work these things out according to what is best.

And also secondly I would say this; it prepares us to receive His blessing. When we have a need and we bring it to God and we pray to Him about that need and then we see the resolution of that need, then God is glorified; our hearts are encouraged because we are living out life in a daily way that helps us to see God working it out. Prayer is one of the means that it is accomplished. It helps us to glorify Him and it deepens our trust in Him. He is honored when we are most gladly expressing our dependence upon Him.

So, the very important point; we're not informing God of anything when we pray. He already knows. And so there is something else that's going on there and what I see is that spirit of dependence that comes from being a disciple who is poor in spirit and dependent upon God and saying, "God, I'm here by your act of creation. I'm in your family by the act of regeneration, and as one of your children, I'm walking through life depending on you; wanting to see your will done, and trusting you for how it all works out."

Q: You know how Christians, when you pray, we end our prayer, "in Jesus' name," some people would even say, "in Jesus' name by the Holy Spirit." Applying it to the teaching last week, it's becoming like repetitious word. It seems like it is a meaningless word sometimes when you say at the end. What is the biblical support that we have to say that; or does it have a biblical support?

A: I think what we want to recognize and remember in that Jesus said, "If you ask anything in my name, my Father will do it." And so that's the biblical reason to do it. You are raising a good question and we don't want to turn that into the kind of meaningless repetition that Jesus condemns there in verse 7, "When you are praying, do not use meaningless repetition..."

What we want to do and what we could all probably do better about doing is recognizing the significance of what it means when we say we're praying in Jesus' name. That is really a rich concept. What we're saying is that we are coming on His merits. It's because Jesus brought us into the family of God through His death and resurrection, brought us to faith in Christ, and it's through His merits and through his authority that we're able to come to God at all.

I'm clothed in the righteousness of Christ. I'm clothed in the invitation of Christ when I come in prayer. And so if I come and I'm praying with those conscious thoughts in mind, then I'm expressing the fullness of what it really means to come in Jesus' name. I'm coming on the authority and in the righteousness of Christ because He has bid me to come.

If we slip into just turning that into a mindless thing that's more like a punctuation mark that really means, "And that's all I have to say," you're right. We need to avoid that. But if, as we're saying "in Jesus' name," we're conscious of all that it means, then that can summarize the fullness of why we're in the presence of God in the first place. Okay?

Q: One of the precious privileges about being a Christian is that you have a relationship with our heavenly Father which is precious to us. One of my questions is what is the importance of Scripture in the sense of prayer? If you do not put Scripture, sometimes you become very self-centered and you do not see beyond yourself sometimes when you do not put Scripture first. What is the importance in your view, Mr. Green?

A: As you are asking your question, Dmitri, what comes to my mind is Romans 12, verse 2 where the apostle Paul said – not necessarily in the context of prayer – but he says:

Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind so that you may prove what the will of God is; that which is good and acceptable and perfect.

As we are soaking our minds in the Scripture and being mindful of what God has said His will is in the Scripture, and who God is in the Scripture, we are able to pray the way that we should. We want to keep in mind the person of God and His promise to bless us as we go to prayer. So we come to the Scriptures to keep renewing our minds continually about who this great God is that we serve, who this great God is that we are praying to, how He worked out things in history, how He answered the prayers of saints in biblical times, and that becomes the model through which we conform ourselves to prayer.

What I think is interesting in the context of the Sermon on the Mount is that after Jesus gave us this instruction Matthew 6:5-8, He then goes and gives us specific content to our prayers. That tells me God understands how hopelessly inept we are at praying if we are left to ourselves. And so Jesus not only tells us how to pray and why to pray, but then He goes on and says here are the themes that should mark your prayer life—the glory of God, your dependence on God, His kingdom, His will, your forgiveness. Those things become the rails upon which the train of our prayer life ought to run. Was that helpful?

Q: As a follow-up to Cindy's question, I would like to hear you again—if a child does not know God; if he is not saved, should we teach him to worship and to pray? Can you speak on that again?

A: Yes. What comes to my mind on that (and that's a good follow-up question), in Psalm 100 that we studied together back in February I think. Psalm 100:1, the Psalmist says:

Shout joyfully to the Lord all the earth. Serve the Lord with gladness; come before Him with joyful singing.

It is only right for our children and all of the world because of the inherent worth of God, because of the inherent greatness and goodness of God even in just sustaining His creation and giving it life and giving it breath, it is right and proper for all men to be called to worship this God upon whom they depend for their very existence.

The fact that some men reject that call and stiffen their neck against it doesn't mean that it is any less right for us to issue that broad call throughout all of the world. And as the head of my family to my children I say, "You come and bless the name of God. You worship God because He created you." And for some of our kids who are coming to know Christ, "Now that you know Him, you worship Him even more." But I still want to call my kids to honor this God because that's the only proper thing for any man who has breath in him to do. He should acknowledge his Creator with thanksgiving and I want to issue that call as long and as broadly and as deeply as I possibly can. Okay?

Q: What about the unsaved friends that say they are praying for us? Let's say we are going to the hospital for a very serious operation and these would say, "Our good thoughts will be with you." Many times they'll say, "I'll be praying for you." And you know their prayers aren't going any farther than the ceiling. Later on when you have survived and recovered sufficiently and they come to you and say, "See, our prayers were answered." How do you approach them without being a hypocrite?

A: I would want to be gracious because their expression of prayer, even as an unsaved person in their willingness to say, "I'm praying for you," is an expression of concern. On a human level, I can appreciate that and thank them for that.

One way to address the concern that you are expressing—that they are unsaved and I don't want to leave them thinking that they are praying to the same God that I am in the same power and with the same relationship that I am—if you wanted to, you could also say, "And I'm praying for you. I'm praying for your salvation that you would come to a true knowledge of Christ. So thank you for praying for me and I'm going to keep praying for you, too."

Just make it a mutual thing that is gracious for their expression of prayer and yet at the same time there is a way to say you are praying for them that also expresses the spiritual reality that is at the heart of your question.

Q: In context of God's election and predestination, why is it still necessary for us to pray for people; especially for our loved ones to get saved?

A: Good question. First of all, at one level, it is a biblical pattern that is given to us. In Romans 10:1, as Paul was talking about the Jews who were apart from God; who were lost in their sins; he said:

Brethren, my heart's desire and my prayer to God for them is for their salvation; for I testify about them that they have a zeal for God, but not in accordance with knowledge.

Paul saw the spiritual condition of the Jews and saw that they were lost and they were his kinsmen according to the flesh. Paul himself was a Jew. He loved them and he cared about their eternal destiny. Where that drove him after a lot of teaching on election—interestingly enough after chapter 9 and he is talking about the sovereignty of God in salvation—it actually drives us to prayer for their salvation. It doesn't extinguish prayer; it is because we are laying a hold of the one person in the universe who has the power to effect that which we really want to see happen.

So we pray to God that He would save them because we don't know who God has chosen. That is hidden from us in His secret counsel. And so we are praying for Him to do that which we cannot do.

I think it is the natural response of a heart that understands spiritual reality (and what I mean by spiritual reality is that the issues of sin and judgment and hell and the free offer of the gospel to eternal life for everyone who believes) the natural response of the heart in light of these realities that so transcend us is to lay hold of the author of salvation and say, "God, be merciful to them." I think the closer the person is to us, in family relationship or friendship relationship or whatever it is, the more we are going to be drawn and the more that's going to be our repeated prayer for them.

A lot of theologians explain it this way (and I'll wrap this portion up with this statement), a lot of theologians have put it this way: The God who appointed the end that someone would be saved also appoints the means by which they would be saved. That includes the proclamation of the gospel and people praying for their salvation.

God gives us the inestimable privilege as we pray and as we preach the gospel of being human instruments in the accomplishment of His will for the salvation of souls. And if someone dies without Christ that we prayed for, as happened probably with my dad, where you come out with that is, "God, thank you for hearing my prayers. I'm grieved that they died without Christ, but I trust you to be righteous in all of your judgments and I trust you to deal righteously with their souls even as I trust you to deal with my own eternal soul."

So if you are trusting Christ wholly for your salvation, then it is just a natural extension of that trust in the goodness of God and the wisdom of God to trust Him for the salvation of everyone else that you care about. Ultimately, you have to bring it back where you are depending on God for everything, even those eternal souls that are so dear and precious to you.

Again you come back exactly where we started out. You come back to the person of God, His goodness, His wisdom, and His righteousness, and say, "God, whatever you do with these souls, I trust you because you are good. And as long as you give me breath and these people are on my heart, I'm going to cry out to you to be a saving God to them just like you were for me. Father, you did not exhaust your mercy when you saved me in

Christ. I know you have got mercy left over (so to speak). So spend that mercy on this loved one of mine as well.”

Q: If we have a prayer request that we are keeping within the family or personally, is there a balance when you go outside the family and ask others to pray along with you?

A: Yes. I think you do have to use discretion on those things. Let’s say someone was having difficulty in their marriage, for example. I wouldn’t be broadcasting that to a large prayer group or anything like that. There is a certain discretion that you use on those things that are a little more sensitive in nature; maybe someone who is starting to stray away that you care about that is starting to walk in sin. You don’t want to turn your prayer request into gossip, so you use a certain level of discretion there.

I can’t remember who it was I was talking to about this issue; it was someone in the past day or two. Just recognize that when it comes to praying, God is not restrained by few or by many. Elijah was one man who prayed that it wouldn’t rain and it didn’t rain for three and a half years (James talks about in James 5).

So it is not that we have to gather together everyone who is loosely associated with the situation in order to make it more likely that God will answer the prayer. I think it is good to use discretion and to be mindful of the fact that not everyone will use that information in a wise way, so you choose your spots carefully in terms of what you share.

Q: What about just somebody’s salvation? Why do we even ask others to pray at all? What would be the need for that?

A: I would view it as a proper application of the biblical teaching to pray for one another. If my dad were still living, I would be beseeching all of you to pray for his salvation as part of the sharing together of life in the body of Christ; sharing the burdens of our hearts. And as I share that with you, you share it with me and we support one another in those burdens of our hearts that only God can ultimately address that we walk together in a closer fellowship with one another as we share those burdens with one another.

Q: You talked last week about repetition and I was wondering how that works out with the widow and the unjust judge?

A: That’s a good question. The key to remember in Jesus’ teaching here in Matthew 6 is what He condemns is meaningless repetition. The key word there is meaningless and repeating things in a mindless chatter—a mindless thing where your mind and your heart are not really engaged.

Not all repetition is wrong. The apostle Paul repeated his prayers (2 Corinthians 12) where he said;

Three times I implored the Lord about this thing; and He said to me, "My grace is sufficient for you, for power is perfected in weakness."

In Gethsemane, Jesus prayed three times the same prayer, "Father, if it is possible, let this cup pass from me."

But in those cases and in all legitimate prayers that are repeated, it is the urgency of heart that is brought to the task. Day after day goes by and this is still on your mind and you bring that as a sincere expression of your heart's desire to the Lord. That is different from, say for example, just mindlessly repeating a prayer like some high church congregations would do or to a further extreme, the Catholics would say seven Hail Marys or whatever and just repeating the words as if the repetition itself meant something.

I have prayed repeatedly and still pray repeatedly for the salvation of my children. God has answered some of those already—praise to His name. As I am praying that, it is not a meaningless prayer because that's the burden and the desire of my heart and I recognize the awful realities that eternal judgment would be upon my children.

So those realities cause me to pray in a repeated manner, but it is not meaningless; there is thought and intention and consciousness of the person of God and His promise to bless that is in those things.

We got time for maybe one or two more. I'm just getting warmed up, man.

Q: We have had a string of deaths in our extended families; we just have large families and it looks like that's going to be the way things go. And I'm wondering, what's the wisdom in looking at someone whose mother has just died and they tend to comfort themselves by saying, "Oh, they are in a better place." And you are looking at this person knowing that this person is in hell. And I tend to not want to affirm them; so I just don't say anything. But is that a time to just be gracious and kind and be quiet, or just knowing that hearts are ripe and wanting them to know the truth...? My husband tends to get to share the gospel up front, but in terms of one-on-one conversation...?

A: He gets to share up front as part of funeral service, you mean? Is that what you are saying?

Response: Yeah, they kind of look at us as the religious ones; so they always ask him to speak. And he always shares the gospel, but in terms of one-on-one conversation...?

A: I would say there are a couple of things that you can do depending on the circumstance and the relationship that you have. I think you are absolutely right that when someone says that mindless thing that they are in a better place. That is totally apart from any understanding of scriptural salvation, that you don't want to affirm that. I would never say to someone who just said that, "Yes, that's right, they are."

What I would tend to do is say, “I know this is a great loss for you. I’m praying for you.” If you have the opportunity; if the situation is right; maybe a little time is passed and you are in a more private conversation and it is not the heat of the moment at the funeral service, then you say, “Thinking about death, what about you? What’s going to happen to you when you die? You know, we’re all coming to this point. What’s going to happen to you one second after you die?” Make the focus on the living rather than the focus on the dead. That’s a good principle for conducting funerals and I think it is also a good principle for those private conversations that you are describing.

Q: Praying for my family (I have a big family), one of my sisters is saved; the rest of them are not; besides that, I have may be 100 or so relatives as such. My question is, for my personal situation; I’m doing physical work. I’m just in the fallenness of the flesh; exhausted from work at the end of the day. How do I get out of the habit of just praying out rote? First I go through a list of my families’ names and then sometimes I’m just so tired I’d just say, “Lord, save my family.” Sometimes it just seems rote; day after day after day and it seems to be kind of discouraging because I feel like none of them have really come to Christ—that’s my question.

A: I think part of the reason that Jesus encourages us not to use meaningless repetition was because He recognized that it does become rote. It does just become discouraging because you are mindful of the fact that “my heart is really not engaged in it for whatever reason.”

I think it is perfectly legitimate to pray like a Calvinist. Go back to the example that I used to close out the sermon last week when George Whitefield was praying after a long day of ministry. After a long day of ministry, he prayed very simply: “Lord, we thank you for all of those with whom we spoke today and we rejoice that their lives and destinies are entirely in God’s hand. Honor our efforts according to thy perfect will. Amen.”

Rest in the surpassing knowledge of God. He knows the needs before we ask them. Rest in the surpassing power of God to accomplish His will and say, “Lord, I don’t even have the energy to go through everybody’s name today. But Lord, you know the names. I trust your goodness. I trust your power to save and I commit these loved ones in your hands once more today. Amen.”

There is nothing wrong with that prayer. Sometimes shorter is better; particularly when it is an informed, brief prayer that says, “Lord, I understand who you are. I know that you know the need of my heart. Here it is, Lord. I commit it to you. Goodnight.”

Trust Him so much that you say, “I don’t have to pray for 50 minutes in order to get your attention. As soon as I turn my heart to you, Lord, I have your full, undivided attention. I’m going to keep my words brief as Ecclesiastes 5:2 says and I’m going to trust that you are going to meet me in your goodness even in my brief prayer. What gives power to my prayer is not how long I pray or the words that I say. What gives power to my prayer is the fact is that I am praying to you, the sovereign God of the universe.”

Hebrews 11:6 says:

The one who comes to Him must believe that He is and He is the rewarder of those who seek Him.

I wish we could go for another hour, but time is up. Let's pray and commit all these things to our gracious God.

Father, we know that there are so many other things that are on our hearts that we could have talked about today. But we thank you for this time together. We thank you for who you are; for the omniscient, gracious, omnipotent, all seeing God that you are. And from that position of unparalleled supremacy, you promised to bless your children of faith who come to you and pray.

Father, what a motivation that is: your goodness; your promise to bless us—what a motivation that is to pray. Father, we thank you that it doesn't take hours and hours of praying to get your attention. Your eye is always upon us to bless us when we seek you according to your Word. May that great, profound truth cause us to pray better and pray deeper, today and in the days to come. May you transform us and liberate our conscience from false views of prayer that we have accumulated over the years. May you free us from that and help us walk in the glorious freedom and the glorious simplicity of prayer that Jesus lays out for us in Matthew chapter 6.

Bless these, my brothers and sisters in Christ, who love you and who seek you. Encourage them, Father and help them as they pray by your Spirit.

For those that are here and those that will hear, Father, who do not know Christ, would you convict them that the first prayer that they must pray is an appeal to Christ for their salvation from sin; that they would repent and put their faith in the living Christ. Father, help them enter into an eternal life that is theirs based on your promise that everyone who believes would have eternal life.

*Give us grace to that end.
In Jesus' name, Amen.*

This transcript was prepared by Shari Main.