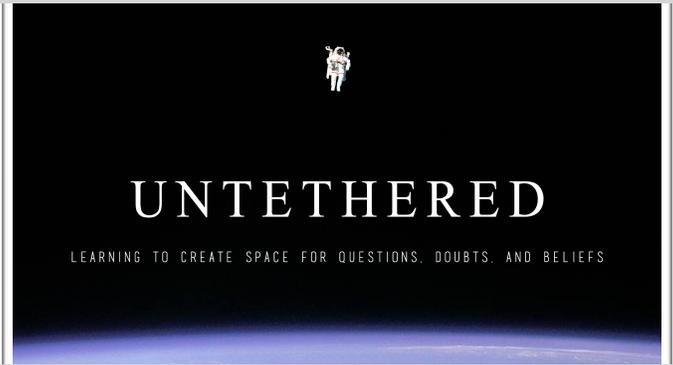


## "THE PLACE PRAYER BRINGS"

**Date:** September 29, 2019

**Speaker:** Danny Clinton



I believe more people have exited the Church over today's issue than any other.

- That issue is prayer... particularly unanswered prayer...

### **The Church teaches that the most basic definition of prayer is "Talking to God."**

- That Prayer can be audible or silent, private or public, formal or informal.
- Prayer is described in the Bible as...
  - Seeking God's favor (*Exodus 32:11*)
  - Pouring out one's soul to the Lord (*1 Samuel 1:15*)
  - Crying out to heaven (*2 Chronicles 32:20*)
  - Drawing near to God (*Psalms 73:28, KJV*)
  - Kneeling before the Father (*Ephesians 3:14*)

Paul wrote... (*Vs*) *Philippians 4:6-7* - "Do not be anxious about anything, but in every situation, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus."

- God's house is to be a house of prayer (*Mark 11:17*)
- God's people are to be people of prayer...

(*Vs*) *Jude 1:20-21* - "Dear friends, by building yourselves up in your most holy faith and praying in the Holy Spirit, keep yourselves in God's love."

### **Question: So, why doesn't prayer work?**

- At least not in the way people of faith often like to believe it does or claim that it does.
- Be Honest: When someone we know, love, or read about is gravely ill, we default to asking people to pray for their healing; more specifically, we ask others to ask God to heal them.
- We enlist people to take our cause... (Wayward Child or Struggling Marriage) to the Almighty.

**I have asked for such prayers thousands upon thousands of times over the past two decades...**

- In countless moments I have privately and desperately petitioned God to bring miraculous cures, heal relationships, to move in a particular moment and a particular person.
- I do believe all things are possible—but I also believed that I could sway God with words to bring it... And I don't think I should have.

### **Today's Big Controversial Statement...**

**"I'm not sure prayer actually works to save sick people from death or cause change in the hearts of those we are praying for."**

- And actually, that might not be a good thing if it did.

**Consider: "To contend that God heals when we pray for those who are terribly sick, or transforms lives because of my prayer life, is to imagine a creator who needs to be convinced."**

- It is to paint an image of a God who, though already fully aware of the gravity of the situation and the worry of loved ones, refuses to move until we ask Him to.
- And so, prayer appeals become spiritual *GoFundMe* campaigns.
- Where we're told that if we "just get enough people praying," healing will happen; that there is a magic number or critical mass that will move the Almighty in our favor.

**In essence... "Most of us don't really pray, we rehearse our anxieties out loud."  
- Ian Morgan Cron**

**The problem with "negotiating prayers" is that we have to make sense of the results.**

- In regard to healing specifically...If the person lives, we somehow believe we have engineered their survival and need to process why our prayers were enough, but the person's in the hospital room next to ours weren't.
- And when healing *doesn't* come, we second guess whether we prayed hard enough, or we lament that we didn't enlist enough "prayer warriors" to effectively move God, and we try to figure out why our petitions failed.
- Either way, it's not a healthy way to live. Eventually we find a way to blame our "Genie God" and leave Him in the bottle He came out of.

**Stop thinking that you can negotiate God into something you desire by praying more dependently or perfectly.**

- When I'm in this mode, it is me that is keeping the power...
- God is now my servant and the function of prayer is to use mechanisms to get God to do what I want.

**“Prayer is standing in a relationship of initiated dependency.”**

- (Vs) *1st King 19:3-6* (Read) As someone said, don't overestimate the Spiritual power of a nap and a snack!

**Ultimately: “Authentic prayer is an utter trusting and letting go.”**

- It is always "seconding the motion and movements" of God.
- You thought you were initiating the prayer, but you were just continuing it. God is the initiator.
- In other words, “Prayer is participation in God's love, the activity that takes us out of ourselves and conforms us to the path of Christ.”
- It makes so much more sense to pray like this.
- Praying for people is a beautiful expression of care and solidarity... an effort to somehow stand beside someone in unthinkable trauma, to let them know that we love them and feel their urgency. And, in this way, prayer surely does work.
- It lets people understand the depth of our concern for them, to allow them to feel a little less alone, to lift them emotionally and physically as they face the senseless suffering of this life...
- And so, we should pray and let people know we are praying for them; that we are pulling for them, thinking of them, and standing in solidarity.

**In this way... “I believe prayer changes our hearts, it tethers us to one another, and it increases hope in otherwise hopeless situations.”**

**I still ask for people to pray and I still pray, but I try to reorient my prayers...**

- What I believe about Prayer...
  - I believe prayer works by unlocking our empathy for others.
  - I believe it binds us together in relationship.
  - I believe it to be a beautiful expression of love for people who are suffering.
  - I believe it is a sacred act of kindness.
  - I believe it connects us personally to God in ways that cannot be quantified.

**I recently heard a story about a Father and Daughter that attend our Church...**

- The father saw emotional danger his daughter's future. He said he warned and warned, he just waited and waited...he didn't save her.
- Eventually the danger came, and she was hurt!
- He said, "As soon as she saw me, she reached for me, as I reached for her, and we just shared that space together."

**Together and Sad, Sad and Together... Nothing was fixed but everything was better.**

- They had never been closer than that moment.
- This is the place prayer brings us to, and this to me is how prayer works.

**Regarding Unanswered Prayers...**

- A Woman who had been abused most of her childhood by the people she loved.
- She said, "Where was God? He was protecting our relationship, my soul, and my future. God only promises one thing, and that's never to leave or forsake you. (Vs) Rom. 8:38-39"
- She was led to this place; just her and God.
- Together and sad, sad and together. Nothing was fixed but everything was better. This is the place prayer had brought her.

***A Song of Prayer...***

*I throw all my cares before you, my doubts and fears don't scare you. You're bigger than I thought you were, you're bigger than I thought...*

*So, I stop all negotiations with the God of all creation, cause you're bigger than I thought you were, you're bigger than I thought.*

**Closing Challenges**

- Where is your prayer life bringing you that you continue to negotiate your escape from?
- Where in your prayer life is God pressing in while waiting for you to recognize and invite?