

Prayer Part 3.

Good Morning hope that you are all well and safe. Well I must say the feedback I have had over the last few weeks has been encouraging to say the least. It seems that some of you have gained some personal insight from the last few Sunday Thoughts. I am pleased that God has spoken to you directly so you can move forward in your prayer time.

This morning I would like to share just a few more of my thoughts about these two books: **How to pray**, by Pete Greig and **Total Forgiveness** by R.T. Kendall. Whilst reading these books, there are two distinct differences in the practice of Prayer the authors focus on, private and corporate prayer. R.T. Kendall explains in his book, his fight over the years to totally forgive those who have hurt him, as a man, as a husband, father, minister and a friend. All aspects of his life he has felt the pain, hurt and rejection from what he describes as those he has invested time in, to build a loving relationship.

He tells stories about those who have deliberately set out to hurt him in his ministry, and those who have hurt him using his family, and through people that just did not realise that they had caused any pain to him at all because of their words and actions. How many of us can say the same thing? How many of us can say this morning, "I still remember when, so n so said that" or "why did they say that without talking to me first".

But there again how many of us can say "I could have said that differently" or "did I really need to say that" or "why didn't I just keep my mouth shut". The problem is, I think we can all say both examples at some point in our lives, whether at home with our families, at work, with friends or in church. I have not met a single person in any church I have attended or pastored that has not had some sort of an issue with someone else. We are all broken, and we live in a broken world, and unfortunately, we have issues with each other sometimes.

Some issues are forgivable instantly, just a misunderstanding, some issues we carry with us for a while, sometimes for a lifetime. We may even forget what the issue is that upset us in the first place, but we still carry the hurt, and over a lifetime that can be harmful. Unforgiveness has been medically proven to be bad for your health.

Jesus knows who we are, how we react, how we keep things inside and allow them to fester until the issue becomes all consuming.

Jesus said in Matthew 6:6-7

'When you pray, go into your room, close the door and pray to your Father, who is unseen. Then your Father will see what is done in secret, will reward you. And when you pray do not keep on babbling like the pagans, for they think they will be heard because of their many words.' These verses come just before the prayer Jesus gives His disciples, we know it as the Lord's Prayer. He is giving them and us, the opportunity to get things off our chest in the privacy of our own room.

When you get something off your chest how amazing does it feel? How much better do you feel when you have cleared the air with someone? It feels good doesn't it??

Can I encourage you then, if you already have a quiet/private time with God praying or talking, to continue, as your prayers make a difference.

If you have never tried a quiet time, again please let me encourage you to try as it will mean a great deal to our Father and to you as you go deeper with Him.

God wants us to talk to Him, to spend time with Him. I look forward to hearing some testimonies when we can get back together.

In contrast, in chapter 6 of his book, Pete Greig talks about the importance of Intercessory Prayer. How important it is to pray corporately as a body of people. He tells a funny story that I think many churches may relate to.

‘There was a small town in Texas where a bar owner applied to extend his premises, but the local Baptist Church were staunchly opposed to his plans and launched a campaign with protests, press-releases, petitions and prayer meetings.

Planning permission was granted, and the work began. The Christians felt bitterly disappointed until the week before the grand opening, when a lightning bolt struck the bar and burnt it to the ground. The Church folk were beside themselves with joy. Their prayers had been answered.

And so, the furious bar owner decided to sue the church on the grounds that it was ‘ultimately responsible for the material demise of his livelihood, whether through direct or indirect actions or means’.

Suddenly the Church folk changed their tune. All those who had been trumpeting a miracle, days before now came together as one to deny all culpability. The case went to court and the judge looked at the evidence and said ‘I don’t know how I am going to decide on this case. ‘We appear to have a publican who believes passionately in the power of prayer, and an entire church that has lost its faith entirely’.

Pete Greig goes on to say that intercessory prayer can be confusing at the best of times, but the fact is, do we believe that our prayers can make a difference? Do we believe that our prayers can heal? can our prayers change the course of governments? can our prayers get rid of Covid-19? can our prayers change the mind of a stubborn relative who doesn’t want to know Jesus???

So, here is a challenge, do we in Sandy Baptist church believe prayer makes a difference? I suspect there are a few people shouting YES, WE DO BELIEVE PRAYER MAKES A DIFFERENCE.

Then why can’t we get more people at a prayer meeting? No finger pointing, I am just asking the question. What is it within our culture at SBC that we struggle to pray together? (being in lockdown does not count) It is a question that needs to be asked and talked about so we can move forward in our relationship with God and each other, even more so, in these times we are now living in.

Jeremiah 29:11- 14

'For I know the plans I have for you declares the Lord, plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future. Then you will call on me and come and pray to me and I will listen to you. You will seek me and find me when you seek me with all your heart. 14a. I will be found by you declares the Lord'. This is a specific promise to all who have been carried off in exile from Jerusalem to Babylon. It has been recorded in the Bible so we too can read it and prosper under God. But we need to be as one, one voice, one body, many parts.

2 Chronicles 7:14 says,

'If my people, who are called by my name, will humble themselves and pray and seek my face and turn from their wicked ways, then I will hear from heaven and will forgive their sin and will heal their land'.

Greig writes: 'the forgiveness of sins and the healing of the land are entirely contingent upon the intercession of God's people. What task could possibly be more important, more urgent for our world today' (page 88.) Also, in Esther chapter 4:15-16, after Mordecai famous speech 'for such a time as this' (I para phrase) Esther prepares to see the King, so Esther's reply to Mordecai is, **'Go, gather together all the people who are in Susa, and fast for me. Do not eat or drink anything for three days, night or day. I and my attendants will fast as you do. When this is done, I will go to the king, even though it is against the law. And if I perish. I perish.'**

I am not saying that we must fast for three days, although that might not be a bad thing, and if you do fast, then please do it safely. What I am saying is, we need to get together as a church and pray. If we gather in person, we can only do that when it is safe to do so and with social distancing. But can we gather on zoom or facetime or any other electronic method?

Let us seek God individually and corporately for the way forward. Prayer is our life source, it is as important as breathing, eating, sleeping. If you do not get to read either of these books, read the Lord's prayer in Matthew chapter 6 and engage with it, I mean really engage. Take your time over each word, each verse, ask God to open your heart and mind to what He has for you. Ask Him 'what do you want to say to me today Lord'. I have enjoyed reading these books and I recommend them to you, but only after you have read God's word. Be blessed this week as you continue to pray for those you love.

Blessings

Mike

