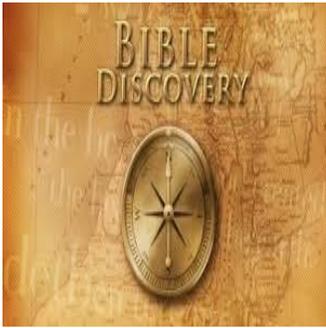


## Bringing our Hopes & Fears to God



There's something about hope which makes people lighthearted. In fact, I believe biblical hope's a close relative to the faith we profess. Yet some are afraid to hope - they've so much hurt & disappointment they're no longer able to face any more. They refuse to hope; they're afraid, filled with fear! And that fear keeps them from victory in Christ. Well known Pastor Rick Warren has said, "*Fear is the emotion that keeps you stuck in the past. Fear paralyzes you. Fear is the number one problem most people face — fear that they're not going to make it, fear of the future, or fear of what other people think.*"

But we can overcome what holds us back by bringing our hopes and fears to God in prayer as our response to the defeating spirit that drains us of life; pushes us from our Lord and Saviour, binds us in defeat and labels us a failure. Bringing it all to our Heavenly Father is what He wants us to do. But if we'd pray effectively, praying with expectation of receiving a blessing, we must do it right! Jesus gives a stern warning, "*When you pray, do not be like the hypocrites...*" [vs. 5] Rather than going through the motions, being seen on earth to have a form of righteousness, prayer requires our whole heart set upon God. Jesus teaches us a "pattern of prayer" not a chant. We have to be in the conversation with God – from the heart! Then when we pray, separated from all that would dissuade us, even a simple prayer changes us; leads us on the path to healing for ourselves and our world. Prayer's never a passive activity. Prayer always alters us, always awakens us. When we earnestly pray our eyes find beauty where we never noticed it. When we earnestly pray our hearts feel compassion we never knew we had. When we earnestly pray our priorities shift - we discover we can in fact survive with "*our daily bread*", that what our Father provides is sufficient for all our needs.

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There's a saying which bears repeating – "*Darkness cannot put out the Light, it can only make God brighter.*" When we pray despite our circumstance, God reveals Himself so much more because we open our hearts to Him and draw closer to Him. That's why it's essential we begin prayer acknowledging who God is, recognizing we're praying to the One True God Almighty of Heaven while at the same time, approaching Him as a little child approaches his loving father. And because of who God is, we approach, praying to our Heavenly Father with honest humility and sincere love rather than praying as if God were some "Cosmic Vending-Machine", there to give us whatever we ask for.

Logan Eliassen, in *Chicken Soup for the Soul*, tells of when he was trapped in a cave following a spelunking accident, having exhausted every attempt to get out during 20 hours of captivity through his own might and that of his would-be rescuers, and now hoping only for a swift end to his life. He cries out to God for mercy. He recognizes his strength is gone, but God's has not. He realizes what his human strength can't do, God can.

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Logan understood that if he were to get out of the cave alive, it would be only through the strength of the Lord. So he prayed that God would free him in His strength. And with that prayer he pushed one more time. He says, "*I didn't feel myself move my muscles, I felt myself being moved. With no struggle, my body moved exactly where it needed to go.*" When the rescuers returned to the passage for one more try at releasing Logan from the cave, they were astonished to see him sitting on the edge of the crevice. When asked how he got himself out, his simple response was, "I didn't." The lesson is "human strength wanes, but God's doesn't". He's waiting to hear our prayers, waiting for us to recognize what He can do in our lives.

Our God's the Sovereign Lord who does above and beyond all we can comprehend; all we can hope for. That's what we're saying as we say, "*Your kingdom come, your will be done on earth as it is in heaven.*" We're declaring God really is in charge of everything! So pray. Pray for peace, for healing, for advances in science, for the strength to eradicate poverty and disease; pray for the courage to overcome injustice, for resolve; pray for others, for you. But pray to God with all your *heart and mind and strength and soul*, then meet the challenges that lie ahead knowing the Lord is leading you! As

you pray come with a humble heart, come with a forgiving spirit asking, "*Forgive our debts as we also have forgiven our debtors.*" After all, where would the Christian Church be if Christ hadn't forgiven the Apostles Peter and Paul? Both had failed Him. God's plan wasn't simply to judge them for their crimes, but to heal and use them as instruments to proclaim the good news of Jesus. Neither does Jesus leave you and me in sin—He has a comprehensive plan to restore us. How then do we treat others when they make bad decisions? Is it the same way that Jesus treats us? As we pray, do we receive encouragement to live up to the potential inside us? Only if we're not harboring ill will, resentment and anger! Soren Kierkegaard reminds us, "*prayer does not change God, but it changes him who prays.*"

Meet Tina who tells her story of being addicted to smoking through 35 years of bondage. Her friend gave her a book entitled, "*Hooked but Not Hopeless*" which she ignored for months. One day, in a devastating bout of depression, she reads it. Its premise for overcoming smoke addiction is simple – change your thinking patterns about smoking. Easier said than done! But there's a sense deep within her that God wants her to quit. What was Tina's responsive cry? "No way, God! I can't do it. You know I can't!" As the sense God wants her to do this persists, she makes a deal with Him. "Apparently you want me to quit smoking, even though you know I'm drowning in depression down here. Well, I think it's completely unfair of you to even suggest it, but here's the deal: I'll try – but I'm telling you this – if I do, You have to do it all. I mean every bit of it. If I have one craving, I'm giving in and smoking."

Tina tells how she got up from her prayer, put the pack of cigarettes in a drawer and went about her house duties. The family came home, they had dinner, watched TV, went to bed. Morning came and they all went about their routines. Throughout the day there was a nagging thought she was missing something – but what? It took two days to realize "I wasn't smoking!" Not only not smoking, but had totally forgotten about it! By the way, that was over twenty years ago. Isn't God great!

That's why I believe God listens to our prayers. I believe God answers us. God's answer to our prayers may be very different from the answer we're searching for. God's answer might come as the strength to fight on or as the courage to face what we fear. God's answer may be the ability to accept what we've been denying or it may appear as hope in the face of despair. God's answer may even be that we let go! Yet God's always near. We're never alone. The saying goes, "He's closer than you think, just a conversation away; if only you could find the time to bow your head and pray." When we really open up to God, our prayers suddenly start working. Then we pray for strength and receive strength. Pray for direction and understand which way we're to go. Pray for anything according to His will understanding prayer's an experience, a sense of being connected, of being brought into the presence of God not a recitation of requests. Its conquering fears which cause us to miss out being in the presence of God. Let me close by giving you three quick ways in which prayer fills your life so that it works to overcome that fear which holds you back from finding victory in Jesus!

- **Fill your life with truth.** Come to Him prayerfully using His Word to open you to Him. The more you fill your mind with God's Word, the more you acknowledge who God is and what He alone will do, the more it drives fear from your life giving you hope. John 8:32 says, "*You will*



***"Your kingdom come, your will be done on earth as it is in heaven."***

***"He's closer than you think, just a conversation away; if only you could find the time to bow your head and pray."***

*know the truth, and the truth will set you free*". It's recognizing that God is in control and that our very sustenance comes from Him! We can pray, "*Give us this day our daily bread*" knowing He gives us everything we need. In following Jesus, we know God cares for his children and takes care of them.

- ***Fill your life with love.*** Our lives cannot be filled with love if we continue to harbour sin. God's the only one who can forgive sin; I think most people agree about that. Yet Jesus reminds us we must forgive from our humble hearts what is done to us so that we're freed from anger, bitterness, resentment and vindictiveness. Holding on to such emotions holds us back from the ability to love or be loved – keeps God from having a place in our hearts!
- ***Fill your life with faith.*** Faith connects us in our prayers with Jesus and gives us a relationship with God! Faith causes us to ask, "*Lead us not into temptation but deliver us from evil.*" Faith causes us to acknowledge we've sinned and this isn't honouring to Him; isn't what He wants from us. It's important for us to realize we can't escape temptation on our own, no matter how "good" we are or how much self-control we have. We're fully dependent upon God's Holy Spirit who lives in Christians to give us eyes that see temptation coming and feet to escape it. That's living by faith!



God doesn't require that you face your life journey alone. God provides a community of faith which can provide more than support when we're in need of help. The members of a faith community strengthen our resolve to heal, link their prayers to ours, and restore us to faith when we wander. They envelop us in caring and love. I invite you to come together in community with those you love. Pray for those in need, for those serving at home and across the world, for those who are sick, for those who are lonely, and for each other. Pray as Jesus has taught us to do...

If you are alone, if you have never prayed, if you would like to talk about the power of prayer and of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ teaching us to pray, I invite you to contact us at 1-519-317-8659 or via email at [office.mbbc@xplornet.com](mailto:office.mbbc@xplornet.com).

May the Lord richly bless you with his presence...

*Blessings,*

*Pastor Dave*