

Faith that Prays: praying in weakness

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Today, we are beginning 21 days of prayer as a church family. As I have shared with you before, prayer is one of my more challenging spiritual practices because of my pride and self-sufficiency. So, when I learn of ways that I can get an extra dose of prayer in my life I try and seize the opportunity. A few weeks ago, I was reminded that *Converge Worldwide* was encouraging every church to participate in this 21 days of prayer in the month of January, I thought, "Hey, why not?"

I'm hoping these next 21 days might be catalytic for us; that this might be a time that inspires more prayer to God and faith in God. If you call FBC your home, you're invited to join us on this journey of prayer. We purchased prayer journals for every single adult and teenager of FBC, which will lead you through a daily time of prayer. The most important aspect of this 21 day journey is every single one of us spending a few moments everyday in prayer based on the daily prayers provided to us in the prayer journals (pick up a prayer journal and begin today). How might God work in our lives these next 3 weeks as we all pray the same prayers together? I'm reminded of God's words to Solomon from 2 Chronicles 7:14, which read "if my people who are called by my name 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 heal their land." There are details from this promise that I won't get into now, but just take the overall thrust of God's words: he will hear us. When we pray humbly, when we pray as we turn away from our wicked selfishness and sin, God hears. Friends, I want that. I want my communion with God to be sweet and life-giving where he hears me and I hear and obey him.

Another major factor of our time together will be hearing teaching from God's word about faith and prayer. So, I have three sermons prepared these next three Sundays on prayer. They will all build on each other and I'd encourage you to make sure you are taking them in. For those of you online, I will post some additional comments on our facebook page for you to interact with, so look for that.

Finally, at our annual meeting, we're going to spend some time together in prayer there, too. So, while we will celebrate what God has been doing and what we hope he will do in the near future, we will also pray. We will thank God for what he's done and we pray that he will work mightily in 2019.

Since our prayer journal is called 21 Dangerous Prayers I thought it might be good for us to examine what we mean by dangerous prayers? What makes a prayer dangerous? I hear the phrase dangerous prayers and I think, "Maybe I should think twice before I pray that kind of prayer." Do you know what I mean? I mean, it's dangerous. If it's truly dangerous, I might not want to pray it; it might be a little risky. I know some of you aren't the roller coaster types, right? You look at its height, you look at its loops and its zero-gravity drops and you say to yourself,

“No way! Too dangerous.” That danger keeps us from taking the ride. There are prayers like that.

Most of the time, our prayers aren't the dangerous type. We pray a lot of safe prayers. We never say, “Boy, I don't know if I want to pray for travel mercies to Grandma's house; that's a little dangerous.” Prayers for success at work, a big pay raise or a job promotion; prayers that a pretty girl at school would notice me flow easily right off our tongues. Those aren't dangerous; that's the stuff we want. We don't perceive any danger, any risk in prayers for our safety, our comfort, long-life or earthly happiness. Really, the only risk we might fear is being disappointed if we don't get them.

Dangerous prayers sound like this:

- Search me, O God, and see if there is any evil way in me.
- Unite my heart, Lord, to fear your name.
- Here I am, send me!

Do you really want God to answer those prayers? Do you really want God to search your heart? To show you those pockets of selfishness and pride you still have in your life so he can, like a world-class surgeon, carefully and lovingly cut your sinful tendencies out of your life? Are you sure you want God to unite your heart to fear his name? You do realize, don't you, that if your heart is captured by the glory and splendor of God you will be a totally different person and everybody at school, at work, in the neighborhood is going to know? Do you want your life to utterly turned upside down by your heart being united to fear God's name or do you like your life the way it is where you really don't want God to interfere that much? And when God asks, “Who's going to be my witness, my servant at Medford Area High School, at Athens, Rib Lake, Abbotsford HS?” do you really want to pray, “Here I am, send me!” High schoolers, middle schoolers, do you want God to send you into your schools like he sent Jeremiah to the lost sheep of Judah? Do you remember what they did to Jeremiah?

Do you hear what I'm saying? Here's how we are going to talk about dangerous prayers in this sermon series: Dangerous prayers put your life into God's hands (REPEAT). Most of our “help me, God!” prayers don't do that. You surrender to God when you pray a dangerous prayer. Dangerous prayers tell God, “Have your way, Lord, in my life. Send me. Teach me. Search me. Speak to me.” Do you know when and where he will send you? Do you know what he might teach you? Are you ready for God to show you what's in the deep recesses of your heart? Will you listen to God if he speaks to you? I'm not sure if I want God to answer those prayers; that's what makes these kinds of prayers dangerous.

Another way we might say it is this: dangerous prayers forfeit control to God. Take a look at this picture (PIC). Who are the people having the best time? The ones with their hands in the air; the ones who have let go of control, right? The ones holding on, the ones who don't quite trust the safety harnesses and feel they need to keep holding on, they're not quite having the best time, are they? That's a really helpful analogy for me as we think about dangerous prayers;

praying prayers that truly puts my life into God's hands. What kind of life do you want to have? One where you let go and trust God or keep holding on, but filled with anxiety?

I'm going to use one main passage for these next 3 sermons. While the passage may not be explicitly about prayer, it is most certainly about faith and prayer and faith go hand in hand. Our passage will be Genesis 32:22ff (READ).

There are all kinds of mysterious things about this story. Who was the mystery man Jacob wrestled with? Why was he fighting with Jacob? Why was he afraid of being overtaken by the dawn? Why did he refuse to reveal his own name? Why did he strike Jacob's hip? We're not going to try and answer most of those questions because the gospel-gold in this passage is found in what God did reveal to us - not in what he kept hidden (that should be a clue to all of your Bible reading). There are 3 major points, 3 big ideas that I'm going to introduce to you and apply to prayer - one for each Sunday we are together.

For today, I want to draw your attention to the critical point where Jacob looked up to God and cried out to him. We're going to talk about his wrestling with God in an upcoming and sermon and how that actually is a good example of faith for us; we're also going to talk about his need to get honest with himself. But there's a dramatic moment in this episode, this encounter with God, that changed Jacob into a man ready and willing to plead to God. I see it in vs. 25 where the man touched Jacob's hip socket and dislocates his hip. Hear that again: Jacob's hip was dislocated. I'm guessing you're not going to win too many wrestling matches when that happens. How impactful, how effective do you think Jacob could be a wrestling with this man with a dislocated hip?

Back in the late 80s and early 90s (PIC) Bo Jackson was bigger than life. Do you remember? Bo knows basketball, baseball, and everything else, too. Bo Jackson was the first two-sport superstar. He was a Pro Bowl RB for the Raiders and an All-Star outfielder with the Kansas City Royals. Many people call him the greatest athlete of his generation. The stories of his accomplishments going all the way back to Jr. high school are the stuff of legends. But, on January 13, 1991, everything changed. Bo Jackson got injured in an AFC playoff game. On what looked like a routine tackle, Bo Jackson dislocated his hip - it was literally pulled out of it's socket. And because of that hip injury Bo Jackson was never the same. He went from the athlete nobody could compete with to a guy who was just average the rest of his career. All because of a hip injury.

Hips are really important. I've read physical therapists who say our hips are the foundation of our bodies; how they are our most important point of strength and power. Bo Jackson was the most gifted athlete the world had seen in decades, but after he dislocated his hip, he never had his seemingly supernatural speed, strength, and ability again.

Jacob was ready to plead to God for blessing, he was ready to receive help and deliverance from God when he was crippled at the point of his greatest strength - his hip. And it's supposed to work that way for you and me.

In the book of Psalms, for example, we often see the call of prayer to God linked to a person's recognition of need and weakness.

- Psalm 118:5, "Out of my distress I called on the Lord; the Lord answered me and set me free."
- Psalm 91:15 (God talking) "When he calls to me, I will answer him; I will be with him in trouble; I will rescue him and honor him."

When I am in trouble; when I am in distress. When I can't see myself out of a paper bag because I am so weak and so needy, I will call and plead to God. That's when we are ready to pray dangerous prayers to God. When we have no other place to turn; when we have no one else to turn to. What other option do we have?

Now, there are two points I want to bring up. The first one is this: it's not automatic that we will plead to God in prayer when we are in trouble. It's supposed to work that way; God means for us to call to him in faith when we recognize our need. But, we might just double down on our self-sufficiency. Maybe you've heard it said (or said it yourself), "Well, they haven't hit rock bottom yet; as soon as they hit rock bottom, then he/she/they will make some changes." You know, I've lived long enough to sadly see that's not true. It's amazing how far down rock bottom is sometimes. There have been too many times where I've thought a person hit rock bottom, I thought they've lost so much that they would finally turn, but they didn't. We have stubborn wills, my friends. Some will never turn to God in prayer even when they go through hell on earth.

I'm reminded of a story in the OT about a king named Asa. Asa's life is a tragedy because it started so well, but ended so poorly. In his early years, he sought the Lord, he prayed to God, and he listened and obeyed the Words of God. But in the end of his life, he did the exact opposite. He stopped praying to God, he stopped seeking God, and obeying his words. Here are the last words describing Asa's life from 2 Chronicles 16:12-13, "In the thirty-ninth year of his reign Asa was diseased in his feet, and his disease became severe. Yet even in his disease he did not seek the LORD, but sought help from physicians. And Asa slept with his fathers, dying in the forty-first year of his reign." When the author says, "Even in his disease he did not seek the Lord" he's saying, "can you believe it? If there's anytime a man would finally turn back to the Lord and plead for his help it's now. He's at rock bottom. But even then, he did not seek the Lord."

So, here's the deal. If there's any time for us to seek the Lord it's when we are weakened at what we thought was a strongest point, but you might not if you're stubborn. So, friends, be warned; be concerned that you have a stubborn heart. See your struggle, your weakness, your doubts, your trouble as an invitation to humble yourself before God and turn to him. I know you

might be angry and hurt and confused, but tell yourself that nothing is more precious than being in a right relationship with God and you can experience that relationship right now through prayer. Turn to him; go to him. Yes, your hip now is dislocated, but if it's the occasion where your relationship with God is deepened and you cry out to him more than it's worth it.

The second thing I want you to see is that God is the one who dislocated Jacob's hip; it was God who brought him to his knees. This wasn't some accident in Jacob's life; it wasn't some coincidence, was it? It was God's plan. It was his will.

You being struck or afflicted at your points of greatest strength is God working in your life to bring you into a deeper and more dependent relationship in him. That's a gift. I know it doesn't feel like a gift. In fact, we hate those struggles. That's when we're tempted to imagine God not being present and God not caring for us. But it's actually God working for us. He's working for our good. It's not our good to be a rascal like Jacob. It's not our good to connive our way through life. It is our good to be dependent on God and to plead to him for everything in life.

I do think it's fitting for us to end this sermon by reminding each other not to despise God for striking us at the points of our greatest strength so that our prayer and fellowship with him go up and up. I'm so hopeful that these next 21 days might do that for us.

Key vs. Genesis 32:25

Questions for the week

- Did this sermon help you better understand what dangerous prayers are? How so?
- How does weakness and vulnerability impact your prayers?
- What's the most important thing you heard today? Why?