

## The Long View

"You must be hungry after shoveling so hard! Let me get you a piece of apple pie. Do you like apple pie? You stay right there and let me get you some pie."

She was an eighty-year-old widow, and I knew it would take at least ten minutes for her to make it into the kitchen, never mind dishing out the pie. I sat at the table, wondering how long she would make me sit before I got my pay and was out of there.

The offering was quintessential New England: Light golden brown crust, piping hot apples, and cold milk in a tall glass. I devoured it.

She had barely sat down at the head of the table to enjoy her slice when she noticed my bare plate. "Let me get you another piece!" There was no declining the offer: She was into the kitchen before I could open my mouth. Funny how quickly she could move at times. The pie was good, the milk cold, and I made quick work of her second offering.

But she kept talking and talking. It was the unspoken dread of our neighborhood – getting caught with Mrs. Back. We all have a Mrs. Back in our lives. Even at that young age, I began to reflect, How could someone be so oblivious to the cues before her – how could she not notice that I wanted out of there?

About ten years later, on a Monday afternoon, something inside me said, "You need to tell Mrs. Back." For on that previous Friday night, at a bachelor party in Harvard Square, I gave myself to Jesus. I still hadn't told anybody. But somehow I knew: I was supposed to tell Mrs. Back.

It was a lovely spring afternoon in May, and Mrs. Back was hanging out her laundry to dry. I walked up to the fence. "Mrs. Back, do you know what it means to be "born again"?"

She dropped everything and looked at me in sheer surprise and delight. "Why, yes I do." She had been a pastor's wife, after all.

"Well, the other night, I was born again."

She looked at me and said with a firm voice, "You stay right there!" I stood on the driveway, at the fence, watching her hobble up to the back door, up the steps with her cane.

Ten minutes later she came out from the back door, walked over to me, and handed me the biggest, most delicious piece of chocolate cake I had ever eaten in my life. She smiled and said, "Eat it!" And I devoured that piece of chocolate cake as she stood there and gazed at me. Celebrating with me. Rejoicing with me.

Finally, she spoke. "For the last fifteen years, since you moved in, I have prayed every day for you and for Paul (my friend who lived on the other side of her house) – I prayed every day that you would come to know Jesus..."

~From Philip Yancey's "Prayer: Does It Make Any Difference?"

# Penetrating Prayer

Long Beach Alliance Church • April 29<sup>th</sup>, 2007 • Pastor Chris Lankford

**REJOICE IN THE LORD ALWAYS; AGAIN I WILL SAY, REJOICE! LET YOUR GENTLE SPIRIT BE KNOWN TO ALL MEN. THE LORD IS NEAR. BE ANXIOUS FOR NOTHING, BUT IN EVERYTHING BY PRAYER AND SUPPLICATION WITH THANKSGIVING LET YOUR REQUESTS BE MADE KNOWN TO GOD. AND THE PEACE OF GOD, WHICH SURPASSES ALL COMPREHENSION, WILL GUARD YOUR HEARTS AND YOUR MINDS IN CHRIST JESUS. FINALLY, BRETHREN, WHATEVER IS TRUE, WHATEVER IS HONORABLE, WHATEVER IS RIGHT, WHATEVER IS PURE, WHATEVER IS LOVELY, WHATEVER IS OF GOOD REPUTE, IF THERE IS ANY EXCELLENCE AND IF ANYTHING WORTHY OF PRAISE, DWELL ON THESE THINGS. THE THINGS YOU HAVE LEARNED AND RECEIVED AND HEARD AND SEEN IN ME, PRACTICE THESE THINGS, AND THE GOD OF PEACE WILL BE WITH YOU.**

**~PHILIPPIANS 4:4-9 (NASB)**

## 1) Planned Transformation

- A) In the midst of a universe which God has planned (Ephesians 1:3-6), God calls on each of us to habitually and consistently pray (1<sup>st</sup> Thessalonians 5:17).
- B) God has designed His universe to have "predestined change," the transformation of events and people which are ordained by God and experienced as change by mankind (Ephesians 2:10, see also 2:8-9).
- C) From small to big, God calls on us to engage Him in prayer (Philippians 4:6) which leads to change (Luke 11:5-13).
- D) Why should we pray? Does prayer make a difference? The overwhelming answer of Scripture is **ABSOLUTELY!** Prayer transforms people and events (Luke 11:5-13).

## 2) The Power Of Prayer On People

- A) We have been focused on prayer which changes events. However, God is most interested in changing the hearts of people (Jeremiah 31:33, cf. Hebrews 8:10).
- B) Transformation occurs when a person encounters the Living God (2<sup>nd</sup> Corinthians 3:16-18; Romans 12:1-2). Prayer is actively submitting yourself to God's transforming power, it assumes our need of God (Psalm 40).
- C) At its most basic level, prayer is submitting requests to God which cannot be accomplished through normal means (Matthew 6:10). This act of humility places our hearts and minds in correct relationship to God (6:11-13).

- D) When we come to prayer, our goal should not be to change a changeless God, but rather, be changed by true interaction with the Living God (note the transformation of Psalm 32).

## 3) Who Needs Prayer?

- A) God hears the prayers of His people uniquely (Psalm 34:15-18; Proverbs 15:29, 8, 28:9). This should encourage us in praying to the Lord (Psalm 34:4, cf. 1<sup>st</sup> Thessalonians 5:17).
- B) Every person needs prayer for the forgiveness of sins (1<sup>st</sup> John 1:9). This prayer for forgiveness transforms our hearts which **MUST** translate into a heart which is forgiving of others (Matthew 6:14-15, Mark 11:25).
- C) Transforming prayer is more private than public (Matthew 6:6, cf. Mark 1:35, Matthew 14:23, 26:36ff, Luke 5:16). Note the heart of humility which God desires in prayer (Luke 18:10-14).
- D) Almost every recorded prayer of Jesus Christ (except for Luke 22:42) was for others. Praying for others, especially for the salvation of others (1<sup>st</sup> Timothy 2:1; Matthew 9:38; Romans 10:1) transforms our own hearts to be sensitive to spiritual matters (2<sup>nd</sup> Corinthians 13:9, Ephesians 1:16-19).
- E) Every person who needs healing is called to request prayer from the elders of the church (James 5:14-15). Note how prayer is coupled with personal transformation in dealing with and defeating sin (James 5:16, cf. 17-18).
- F) Pastors and church leaders need your prayers (Acts 12:5). The measure of our commitment to leaders is translated in prayer for them (Colossians 4:2-3ff; 1<sup>st</sup> Thessalonians 5:25).