

TO BUSY TO PRAY?

Proposition: God invites us to influence our community, our nation, and the world – to literally direct history while we're on our knees.

Would it be this morning that as we I share with you what the Lord has been saying to me regarding prayer that you and I will begin to realize and truly believe that

God invites us to influence our community, our nation, and the world – to literally direct history while we're on our knees.

– **Brother Andrew**

Prayer is in so many ways a mystery. Over the next few weeks we are going to cover some very basic and fundamental truths around prayer, we will also look at the painful issue of how do you and I handle unanswered prayer and then on August the 7th I want to invite you to join the church for a full day of prayer and fasting, culminating in an evening service of extended worship and prayer.

I have really felt the Lord stirring me about my own prayer life and so when I saw in the book shop a book by Bill Hybels called “Too Busy to Pray” I felt that I had to pick it up to challenge myself and the missionary family at Ranui Baptist Church. My prayer personally is that you and I become more disciplined in prayer over the next five weeks as we look at this topic. My prayer for us corporately is that more and more people will want to go to Meleane and commit to the prayer ministry team after church, that more and more of us will go to the prayer room for a few minutes before each service, that more and more of us will go to the prayer meetings and commit to intercessory prayer in our small groups.

We are a church full of people that have come from different cultures and in many cases different religions. You and I are aware that every religion has as one of its core practices prayer. You may have observed as I have that even atheists who say there is no God will at times in their lives find themselves praying also. And even though in the west we have really complicated prayer, and there is a lot of mystery around prayer, particularly when it appears our prayers haven't been answered – it seems to me that humanity is wired to pray. There is something in every human being that will cause them at least at times to call out to God the creator. In a way prayer seems a very natural thing to do.

In this generation though prayer is becoming less and less natural though.

Ronald Dunn said;

“The Book of Acts is filled with prayer meetings; every forward thrust the first church made was immersed in prayer. Take another look at the church at Pentecost. They prayed ten days and preached ten minutes and three thousand people were saved. Today we pray ten minutes and preach ten days and are ecstatic if anyone is saved.”

Now I have my own theory about why we culturally are not so good at praying today. When I look at the culture that I have been raised in, that I have grown up since 9 yrs of age; being told to sort it out yourself, to be self sufficient, to set goals, that success and change in life is achieved by doing things and not only that doing things with pace and discipline. That is the message I understood from our culture about how to cope with life as a kiwi kid. DIY, get it sorted. Solve your own problems by working hard.

That culture that I have just described, our culture is very, very different from a world view that says "Be still and know that I am God".

Its very different from a biblical world view that says

Psalm 145:17-18

17Our LORD, everything you do

is kind and thoughtful,

18and you are near to everyone

whose prayers are sincere.

Matthew 7:7

7Ask, and you will receive. Search, and you will find. Knock, and the door will be opened for you.

Psalm 40:1

1I patiently waited, LORD,

for you to hear my prayer.

You listened 2and pulled me

from a lonely pit

full of mud and mire.

Matthew 21:22

22If you have faith when you pray, you will be given whatever you ask for."

Our culture says Do It Yourself, act now, sort it out.

But the bible says wait patiently, listen, have faith and He will sort it out.

Now we do believe, but every time there is a huge list of things to do on one hand, and God is inviting us to sit still and trust Him on the other hand, there is a conflict of beliefs, and some deliberate daily choices to be made.

Now if you have had some painfully unanswered prayers and if you have rationalized Gods willingness and power to help you away you are going to be even less motivated to pray.

This morning I want to give you a biblical perspective on God's willingness and ability to answer your prayers, in the hope that it will help you and I, believe what He is saying, as opposed to believing what our culture is saying.

Let's address the issue of willingness first. Does God want to help me? After all He has a lot of people to deal with and disasters to sort out and visions and dreams to give, does He really want to listen to our prayers and answer our prayers?

Let's return to a familiar but often misunderstood parable in Luke 18

2In a town there was once a judge who didn't fear God or care about people. 3In that same town there was a widow who kept going to the judge and saying, "Make sure that I get fair treatment in court."

4For a while the judge refused to do anything. Finally, he said to himself, "Even though I don't fear God or care about people, 5I will help this widow because she keeps on bothering me. If I don't help her, she will wear me out."

Now widows 2000 years ago had a terrible life. If their sons or brothers in law or some bloke didn't look after them they would become beggars or prostitutes to survive. It was a harsh life and these widows had no real rights. They were unimportant people in society. This widow in this parable was being treated unfairly by someone else and she wanted protection from the magistrate and justice against this person who was mistreating her.

In this parable she goes to a judge who we are told doesn't fear God and doesn't care about people. This is not a nice guy. People are just a nuisance to him. He couldn't care less that she was being mistreated, just get out of my face lady was his opinion. The widow goes to this man for help and of course he doesn't. He couldn't care less, but she doesn't give up, she is onto him like a shirt on his back, everywhere he goes – there she is again – always asking for him to intervene and act justly. Finally, finally this guy says I am sick of her badgering me constantly, I am going to answer her request to get this annoying woman off my back.

Now some times people read only the first part of the parable and think that we are like the widow with no rights and we have to just keep on annoying a God who doesn't care until we get our prayers answered but see what the bible actually does say.

6The Lord said:

Think about what that crooked judge said. 7Won't God protect his chosen ones who pray to him day and night? Won't he be concerned for them? 8He will surely hurry and help them

Is God too busy for you and me?

Does He really want to hear my request for help?

God is the opposite of this rotten magistrate. You and I are not some unimportant person at the bottom of the social ladder. You and I are not some unrelated

individuals! You are His chosen ones, you are related to Him, Jesus says when you talk to God call him Aba – Father. Even a bad parent wants to listen to their kids and find out what is going on in their lives. How much more will your Father in heaven want to listen to you and desire to help you.

“No-one's voice sounds sweeter to God than yours. Nothing in the cosmos would keep him from directing his full attention to your requests.

God is interested in your prayers because he is interested in you. Whatever matters to you is a priority for his attention. Nothing in the universe matters as much to him as what is going on in your life this day. You don't have to pester him for his attention He's your Father and he wants to hear what you have to say.”

– Hybels

He is willing, in fact looking forward to hearing from you. You are His child, He loves to hear your voice. Any time, any place you have access to Father's ear.

God is willing and God is able.

I want you to pause and think right now, if you could ask God for one miracle in your life, knowing that there is a 100% guarantee that he would answer that prayer, what would that miracle be?

A marriage restored? A Job change? A healing? A wayward son or daughter back on track? What would it be for you?

I believe that our rational culture and some negative, hard to interpret experiences work against us trusting God for a miracle. We say we know God can, he is able, he's able, I know he's able, I know my God is able to carry me through. But at times we struggle to believe it.

Lets look at what the Bible tells us about His ability to help us and use these things to challenge our limited faith in His ability.

God has power over nature.

Exodus 14 and Joshua 3 prove that if God wants to part the sea or hold back a huge river, he can do it and thousands have witnessed it.

If he wants to send bread from heaven Exodus 16 or multiply a few loaves and fishes John 6, He can do it. If he wants a rock to give out enough water to quench the thirst of nearly 4 million people in Exodus 17 its not a problem.

God also has power over circumstances

In Acts 12 we read how the apostle Peter had been chained, shackled between two guards and was surrounded by other guards in prison waiting to be beheaded the next day by Herod Agrippa. While he slept between these guards confident in God whether he lived or died a group of Christians were in a house praying for a miracle. In the night an angel wakes him up, and the chains fall off and the prison gates open in front of him as he and the angel walk out of maximum security unopposed. Peter

latter walks to the prayer meeting.

God has power over the human heart look how he changed Peters' heart and has changed yours and mine. He can change the most stubborn of hearts.

As the scripture on the wall behind me says "Jesus Christ is the same, yesterday, today and forever." so if he did it then, he is able to do it now. God hasn't changed.

I want to share with you a personal revelation before closing. If you are about my age then you would have been around many, many Christians and itinerant ministers who in the last 20 years have taught us that some one can lay hands on you and pass their anointing onto you. I have struggled to find any basis for that in the bible or evidence for that in the lives of people. The idea that some evangelist can lay hands on you and you will be an evangelist like them is crazy. The idea that if you want to be used by God for healing just get Weston Carrier or Bill Subrizky to pray for you is crazy. You received your gift mix and anointing the day that you received the baptism of the Holy Spirit. By using your gifts and by daily being filled with the spirit your ministry will grow but you can't get another persons anointing that God has given them and that has been developed through hours of prayer and life experience.

So many Christians run from this ministry to the next hoping we will become like that person.

Power for ministry though, comes only as you spend time in prayer with the Lord. All these people we know as heroes and legends of the faith have great power from God not because some-one prayed for them but because they have spent hours and hours on their knees.

I love the Old Testament in Exodus 17 story of Moses standing on a hill overlooking a battle between the Israelites and the Amalekites. As long as Moses lifted up his hands in prayer and asked for God's help, the power of God flowed down giving victory on the battle field. As soon as he lowered his hands and took a break from prayer the tide turned against the Israelites. Prayer brought power which brought victory. And its the same for you and I today.

Do you and I want more power in our life? Do you want to see more answered prayer and more miracles?

Pray more.

God is inviting us to pray.

He is willing and he is able to do anything, to change anyone and to intervene in any circumstance!

My challenge to you and to me this week as most home groups aren't meeting is this. Find some where quiet to be with the Lord and ask Him. Lord am I believing the messages I am getting from my culture, or am I believing what you say in your Word? Where is there a conflict of belief. Help me get that sorted so that you can use my prayers to bless thousands – in Your name.