

CHAPTER TWO

Foundational Prayer

The Key to the More Abundant Life

The thief cometh not, but for to steal, and to kill, and to destroy: I am come that they might have life, and that they might have it more abundantly.

John 10:10

While most professing Christians have no difficulty believing that they have received eternal life (*been saved, been born again, etc.*), few can honestly say that they enjoy the more abundant life that Jesus came to give us. I couldn't say I enjoyed life more abundantly during my first nineteen years as a believer! I was beaten, battered, bruised, starved, and ready to die. The blazing fire that Jesus had ignited in my soul when I got saved had all but gone out. But God was faithful. He didn't leave me for dead, and He isn't going to leave you for dead, either. If you want the more abundant life that Jesus came to give us, keep reading.

An Analogy

Think of salvation as a platform that God sets us on when we get saved. We are no longer in sin, but we are not far from it. Think of the more abundant life as a second platform high above the first one. Every good work takes a certain amount of energy, and brings us half our current distance to the second platform (*so, there will always be a gap*). Also, we start every new day on the first platform (*losing all the previous day's progress*).

Because the love of God is shed abroad in our hearts, and because the experience of having received new life is so fresh, we, as brand new believers, are highly motivated (*and for a time, supernaturally energized*) to do good works. Doing good works enables us to perceive the reality of the second platform (*the more abundant life*), and the reality of the unbounded pleasures that await us there. Eventually, God stops supernaturally energizing us, fatigue overwhelms us, and we fall to the ground in total exhaustion.

After a rest, our desire for the more abundant life drives us to resume our good works. We get close to the second platform again, and our desire grows proportionally. Fatigue overwhelms us again, and we find ourselves totally exhausted again. Eventually, all hope of ever enjoying the more abundant life dissolves away. We lie there helpless until God comes, in the fullness of time, and shows us the way. More often than not, we lie there until everything in our lives has either fallen apart, or is on the verge of doing so.

The Process

See now that I, even I, am he, and there is no god with me: I kill, and I make alive; I wound, and I heal: neither is there any that can deliver out of my hand.

Deuteronomy 32:39

God is a wonderful Father who gives us exactly what we need, even if it hurts us a little bit (*Romans 8:18*) for a very short time (*80 years is what percent of eternity?*) (*James 4:14*). God brings us through this painful process so that He can bring us close enough to Himself to protect us from being destroyed by the pride that the more abundant life would otherwise produce in us.

The LORD is nigh unto them that are of a broken heart; and saveth such as be of a contrite spirit.

Psalms 34:18

These passages of scripture make a lot more sense to me now that I understand this process:

The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit: a broken and a contrite heart, O God, thou wilt not despise.

Psalms 51:17

*Blessed are the poor in spirit: for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.
Blessed are they that mourn: for they shall be comforted.*

Matthew 5:3-4

But he giveth more grace. Wherefore he saith, God resisteth the proud, but giveth grace unto the humble.

Submit yourselves therefore to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you.

Draw nigh to God, and he will draw nigh to you. Cleanse your hands, ye sinners; and purify your hearts, ye double minded.

Be afflicted, and mourn, and weep: let your laughter be turned to mourning, and your joy to heaviness.

Humble yourselves in the sight of the Lord, and he shall lift you up.

James 4:6-10

Of course, God would prefer if we got close to Him through prayer instead, but we have a natural aversion to prayer (*we hate it!*), and we are incredibly stubborn (*I resisted for 19 years!*). So, if you would like to enter into the more abundant life Jesus came to give us, with as little suffering as possible, establish a solid habit of Foundational Prayer right away, and guard it with your life.

The More Abundant Life

Life on the second platform is characterized by victory and success in areas where believers have always experienced failure and defeat. Things like stress, depression, addictions, nervous habits, and sinful strongholds have no place in the more abundant life. Because they are no longer needed to reveal the abundant life to us, God can use our good works to bring others to Christ, and to show them how to have life transforming relationship with the Father.

After these things the word of the LORD came unto Abram in a vision, saying, Fear not, Abram: I am thy shield, and thy exceeding great reward.

Genesis 15:1

As unbelievable as it may seem from where you are right now, the greatest benefit of the more abundant life is the quality of relationship with God that is available to us there. I will not take any time trying to describe it. Suffice it to say that, to me, God himself has truly become my exceeding great reward. But don't take my word for it. Taste and see for yourself!

*O taste and see that the LORD is good: blessed is the man that trusted in him.
Psalms 34:8*

A Few Essential Definitions

Prayer – Study the original languages all you want. Prayer simply means talking to God. It is verbal worship. It is intercession (*asking God for things for other people*), supplication (*asking God for things for yourself*), and the Hebrew word even includes the idea of a hymn. So, if you feel like singing your prayers to God, you go right ahead, and don't let anybody stop you.

Christian Prayer – Prayer that God listens to. Prayer offered by a person who has believed on Jesus, repented of their sin, and given their entire life over to the absolute Lordship of Jesus Christ. Prayer offered by a person who will obey whatever God tells him, or her, to do, no matter what it may be.

Foundational Prayer – Diligent, disciplined, daily, prioritized, Christian prayer.

Sporadic Prayer – All Christian prayer that does not constitute Foundational Prayer.

How to Get Started with Foundational Prayer

1. Make the decision right now that you are going to start your day tomorrow with Foundational Prayer.

If you do not decide to start right away, you may never start. All the devil has to do to steal a lifetime of powerful prayer from you is to rob you of just one day. Do not give him this victory in your life.

2. Determine what your Foundational Prayer time is going to start out looking like.

It may be structured (*using a list, or a model like the Lord's Prayer*), or unstructured (*simply saying whatever comes into your head*), or some combination of them both. It can be reclining, kneeling, walking, or sitting in a bathtub. As long as you are open to making any changes that the Lord wants to make, you can start out with anything, and trust that God will work with you to develop the Foundational Prayer time that is perfect for you.

3. Establish a point of termination that constitutes the conclusion of your foundational prayer time.

I ask people all the time if they think they pray enough. They always say no. When I ask them how they know they do not pray enough, those who don't go blank usually tell me that they could pray more. Then I tell them that they did not answer my question. I do not do this to torment them. I do it to show them the total irrationality of saying that they do not pray enough when they cannot honestly say what constitutes praying enough. Establishing a point of termination strips the devil of this weapon. You do not have to stop when you reach your point of termination (*feel free to pray more than enough whenever it suits you!*), but you must determine that you will never stop before you reach it.

Attributes of Foundational Prayer Explained

Diligent – Determining what your Foundational Prayer time will start out looking like is the first part of the process of spiritual due diligence. Studying the subject of prayer throughout the remainder of your life continues this process. When the introduction of further light, or the leading of the Holy Spirit, indicates the need for a change, make the needed change immediately.

Disciplined – Making yourself do what you determined to do whether you feel like it or not at the time. It means always entering into Foundational Prayer when you are supposed to, and never stopping before you reach your point of termination.

Daily – This means every day. Weekends and holidays are not exceptions. Vacations are not exceptions. There are no exceptions.

Prioritized – This means that Foundational Prayer is done before work and play. You do not need to get legalistic about things like brushing your teeth or eating breakfast. But it is vital that you always pray before going to work, or entering into the recreational activities of a day off.

Mercy Over Sacrifice

It is important to be fully committed to obeying God in Foundational Prayer, but it is never more important than loving your neighbor. If you forget to set your alarm clock, you may have to decide what is more important to you; Foundational Prayer, or getting to work on time. But if you have to decide between Foundational Prayer and taking your injured friend to the hospital, you are a Pharisee in need of some serious repentance.

Freedom Over Form

When I say you should establish what your Foundational Prayer time will look like, I do not assume that it will look the same every day. We are not to take weekends off, but we may have liberty from the Lord to sleep in. If I get up at six in the morning during the week, but I sleep in until ten on Saturday, as long as I pray before I play, I am A OK.

Be aware that God reserves the right to do whatever He wants. I typically pray from a list, but God may tell me to put it away and engage in unstructured prayer. It may be just for that day, and it might be a radical, permanent change. Do yourself a favor now. Do not allow yourself to get too comfortable with any style of prayer. That is the stuff that idols are made of.

Why We Were Created

God is the eternal, unchanging, self-existent being. By definition, a perfect being cannot need anything, so His choice to create must have been desire based, not need based. The members of the Godhead have always loved one another perfectly, and have always enjoyed the pleasure of that perfect love. As such, God would not need to create in order to be fulfilled in this area. But it also makes sense that He would desire to increase His enjoyment of the pleasure of love. That is where we come in.

As sentient beings we can know God truly, but as finite beings we cannot know Him exhaustively. As free will beings we are capable of loving God, which we do in direct proportion to our knowledge of God. Therefore, giving us the gift of eternal life means that God gets to eternally enjoy the pleasure of perfect love within the Godhead, and He gets to eternally enjoy the pleasure of ever increasing love with us. We get to eternally enjoy perfect love from God, and we get to eternally enjoy ever increasing love for God. This is why we were created.

Thou art worthy, O Lord, to receive glory and honour and power: for thou hast created all things, and for thy pleasure they are and were created.

Revelation 4:11

What we believe affects what we do. If we believe that we were created to effect the infinite increase of God's pleasure in love forever, then prayer (*how we express love to God directly*) is our primary task. Evangelism and discipleship (*how we express love to God indirectly by introducing others to Him, and helping them grow in their love for Him*) are definitely next in line. Everything we do in life has value only to the degree that they help us to fulfill one or more of these three tasks. And these three tasks have value only to the degree that they are calculated to increase God's pleasure in love forever.

Common Attacks that Kill or Hinder Foundational Prayer

1. Knowing that God is right there listening to us when we pray does not change the fact that we appear to be talking out loud to no one, and the enemy makes us feel stupid and foolish for doing so. The only way to combat this is to truly stop caring what people think about us. The sooner we start acting like God's opinion is the only one that matters, the better off we will be.

2. The enemy plants the following question in our minds: If God knows what I need before I ask Him, why do I need to pray? There are two problems with this question:
 - a. Prayer is not just about getting things from God (*for ourselves, or for others*). People need to stop acting like God is nothing more than a great big vending machine in the sky. God wants us to share our hearts with Him, and He has things that He would like to share with us.
 - b. We need to stop thinking about prayer as something that we *need* to do. People spend time with those they love because they *want* to, and God is no exception.
3. Fear. We have a mental picture of God (*placed into our heads by the enemy*) sitting on His throne with a great big hammer in His hand just waiting for us to mess up so He can blast us. If we would start spending regular, quality time with God, we would begin to learn that He is not like that. Of course, if God really was like that, you would not be reading this right now, because we would all have been blasted years ago!
4. Unbelief. We feel too guilty to approach God because we do not really believe that God has truly forgiven us. We say that we do, but it is mere lip service. We know that it has to be true. We know that the Bible says it is true. But, deep down where it matters, we do not really believe it is true. (*Of course, if we harbor secret sin in our hearts, we really are not forgiven, and our aversion to getting close to God in prayer is well justified. If this is the case, repent, ask forgiveness, and move on!*)
5. The enemy introduces the idea that offering the same prayers to God day after day is a violation of Jesus' teaching against the use of vain repetitions in prayer. There is a difference, however, between vain repetitions and holy repetitions. If all repetitions in prayer were vain, Jesus would not have specified what kind of repetitions to avoid. Vain repetitions speak of the heathen practice of saying a lot of words over and over to get their god's attention. We have our omnipresent God's attention before we even start speaking. I don't know the fullness of why God wants us to offer petitions more than once, but the Bible makes it clear that he does. "Give us this day our daily bread," is obviously a petition to be repeated on a daily basis, and so, by extension, the whole model prayer Jesus gave for us to follow should probably be followed on a daily basis. Also, a better rendering of the exhortation to, "ask and ye shall receive," would be to "ask and keep on asking, and ye shall receive."
6. The enemy tells us that our prayers are ineffective because we are not seeing any results. But the purpose of prayer is not to get results. The purpose of prayer is to make God happy. The sooner you grasp this fact, the sooner your life will get dramatically better.
7. The enemy tells people that a disciplined approach to prayer cheapens prayer. To see the stupidity of this argument, simply ask yourself if the same, disciplined approach to other activities cheapens them. (*i.e. going to work, eating meals, church attendance, tithing, etc.*)

How Foundational Prayer Blesses God

1. God, like any good father, is blessed when He sees that His children are blessed.

Foundational Prayer strengthens our righteous desires, weakens our sinful desires, cultivates the fruit of the Spirit in us, and continually fills and refills us with the Holy Spirit. A soul filled with the Holy Spirit conducts the voice of God clearly, and muffles the voice of the enemy. It strengthens the lobbying efforts of righteous desires, and weakens the lobbying efforts of sinful desires, resulting in less sinful choices and more righteous choices. Righteous choices produce acts of worship. Since worship is a tool that naturally makes people progressively more like the object or individual worshipped, Foundational Prayer ultimately makes us more and more like God (*i.e. happy, healthy, holy, complete, loving, wise, well adjusted, etc.*), and it blesses God to see us being so blessed.

2. God enjoys our company, and is blessed when we choose to spend time with Him in prayer. Especially when we spend time with Him in Foundational Prayer!

True friends are not those who like being around you when all is well. True friends are those who do not run and hide when there is work to be done, or needs to be met. The old cliché is so true: A friend in need is a friend indeed. Praying when you feel like (*sporadic prayer*) it is like hanging out with a friend when all is well. Choosing to regularly spend time with God in prayer, even when you do not particularly feel like it (*foundational prayer*), is like driving across town in the middle of the night to watch your friend's kids because he has to take his wife to the hospital. Being a friend in need sweetens every aspect of a friendship.

Foundational Prayer is Just the First Step

Praying always with all prayer and supplication in the Spirit, and watching thereunto with all perseverance and supplication for all saints;

Ephesians 6:18

Just as “getting saved” is only the first step in the three phase process of salvation, we have discovered that foundational prayer is just the first step in a powerful life of prayer. Whatever you do, resist the temptation to think you have arrived (*you will feel like you have!*), and that there are no greater glories ahead. And by all means, resist the temptation to religionate* foundational prayer.

* Religionate – to take something that God ordained to give life, and turn it into a legalistic, life sucking instrument of death.

Let me give you a loving warning before moving on to the next chapter. If you are unwilling to establish foundational prayer, either 1) you are not saved, or 2) you are on your way to being totally crushed by God.