Your Checklist for Prayer (Part 1)

by Bayless Conley

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Hello friend. I'm glad that you have joined me. In this message and in the next message, I'm going to be sharing your checklist for prayer. I'm going to actually look at just four simple things that you need to check off before you pray. Let me explain what I mean by that. Just by way of an analogy, my wife and I, some years back, were invited by some friends to fly over to Catalina. It's an island about 25 miles or so off the California coast. It has a little tiny airstrip that you can land on. There are a few restaurants and not a lot of people living there, but it's a beautiful little island. We said, “Yes.” We met at a local airport. My friend, who was a trained pilot, had rented a little four-seater plane. The four of us climb on board. It's him and his wife in the front, and my wife and I are sitting directly behind them. He goes through this whole checklist. He actually has it out, and he's going one by one through these things. He’s checking the fuel, checking to make sure this indicator works. He's checking to make sure that works. I think he checked to make sure that the flaps worked on the wings. I don't fly, but I watched him go through this whole checklist meticulously.

He wanted to make sure everything was covered because if one of those things wasn't working, it could have been disastrous for us, even to the point that it could have caused us to crash and not reach our desired destination. Every trained pilot goes through a checklist, whether you're riding on a jet or a little four-passenger prop plane like we were. They all go through a checklist to make sure everything's working, and make sure everything is right before they ever take off from the ground. Before we ever release our prayer in flight to God, there's a checklist that we should go through. Otherwise, our prayers will be hindered, and they'll never reach their desired destination. They certainly will not bring the answers back that we are desiring. Here are four simple things on your prayer checklist. Number one, ask yourself, “Do I have Scripture that covers what I'm asking for? Do I have Scripture that covers my case? Is the thing that I'm praying for promised to me in the Bible?” Jesus said this in John 15, and I'm going to begin reading to you from verse 7. John 15:7–8 NKJV. Jesus said,

> [7] If you abide in Me, and My words abide in you, you will ask what you desire, and it shall be done for you. [8] By this My Father is glorified, that you bear much fruit; so you will be My disciples.

Now, here He's talking about prayer fruit, will bear much prayer fruit. Our prayer will get answers, abundant answers, if we abide in Him and His Word abides in us. His Word needs to abide in us before we ask. Now, He said, “Ask what you desire.” But obviously, it's something that has to be in line with the Word, consistent with God's Word, promised by God's Word. So, that's where we begin when it comes to our checklist for prayer. As I sit here right now, my wife is enroute to Los Angeles International Airport. She was in another state, staying with a friend for a few days. I get to go pick my sweetheart up just about an hour after I'm done here. If she would have gone into the airport and actually even walked up to the gate to get on her plane, do you know what they would have asked for? They said, “May I see your ticket, ma'am?” So, she shows the ticket that says Los Angeles International Airport, which has her name and her seat number on it. But if she walked up there and they said, “Ma'am, can I see your ticket?” She says, “Well, I don't have a ticket, but I believe I'm going to Los Angeles.” They said, “Well,

not on this plane, ma'am. Not without a ticket." "Well, I just believe I'm going to Los Angeles." "Well, ma'am, I'm sorry. You have to have a ticket to board this plane. This plane will not take you to Los Angeles without a ticket stating that you are going there."

Now, whether it was one that she needed to scan from her mobile device or a paper ticket, she needed to be in possession of that ticket. Here's the truth. Your prayer won't get off the ground without a Scripture that's promising your desired destination. I mean, when you go to pray, you better have a ticket that says, "By His stripes, I was healed." If you're going to be praying about healing, you better have a ticket that says, "God will keep him in perfect peace whose mind is stayed on Me." "Whatever things you know you desire when you pray, believe you receive them and you shall have them." You just need to have a ticket, so to speak, by way of metaphor that covers your need, that covers what you are praying about. It is so, so important. Abraham is set forth as an example of faith. You can read that in Romans 4 that we are to follow in the footsteps of Abraham's faith. It talks in detail there, and you can read the story in Genesis. Abraham is 100 years old. His wife, Sarah, is 90. She had been barren her whole life. Never had the ability to have kids. One translation says that, "Now, Abraham is 100 years old, and Sarah's womb is dead."

So Abraham, and again, one paraphrase says he had one foot in the grave. His wife's womb was incapable of producing children. But God promised him, "You will be the father of many nations." So, against natural hope, he continued to trust God. It says that Abraham believed. You can read it in Romans 4. He believed according to what was spoken, "So shall your descendants be." God said, "They'll be as numerous as the stars in the heavens." If you read in Romans 4, the promise is mentioned or alluded to at least seven different times. The promise, the promise, the promise, the promise, the promise, the promise, the promise. Abraham just didn't believe according to something that he wanted to see happen. He didn't just believe according to popular opinion. He didn't believe according to what the doctor said or didn't say. He didn't believe according to the advice of his neighbor. He didn't believe according to what his physical circumstance said was a possibility. He believed according to what was spoken. Friend, true faith is based on the Word of God. Romans 10:17 NKJV,

> [17] So then faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the word of God.

Fruitful prayer is based on the Scripture. I've said this many times, and I'll say it once again. You need to have a love affair with your Bible. Become familiar with the promises. Become familiar with God's commands. Become familiar with His decrees. Learn God's ways. We do that by spending time in the Scripture. So, number one, have a Scripture, have a promise that covers your area of need. Many times throughout the years, I have prayed for people. On occasion, we've had people come to the front of the church. We have had a prayer line. So, you go from one person to the next, "All right, what are you praying for?" "Well, I need God to do this." "I need this." "I'm trusting the Lord to do that." Many times I'll ask them, "Okay, what Scriptures are you standing on? What promises from the Bible have you found that cover your needs?" Nine times out of 10, there'll be a startled look on the person's face, like they never considered such a thing. Sometimes, a person will say, "Well, nothing in particular." Well, that's probably what you're going to get: nothing in particular. So number one on our checklist, ask yourself, do you have Scripture that covers what you're asking for? Is there a promise that covers your needs? The second thing on our checklist is this: check and see whether you are in faith. I'm going to explain that, so I want you to stay with me here. I don't want you to misunderstand this. So number two on the checklist, check and see whether you are in faith. Let me read to you 2 Corinthians 13:5 NKJV. Paul is writing here to the Corinthians. He says this,

> [5] Examine yourselves as to whether you are in the faith. Test yourselves. Do you not know yourselves, that Jesus Christ is in you?—unless indeed you are disqualified.

Now, think about it. He said, “Examine yourself as to whether you are in the faith. Test yourself.” Now, he's talking about generally having faith in Christ for salvation. Are you a part of the body of Christ? Have you been saved? Have you been washed in the blood? Have you been born again? Are you really Christ's? Is He really your Savior? He said to examine yourself. There are certain things we can examine concerning that. Though it is true that we can know that we know that we're in Christ. First John said, “We know we have eternal life because of the Spirit that He has given to us. We know we've passed from death to life because we love the brethren. So, there are some ways that we can know that we are in Christ, that we're His. Though that's true of that aspect of faith, it's actually true of the entire spectrum of faith. You can examine yourself and know whether you're in faith for salvation. You can also examine yourself and know whether you're in faith to receive physical healing for your body. You can examine yourself and know if you're in faith when you've been praying for your kids, or for your marriage, or for a material need, or whatever you might be facing right now. You can know whether you're in faith.

Listen, if you give me your attention for the next few minutes, I'm going to share with you how. It's not that difficult, and this could revolutionize your world. Examine yourself. The word examine means “to take a penetrating look, to thoroughly scrutinize, to strip away everything else and take a look at what's really there.” Is your faith genuine, or is it just a close facsimile? Now, somebody says, “Well, you just said if I have a promise that covers my need.” It's true, but you need to be in faith concerning the promise. The promise's potential is tapped when you believe it. Abraham believed the promise of God, and he became the father of many nations. The promises of God are true, but they will lie dormant. They are pregnant with supernatural power, but that power is not released until those promises are believed. So, again, we need to strip away everything and take a close, excruciating examination of ourselves and ask, “Am I really in faith, or is it what I have a close facsimile?”

My wife, Janet, some years ago, a lady in church came up and actually gave her a pearl necklace. It was really beautiful, and we weren't expecting it. My wife was very gracious and thanked her. They weren't some big, ostentatious, huge pearls. They were little pearls, but it was a beautiful little pearl necklace. I remember thinking, “Man, what a gift.” Here she gave away this personal piece of jewelry to my wife, and she explained that it was like her favorite piece of jewelry and that she wanted my wife, Janet, to have it. So, Janet has this. One day, I snuck into her jewelry box, and I took it out. I went to a jewelry store. I was going to see if I could have some pearl earrings made to match her necklace, or if they had some that I could buy, some pearl earrings. So, I go to the jeweler there, and I said, “Hey, somebody gave my wife this pearl necklace, and I wanted to either have made or buy some pearl earrings to match it.” The guy said, “Well, let me see it.” He gets a little loupe out, kind of a little magnifying glass that the jewelers use.

He looks at it, and he says, “Sir, these are not real pearls. They're imitation.” I go, “No.” He said, “No, they are. They're imitation.” I said, “How do you know?” He says, “Well, look.” He gave me the loupe and handed me back the pearls. He said, “Look, if you look at it, you can see a seam. Look really closely, and you can see a seam where this thing's been manufactured. These are not real pearls at all.” I looked, and then sure enough, as I looked closer, I could see he was right. They were a close facsimile. They look like pearls. We thought they were pearls. I'm thinking back. The woman didn't tell my wife that they were real pearls. We just assumed it. The truth is, they weren't the real thing. There is a close facsimile to faith called mental assent.

Mental assent looks like faith. It sounds like faith. But upon closer examination, it is revealed that it's not real faith at all. You see, mental assent agrees that the Word of God is true.

Mental assent agrees that salvation and forgiveness are true. It agrees that healing is true. It agrees that healing is in the Bible. Mental assent agrees that God supplies all of our needs according to His riches in glory by Christ Jesus. Mental assent agrees that deliverance is true and is available. Mental assent agrees that Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, today, and forever. But it never possesses the promises. Here's why. Because real faith is of the heart, it's more than just going through the motions and mentally agreeing that the Word of God is true. Romans 10:10 says, “For it is with the heart that man believes.” You need to know the difference between the two. You need to know the difference between heart faith and mental assent or mental agreement. Let me explain to you. As I said, I was going to do that. Here's an illustration. It’s a pretty simple one, and I think fairly easy to understand. Think of a recent meal that you have eaten. Maybe something from let's say a week ago. Maybe you and your husband, you and your wife, you and your girlfriend, or you and your buddies went out and you had a nice steak dinner, or you ate some ribs, or you went to some vegetarian restaurant, or you went to an Italian place and had some amazing pasta. You still remember the aromas as they hit your nose. You remember the beautiful presentation of the meal. You remember that first bite and how exquisite it was.

I was out recently with a friend, and I took him to a little place that I had found. We went, and we both got the lunch special. It was only about 10 bucks each, but the food was so good. It all comes from these organic farms, and all the meat there is grass-fed. They get local growers to get all their vegetables. They make their own salad dressings. It's just a really cool little restaurant. We both got the same lunch special, and I'd never gotten it before, though I'd eaten there several times. I was close to being stunned at how good it was. I mean, it wasn't just good, it was good. I remember every smell. I remember the texture. I remember the taste. I remember the colors. I remember the presentation. It was just outstanding. I took the food, I put it in my mouth, I chewed it, and I swallowed it. My body assimilated it, and then it produced physical strength in me. That's what the food did. I assimilated it into my system, and it was transmitted. It was transformed into physical strength. But now, even though I can remember the taste, the texture, the smell, the color, and the presentation, I remember everything about it, I can no longer derive physical strength from that. My body has used it all up. It's a memory.

I cannot derive physical strength from that memory, even though I can describe it to you perfectly. I need to eat again if my strength is going to be renewed. That's just the way it is with some people spiritually. We're to eat faith food. The Scriptures, the Bible is faith food. The Bible says, “Desire the sincere milk of the Word that you may grow thereby.” The metaphor is also used of those who are mature in the Lord. They can take the meat of God's Word. So, we are to take in and digest the meat and the milk of God's Word. When we do eat that faith food, when we do take in the Word of God, it produces a spiritual strength called faith. But here's the thing. The Scriptures that brought faith to me six months ago will not necessarily produce faith in me today just because I have a mental recollection of them. I might be able to quote them. I might be able to remember back as I sat in my study or at my kitchen table and read those verses, and tears began to roll down my cheeks as it suddenly became alive to me, and God spoke to me through His Word. It was so real. It caused my faith to grow. It brought spiritual strength to me. I might remember the emotions that were present, or maybe there weren't, but I can maybe just recollect those Scriptures. That doesn't necessarily produce faith in me now.

The Bible says, and I quoted a few moments ago, “Faith comes by hearing and hearing by the Word of God.” Notice, it's present tense. “Faith comes by hearing and hearing by the Word of God.” Faith doesn't come from having heard. Faith comes by hearing, present tense. I need to feed upon God's Word daily. Did you know that when the Israelites were going through the wilderness to the promised land, God provided manna for them, bread from heaven? They would go out of their tents in the morning, and there would be manna on the ground. They would collect that manna, and they would have to go out every day to get fresh manna because the manna would not keep. Manna is a type of the bread of God's Word. It's a type of spiritual food. If somebody tried to save the manna from today and collect a whole bunch and try to eat it the next day, do you know what? The Scripture says it bred worms. It would not keep.

The same thing is true, so to speak, by way of a metaphor, of an example. God's Word that I collected in my heart a week ago, a year ago, a month ago, will not necessarily produce strength in me today. I need to go out and get fresh manna. I need to feed on His Word every day. Jesus said, “Man doesn't live by bread alone, but by every Word, and here's the Greek, proceeding from the mouth of God.” It's something that's alive, that's fresh, that's now. So, I don't live by bread alone, but by every Word proceeding from the mouth of God. Well, God speaks to us through His Word, but we must feed upon it daily. So, before you pray, obviously find Scripture that covers your need. You need to ask yourself, “Do I have that?” If yes, then examine yourself whether you are in faith. Take the time to feed upon God's Word. Read the Scriptures. Meditate on the Scriptures before you pray. The truth is, there are very few real emergencies that call on us to pray now.

Every once in a while, we have an emergency. We need to pray, and we need to pray now. Okay, I'm on it. I'm with you. We're going to do that. The truth is, there are very few true emergencies. Most of the time, we have time to get into the Word of God. You should do that before you pray. In fact, my habit of life, before I pray about something, unless it's an emergency that needs prayer right now, I'll take time to get into the Word. I might even take a couple of days to just soak in the Word of God, to feed upon it, to drink it in, and to meditate upon it. I'm talking about Scriptures I already know, things I'm already familiar with in the Bible, and then I will pray. It is a good practice. Let me read to you from Proverbs 15, if I might, in verse 28. It says,

> 28 The heart of the righteous studies how to answer, but the mouth of the wicked pours forth evil.

The heart of the righteous studies how to answer. The word answer means to “begin speaking, to respond.” The heart of the righteous, and remember, faith is of the heart. It's with the heart that man believes. Our heart is the home of God's Word, and that's where faith springs forth from. So, the heart of the righteous studies how to answer. Then the very next verse, verse 29, says,

> 29 The Lord is far from the wicked, but He hears the prayer of the righteous.

So, those verses are connected. The heart of the righteous studies before it begins to speak. What is he talking about here? Well, God hears the prayer of the righteous. Before I begin speaking to God in prayer, my heart studies. Here's the thing: this word studies is the same Hebrew word translated as meditate. It means “to think upon.” It means “to roll over and over.” It means “to ponder, to imagine.” In fact, the literal Hebrew means “to mutter or to murmur to yourself over and over.” So, the heart of the righteous studies God's Word, meditates in the Word of God before it ever begins to respond or talk to God in prayer. It's the same word we

find in Joshua 1:8. God said, “Joshua, this book of the law shall not depart out of your mouth, but you shall meditate in it day and night. Then you'll make your way prosperous, and then you'll have good success.” So Joshua, if you're going to have good success, if you're going to prosper, you need to meditate on God's Word day and night.

Think about it, reflect upon it, study it, even murmur or mutter to yourself, and that means I just read the Scriptures. I'm reading them aloud. “Faith comes by hearing.” I'm reading it over and over, and I'm thinking about it. I'm musing upon it. I'm taking the brush of prayer, and I'm painting a picture on the canvas of my imagination with the ink of God's Word. By the way, the same word we find in Psalm 1, where it talks about the person who's like a tree planted by the water. His leaf doesn't wither. Whatever he does prospers, and he'll be fruitful. Well, it's the one who meditates in the Word is what it says there in Psalm 1. The one who meditates in the law of the Lord day and night is like that tree planted by the rivers of water. Its fruit leaf doesn't wither, and it bears fruit. Well, remember all the way back where we began in John 15? Jesus said, “If you abide in Me and My Word abides in you, you'll ask what you will, and it'll be done for you.” He said, “By this My Father is glorified that you bear much fruit.”

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