

Day One: H.O.N.E.S.T. Prayer

Author: Brent Colley

Last year I was thrilled to get to travel to Israel with our pastor and several other members of our Underwood family. One of the many sights we saw was a place in Jerusalem called The Temple Institute.

(www.templeinstitute.org) The Temple Institute has one goal, to restore Temple consciousness and reactivate these "forgotten" commandments. We hope that by doing our part, we can participate in the process that will lead to the Holy Temple becoming a reality once more. It was an amazing and indescribable place. It had scale models of the temple we read about in scripture. It had instruments that are to be used in the temple once it is rebuilt.

During our visit we were given a tour and a short lecture by a young Jewish girl. One thing she talked about was the incense. She allowed us to smell the ingredients, and she discussed them at length. She said that when the priest placed this fragrant offering on the fire, it could be smelled for miles. Think of it. An offering sent up to the Lord that reached beyond the temple mount, over the walls of Jerusalem and all the way to the countryside. She said it was so sweet that the women of the day would not even have to wear perfume.

This created such a beautiful picture in my mind. I want the fragrance of my prayers to touch Heaven. Not only that, I want them to impact the world that surrounds me.

As I began to think about them, I stumbled over the acronym H.O.N.E.S.T. by Mrs. Kim Bunton. It teaches us how to make our prayers a sweet aroma to the Lord.

H-Heart. God desires prayers that represent your heart. What's in there? What's hurting? What's happy? Tell Him sincerely what's going on in your heart.

O-Original prayers will smell good to God. Yes, there's a time and place for praying the beautiful prayers penned by giants of the faith. Don't count those out. But using your own words, your own rhythm, your own inflections surely brings familiarity between the two of you in prayer. That's good stuff to the One who wants to be your friend.

N-Natural. I could go on all day about this one. Why is it we can pick up the phone and talk, talk, talk without really thinking (a problem in and of itself), then get freaked out when it's time to talk to God? Be natural. Talk to Him like you would a friend on the phone or over a cup of coffee. It's really OK to do that. Share everything with Him...naturally.

E-Expectant. A sweet, aromatic prayer is expectant. When you bow your head in prayer or simply converse throughout the day, expect God to hear you, expect Him to listen and care, expect Him to answer.

S-Submission. Oh, there's a word that nobody likes. It's really a good one, though, especially in relationship to God. When we pray with an attitude of submission, we're acknowledging that God is God, He is who He says He is, He is in control, and He can impact our situations because of that. Why wouldn't you want to yield to the One with all the power?

T-Transforming. A sweet smelling prayer has the potential to be transforming. Maybe it's the situation that's changed, or maybe it's the person offering the prayer who's changed. Either way, there's potential for transformation when we go to God in prayer.

The simple connection is this: You don't have to be, act, think, or talk sweet for your prayers to be sweet-smelling to God. If you're not sure about your fragrant offering, follow the plan to be H.O.N.E.S.T. with God...then He won't think you stink.

Day Two: Chadron, NE --- Here We Come!

Author: Shelly Hollis

I just have to share the coolest story with you about how God clearly answered a prayer for our family. Several weeks ago, Jimmy Rowe scheduled an informational meeting for anyone interested in going to Chadron, NE, for a mission trip. Something in my spirit was stirred. Tim asked if I wanted to go to this meeting and I quickly said, "YES!" I guess I had heard Andrew Bishop so excited about going the year before, that I didn't want to miss it. Plus, God spoke to my heart about women in Chadron who need to be taught in the Word.

After the meeting was over, we were pondering the cost of the trip for Tim, Hannah, and me. We did pray about it, but couldn't get past the finances. We had "kind of" decided that we would just send Hannah, and perhaps Tim and I would make the trip next year. What you need to understand is that Tim's office was shut down last July. Since then, he has opened his own home inspection firm. With any new business, there is always start-up costs, training fees, and time to build the business. With all of those variables swirling in our head, we settled for the "answer" that we would not go. Well, let me re-phrase, I settled. We both continued to pray about the situation to see if God would give us any further word. I couldn't let go of the feeling that, for some reason, we should be going on that trip. Tim put his faith into action by writing me a letter, dated April 1st. Here is the content of the letter:

Dear Shelly,

You are getting this letter because I told the Lord that 12 home inspections in April would provide the money we need to go to Chadron. Pack your bags and Bible because we are going to Chadron!

Praise the Lord, He is Great!

I am writing this devotion on April 26th, and to date, Tim has had 16 home inspections this month. Furthermore, the monthly goal he set for himself at the beginning of this year was 8 inspections. God CLEARLY answered this prayer by doubling that figure!

Mark 11:24 tells us, "Therefore I say to you, all things for which you pray and ask, believe that you have received them, and they will be granted you." That is exactly what Tim did. He believed that God would give clear direction about this trip. So many times we pray for things and then are surprised when God answers. Is this because of our lack of belief?

I thank God for a husband who believes in the power of prayer and sets forth a great example for me and our kids. Since his office shut down last July, I have seen his faith in action more than any other time in our marriage of almost 23 years. I firmly believe it is because his faith is in God and not in himself or his job.

I challenge you to begin praying now for the Chadron team and the Colorado team that will be ministering in the west this summer. I am expecting God to do great and mighty things! Prayer changes things.

Day Three: Types of Prayer

Author: Tabatha McDowell

I was thinking the other day of all the things that start with prayer or at one time started with a prayer. Of course the obvious church services and mealtime but, also, all types of ceremonies such as weddings and graduations. Football games or other sporting events at one time started with a prayer. I even remember being in elementary school and starting the day with a prayer (not just a moment of silence) and actually reading Bible verses in front of the homeroom class. Think back through your life and you can probably come up with even more examples of situations and events that started with prayer.

Do you realize the most important decision of your life starts with a prayer? I'm referring to when you prayed the sinner's prayer and accepted Jesus as your Lord and Savior. Because of this prayer, your eternal destination is secured.

(Romans 10:9) "If you confess with your mouth Jesus as Lord, and believe in your heart that God raised Him from the dead, you shall be saved."

The sinner's prayer is a simple prayer, but, in one way, it is some of the most powerful words you will ever say. Your entire life changes. Do not take for granted what a small simple prayer can do for you or for someone else. Remember, God is listening. It starts with prayer.

Day Four: God's Gift

Author: Jason Moore

"For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God." (Ephesians 2:8).

Salvation testimonies are some of the most wonderful stories to hear. It is incredible to listen as someone shares how Almighty God called them into a loving relationship through Jesus Christ. I am one of the fortunate souls to have experienced this indescribable grace that was poured out on Calvary's cross!

I was blessed to be born into a Christian home and raised in church. I became aware of my sinfulness and separation from God at a fairly early age. By the time I was eight, I knew God was drawing me to Himself.

With my mom sitting on my bed one evening, I asked Jesus to forgive me of my sins and to come into my life as Lord and Savior. I didn't know much then, but I knew I was saved.

A few years later our pastor told my parents that God was going to use me. As a young teen, that thought scared me to death. That meant either being a preacher or a missionary to Africa (what a limited view, right?). I wanted neither! The only thing I could think to do was to become someone God wouldn't use. I ran from God for many years, but His grace never wavered. His promise to never leave us or forsake us is real! Looking back now, I see times when God used me despite myself. When I finally stopped running, Christ was right there waiting on me. I felt an overwhelming sense that it was time for me to try things His way. It is a decision I have never regretted. Since then, God has called me into the ministry, seen me through seminary, and led me to this incredible place of service. Through my life, I have never doubted His love for me, but I have learned much about His grace. For it is in His grace that we find salvation. He loves the whole world, but the whole world is not saved. Only those who receive His grace can experience His salvation. To God be the glory, great things He has done!

Day Five: His Wish--Your Command

Author: Pamela Storz

Dear friends, if our hearts do not condemn us, we have confidence before God and receive from Him anything we ask, because we obey His commands and do what pleases Him. And this is His command: to believe in the name of His Son, Jesus Christ, and to love one another as He commanded us. Those who obey His commands live in Him, and He in them. And this is how we know that He lives in us: we know it by the Spirit He gave us. (1 John 3:21-24)

I may be lalala-dum-dee-dum years old, but still a veritable toddler in my grasp of God's incredible generosity, providence, and grace through an effective prayer life. My dreams have come true!

One thing I've found is that, at some point, we all have the same question, "Why did my prayer go unanswered?"

Some prayers go unanswered because we never really prayed specifically, and we are out of fellowship with God. To walk in fellowship with God means we must, to the best of our ability, live according to His will, relying on Him for help. We fail hourly; or, in my case, each minute of the day. We must confess our sins immediately to always remain in a mindset pleasing to the Father.

If I had cherished sin in my heart, the Lord would not have listened; but God has surely listened and heard my voice in prayer. Praise be to God who has not rejected my prayer or withheld His love from me. (Psalm 66:18-20)

Some prayers go unanswered because they are self-centered rather than God-centered, and there is no expectation that God is going to do anything in response to our prayers. We go through the motions of saying,

"Thy will be done," uncaringly...sort of like a teen rolling their eyes and saying, "What-eh-ver." We are pouting, immature humans, flawed and self-centered. We insist on asking only for what we want and do not understand God's way. We are heavily oriented to our own desires. Remember that we also pray "in the name of Jesus," so how does it honor Him that we ask for anything in His precious name that would grieve and hurt Jesus?

You do not have, because you do not ask God. When you ask, you do not receive because you ask with wrong motives, that you may spend what you get on your pleasures. (James 4:2-3)

It's not magic and enchantment. It's not rocket science. It's really pretty simple. The closer we walk with the Father, the stronger our will becomes desire to honor Him. He wishes for us to follow His commands and that is our strongest desire. Then, our requests are heard by the Father, because (epiphany warning!) **He placed the desire in our hearts!** The more I pray for God's will to be done, the more my dreams come true, because my will is His and my dreams are things He desires for me. In my God's world, there is no such thing as an impossible dream or an unanswered prayer.