



Conversation with God – Part 6
2 Corinthians 1:8-12
GCSP – 01/10/2009

When I was 17-years old I got a job at the local K-Mart. I worked there for about three years in the camera/jewelry department. This was in the late 70's and at the time K-Mart was well known for their "Blue Light Specials." Each store had a rolling cart with a flashing blue light attached to the top of a high pole so all could see throughout the store. If I remember correctly we would run a Blue Light Special once every hour that lasted for fifteen minutes. A particular item would be marked down at a bargain price for those fifteen minutes only.

It was a Sunday evening, two days before Christmas. We normally closed at 6:00 p.m. but on this night we were open until 10:00 p.m. And from 6-10 it was heavily advertised that we would be running Blue Light Specials every ten minutes during those four hours. I had no clue what I was about to experience.

My department was third or fourth on the list and we were marking down GAF Viewmasters. Customers had to get one of the items and hand it to me so I could put a special price tag on it for the cashiers to recognize the marked down price. I wasn't paying attention to the first few specials that were going on prior to the Blue Light coming to my department, but the manager was on the intercom hyping the next destination of the Blue Light: "Where's it going now K-Mart shoppers?"

When he announced that the Blue Light was stopping in the camera department I looked up and saw this huge crowd of crazed people following the person who was pushing the Blue Light around. I knew I was in trouble when this same gentleman stopped the rolling cart in front of me and then ran. I was quickly surrounded by this mob who were pushing and shoving to get through to the counter to get a GAF Viewmaster; which they then had to stick in my face so I could mark it with the special price tag.

The shelf was emptied quickly but there were more Viewmasters in what we called overstock on shelves above this island display. The mob began shaking the display so that the Viewmasters would come crashing down to them. It was total chaos. I somehow survived my ten minutes of pandemonium and stood in shock for several minutes after my fellow employee came and took the Blue Light away.

I then watched as the Blue Light landed in our Menswear department to sell marked down neckties. The fortunate few in the mob who were in front were quickly going through the ties and then tossing the ones they didn't want up into the air behind them for others to fight over. I could not believe what I was witnessing. I thought I was in the old Jerry Lewis movie, "Who's Minding the Store."

By the end of the night if you didn't know what was going on you would have thought a bomb had exploded in K-Mart store #4337. The store staff stayed well into the night and early morning hours cleaning up the mess and restoring some semblance of order.

Blue Light Specials were designed to elicit an aura of excitement, albeit a temporary one. At least for this one night in 1978, it accomplished that and much more.

Grace Church just completed our first dedicated week of prayer. We gathered at five different homes throughout the week for the express purpose of praying over specific issues and topics. It was an exciting week with a very exciting finish last night at Dick & Jean's home.

Last Monday morning, Clay asked me what my intended purpose was for this week of prayer meetings. I told him that I really did not have a specific purpose in mind other than getting our people excited about prayer. And for the 12-15 fifteen people who showed up each night I would have to say that the mission was accomplished. There is indeed a new found excitement for prayer amongst those who were able to attend one or more of these meetings.

The challenge now is for us to hang onto that excitement throughout the year and not let it fade as if someone has turned the Blue Light off and stored it away. And most importantly this excitement must translate into action as all of us develop a passion for an intimate relationship with the Lord; and vibrant, powerful, and consistent prayer life.

Turn with me in your Bibles to the Book of **2 Corinthians**.

2 Corinthians 1:8-12

Let's pray.

In this passage of Scripture the Apostle Paul attributes his success in ministry to God, but he also is quick to point out that God sustained him and protected him as a result of the prayers of others. In the infinite mind of God He has somehow worked His plans and purposes for us through prayer. I cannot even begin to explain how God does this but He accomplishes His plan, purpose, and will in the lives of each and every one of us through the prayers of other Christians.

This is an amazing concept when you think about it, because on the flip side of that coin you could say that God's complete plan, purpose, and will for my life will be lacking apart from the prayers of other Christians. None of us will be all that we can be in our Christian walk if all of us are not fulfilling the biblical command to pray for one another (**James 5:16**).

At the same time we can be confident that God will stir the hearts of those around us to pray according to what He is about to do in our lives. Don't spend too much time trying to wrap your brain around this because it defies human logic; just accept the principle and the truth of this aspect of God.

We can be confident of this and all other truths about God because of something Spurgeon calls the "Rule of Three." Because our God is "**the same yesterday, today, and forever**" (**Hebrews 13:8**), His love in times past is an infallible assurance of His kindness today, and an equally certain pledge of His faithfulness in the future. Whatever our circumstances are, however perplexing our pathway may be, and however dark our

horizon, if we keep in mind the "Rule of Three" that He has, He does, and He will, our confidence and comfort can never be destroyed.

If we had to deal with a God who changed all the time we could become bitter, and quite honestly we would be fools to follow such a god, for he would be no god at all. The whole aspect of change means something needs improving, so if we served a god who needed to improve then he wouldn't truly be a god at all. But since our God never changes it should be getting progressively easier for us to rely on Him and follow Him regardless of our outward circumstances.

Let's dig into the text and first discover the power of united prayer. It has pleased God to make prayer the abounding river in which the vast majority of His mercies flow to us. It is the golden key that unlocks every door and gate of blessing. Some of God's mercies come to us even when we have not asked or sought for them, but much of God's mercies only come to those who ask, seek, and knock; and for that matter, those who keep asking, keep seeking, and keep knocking.

Why is God pleased with, and thus why does He answer, the prayers of the righteous? - Because prayer and worship, more so than any other holy acts we can engage in, glorifies God. When you have the proper attitude and posture for worship and prayer you are coming to God the Father in complete and abject humility. You are coming to the Creator and Giver of all good things empty handed; unable to do or provide on your own. You are approaching the only One who can grant your request and fill your need. God is more pleased by our prayers than He was of the unending incense that burned upward to Him in front of the Holy of Holies in the Temple.

If God always gave whether or not we prayed our pride would most likely run rampant. The healthiest state of a Christian is to always be empty and thus always relying on God to supply his or her need; it is to know our utter necessity of God's provision, knowing our own weaknesses and frailties.

Prayer, besides being the divine instrument that brings us the desires of our heart, gives us endurance for all that we face on a daily basis. Prayer gives us inner strength to engage in the spiritual battles against the powers and principalities of the unseen world around us. Prayer is the uplifted hand of Moses that routs the Amalekites more so than the sword of Joshua. Prayer clothes you with the attributes of Deity, empowers your human weaknesses with divine strength, turns human folly into heavenly wisdom, and gives troubled mortals the peace of the immortal God.

Is there anything that prayer cannot accomplish in the life of a righteous and obedient believer?

As much as it is true that the prayers of a single, consecrated believer will accomplish much, God's Word is clear that untied prayer will accomplish even more. The shackles dropped and the prison doors opened for Peter as the entire church was untied in prayer for his release. The Day of Pentecost came about as the 120 disciples were gathered in one accord in prayer. The great missionary journeys of Paul and Barnabas, and thus the spread of the gospel message throughout the world that eventually came to you and

me, had their beginning because the elders of the church gathered in united prayer and fasting to seek the Holy Spirit's leading.

United prayer that reaches beyond your own needs and desires opens the floodgates of God's work on the earth. United prayer is unselfish prayer. United prayer is humble prayer seeking the benefit of others. United prayer is powerful and God-pleasing. United prayer is God telling you to gather your brothers and sisters together, and in the course of loving one another, and encouraging one another, and serving one another, and being hospitable to one another, and comforting one another, and forgiving one another, and being kind to one another, and caring for one another, and bearing one another's burdens, and giving preference to one another in honor, in the unity of the Holy Spirit ask whatever you desire and it shall be granted to you. This is the sense and power of united prayer.

Beloved, Grace Church is an extremely diverse group of people who have been raised in a wide variety of spiritual and religious traditions. At times we do not see eye-to-eye on issues of doctrine or the interpretation of certain Scriptures. The primary reason I keep hammering home the thought of always ***believing what you read and not reading what you believe*** is so we can eventually be unified on all biblical issues. Don't read into Scripture what isn't there. Don't insert your preconceived notions into a passage, when it doesn't say what you want it to, in order to support your personal view. God doesn't need your help to clarify what He said. God didn't accidentally leave out a few words that need your attention to set the record straight. Yes, sometimes the English translation from the Hebrew or Greek is lacking in the depth of meaning that was intended but Scripture is never to be added to or taken away from like we are so want to do when our personal theology is threatened.

You need your brothers and sisters in Christ. You need their prayers on your behalf. I need your prayers on my behalf. I cannot do the work of a pastor without your prayers. I cannot understand the depths of Scripture that the Holy Spirit charges me to teach you apart from your prayers. I will not have the wisdom and discernment required to lead this glorious group of people that God has called together apart from your prayers. We are all interdependent upon each other if we are going to spiritually grow together in this place we call Grace Church.

Augustine said, "*The poor are made for the rich and the rich are made for the poor.*" He was making this same point; we are interdependent upon each other if we are ever to become all that Christ intended for us to be. And I firmly believe that all begins with praying for one another and joining together in united prayer.

The human body cannot function properly, and sometimes cannot even survive, if you were to take away any piece of that body. Remove a limb, or your eyes, or your tongue, and your functionality is severely limited. Take away your liver, or your lungs, or your heart, and you die.

Far too often the Body of Christ, the church, looks around and determines that we would be better off if this person or that person weren't here. For all we know, this person or that person is the right arm, or left leg, or eyes of the Body, and if this person or that person were to leave apart from God's leading the church could suffer a disabling

setback. We would manage to get along but we would not be getting along as well as we could. Too often we look upon certain individuals as if they were a disease or a broken arm that is holding us back, when the Bible is clear that the Lord brings together all of the pieces of the Body – we don't get to choose.

This could be the reason so many churches do not receive the weightier gifts and mercies from heaven, for they are only granted to those Bodies who are unified in the Holy Spirit, and unified in love for one another, and thus unified in their petitions and requests before the throne. These are the churches that perceive the value of the entire Body of Christ and remove themselves from the throne of judgment so that the Lord can reclaim what is rightfully His.

Is it not a happy and glorious thought that the very poorest and most obscure member can add to the strength of the church? We can't all preach (although I catch many of you trying to do so in your testimonies and public prayers), we can't all lead, we can't all give significant sums of money, but we can all pray. Prayer is the great equalizer in the Lord's church. Prayer puts us all in the same court, at the same level, and with the same divine power. It doesn't matter if you are short or tall, fat or skinny, healthy or sick, rich or poor, well-educated or uneducated, everyone can pray.

United prayer also needs to be made on behalf of church leaders. I briefly mentioned how much I depend upon that but it can be found in most of Paul's letters. He either makes mention of his appreciation for prayers already made on his behalf, as he does in our text today, or he simply asks for the churches to pray for him. The Apostle Paul of all people could not do what he was called to do apart from the united prayers of the churches on his behalf.

I don't want to come off as sounding arrogant or special in any way, but there should be times when this Body should be gathering together without my knowledge for the purpose of unified prayer on my behalf and on behalf of the other leaders of this church. If anything about the church concerns you, what better way to address that concern than before the Lord? When you take that concern before the Lord one of two things will happen: The Lord will change the hearts of the leadership or He will change your heart in order to restore the unity of the Spirit.

Do you desire more powerful and life-changing preaching? Then you must pray. Do you want to see our worship reach ever higher and higher? Then you must pray. Is it your desire to see the Holy Spirit manifest Himself more in my life and in the life of everyone else in the church? Then you must pray. Do you desire to see new faces attending our services and unbelievers becoming believers in our services? Then you must pray.

Beloved, you can put wishes and hopes and dreams in one hand and a cow patty in the other and they are both worth the same thing. Quite honestly from a fertilization standpoint the cow patty will be worth more, but you get the rather graphic picture. Wishing and hoping and dreaming don't amount to a hill of beans if it is not infused and saturated with prayer. And when it comes to the issues of the church, united prayer is more often than not going to be the golden key.

Once the power of united prayer is manifest our first response is to recognize the value of united praise. Praise should always follow answered prayer.

At our prayer meeting last night I mentioned how we had been praying for good traveling weather during the entire week so all who desired to come out would not be hindered by the weather. Yesterday's forecast was for snow all day long from Summit County and farther north down to Teller and El Paso County in the south. Lo and behold our area of Park county got a dusting overnight and in the morning, and that was it. We all praised God for answering our prayer. Our prayer focus last night was for physical healing and for spiritual healing and for emotional healing within our natural families and our spiritual families. Brother Chuck was limping noticeably and was in obvious pain when he arrived last night but in the midst of our prayer time the pain disappeared and the mobility returned in an instant. He expressed this transformation in his prayer and we all praised God; some even clapped and shouted.

Praise should always follow answered prayer. Individual praise is vitally important but united praise is even more so. Individual praise is a flute solo but united praise is a chamber orchestra. Both are beautiful in and of themselves but a flute can only accomplish so much. The praise of one individual is a sweet smelling fragrance to the Lord and praise should continually be on our lips, but the praise of a combined and united church multiplies and grows and crescendos in a way that one individual cannot accomplish.

This is why the public gatherings of the church are so vitally important in your life. I don't care how consecrated you are, how holy you are, how righteous you are, how devoted to the Word of God you are, or even how devoted you are to worship and prayer, if you are forsaking the assembling our yourself together with the church you are missing out on so much; you are the lonely flute player in power and volume and fullness of sound. You can't begin to exhibit the power and volume the full orchestra can put out. You can't play the rich harmonies or the full range of octaves on one single instrument.

The praise of a united symphony and a full choir will always accomplish more than a solo possibly can – even though solos can be beautiful and have their place. Christianity is not meant to be hoarded in any way or confined to a select few, it is meant to be shared and for us to be dependent upon each other, which is why there are so many "one another" passages in the Bible, as we recited together on Tuesday evening at one of our prayer gatherings.

We must never consider ourselves to be better than any other Christian; in fact the Bible teaches the exact opposite. **Romans 12:10** says, "Give preference to one another." **Romans 15:7**, tells us to "accept one another." **Ephesians 4:2** says we are to "show tolerance for one another." **Philippians 2:3** says, "Regard one another as more important than yourselves." **1 Thessalonians 5:13** says, "Live in peace with one another." **1 Thessalonians 5:15** says, "Seek after that which is good for one another." **James 4:11** says, "Do not speak against one another." **James 5:9** says, "Do not complain against one another." And all of this is topped off with two verses that command us to **forgive one another** and nine verses that tell us in no uncertain terms to **love one another**.

How can we possibly be united in prayer and be united in praise when we hold ought against a brother or sister in Christ? How can we expect God to shower us with blessings and every good and perfect gift if we can't get along with or hold ill will against one of our spiritual siblings? In human terms, no matter how self-righteous you think you are, if you were in a battle with paternal brother or sister did your dad overlook that and shower you with gifts anyway?

We must be united in prayer and united in praise if we expect the Lord to bless us in the unimaginable way the He desires to bless us. Beloved, there are going to be times when a brother or sister rubs us the wrong way. There will be occasions when a brother or sister will offend you. There will be certain qualities and characteristics of some of your brothers and sisters that will drive you up a wall. We are all different and we are all unique, but most importantly we are all created by God and created in His image. When you hold a grudge for any reason against one of God's creations, whom He has chosen to be your brother or sister, aren't you in essence saying God messed up? Or at the very least aren't you disobeying the commands of God?

Someone asked me if you can love someone without liking them. My answer was yes, and I gave the example of how sometimes the behavior of family members can cause you to not like them at the moment even though you still love them. But as I thought about that some more I believe we need to be careful to what extent we take that attitude. If it just on occasion that you do not like a brother or sister in Christ due to their sinful behavior, you could most likely still say you love them and be truthful. But if your feelings for this person never changes regardless of their current behavior, how on earth can you justify saying you still love them and be truthful? If you get angry with your spouse and you remain angry for forty years, is it really possible to truthfully say you love them? Aren't you now guilty of disobeying the command to love and guilty of committing the sin of lying?

Beloved we desperately need the unity of the Holy Spirit. We simply cannot live our lives with a false unity; one in which we grit our teeth and tolerate each other with a plastered on smile. We cannot exalt ourselves above our brothers and sisters in Christ. We cannot be of the mind that we have some greater understanding of the Scriptures and all who oppose us are some lower class of Christian. Of course, we all are at different levels of maturity in Christ and we all have different levels of understanding the Word of God, but none of that makes us superior to another. God isn't impressed with your knowledge; He is impressed with your heart.

United prayer brings down the blessing of heaven. United praise lifts the soul. Paul and his companions are united in their praise to God for His protection and provision, and Paul includes the Corinthian church to unite with them in praise because of the answered prayers they offered up on their behalf.

Where does Grace Church fall on the unity scale? I'd say we are better than some and worse than others, but we had best not compare ourselves with other churches. The standard is complete unity in the Holy Spirit, and unity begins with you. Don't wait for others to align themselves with your way of thinking. Get busy aligning yourself with God's Word in every way, shape, and form; then you will be united and controlled by

the Spirit. Only then will you be able to view your brothers and sisters in the proper light.

Let's pray.