

Praying Specifically

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My dad tells a story about an old deacon who was asked to pray during a church meeting. The man stood up and after other typical worn out phrases said, “Lord, we pray for all those for whom it is our duty to pray. Amen.”

I guess that about covers it.

That’s what I would call a *generic* prayer. And while most people aren’t that succinct, many of us tend toward generic praying. Generic praying is the kind of praying that doesn’t really define a particular request. “Be with the Jones family, Lord.” “Father, we just ask that you would work in this situation.”

Now, not all generic praying is bad. Sometimes we just don’t know what to ask for other than that the Lord would work in a situation or that he would be present with a family. This can be heartfelt and right. I certainly pray this way at times.

I only want to suggest that when we pray, it’s often right to ask *for something*—that is, something that we can articulate, something that we can remember.

Look at this prayer that Paul prayed for the Colossians:

“We have not ceased to pray for you and to ask that you be filled with the knowledge of His will in all spiritual wisdom and understanding, so that you will walk in a manner worthy of the Lord, to please Him in all respects, bearing fruit in every good work and increasing in the knowledge of God . . .” (Col 1:9-10)

This prayer has content. Paul has thought about what to ask for these Colossians and he remembers what he is asking. I want to pray more like that.

What were your prayers like this morning? When you prayed for that person, did you make any particular request or was it more like, “I bring Mike before you, Lord, and pray that you would help him with his job situation”? Sometimes we bring a whole list of things before the Lord but don’t really ask much about them.

What is specific prayer? There are a few kinds. For Larry, you might pray, “Father, please help him to recognize that he is prideful in this area and grow him in humility.” This is thoughtful, specific request. It may not, however, be easy to see if or when



God is answering it. Other prayers may be even more specific. “God, give me an opportunity to talk with Jenny about Jesus this week at work.” It will be easy to see if or when God answers that one. I recommend both kinds. One is more general than the other, but with both, you are looking for God to act in a particular way.

Reflect on these benefits of praying specifically.

Praying specifically requires more faith. Maybe that’s why we don’t do it as much. We are afraid to go out on a limb, uncertain whether God will answer as we’ve asked. So we hedge our bets and only pray vague prayers that He can’t help but answer. Now, it’s true that praying involves risk. God does not always do what we ask, maybe simply because what we asked for was not what He wanted to do. Even Jesus and Paul made requests that God did not grant (Luke 22:42; 2 Cor 12:8-9). However, if we never make requests with bold faith, we will never experience the joy of seeing God actually answer them. And the more we see God answer prayer, the more we will learn to pray according to His will.

Praying specifically requires more thoughtfulness. When you ask God for particular things and watch in faith for the answers, you think carefully about what you ask. You don’t walk into the throne room guns blazing and leave the back wall riddled with requests you can’t even remember the next day. Instead, you thoughtfully consider what God desires to do before asking Him to do it.

Praying specifically encourages an attitude of expectancy. When you pray like this, you look at the world with prayerful eyes. When talking with your neighbor, you remember that you have prayed for an opening to talk with her about Jesus. When visiting your friend in the hospital, you remember that you have prayed for his healing. When talking with your family, you remember that you have prayed for more grace and kindness in your speech.

Consider keeping a journal. Write your requests and leave room to record God’s answers. For me, praying specifically has made prayer more of an exciting conversation. It’s no longer a 10-minute morning monologue, but an ongoing exchange of prayers and answers.

What if we walked into every day with the expectation that God hears and answers *specific* prayer?