

“Conversations with Harry Reeder and Bruce Stallings”

Part Twenty Six

September 20, 2020 • Sunday Evening

This Q & A is in place of our Sunday evening service while we are currently in a pandemic until we can meet in person. This has been wonderfully received and encouraged and we get plenty of questions. I'd like to begin with a devotional thought and maintain it with the flow of ministry at Briarwood. In this present distress we are going to act with prudence and not panic. We're going to trust God but not seek to tempt God and we want to do what we do in a way that honors the Lord. We want to live sensibly, righteously and Godly in this present age, even in the midst of this present distress.

We have also just initiated something we think is very crucial and that is 70 days of fervent prayer. We are one week in to this call of 70 days of fervent prayer. The word fervent is coming from James 5 where we are instructed in James 5:16, [16] *Therefore, confess your sins to one another, and pray for one another so that you may be healed. **The effective (fervent) prayer of a righteous man can accomplish much*** (NASB).

There are two ways to look at this matter of a righteous man. First of all, it can refer and people interpret it to mean that God's people who are trusting in the perfect righteousness of Christ have an effective prayer life if they are fervently engaged. The other way is to see the righteous as the person who is praying that their lifestyle is devoted to the pursuit of righteousness – not attempt to live righteously to be saved but an attempt to pursue righteousness because you are saved. This is seen in the life of Joseph, the adopted father of Jesus, for he was considered a righteous man. It is seen in Zachariah as well. There is a third possibility that it is actually both of those ways, where the person praying is resting in the perfect righteousness of Christ, while pursuing righteousness is a gift of love to Christ.

But what is fervent prayer? I want to give you three thoughts about fervent prayer. One, is that fervent prayer is intentional prayer. You have fervent prayer when you're intentional. Secondly, fervent prayer is passionate prayer. That means it is prayer that is rooted in the depths of your soul and heart and the burdens of your life. Thirdly, fervent prayer is believing prayer. It is not only trusting in Christ to pray the way Christ's teaches you to pray but it is trusting in Christ that His answers are perfect. When He says 'yes' that's good. When He says 'no' that's good and when He says 'keep praying' that's good for you are trusting Him for the outcome. It is also prayer with a burden.

There was a man who was struck with a serious heart issue. He had a heart attack right outside of our sanctuary. I remember seeing hundreds of people calling upon the name of the Lord. You could just hear the pleas and you could just see them praying before the Lord. God was so gracious in that context, as this man who flat-lined four times in the hallway and I was able to talk with him that afternoon. But what I remember was his wife, our pastors, members and friends calling upon the Lord. There was just a fervency of prayer – intentionality, believing prayer as they called upon the Lord and there was a burden.

We need to have a burden that God would do a work in our soul, in our marriage, in our families and in our church, in His church, in our denomination, then also in our nation and that God would do a glorious Gospel awakening. Also, prayer is not done serendipitously. The Bible tells us to have a closet of prayer and I take that to mean to have a sacred time, place and space. I would encourage you to have this in three areas.

Number one is in your personal time. I have a chair where I meet the Lord in the morning. Secondly, have a place for you and your spouse. My wife and I have a place we pray together and we'll literally place our arms around each other as we pray together for the matters that are on our hearts. Thirdly, is a time with your family. Now that one is out for me except when our kids come over but when they were still in the home we did it at night before they went to bed. Our sacred place was our bed as they all climbed on the bed. If they had friends over their friends got up on the bed as well and joined in.

Be intentional with your prayer life. Where is the place you are going to meet God every day? During the next 70 days is a great opportunity. Where is the place where you and your wife will meet together to meet God? Where is the place that your family can best come together to meet God? It may be at the evening meal or right before bed, but that is what intentional does. You have the burden for prayer and you trust the Lord. He is your Father and His answers will be right.

Bruce: As we started this week I was looking at this week's 70 Days of prayer list and this is just a note of God's sovereignty, but Tuesday we are to pray for the Supreme Court. We just heard that Justice Ginsburg has just passed away and here on that week we are to pray for the Supreme Court. It's just a way of thinking of God's sovereignty on the huge enormous things and on the very small things.

Harry: Yes and we started making those guides out for the 70 Days of prayer months ago.

Bruce: We see how God is in all things and this coming Saturday our topic is the Holy Spirit. You just gave your sermon on the part in the Apostles' Creed about the Holy Spirit and now we can take that information and digest it for this week as we prepare to pray for this topics this week and focus in thankfulness on the Holy Spirit this Saturday. I know that God is in it and I know Satan will be around it so what would you say are some things to consistency? We get off to a good start and then here comes Satan so how do we stay consistent?

Harry: Jesus talks about the ministry of the Holy Spirit in John 14, 15, and 16 and in John 16:1 Jesus says, *"I have said all these things to you to keep you from falling away."* As you just said, warning God's people that Satan is going to come at you is one of the ways to be consistent. I know that as we have started this 70 days of prayer Satan is going to try get people out of kilter with other people, he'll make mole hills into mountains, he will break up relationship, etc. for he will do everything he can to get you not to pray. Jesus goes onto say in John 16:2-4, [2] *They will put you out of the synagogues. Indeed, the hour is coming when whoever kills you will think he is offering service to God. [3] And they will do these things because they have not known the Father, nor me. [4] But I have said these things to you, that when their hour comes you may remember that I told them to you.* Jesus is telling them so they will be ready for what comes at them. So one is consistency is the full knowledge that Satan is going to come at you to make you at best inconsistent and at worst, just absolutely frustrated where you cease pursuing anytime with prayer.

If something happens and you miss a day don't quit, just start back the next day. It is similar with those who go on a diet and mess up one day then they just quit the diet. No, if you miss it that day just get back on the horse the next day. The Lord can restore your consistency.

Here is the way I'm praying for everyone. I'm praying that every day you will have a time and place to meet with the Lord. Then that every day there will be a place and time where you and your spouse meet together with the Lord and that every day you and your family will have a place and time to speak to the Lord and pray together. Then I'm praying that once a week you will have a prayer time with a small group of people. Then if you are a part of a ministry I'm praying you will have a time with your ministry friends to meet together and pray. This could also be with your congregational community perhaps once a week or once every two to three weeks.

I believe the spiritual disciplines are very much like the physical disciplines. I remember when I lived in Miami and I decided I didn't have time to go to a gym so I ended up doing something I never thought I'd ever do in my life. I began to run, jog and my first three weeks were terrible, but after that I kind of started looking forward to it. I began to think 'I need to get home to do my run' or 'I need to get home and do my walk.' I started looking forward to it particularly when I began to build some prayer time into it. With runners eventually there are these endorphins that tend to kick in and they call it a 'runner's high.' Now I don't run fast enough to get too high but I did have that experience a couple of times where you almost feel like you could run forever.

I think that happens in the spiritual disciplines. Once you get into this you begin to think 'I need to get to my time with the Lord' or 'I can't wait to get with my wife and pray together.' It actually becomes a vital part of your life. Get your place and time and stay with it and out there somewhere you will be drawn to it, you don't want to miss it and then even beyond that it's almost something you get an exhilaration from. In other words, instead of you needing to stay with it, it becomes something you really enjoy. It kind of lifts you up. It is kind of what the means of grace are when you honor the Sabbath and what He says in Isaiah.

Isaiah 58:13–14 says [13] *"If you turn back your foot from the Sabbath, from doing your pleasure on my holy day, and **call the Sabbath a delight and the holy day of the LORD honorable**; if you honor it, not going your own ways, or seeking your own pleasure, or talking idly; [14] then you shall take delight in the LORD, and I will make you ride on the heights of the earth; I will feed you with the heritage of Jacob your father, for the mouth of the LORD has spoken."*

Bruce: I was really encouraged this last week. I had a fair number of meetings this past week and in every meeting the person leading used the 70 Days of prayer so you could see it being built into the gathering of our people. In fact, the first question we have for this time comes from the 70 Days of fervent prayer. The person acknowledges that we focused on praying this past week for spiritual awakening to take place in our country so their question is, how do we know it's actually taking place and what can we do as individuals to promote such a great awakening?

Harry: From the sermon I did on prayer opening us to this 70 Days of fervent prayer, I've gotten a lot of feedback, questions and comments but one of the things I've been interested in is when I said that when I pray personally I pray out loud and there have been a number of people who have thanked me for that because of how helpful it has been for them. Then there have been others who have told me they do the same thing and I appreciated hearing that because at times I thought I was crazy for doing that so it was affirmation to me.

So let me go to the part of how you know there is a spiritual awakening. First of all, when a spiritual awakening comes, it gets worse before it gets better usually. Secondly, it

doesn't happen to the nation first, it happens to the church first which means it happens to me first. What happens is, people start coming alive in the Lord and instead of criticizing others, it's Lord revive me. It's lift up my heart, do Your work of revival in me. Revive Thy work in the midst of the years O Lord. In that spiritual awakening there's a sense of burden and passion that happens to the individual that spills over into churches and churches get on mission on message and in ministry.

I remember a little bit of an awakening we had in our nation in the 60s and 70s and I really sensed it in the PCA for God was doing something back then. In our denomination it was fulfill the Great Commission, stay true to the Scriptures and be faithful to the reformed faith, where nothing else disturbed that focus for it was that kind of a passion. I think passion and focus is when you begin to see a revival, everyone is talking about Jesus, everyone is wanting people to come to Christ and everyone is talking about their need for the Holy Spirit and surrendering to Him.

Bill Bright, the founder of Campus Crusade for Christ (CRU), was right on that because he kept saying the key is for people to be filled with the Spirit. To walk in the Spirit you have to be filled with the Spirit. Filling means to be controlled by – when something gets filled up, whatever it is that is what is controlling it. Another term is to be controlled and led by the Spirit and that means you will walk in the Spirit and bear the fruit of the Spirit. When you are bearing the fruit of the Spirit you make a lot about Jesus and that's what people begin to be known for. The Spirit of God and the Word of God are lifting up the Son of God as more than Savior to this world. The company of the unashamed is joined – enough with the trivial, let's get on with what's important.

Bruce: With the recent resuming of professional sports, there is the question about those playing who kneel during the national anthem and how should a Christian process this concept of kneeling?

Harry: First I want to separate this. There is kneeling that is done as a function to do something, like when Jesus knelt as He washed His Disciples feet. He didn't kneel to express something, He was just showing His heart to serve them. So that is one form of kneeling.

Then in this matter there is kneeling as a statement of allegiance. I believe it is appropriate as a sign of the covenant this nation has with the Constitution that is symbolized with covenantal relationships. This nation made a fiduciary commitment – these covenant documents of the Constitution and Declaration of Independence – and this is what we're going to commit ourselves to, this is how we are one nation. We are multiple ethnicities but this is what brings us together and the symbol became the flag.

We use symbols all the time. When we come to the Lord's Supper, the bread and the cup are symbolic and then by faith we actually participate and partake of Christ. When you get married that is a covenant relationship and you have a symbol that you are married with the rings that are shared at the wedding ceremony. Our nation's symbol is the flag and I have a heart affection for the values and precepts of this country but I'm not saying we have done it perfectly. In fact, I'm very glad for the Bill of Rights that help us maintain and mature our performance, with free practice of religion, protests, grievances and all of that. I have no problem that our country is represented by a flag, what it represents and I put my hand over my heart for I have a heart relationship with that.

If there was ever a movement in our country that when the flag was raised I had to kneel I wouldn't do it. I would put my hand over my heart but I wouldn't kneel because of what kneeling represents. My forbearers in Scotland by the hundreds were killed because when they went to the communion table they wouldn't kneel and they didn't kneel because the people administering the sacraments were claiming that Jesus was physically present in the bread and the wine and He is the King so they wanted people to kneel to the King then. They said 'Oh we'll kneel in prayer to the King but we're not coming to that table to kneel because we know what you are saying is not true for Jesus is at the right hand of the Father.' When He said 'this is My body and blood' He was standing right there with the Disciples. So clearly He is talking about spiritually feasting upon Him and not actually feasting on Him. Plus He is not there to be re-sacrificed every time we come to the Lord's Supper so they would not kneel. They were reverent and bow their heads when they took communion but they wouldn't kneel at that point. So we have to be careful on this kneeling thing.

Kneel means subservience. Now in terms of a function I want to be a servant to everyone so I'm willing to kneel in the sense of washing feet and cleaning feet with towels and all of that but when I am doing something at a moment that is a declaration of allegiance then the only time I'm going to kneel is when I'm doing Jesus on that one for He is King of Kings and Lord of Lords. So that means I'm not going to kneel to something else when the flag is there, because I wouldn't even kneel to the flag. I would put my hand over my heart which I do and I gladly do that because I think it declares the appropriate respect for the documents, principles and values and it also declares my allegiance to try to mature, maintain and grow those so that we really do have a nation where there is equal opportunity for the pursuit of happiness – not equal distribution but equal opportunity for the pursuit of happiness and equal protection under the law to enjoy their inalienable rights because they are made in the image of God.

Bruce: The next question has to do with the judgment Christians are going to face. So the question is how will we not mourn, shed tears at the Judgment Seat of Christ when all of our works, both good and bad, are laid out before God? They acknowledge there is no mourning in heaven. Then they go on to ask, if we're saved by grace alone through faith alone and all our sins are wiped away when we become a Christian will we really have to see and hear about our sins we have committed at the Judgment Seat?

Harry: Great question. First of all we all have to appear before the Judgment Seat or either you just cut those verses out of the Bible, which I don't do. The Bible says we all have to appear there and then we'll receive a recompense, but I think it's clear that at the Judgment the sheep and the goats will be separated. That is another way of saying there are those who will be judged by their deeds in terms of eternity for their names are in the Books – their life and the verdict will be brought before them. Then there are those whose names are written in the Book of Life who are forgiven of all their sins. Our judgment will be a judgment of stewardship – what did we do with what God gave us. The Bible says we're accountable for how you use your gifts, how you handled your responsibilities, etc. The Christian's judgment is not a destination judgment for our destination judgment has already been secured through Christ.

The question is, when we appear before our stewardship judgment will our sins be exposed? There is actually a lot of discussion on that and I actually think they will be. I think the Bible says that it is all going to be disclosed and some are saying 'won't that cause me shame' and yes it will. There could have to be some lament, but what Jesus will then show you

is how great His grace is and you will see how much Jesus loves you where you have no idea. I don't even know my heart yet I know my heart better than you know my heart. You know your heart better than I know it, but you don't even know your heart. Jesus will disclose it. There are sins of omission and commission, sins of thought, word and deed and we will see just how far short we fell. Then we will see how glorious God's grace is and the result will be worship.

The question, with all due respect, is still a self-centered question. I don't want to feel bad at the judgment seat, no I want to feel glad. God is going to show you how much He has done to save you and then it's not about you but the praise of His glorious grace. You will praise God on that Day and that will become our joy. Right now you praise God for what He has done in your life more than I can praise God for what He has done in your life because you know your life better than I do. Our new joy will not simply be that we were forgiven but it will be to know what God did to forgive me and praise God for that blessing of what He has done.

So for the Christian it will be a stewardship judgment and a revealing judgment of how much grace God has secured for you and how much He has done to save you. Therefore how much He has loved you and it will be an opportunity to display to the world how great God's grace is. Those in that day who have ridiculed you – when they have wrongly judged you – in the day of God's judgment and in the day of God's grace they will have to glorify God for what God has done in our life and we see that is what Peter tells us.

Bruce: This will be our last question for this session and this question comes from a student who was taking a course in college. This professor was comparing Mesopotamian literature to the Bible and specifically talked about the Epic of Gilgamesh, predating the book of Genesis and that the flood stories were very similar. The professor implied that possibly the author of Genesis borrowed the flood accounts from the Epic poem and other ancient texts, so the question is what is the Christian's response to this?

Harry: I went through this same thing for this is a favorite one for college professors. The Epic of Gilgamesh is older than the Bible and look at this similar story about a flood, a deliverance, a family, etc. but this is where I would sit the professor down and say something like this; I'm glad you know about the Epic of Gilgamesh for there are about 318 different flood account in cultures. In other words, almost every culture you go to they have a flood account and some of them are older than the Bible, but that's not saying the flood account in the Bible is wrong. That is just telling you that there was a flood.

So if you look at all 318, look how similar they are so now the question is, which one of those are right? Clearly there was a flood in the history of this world. There would not have been so many different version of it. We believe, not the oldest is right for that's just telling you there was a flood and every culture has recorded it, but that the Spirit of God led Moses, the author of the book of Genesis, with the historic oral and Holy Spirit revealed account. Then when you begin to compare the Biblical account with the other accounts, you begin to find out that this one made sense. When you look at the dimensions of the book, it works. When you look at many of the other things there is no way those would have worked.

Bruce: The Ark Encounter does a great exhibit on that and you could spend two hours in there watching that. All the other boats don't see to hold up to it and I said to one of my children 'you pick which boat you would have rather been on.'

Harry: Right, you begin to see that actually the dimensions work for the ark. It doesn't work for these others. The concept of the family and all of the DNA that would be necessary that shows up in all of our ethnicities is affirmed by the family of Noah. Then the accounts of what was in the ark – does it fit or not fit in the dimensions – and all of sudden you find out that the account of the ark makes sense. We believe that the account of Noah is not the oldest but it's the true one because it's the Spirit of God who gave this to Moses in the various ways it is put together. We have the account of the Noahic flood, why it was there, what happened after it was there and all of this makes sense. Then when you look at the dimensions, features, chronology and the descriptions, it all makes sense.

Honestly all 318 are really ludicrous but the one revealed by the Spirit of God through the first author of Scripture makes sense. I don't believe it because it makes sense. I believe it because God revealed it and it doesn't surprise me that it makes sense.

Bruce: That is all we have time for in this Q & A session. Our focus in prayer today is that the church of Jesus Christ would be a house of prayer for all the nations as He so declared. We embrace that when we as individuals pray so makes sure you have your time today to spend in fervent prayer. Have a time, place and a plan in place for your time of fervent prayer. I want to encourage you to continue to send your questions to askthepastor@briarwood.org and we'll look forward to answering them, Lord willing, in our future Q & A time of Conversations with Harry and Bruce. God bless you.