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Transforming Fear into Faith

I discovered an astonishing truth: God is attracted to weaknesses. He can't resist those who humbly and honestly admit how desperately they need Him.

JIM CYMBALA

IN APRIL OF 1982 I heard a Christian leader tell the great benefit of applying the principle of first-fruits to the use of his time. As he had deliberately given to the Lord the first few minutes of each day, the first day of the week, and the first few days of each new year, he had experienced special joys and blessings. I listened attentively as he spoke and began to process the possible application of the truth to my life. The discipline of giving to the Lord the first moments of a day and the first day of the week were things that I was already attempting to practice. However, I had never thought of giving the first few days of a year to the Lord, so I proceeded to make a note in my future planning to seek to do that in January of 1983.

When January arrived I was very tired. However, as a professor, I had a few days before my classes started, and I told the Lord that I desired to present those days to Him for His purposes. As I sought the Lord, He gave a few ideas of how to make use of this time. I first of all made an attempt to declutter my life and got rid of some clothes and some other possessions that had not been used in the past few years. During those days I also looked at some past journals that I had written. In this time three things stood out to me that gave me direction for the new year. I made a conscious decision to go into 1983 and trust God for those three things. The year was one of the most fruitful years of my life as I had never previously deliberately entered a year trusting God for specific things for Him to do in my life during that year. I prayed for Him to allow me to see the beauty of His character in a new way, to be overwhelmed with His personal love for me, and to understand in a fresh way what it meant for Christ to be my life.

When the next year came around I decided to do the same thing and seek God to once again give me three things for which to trust Him for that new year. This has become a yearly practice. In 1990 one of the things that I went into the year asking God for was to be used of Him to raise up prayer among His people. As I pray these requests during the year, I try to keep notes on the answers and insight God is pleased to give. As I sought God for a year about this matter of how to be used of Him in this way, I learned only one insight. It is this insight that I would like

to present in this section of the book. God showed me that the way to raise up prayer among His people was to share with them how to make use of their “needy moments.”

DISCOVERING OUR NEED OF GOD

What is prayer? O. Hallesby, one of Norway’s leading Christian teachers, said that prayer is an attitude of our hearts toward God. It is an attitude of helplessness. This attitude of helplessness is not meant to drive you to anxiety but rather to drive you to God. In other words, prayer is helplessness plus faith. We may stumble over this until we realize that faith is simply coming to Christ with our helplessness. When we petition God in prayer, we come to Christ and tell Him what we and those for whom we pray are lacking. It is opening up our needy lives to Him.

Let us be very specific in defining some of our “needy moments” that promote this attitude of helplessness that can give birth to true prayers. Let us look at times when we tend to be fearful and anxious.

One year I asked God to give me clear insight into my own unhealthy fears. If you do this you may be surprised how significant a motivating force fear is in your life. For example, ask the Lord, “What are things I say or do not say and things I do or do not do that are motivated by a fear of rejection?” The relevance of this is that we are to seek God in prayer at every point of our fears. Look at Psalm 34:4: “I sought the Lord, and He answered me, and delivered me from all my fears.”

As we seek God at our point of fears, we need to look for specific promises that can transform our fear responses into faith responses. The first time I was asked to speak on a nation-wide radio broadcast and answer questions from people who would call in from the audience, I agreed to pray about it. My fear was what would happen if I could not answer the questions. As I sought God He used Psalm 67:7 to assure my heart and calm my fears. That verse says, “God blesses us, that all the ends of the earth may fear Him.” I saw the principle that I could count on God’s blessing as I sought to benefit others. God is eager to help us process our fears as we seek Him in prayer.

In Philippians 4:6 God graciously commands us to “be anxious for nothing.” If He stopped there with His instruction it would only make us more anxious. Now we would be more anxious because we would also realize that we are clearly disobeying God!

In God’s kindness He also instructs us how to process our anxiety. Every time you are tempted to be fearful or anxious, view it as a prompting of the Lord to pray. God uses three words to explain this process—prayer, supplication, and thanksgiving. In prayer we talk to God about our anxiety. We may even need to ask Him what it is that is bothering us. In supplication we petition Him and tell Him what we would like Him to do about it. You will never have real peace until you do. In thanksgiving you turn your attention away from the problem and to God. If you only prayed and supplicated or petitioned, and neglected

thanksgiving, you would become more wrapped up in the problem. Thanksgiving links your heart to God as you praise Him for His knowledge and concern of the situation as well as His desire to carry the burden.

CASTING OUR ANXIETIES ON THE LORD

In prayer God can train us to cast our cares upon Him (1 Peter 5:7). Some anxieties are easier than others to cast upon God. The more something means to you the harder it is to trust God with it. God tells us that when Abraham offered up Isaac on the altar, his faith was “perfected” (James 2:22). It was “perfected” in that God’s *goal* for Abraham had been reached. His goal is to train His people to trust Him with the most precious thing of their lives. The most precious gift of God to Abraham was his beloved son Isaac. In previous times he had had lapses of faith where fear struck him and Abraham took matters in his own hands (Genesis 12, 20). At this time he had come to the point that he could trust God with his most precious gift—even when being asked to do something that he did not fully understand (Genesis 22; Hebrews 11:17–19).

What is your “Isaac”? Are you willing to surrender the matter to God and realize that He is able to guard what you entrust to Him (2 Timothy 1:12)? What *you* try to control is up to *you* to worry about and work out. Let this battle be used of God to raise up many times of precious prayer. Why not talk to Him right now about your “Isaac”?

Praying with Confidence When You Feel Unworthy

God is not aloof. He says continually through the centuries, "I'll help you, I really will. When you're ready to throw up your hands, throw them up to me."

JIM CYMBALA

A PASTOR TOLD ME about a personal experience that has been a great help when I feel inadequate and unworthy of God's blessing as I pray. He said that after a very difficult day he was trying to pray before he went to bed. As he sought God amidst the discouragement of this difficult day, he thought to himself, *Would you have any problem praying if you had led somebody to Christ today and had a great time studying the Scripture?* He reflected on this thought and responded to himself, *No, I would have no problem praying; but this is not the kind of day I had. I have had an awful day that has been characterized by many wrong responses.* During this time of seeking God and reading the Scriptures, he related how he sensed a loving rebuke from God as he reflected on praying in Christ's name: "Do you

want to come to Me in *your* name or in *Jesus'* name?" Only when we learn to pray in Jesus' name can we use our times of feeling unworthy and inadequate and turn them into confident intercession.

What is meant by the concept of "name" in Scripture? It refers to one's character. God's changing a person's name foreshadowed a change of character that He planned to work in that person's life (cf. John 1:42). It also refers to one's corresponding reputation. In this sense the Bible refers to the desirability of a "good name" (Proverbs 22:1). Third, it may refer to one's authority. If you made a request to a fellow employee, and he seemed reluctant to follow through, would it not radically change things if you informed him that the request is being endorsed or authorized by the president of the company?

We are to come to God in Jesus' name (John 14:14). We must pray for things that are in line with His revealed character and for requests in which His answers would enhance His reputation. We are also to come to God in Jesus' authority. I will never deserve God's blessing and neither will you, but that is not the point. The marvelous truth is that because of God's grace, Jesus died in order that we could experience all of His blessings (Ephesians 1:3). We must humble ourselves before God and receive His gracious gifts. God's name is honored as He forgives our sin, for it shows His loving, merciful, wise, and righteous character (Psalm 25:11). His name is honored as He gives us guidance (Psalm 23:4) and allows His people to

experience His rest (Isaiah 63:14). When a sheep ends up in the right place, discerning people do not praise the sheep but rather the loving and caring Shepherd.

The key is to come to God with confidence during your needy moments. Humble yourself before Him and let Him use your life to display to the world how kind and gracious He is (Ephesians 2:7—look it up!). At the Tower of Babel the people fearfully attempted to make a name for themselves (Genesis 11:4). A believer in Christ has the awesome privilege of living for God's name (Psalm 115:1). In all of life our wonderful Lord can teach us how to draw attention to Him—even in the routine of life (1 Corinthians 10:31; Colossian 3:17). This will happen as we learn to come to Him not in our own name but in Jesus' name.