

Experiencing Power Through Prayer

“Power For Freedom”

Intro: We have three cats that live in our house. Two of these cats are tolerable...most of the time. Yet we have one that is a complete freak! WHY? All the cats are treated the same. All have freedom to pretty much do what they want. Yet one cat lives in bondage! We have one cat that is like a wild animal in the house. (lives in fear / hides all day / runs in terror / can't hold it...sometimes I do therapy with it.) This cat is free...yet it doesn't live free. Our cat is great example of how a lot of followers of Christ live.

- The Bible tells us that we have been given tremendous freedom through our relationship with Jesus Christ. He purchased and won our freedom on the cross. So where is all this freedom for living? This freedom must be maintained. Just because Jesus has declared us free, doesn't mean people live free.
Gal. 5:1 “So Christ has truly set us free. Now make sure that you stay free...” (NLT)
- We have a responsibility to cooperate with Christ in order to live out our freedom on a daily basis. Prayer is one of THE key responsibilities that produces daily power for walking in this freedom.
- Today we're going to learn how to pray in a way that results in power for living out this freedom.

I. Pray That We Live In Freedom From The World

Rom. 12:2 “Do not be shaped by this world; instead be changed within by a new way of thinking. Then you will be able to decide what God wants for you..” (NCV)

Col. 2:8 “Don't let anyone capture you with empty philosophies and high-sounding nonsense that come from human thinking and from the spiritual powers of this world, rather than from Christ.” (NLT)

I John 2:15 “Do not love this world nor the things it offers you, for when you love the world, you do not have the love of the Father in you.” (NLT)

1. We must never forget that there is a clash of Kingdoms going on. This physical world with it's ungodly system, philosophy and values is NOT the Kingdom we belong to. If we forget this, we will be taken captive again by this world.
2. We will start loving the things of this world rather than the things of God's Kingdom. We become slaves to materialism - prosperity / positions / prestige / pleasure / pride / Power. We start living just like everyone else.
3. We also start putting more authority in the voices of our culture rather than the word of God. We start questioning God's values and embracing the world's values. The Christian community is doing this all the time!
 - We don't believe in the creation account anymore because Darwin knows more than God's word. Science has enlightened us to the real truth!

- We don't believe in biblical morality because it's acceptable even preferred to live together first before getting married. C'mon, it only makes sense that we "practice" being married first. (Statistics show a 75% divorce rate for people who live together)
4. We have a generation of Christians by name, yet by their lifestyle. they show that they are slaves of this world. They look and act and think just like it! Their slaves! Some of you are slaves and you don't even know it!
 5. So, let me challenge you to pray. "Lord, I don't want to be a prisoner to this world. I want to be free. Would you show me where I'm being a slave...where I'm being taken captive...show me where I'm listening to the world more than You."
 6. Start every day by asking the Lord to help you live free from the world today. Take these Scriptures and pray them back to God.

II. Pray That We Live In Freedom From The Flesh

Rom. 6:7 "For when we died with Christ we were set free from the power of sin." (NLT)

- "died with Christ" refers to us giving our lives to Christ"...death to our old self." It is the death of our old self that liberates us from the power of sin.
 1. Even though Jesus has set us free from the power of sin, doesn't mean we stopped sinning. WHY? Because even though sin's authority over our lives was removed, we still have fleshly desires that we will struggle with the rest of our lives.
 2. Although these fleshly desires seem intense at times, they do not have authority to make us prisoners. That authority and power was lost to sin at the cross. We now have the ability to walk in freedom. HOW?

Gal. 5:16 "If you are guided by the Spirit, you won't obey your selfish desires." (CEV)

3. We all now have the option to either live according to the flesh or live by the power of the Holy Spirit that is inside us now. The key to freedom is choosing the Spirit over the flesh. HOW? Through prayer!
4. There are two ways to pray so that we can experience more freedom from the flesh.
 - First, when we do sin, we immediately go back to God and confess. So often what people do is feel guilty and avoid God rather than running to Him. All this does is give the flesh more power in your life. (guilt is bondage) It is in re-connecting with God and His Spirit that empowers you to not sin. Practice confession prayers!
 - Some of you have been running from God because of guilt.
 - Secondly, we need to practice dependence prayers. Since the Bible tells us to "be filled with the Spirit" this is something we should pray for. We can be filled with our fleshly desire or be filled with the Spirit's desires. Therefore, we develop prayers of dependence. We daily, and repeatedly ask for the filling of God's Spirit.
 - It's not your will power that enables you to not sin...it is God's power in you. The harder you try to not sin the more you'll sin. It's the wrong focus. It's not about effort but about dependence. Learn to pray this way!
 - The more we stay connected to God the more freedom we experience.

III. Pray That We Live In Freedom From The Devil

II Tim. 2:26 "Then they will come to their senses and escape from the devil's trap. For they have been held captive by him to do whatever he wants." (NLT)

1. Even though Jesus defeated Satan on the cross, followers of Christ can still be taken captive by him and even be used by him to do his will.
2. I have seen Christians do more damage to the Kingdom of God than any unbeliever. Believers can become tools of the enemy if they are not walking in fellowship with God.
3. In fact, I believe that if any believer in Christ is not walking in fellowship with God they are being used as a tool of the enemy and they don't even know it. I have seen believers destroy their own families / say the most mean-spirited things to each other / destroy their own churches / - more churches are destroyed by believers than unbelievers. (The threat comes from within!)
4. I've had a front row seat to this carnage living through multiple church splits in my years before Foothills! I have seen behavior in churches that wouldn't be tolerated in a bar. I have had multiple anonymous letters berating my character / my strategies / and my motives.
5. I have seen believers divide over the most ridiculous issues...music – instruments – food in the auditorium – paint color – having too much fun in church – bringing hay in the church -
6. If you're not a tool for the Kingdom of God you're going to be a tool for the enemy! You and I can be held captive by him to do his will. What's his will? To bring division to the church!
7. We can protect ourselves by learning to pray against this. HOW?
 - Pray daily for God to protect you from the devils attacks / influence against you / choose to wear the spiritual armor He's given you. – Last week
 - Pray daily that you would be a tool for the Kingdom of God
 - Pray daily that you would be a unity builder never a unity destroyer. Are you building unity in your marriage / kids / in your church?

IV. Pray That We Live In Freedom From Masquerading

James 5:16 "Confess your sins to each other and pray for each other so that you may be healed..." (NLT)

Eph. 4:25 "So stop telling lies. Let us tell our neighbors the truth, for we are all parts of the same body." (NLT)

1. If we are constantly pretending to be something we are not we will never walk in freedom. There just seems to be such tremendous pressure in the Christian community to pretend that we have it together much more than is reality.

- Let's come to church and pretend how great our lives are. Don't let anyone see that we have problems / that we're dying on the inside / life is falling apart / we're in pain.
2. What we need to understand is that as long as we masquerade, (wear the mask) the bondage in our lives continues and gets worse. The issues we are working so hard to hide will control us.
 3. Freedom is ONLY experienced as we choose to be transparent and honest within the context of the community of believers. God never intended for the freedom He provided to be just an individual experience. It's a group experience. How can you be free if you're constantly worried that people will find out who you really are? Not freedom!
 4. Some of you are worried about being judged / rejected / looked down at / not accepted because of something in your life. You work very hard at keeping the façade in place. It's exhausting isn't it?
 5. You have come to a place where you can relax; take the mask off, and be accepted by a community of people who are all working on their stuff too. It's in this context where we get free.
 6. We can practice James 5 where we can confess our sins to each other (our struggles) and then we can pray and support each other...and experience healing / Freedom / life change!
 7. Some of you are controlled by this fear. It's time to be free. Will you be willing to pray, "Lord, help me to take off the mask. Help me to stop masquerading. Help me to stop pretending and hiding behind a façade."

V. Pray That We Live In Freedom From Isolation

- Relational isolation is the quick path to bondage for any believer in Christ.

Ecc. 4:9-10, 12 "Two people are better off than one, for they can help each other succeed. If one person falls, the other can reach out and help. But someone who falls alone is in real trouble. .. A person standing alone can be attacked and defeated, but two can stand back-to-back and conquer. Three are even better, for a triple-braided cord is not easily broken." (NLT)

I Cor. 12:18-21 "But our bodies have many parts, and God has put each part just where he wants it. How strange a body would be if it had only one part! Yes, there are many parts, but only one body. The eye can never say to the hand, "I don't need you." The head can't say to the feet, "I don't need you." (NLT)

1. Spiritual freedom is never maintained in relational isolation. We are always stronger together than when we're alone. We must resist the urge to isolate when we struggle. Refuse to believe that we don't need the body of Christ! Our lives and freedom depend upon not only our connection with Jesus but in our connection with each other!
2. I love this image of a Roman army. (slide) This is the formation they would use as they attacked fortresses. It was called the tortes. It was said to be so strong when held together men and even horses could walk on it.

3. It is a great image for us as the church. We are meant to live together / walk together / fight together / defend and protect each other / This is the church. Isolation makes you an easy target and easy to capture.
4. The other image that is used is one of the body with the variety of body parts. To think that a hand can survive on its own is ludicrous...or a foot...or an eye / etc... Yet this is how many people live out their relationship with God. They think they can do it without the need for others.
5. Just think how hindered you feel when you hurt only one body part (sprain an ankle / pull a muscle in your back / ingrown toenail). It restricts your entire body. Some of you are in bondage because you think you don't need the other people sitting in this auditorium. You don't have only one hurt body part, you've cut yourself off from the body itself!
6. Some people believe that they can be a follower of Christ and not go to church. Well, you might be able to be a follower of Christ without others, but you will never be a victorious one living in freedom without others.
7. For some, it's time to get out of relational isolation. It's time to walk in relational freedom with each other. Will you pray; "Lord will you help me move out of isolation? Will you show me people I can connect with / lock my shields with?" "Will you help me place myself in environments where these relationships can take place." (Take a class / home group /
 - Christ has indeed set us free, but are you living free? Will you be willing to pray in a way that will result in this freedom becoming a reality? Will you realize this freedom must be maintained?
 - Even in our great Nation, we are not free because we fought a war over 200 years ago. That war may have won and declared our freedom, but it has been maintained for over 200 years with great effort and sacrifice. So, is our freedom in Christ!

Will you pray for your freedom from the world / the flesh / Satan / masquerading / isolation? These things will lead you to bondage. Which ones hold you in bondage today? Which ones are controlling you? Are you wanting to be free?

- As we close today, I want to invite those needing freedom in one of these areas to come forward and pray here at the front. I want to ask you to break out of your fear that keeps you stuck in your chair and experience freedom. By walking away from your chair you are saying I will not be held a prisoner any longer. As we sing, you come!