

Leadership Lessons from Kings

The Role of Prayer in Making Good Decisions

Rough Transcript

Patrick Morley

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Hello, men, and welcome to another episode of the Man in the Mirror Bible study. I'm Pat Morley. Today we're going to be talking about the role of prayer in making good decisions. Please turn in your Bibles to I Chronicles, 14:8. What is the major decision that you are facing right now? And what is the key for you to make a good decision? It might be something related to a health issue. It might be how to educate your children in tough times. It might be something related to a broken relationship. Very likely it could be related to work, whether or not to take a different position, or to find work, or it might be if you're a business owner, whether you let staff go or ask everybody to take a little bit of a cut so that you can keep your staff together. It might be to close down your business or to borrow money in order to keep it going.

The problem with making major decisions is that there usually is not one right answer, and this is a moral decision. And a lot of times these choices turn out wrong. And so what is it that you and I can do to give us the highest likelihood of making a good decision?

THE DIVINE MYSTERY OF PRAYER

The first thing I want us to talk about though this morning is the divine mystery of prayer. A young doctoral student at Princeton University asked Albert Einstein, "What in the world is there that's left that's worthy of original dissertation research?" Einstein said, "Find out about prayer. Somebody must find out about prayer." Tony Campolo is one of the most colorful and interesting Christian authors and speakers of the last 50 years. He told the story of being invited to speak at a chapel service at a Pentecostal college.

Before the chapel service began, eight men took him into the back room, asked him to kneel down. They laid their hands on top of his head, and then they began to pray, and they prayed, and they prayed. And the longer they prayed, the more tired they became. And eventually their tired hands started getting heavier on the top of Tony's head and he couldn't wait for the prayers to be over one. One man wasn't even praying about Tony. He was praying about Charlie Stoltzfus. He said, "Oh Lord," he said, you know, Charlie Stoltzfus you know, Charlie Stoltzfus, you know the one that lives about a mile down the road from here and that silver trailer, Lord that's on the right-hand side of the road." Tony Campolo is thinking, "God probably knows where Charlie's Stoltzfus lives. So let's get on with the prayer."

The man continues to pray, he said, "Oh Lord. You know that this morning Charlie Stoltzfus told me that he is going to leave his wife and three children. Oh God, please intervene. Please send somebody to help Charlie Stoltzfus so that he won't leave his wife and three children and tear this family apart." And then finally the prayer is concluded. Tony gave his message, got in his car and started to drive home on the Pennsylvania turnpike. A few miles up the road he saw a hitchhiker on the side of the road. He pulled over and picked him up. After driving a few minutes he said, "I'm Tony Campolo, who are you? What's your name?" He said, "Well, my name is Charlie Stoltzfus." Tony was totally taken a back. At the next interchange Tony pulled off, turned around and started back the other way. The man was freaking out.

He said, "What's going on? Where are you taking me?" He said, "I'm taking you home." He said, "Why would you do that?"

He said, "Well, you left your wife and three children today, right?" Now the guy's really freaking out. He plastered himself against the side of the car and get as far away from Tony as he can. And he said, "Yeah, that's right." And then to really put a stamp on it, Tony drove right up to the silver trailer where Charlie Stoltzfus had just walked away. And now he's really freaking out. He said, "How did you know where I live? How did you know where I live?" Tony looked at him and he said, "God told me where you live." And in a sense God had told him where he lived. The man got out of the car. He walked up to the front of his trailer. His wife opened the door and she shrieked, "You're back. You're back."

He leaned over, began to whisper in her ear. The more he whispered the bigger her eyes bulged. Tony walked up and said very authoritatively, "I need to talk to you too. I want you to go in the trailer and sit down on the sofa there and we're going to have a talk." And that afternoon Tony led that young couple to faith in Jesus Christ. Prayer really is a divine ministry. And if you want to make good decisions, I know I do, then the Big Idea today is this. **Cultivate prayer as your first impulse in every situation.** Imagine how God used the prayer of that faithful man in that little prayer circle for Tony Campolo, to release the power of the gospel that would lead a young couple to faith in Jesus Christ. It is a divine ministry.

A MAN WHO PRAYED ABOUT EVERYTHING

I want to unpack for you how this works. How you can think about cultivating prayers, the first impulse in every situation, by looking at a man who prayed about everything, and that is King David. At 1 Chronicles 14:8 begins and says essentially that the Philistines had come up in full force to look for David. And he heard about it. And then he went out to meet them. And then in verse nine, "Now the Philistines had come and raided the Valley of Rephaim." David now has a major decision. What does he do? Does he go to the left? Does he go to the right? What does he do? So what is the first impulse of David? In verse 10 we read this, "So David inquired of God." The first impulse of David in every situation is to pray. "So David inquired of God, shall I go and attack the Philistines? Will you deliver them into my hands?"

David didn't know what to do. He didn't know if he should go and attack or do something else. And so he prayed because he knew that that's how he could have the highest likelihood of making the right decision. And this is the same for you and me. So the Big Idea is, **Cultivate prayer is your first impulse in every situation.** Look what happened, reading on, "The Lord answer him, 'Go. I will deliver them into your hands.' So David and his men went up to Baal Perazim, and there he defeated them."

Now, if you're like me, once you have acquired some competence at something, the tendency is to think that the next time you come upon that same situation that you already know what to do. And there might be a tendency not to make prayer your first impulse in every situation, but rather to rely on your competence, on your experience, on your expertise. But we're going to learn now here a twist, a really important lesson from David, the man who prayed about everything. In verse 13 it says "Once more, the Philistines raided the valley." David could have said, "Okay, well, I've seen this before. I've got this. I've prayed about this before. I know what to do." But notice that David's first impulse is not to rely on his own competence, but rather it says in verse 14, "So David inquired of God again, and God answered him," watch this.

"God said, 'Do not go directly after them, but circle around them and attack them in front of the poplar trees. As soon as you hear the sound of marching in the top of the poplar trees, move out to battle, because that will mean God has gone out in front of you to strike the Philistine army.' So David did, as God commanded him," he obeyed, "and they struck down the Philistine army, all the way from Gibeon to Gezer." The best decision may not be what it was before. If you want to understand the leadership of David, you have to understand that he had made prayer his first impulse in every situation. Now David

made a couple of mistakes when he didn't pray. They're well-documented in scripture, and we all will make mistakes. But nevertheless, his first impulse really was to pray in every situation.

I know that on my Bible study preparation worksheet, I have written that I should repent of any self-sufficiency to prepare or deliver this message. And then I have a special note to pray when I'm unsure about what to say, but especially when I'm sure. And notice that that's what David has done here. So we should pray when we don't know what to do, but we should especially pray when we think we do know what to do. And that's the spirit of having prayer as the first impulse in every situation. So once again, the Big Idea today is to **cultivate prayer as your first impulse in every situation.**

IDEAS TO CULTIVATE PRAYER AS YOUR FIRST IMPULSE

Now, let me give you some ideas to cultivate prayer as your first impulse. There are some verses from Jesus that I want to share that will help us in this area. Luke 5:16, "But Jesus often withdrew to the wilderness for prayer." The idea of having real times where we set aside blocks of time when we can pray is part of the disposition of prayer. Jesus used prayer when he would make some of his major decisions, and Luke 6:12-13, "One of those days Jesus went out to a mountainside to pray, and spent the night praying to God. When morning came, he called his disciples to him and chose 12 of them whom he also designated apostles." So Jesus made prayer his first impulse in every situation. He set aside times to pray. And when he had important, especially important decisions to make, he put in a special prayer. In Matthew 17:19 and following the disciples had been approached by a man who had a son possessed by a demon, and the disciples could not drive the demon out, and Jesus eventually came and did.

And Matthew 17:19, they said, "The disciples came to Jesus in private and asked him, 'Why couldn't we drive it out?'" And this is what Jesus said, "Because you have so little faith. Truly I tell you, if you have faith as small as this mustard seed, you can say to this mountain, move from here to there and it will move. Nothing will be impossible for you." And in the version of the story in Mark 9:29, Jesus says, "This kind can come out only by prayer. This kind can only come out by prayer."

One of the most important ideas to make prayer your first disposition in every situation, your first impulse in every situation, is to really believe that prayer is real. To have faith in prayer, to believe that God answers prayer. Now you might have, probably have, hopefully have an experience to confirm that prayer is real. One that I often read refer to. I was speaking once in Charleston, South Carolina, big conference, big men's conference, I was one of the speakers, and I had some kind of a stomach bug. So I was back and forth from the restroom. And finally I had to tell the event organizer, "I don't know if I'll be able to go on. And if I do go on, I don't know if I'll be able to finish."

He told me they had a prayer room. And so I went to the prayer room and there were four or five prayer warriors there. And prayer people are different. So when I told them what's going on, they went into action and some of them put their hands on my head and some of them put their hands on my stomach and they began to pray. They pray. They began these prayer prayers of whaling, imploring God, begging God to heal me. And you know what man? That quick I was healed. I believe that prayer is real. I have faith.

So one idea is to imitate Jesus and other idea is to have the faith that Jesus talked about that prayer is real. And then let me give you just a few practical ideas on prayer. I think it's important if you want to cultivate prayer as your first impulse in every situation to have some routine habitual prayers that you pray every day. I think it's not a bad idea, and I have six of these prayers.

One of them is the Lord's Prayer, The Our Father. So most days I will pray Our Father who art in heaven and so on. Another prayer, and this was the first prayer that I ever started to pray on a daily basis. It's a prayer of surrender. I pray, "Jesus, I make a full, total complete surrender of my life today to your Lordship." And then another prayer that I've developed is just one of worship. It's, "Lord, I worship you in the beauty of your holiness and the majesty of your creation and the unconditionality of your love

and the generosity of your salvation and the mystery of your Providence. And these habitual routine prayers, they draw me into a way of thinking about God that helps me to have a disposition of prayer. It helps me when I get into any kind of situation to have prayer as the first impulse of what I want to do most of the time, not all the time, nobody does, but most of the time.

Another idea that I've developed, and I encourage you to give this a try if it resonates. I've developed a daily top five. I put a daily calendar reminder at 9:00 AM. So every day at 9:00 AM I have my daily five pop up. Five names of people that I'm praying for in different situations. A lot of times, most of the time, they're family members on the list. Right now I have one of our former table leaders. We had a great season together, Don Walburn, who was in a terrible motorcycle accident about a month and a half ago and they didn't know if he was going to make it or not. People are praying for him all over the world and by God's grace he looks like he's going to end up making a full recovery. Really a miraculous full recovery, but I have his name on the daily five.

And then another practical idea, which I've only started in the last four months. I now, every week, once a week, I put a new photograph of somebody on the lock screen of my iPhone. So every time I pick up my iPhone and the screen lights up, there is a picture of someone. And then that reminds me and I say a quick prayer for them. It helps me to have prayer as my first impulse when I pick up my iPhone, you might want to give that a try. Don Walburn for example is the person that I had on last week. And then every time I picked up my iPhone, there was Don laying in his hospital bed with the tube coming out of this nose and everything. And it reminded me to pray for him. So those are a few practical ideas.

There was a father who asked his son to clear a part of the yard of some rocks. And so the boy went over. He wanted to please his father. He was digging out these rocks, but one rock he just couldn't seem to dislodge. This father watched him, and he was straining and straining and he could not dislodge the rock. And finally he gave up in frustration and he said to his father, he said, "I can't do it, I give up." And the father said, "Did you use all of your strength?" And the boy was hurt. He said, "Yes, dad, I gave it every ounce of my energy." He said, "No, you didn't, you didn't ask me to help." And then father walked over with the son to that large rock and relatively easily pulled it out of the soil.

When you have a major decision that you have to make, ask for help, cultivate prayer as the first disposition, your first impulse in every situation. That's the Big Idea, **cultivate prayer as your first impulse in every situation** and ask for help.

Let's pray. Our dearest Father. Thank you for your word. Thank you for the example of David, who did not assume that he knew what to do, but made prayer his first impulse in every situation, even when he thought he knew what to do. And thank you for the example of Jesus. Thank you for practical ways that we can cultivate prayer as our first impulse. I pray that you would help each of us Lord to understand that prayer is a major part, perhaps *the* major part of making good decisions and that we would allow that to be our first impulse in every situation. Jesus, we ask this in your name. Amen.

Thank you, men. I hope you've enjoyed this series. God bless.