

Why Politeness Might Be Strangling Your Prayer Life

Christians in North America are generally polite pray-ers. We tend to pray correct, respectful words that we think God wants to hear. But let's be honest ... many of our prayers are tentative, repetitive and somewhat boring.

I'm all for politeness with acquaintances. But real relationships require more. If my husband only spoke distant and polite words to me, our relationship would wither and die. I want to hear his struggles, his fears, his anger and his joys. I want to process with him, not just hear his conclusions. I want him to trust me.

Intimate relationships require authentic feelings. Our innermost thoughts—however wrong or immature—are shared in trust. So why do we keep God at arm's length? Are we trying to be something we're not? Are we afraid to trouble Him? God is our Father, yet we often treat Him like a distant relative.

Be Authentic in Prayer

Recently, I was reading through Jeremiah, and I was struck by how real his prayers were. He didn't pretty up his words. He prayed heartfelt words. He brought his complaints to God and pleaded with Him.

Righteous are you, O LORD, that I plead with You. Indeed, let me talk with You about matters of justice. Why does the way of the wicked prosper? (Jer. 12:1).

Why did I come forth from the womb to see trouble and sorrow, so that my days are spent in shame? (Jer. 20:18).

Heal me, O LORD, and I will be healed; save me, and I will be saved (Jer. 17:14).

What if we prayed what we really felt? Our words would come as no surprise to God, but we may be humbled when our foolish thoughts become words. Sometimes we feel things but can't really define or understand them until we speak them out loud. So we vent them to friends or shove them down deep not wanting to trouble God with our "little" cares. We make a critical mistake when we don't bring our troubles immediately to God. Not only does He care, but He also has the power to change things.

Prayer brings us to a vulnerable place. We lay bare our hearts to God in prayer. Our carefully created persona is peeled back until we stand naked and exposed before a holy God. This is an uncomfortable—no, terrifying—thought without Christ's blood shed on our behalf. There is no pretending with God. He knows our thoughts before we speak them (Ps. 139:4). Every hair on our head is numbered (Matt. 10:30). He knows us. The *real* us.

But the Christian can approach the Father with boldness (Heb. 4:16, Rom. 5:2). We are beloved children, not distant employees. We don't need to fear Him because the cross happened. Christ paid the penalty for our sin and clothed us in His own righteousness (2 Cor. 5:21). So we take an uncomfortable leap of faith, not because we have confidence in ourselves, but because Christ is trustworthy, and God has adopted us as His own.

Expect to Be Changed

When we bring our complaints and requests before our heavenly Father, something unexpected happens. We come to Him hoping for a change of circumstances and leave with a new perspective. We are changed by prayer. We see this pattern often in the Psalms. A complaint turns to praise through the course of prayer. If we apply this template to our own prayer lives, we may be surprised by the fruit it bears.

When it's just you and God in private prayer, why not be

brutally honest? You can trust Him with your heart because He cares for you. Authentic prayer deepens communion. It grows assurance and inflames love. Go ahead and jump in the deep end with God. Polite prayer may be more comfortable, but authentic prayer transforms hearts.

Do you feel free to be honest with God in prayer? If you stopped being polite, what would you say to Him?

*Copyright © 2001-2016 Revive Our Hearts. **Christel Humfrey** is a follower of Jesus, wife to Clint and mom to three boys. In 2013, she was diagnosed with an autoimmune condition that caused her life to become a little more messy. She is thankful that no trial can steal her spiritual inheritance and that God's grace is better than even the greatest earthly joy. Trained in classical singing, Christel is now married to a cowboy, who also happens to be her pastor. Christel makes her home in Calgary, Canada, and spends her days with three mischievous little boys.*