



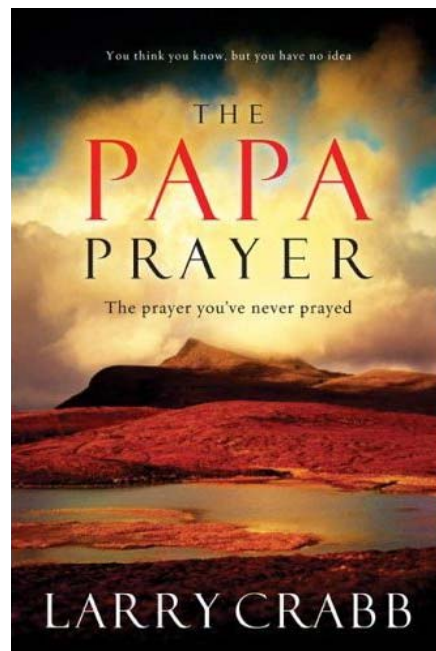
DEAN WELCH - TEACHER

THE PRAYER YOU'VE NEVER PRAYED!?!
[INTRODUCING "THE PAPA PRAYER"]

WEEKLY SUNDAY SCHOOL LESSON

APRIL 27, 2008

LESSON #1 FROM THE **MASTER WORKS** SERIES STUDY OF:



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THE PRAYER YOU'VE NEVER PRAYED!?!

[INTRODUCING "THE PAPA PRAYER"]

A father and his 10-year old son were looking at books one day at Barnes & Noble. His father said, "Here's an interesting book," 'The Complete Idiot's Guide to Prayer.'" The son quickly replied, "Dad, you don't need to read that book. It's only for idiots." But do we ever feel like we could really use a book like that?

All kind of books have been written about prayer. Most people say they believe in prayer and most Christians want to have a good prayer life. We want to feel that our prayers make a difference and that we're not talking just to be talking. We want to know that God hears our prayers and is paying attention to them. Today we start a great five week adventure that I assure you will change your life—especially your prayer life—as we begin a new study from Dr. Larry Crabb's book, *The Papa Prayer*.

As I read Dr. Crabb's book this past week in preparation for this new series, I thought a lot about the name—*The Papa Prayer*—and wondered why he chose to use the name *Papa*? Well, I know God works in mysterious ways, but He also has a sense of humor. On Thursday of this past week, my daughter Ashley dropped by my office after picking up my oldest grandson, Jaxson, from kindergarten, as she often does once or twice a week so I can see my grandchildren for a moment. Jaxson was so excited as I talked to him through the car window, telling me how he had been a good boy that day at school and was given a "sticker" by his teacher as a reward. He held up his hand and showed me the *sticker*—beaming from ear to ear. You see, the three prior days Jaxson had not been such a good boy and was now rewarded with a sticker. As a matter of fact, his teacher commented to my daughter that he did not pay attention and did not mind his teacher. Being the concerned mother, Ashley restricted him those days and didn't let him wear his Spiderman costume—which he dearly loves. When he was asked what had happened, he shook his head and said—at three years old—*"I don't want to talk about it."*

BUT, Thursday, he had been good! Knowing the significance of the *sticker*, I asked him if I could borrow his sticker and wear it on my hand? He immediately responded, saying, *"No, PAPA, you have to be good to get a sticker."* I pretended to be sad and commented that I had been good that day. Then, as Jaxon looked up at me standing at the car window, holding his hand out with the bright orange *sticker* held high, he said, *"That's OK, PAPA, you can ask Nanny for a sticker if you've been good."* It all of a sudden hit me why Larry Crabb used the word *Papa*. Just like the sweet, gentle, simple, down-to-earth conversations I have with my grandson, Jaxon, God also wants us to talk with Him the say way, desiring a close, intimate relationship and longing to draw closer to Him. We all want a papa!

And we have one. His name is God. And like the best Papa we can imagine, the sound of His footsteps, if we know He's coming, inspires exuberant joy. And when we hear His voice and feel His hug, all is well. We're safe. Papa is here. What can go wrong? But for many Christians, something's not right. We can't hear the sound of His footsteps as He enters our lives. Or if we do, we back away. What's wrong? The idea that our heavenly Father is sitting on the floor, holding out His arms to embrace us when we run to Him, seems far-fetched, impossible, unthinkable. Many of us have no reference point—it never happened with our earthly dad. We've never known the papa of our dreams.

Open your Bible to **JOHN 14:14 (NIV)** and follow along as I read the words of Jesus: ***¹⁴You may ask me for anything in my name, and I will do it.*** What did that verse say? **Anything?** Well that's what He said! OK, a little later we find Jesus saying the same thing again, this time with stronger emphasis and an added guarantee of happiness. Look down a couple of chapters to **JOHN 16:23-24 (NIV)**: ***"...I tell you the truth** [He leaves no room for argument; He wants us to know He means what He says], **my Father will give you whatever you ask in my name. Anything! Whatever!*** Now, look at the last sentence of verse 24, ***"Ask and you will receive, and your joy will be complete."*** Simple, isn't it?

Jesus told us to ask Him for whatever we want. Is that true in your life—ask and you will receive?

This new study about prayer from Larry Crabb's book is for people who long to hear God's voice, who want to know God so well that His life actually becomes theirs. Let's look back at the nine questions Dr. Crabb asked us at the beginning of our study on Day One this week. They are listed on **Page 108** of your quarterly and I want us to read them one more time.

1. Ever ask for something from God that you didn't receive?
2. Ever pray for guidance, especially in a difficult relationship, that never came?
3. Ever really need to hear God's voice and then try to believe you did, even though you weren't sure?

My answer is yes to all three questions so far. What's yours?
Continuing,

4. Do you sometimes feel that God is turning a deaf ear to your most desperate prayer requests?
5. Have you ever prayer for comfort yet ended up feeling more empty and alone after you prayed?
6. Has praying for strength to overcome temptation ever left you feeling just as weak and the temptation just as strong, or even stronger?

How did you do with those three? Again, all "yeses" for me. The three final questions dig a little deeper.

7. Do you know God well enough to enjoy His company the same way you enjoy being with a family member or close friend?
8. Do you want to know God better and enjoy Him more than you know and enjoy anyone else?
9. Do you connect with God in such a way that enables you to hear His voice and to know He's right there with you?

Just like Dr. Crabb, for years I've wished I could answer yes to those final three questions. But I've had to say no. Enjoy Him? Get to know Him better? Hear His voice? Yeah, right. If you're like many people, you can barely find a couple of minutes to read the Bible every morning. Truth is, even when you do, your "time with God" doesn't mean much. It's dry. And you're bored. You're so busy with life and probably confused about prayer, verbalizing little one-liner pleas for help: *"God, keep me from blowing up at my kid."* *"God, let the dentist find nothing more to drill."* *"God, don't let this deal fall through."* *"God let my son pass this time."*

Sometimes, we seem to think this is all about us and what we want—it's the prayer of the *"spoiled child."* But, think back a moment to those verses we just read in **JOHN 14** and **16** about asking and receiving ... **Anything**? What's wrong here? His words are clear! Right? Let me give you another example. When I was about eight or nine years old, I loved to watch *Superman* on TV, with George Reeves. Remember? *"Faster than a speeding bullet, stronger than a locomotive, able to leap tall buildings with a single bound..."* I could think of nothing I wanted more than to fly like Superman. Desire consumed me. Thinking that all I had to do was just A-S-K and it would be given to me, I did. I went outside one day, stood on the driveway, put on my superman suit, cape and all, bowed my head and prayed, *"God let me fly like Superman."* I jumped as high as I could—maybe eight inches—claiming God's promise. A half-second later, I landed with a thud on the concrete—falling and bruising not only my ego but my knee. What went wrong?

These verses we read embarrass us. We can't get them to work. Then we notice an OUT. Jesus narrowed thing with the qualifying phrase *"in my name."* All the explanations I've heard of what Jesus meant boil down to this: He promises to give us anything we ask for that SUITS HIS PURPOSES. And since He's sovereign and a lot smarter than we are, we're told that's a good thing. But it leaves me wondering what we should bother to pray if He's going to do what He knows is best anyway. *"Just sit in the back of the*

bus and leave the driving to Him.” That’s one thought, but here’s another.

Prayer can sometimes seem more like feeding money into a slot machine than making requests of a loving Father. Jackpot stories get written up. Those who walk away with empty pockets—well, they just walk away and try to hang on to their faith in prayer as best they can. Like **Tom and Tammy Wortham**. In the fall of 2001, Tom and Tammy discovered that their two-year-old son, Taylor, had a brain tumor. A risky thirteen-hour emergency neuro-surgery was required to remove the tumor and give Taylor any hope of living. Tom and Tammy’s family members and dozens of lifelong friends and members of their Bible Fellowship class camped out at the hospital to pray for Taylor and to support the family.

The surgery was somewhat successful, and everyone thanked God for answered prayer. But a year of chemotherapy followed to attempt to remove the rest of the tumor. Friends and family held a yearlong prayer chain for the family as they endured the side effects, blood count irregularities, financial burdens, and quarantines from other children. I can’t think of anything that would test your faith more than a prolonged, severe illness in one of your children. Taylor has now finished his chemotherapy and God has answered a lot of prayers, but the long-term prognosis is still unknown. In spite of uncertainties about Taylor’s future, Tom and Tammy continue to hold out hope that God will answer their prayers, and remarkably, they continue to trust in the goodness of God. Tammy wrote about how she has attempted to overcome the temptation to become bitter:

I picture us in a boat in the middle of a storm. Though you’re surrounded by the storm, you know that God is in the front of the boat. And you know He never abandons the ship. We know God has been in this boat with us from the beginning. He’s not jumping out now. And when I cuddle Taylor in my lap, I picture Jesus holding all of us. We don’t like what we’ve been through

this year, and there have been times when we just sit in our Father's lap and cry, but we don't lose faith in our Father.

Ever wonder if God is listening? Many of you know that our son, Adam, has been struggling this year. His wife had decided to leave and moved back home to Mississippi. He had to sell his home. He has taken the bar exam several times and not been able to pass. He has lost his job with the law firm he and his wife had worked with for two years and doesn't really know what he's going to do. He needs the Lord and strong Christian mentors to bring him back into the Church and the body of Christ. Beverly and I, along with many of you, have prayed for such a long time for Adam and his situation. He needs a victory somewhere, we beg God. We can't believe that what we're asking for is not *"in Jesus' name."* Don't the words we just read mean, *"Ask for anything and if it fits My heart and character, I'll say yes every time?"* How many saints have prayed prayers that seemed a shoo-in to meet that standard but remained unanswered? If God's heart is love and His character is good, then prayer for someone like Adam has to fit. Doesn't it?

Can you relate to this? Have you ever asked, *"God, where are you?"* Like we read this week, I've too have often asked, *"Are you listening to me? Do You know what's going on in my life? Do you care? Do I even know who You are?"* We're not alone, are we? Let's look at a couple of examples that we read this week. Turn first to **JOB 30:20 (NIV)**, ²⁰*"I cry out to you, O God, but you do not answer; I stand up, but you merely look at me.*

Now, let's look at **PSALM 28:1 (NIV)**, ¹*"To you I call, O LORD my Rock; do not turn a deaf ear to me. For if you remain silent, I will be like those who have gone down to the pit."* Or, is the way you feel about prayer like that in **PSALM 6:9 (NIV)**, ⁹*The LORD has heard my cry for mercy; LORD accepts my prayer.*

One thing we're going to learn in this study about prayer is that it's all about RELATIONSHIP—not about what He can do for you. Let's suppose that Walt and I had arranged to meet for lunch

tomorrow and he'd offered to pick me up around noon. But when he picked me up, the first thing I said to him was, *"Walt, I need you to come by our house tonight. Beverly and I need your advice about something. And could you run by the pharmacy at Target in Myrtle Beach? I need to pick up a prescription."* Then when we sit down for lunch, I ask him about one my children. *"And oh, by the way, any chance of a loan? Things have been pretty tight. To be honest with you, I'm hoping you'll pick up lunch, if that's OK?"*

How would you feel if I talked to you like that? Yet that's how many of us talk to God. Now, obviously, I'd never act like that with Walt. It would be nice just being with him. But sometimes we don't know how to just BE WITH GOD. So, we ASK Him for a lot of things. As Beverly and I were riding yesterday, I mentioned that I was going to make a deal with God on something specific that I'd been praying for. Have you ever done that? *On a cartoon a little boy was kneeling by his bed in prayer. "Listen to this, God, here's an offer you can't refuse."* Beverly quickly laughed and responded, *"It doesn't work like that, Dean."* Duh!

Turn to **LUKE 18:1-8 (NLT)** and let's look at a very familiar parable about the persistent widow that Jesus told to his disciples: *¹One day Jesus told his disciples a story to show that they should always pray and never give up. ²"There was a judge in a certain city," he said, "who neither feared God nor cared about people. ³A widow of that city came to him repeatedly, saying, 'Give me justice in this dispute with my enemy.' ⁴The judge ignored her for a while, but finally he said to himself, 'I don't fear God or care about people, ⁵but this woman is driving me crazy. I'm going to see that she gets justice, because she is wearing me out with her constant requests!" ⁶Then the Lord said, "Learn a lesson from this unjust judge. ⁷Even he rendered a just decision in the end. So don't you think God will surely give justice to his chosen people who cry out to him day and night? Will he keep putting them off? ⁸I tell you, he will grant justice to them*

quickly! But when the Son of Man returns, how many will he find on the earth who have faith?"

It's hard to miss the point. It's even harder to spin it to fit our experience. Jesus was pretty clear: keep praying, don't quit; and if you stay with it, your request will be granted, sooner rather than later. But, DUH, that's not what's happening. Sincere people all over the work cry out to God and get no answer. A friend recently died of Lou Gehrig's disease despite the intense prayers of many. Fill a room with a thousand honest Christians—ask them to stand up if they've been asking God for something unselfish and good for a long time that has not yet been given, and nine hundred will jump to their feet.

Why? Is God listening or not? Does praying make any difference in what happens? Absolutely. Ask Leroy and Nancy Bridenstine, as Nancy finally received a liver transplant and is on the road to recovery. Ask Oscar and Brenda Glaze, as Brenda was finally able to get a kidney transplant after months and months of dialysis and problems. The list goes on and on, doesn't it? What about in my own life—after what happened in mine and Beverly's lives ten years ago? Don't tell me that God doesn't answer prayer. We know he does. So what's the problem then?

Dr. Crabb tells us it's in the WAY we pray! Can that be true? Let's look at one more verse, this one direct from Abba, from Father God, our Heavenly Papa. Listen to what He once said to some of His kids who weren't doing so well. Since God doesn't change, we can assume the longing heart from which He spoke to them is the same longing heart from which He's speaking to us right now. Listen to these words from **JEREMIAH 3:19 (NIV)**, *"How gladly would I treat you like sons and give you a desirable land."* What's stopping Him? Maybe, as Dr. Crabb suggests, it's the way we pray. OR, maybe it's the way we DON'T pray. Consider this, we do a lot more ASKING of God that RELATING to God.

Even if that's true, is it a problem? Didn't Jesus tell us to come to Him with our requests? Do you recall our memory verse from **PHILIPPIANS 4:6 (NKJV)**? *Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known to God.*

I wonder what would happen if our prayers were more like the response of a child lost in a Super WalMart when he or she finds her dad? Can you picture that? Can't you just hear the scream when the child sees his or her dad and the words, *"I was scared I wouldn't find you?"* At that point, all those earlier questions about toys vanished. All he or she wants is to be with dad, to stay close by his side, to keep dad in sight, to go wherever dad wants to go.

Dr. Crabb, in explaining the Papa Prayer, says that the first thing in prayer is to RELATE TO GOD. If you get Him, everything else follows. Think about the opening words of the Lord's Prayer. We are most familiar with the Lord's Prayer in the words of the King James Version: *"Our Father which art in heaven, hallowed be thy name."* Did you hear those first few words: *"Our Father."* They get us thinking about relationship. *"Papa, we're coming to You."* And Jesus wants us to be crystal clear about who it is we're coming to. Our Papa is the holy God of heaven. If it weren't for Jesus, we'd never even imagine conversing with God and calling Him Papa. Rather the scene would be a courtroom. We'd be standing in the dock trembling before an inflexibly righteous judge, knowing we were about to justly receive the sentence of death. BUT JESUS HAS CHANGED EVERYTHING and we are to pray in the Spirit.

As we close, I want you to get a better grasp of what it means to pray in the spirit. Turn to **JOHN 15:5-7 (MSG)** and follow along as I read from Eugene Peterson's paraphrase in *The Message* for a little better understanding of what Jesus is saying: *"I am the Vine, you are the branches. When you're joined with me and I with you, the relation intimate and organic, the harvest is sure to be abundant. Separated, you can't produce a thing. Anyone who*

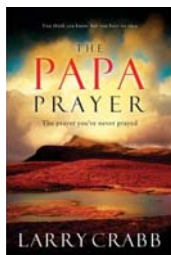
separates from me is deadwood, gathered up and thrown on the bonfire. But if you make yourselves at home with me and my words are at home in you, you can be sure that whatever you ask will be listened to and acted upon.

Jesus is introducing an entirely different approach to prayer than the one we naturally follow. What do the prayers look like of people who remain in Christ, who make themselves at home with Jesus, and who feel at home with everything He says? What does it mean to *“pray in the Spirit?”* It has to be all about Him—not me! We can’t remain in SELF. We have to get God before we can get anything from Him.

I’ve handed out the outline of *The Papa Prayer* for you to put in your Bible and have as a handy reminder of this revolutionary new way to talk to God—your Papa. Each week over the next four weeks, we’ll look at each part of this prayer and hopefully grow closer to Him and truly learn how to pray in the Spirit.

Let’s pray.

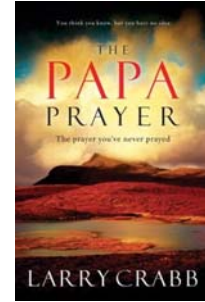
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THE PAPA PRAYER

Present yourself to God
without pretense.

Attend to how you're
thinking of God.



Purge yourself of anything blocking
your relationship with God.

Approach God as the first thing in
your life.