

Extreme Prayer - Part 1

by David Smithers

The sermon emphasizes the need for extreme prayer and devotion to God, highlighting the importance of intimacy with God and the cost of prayer.

Duration: 34:36

Scripture: Hebrews 12:3-4

Topics: "Intimate Prayer", "Holy Spirit"

Description

In this sermon, the speaker emphasizes the importance of extreme examples in revealing the possibilities of God's grace. He encourages listeners not to feel condemned by these examples, but rather to be encouraged by how far God's grace can empower them. The speaker also discusses the significance of Christian biographies in inspiring and challenging believers to go deeper in their relationship with Christ. He highlights the importance of intimacy with Jesus, comparing it to the intimacy in a marital relationship. The speaker emphasizes the need for costly and sacrificial devotion and prayer as a natural response to receiving God's love, rather than as a means to earn His love. He also addresses the misconception that God cannot be affected by our careless attitude, pointing out that the Holy Spirit can be grieved and wounded. The speaker encourages believers to prioritize spending meaningful time with Jesus and to not begrudge the time it takes to worship and listen to Him.

Transcript

Jesus, I just ask that your presence would continue to minister, Lord. You just give me clarity of thought, fill in the gaps, the voids, the things that need to be said that I have not noticed, and the things that need to be with my mouth, Lord Jesus, that you would give me an anointing. Let your anointing just rest on me, Lord, and I pray that you would help me to do this with all my heart.

With every inch, every fiber that's within me, Lord, help me deliver, Lord, what I believe you've started to show me. And God, I just ask that you'd be with me, and I just declare and confess that I can't do this without you, Lord Jesus. I just humble myself before you, Lord, and just ask you to strengthen me, God.

That you'd be with me, and I just declare and confess that I can't do this without you, Lord Jesus. I just humble myself before you, Lord, and just ask you to strengthen me, God. That you'd just strengthen me, Lord Jesus.

Thank you, Lord Jesus. Praise your holy name, holy name. Thank you, God.

Thank you, God. Thank you, Jesus. Amen.

The title of my message is called Extreme Prayer, or Pray Till You Bleed. That's a real subtle title, isn't it? Extreme Prayer, or Pray Till You Bleed. As I was preparing this just in the last few weeks, it seemed strange to me in a day when there is such a lack of fervent prayer in the church, and when so much of the church is still what we would call lukewarm.

That the term extreme, praying extremely or doing anything for Jesus extremely, would catch so much caution and warning. We are living in a day that we need God to do some extreme things. There is extreme need.

How else can we explain the things that Marquita talked about tonight? The things Brad brought up about the condition of our world and our communities. These are extreme times. People are doing extreme, if not excessive things with the power of the enemy.

And we need extreme prayer. We need extreme Christians. In the kingdom of God, extreme examples of devotion serve a very important purpose.

I just want to explain the purpose of all this and give a few definitions. Extreme examples reveal to us the possibilities of grace. They show us how far God can empower us.

We shouldn't be condemned about these things. We shouldn't feel badly. These things should encourage our heart.

They show us how far the grace of Jesus Christ can really carry us. Have we really appropriated the full work of the cross in our Christian devotion? This is the question that these things should raise to us. Are such examples meant to condemn? Certainly not.

Such examples stretch us and teach us that if others have found such grace, we too can go deeper in Christ. I'm a real lover of Christian biographies and talking to people about those. You either find that people really love them or they hate them.

They say, oh, what a great biography, it just changed my life. Then I'll run into somebody that read exactly the same biography and they said, oh, I just felt terrible after I read that thing. I mean, I felt like, am I a Christian? This is the ploy of the enemy.

These kind of extreme examples are meant to challenge us, again, to show us how we can go farther in Jesus Christ. We're going to get to some of these later, but let me just continue. Turn with me to Hebrews 12, 3 and 4. This really lays the foundation for the purpose of those who seek Jesus in an extreme way.

Examples of extreme Christianity, examples of extreme prayer. Hebrews 12, 3 and 4. For consider him who endured such hostility from sinners against himself, lest you become weary and discouraged in your souls. Hebrews 12, 3 and 4. You have not yet resisted bloodshed striving against sin.

Do you see the principle here? It's that when we feel weary, when we grow faint, when the Christian walk becomes rough, we should consider Christ who laid down his very life in order to fight against sin. These examples of extreme Christianity, of extreme prayer, are not meant to condemn us, not meant to bring us down, but to lift us up. Ask the question, have we prayed till we've bled? Have we strived in the power and grace of God till we've shed blood in resisting against sin in order to establish the kingdom of God? How

far have we really went? In light of what Jesus has done on the cross, all of our consecration, all of our devotion to him pales and is seemingly insignificant.

So when you grow weary, when you grow faint, look at the cross and ask yourself, have you yet shed blood in resisting against sin? This is the purpose for extreme examples. And perhaps there's no greater and more extreme example of love and devotion to God the Father than what Jesus did on the cross. When someone presents to you, when they raise the standard, when they tell you how saints in the past, how people in the scriptures of the past laid down their life in love and lordship of Jesus Christ, these things, if you feel under the pressure, if these things weigh you down, if these things condemn you, you need to know right there that that's the scheme of the enemy.

That is, he's you trying to monopolize, manipulate these kind of things to wound you. But that is not the purpose. That is not the purpose.

And you just need to deny that work and to see what God's really trying to show you. But don't deny the examples. See, what's happening a lot is people will lift up a standard, perhaps of holiness, of devotion, of prayer.

Real, live examples of how people of God in the past have walked with Jesus. And then all of a sudden somebody will say, well, that makes me feel bad. I don't like to look at that.

That's either one or two things, folks. It's either conviction of sin, God's trying to take you deeper, trying to break the vessel a little bit, or the enemy is trying to use that and twist the word. And we all know how effective the enemy can twist the words.

What did Satan come to Jesus with in the wilderness? The scripture, truth. What did Satan come to Eve with in the garden? Truth, twisted, a little bit of it left out, a little bit of it added. So this is a scheme of the enemy, but it does not necessarily mean that the standard that's being lifted is not accurate, is not true.

The title, Pray Till You Bleed, is meant to communicate a concept of prayer that contains sacrifice. In 2 Samuel 24, 24, David declared, Nor will I offer offerings to the Lord my God, which cost me nothing. How much does your prayer life cost you? Much, much of what's called prayer today is cheap, is way too cheap.

It doesn't cost us anything, folks. Does it cost you anything to shoot up a prayer while you're driving on the freeway? We should really, we should be ashamed of some of the books that line the Christian bookstores today, the shelves of them. I was reading through a book list the other day, and a title caught my eye.

It said, 15 Minutes Alone with God. Or I've seen another one that was entitled, Prayer for Busy People. Folks, this stuff's shameful.

You tell me. Now, you know, with the big emphasis on marriage and intimacy and correct family life, you write a book that's entitled, 15 Minutes Alone with Your Wife, and you see how long your ministry would last. Man, if you were a radio preacher, you'd be off the air.

Man, it would be over. Well, how much more, how much more intimacy, love, closeness does Jesus deserve than our spouses? In Ephesians 5, the writer there, Paul, is telling us that God has so organized, so constructed the marital relationships between a man and a woman to teach us about our relationship with Jesus Christ. And we make special nights to have dates and spend time, meaningful time with our

children, with our spouses, and yet we can talk about 15 minutes alone with Jesus.

Can you see how that is twisted? And it comes, it flows out of something that says down deep in the back of our mind, in the recesses of our heart, that God cannot be hurt, that He cannot be affected by our careless attitude. Yet the Scripture is clear that the Holy Spirit is grieved, that He is quenched, that His heart is wounded, that God longs for intimacy with His people. And we talk about 15 minutes alone with Him.

Do you begrudge the service like we even had tonight, where we just take time to sing songs to Jesus, and we can wait? Are the long pauses in worship uncomfortable for you? We wouldn't dare, you know, begrudge our spouse the time it takes to listen. It takes time to listen, folks. You've got to sit there for a while, not saying anything, not doing anything.

That's what's going on in worship sometimes. Give the Holy Spirit time to speak to people's hearts. This concept is totally inconsistent with the holy and loving God who gave everything, everything in order to redeem us from the eternal death sentence.

So no one misunderstands me, let me say this, that we do not desire costly, sacrificial devotion and prayer in order to obtain God's love, but as the natural and grateful response to receiving God's love. Do you see the difference? I'm not talking about works here, folks. I'm not talking about, you know, earning God's love by praise and worship, by hours spent in prayer.

But what else is consistent with what Jesus has done for us? He's given us it all. He laid everything down for us. We love because He first loved us, the Scripture says.

And if you begrudge Jesus in prayer, the love that He deserves, in worship, the love that He desires, all that reveals about you is that you have never really come into a revelation of His love for you. Because if you really, really knew that Jesus loved you, if you felt the depth of that love, it would never be a hard thing. To the extent that we understand this revelation is to the extent that we go deeper in prayer, deeper in love with Christ, deeper in worship, deeper in devotion, deeper in obedience, deeper in holiness.

We often equate extreme with excessive. I was so blessed as I studied about this word extreme a little bit. To be excessive is to be beyond established laws of morality and religion.

To put it simply, it is to go beyond that which God desires. Excessive is just that too much. Excessive is the reason why Nadab and Abihu, Aaron's sons, were burnt before the congregation of God.

Because they asked for that which God did not require. They offered a strange sacrifice, and like that they were consumed by the fire of God. The same fire of God that was being poured out on the altar to show the people that he had received their sacrifice freely was now consuming the very priests of God because they offered that which he did not ask for.

They were excessive. The definition of extreme is the outermost edge, uttermost, greatest, most violent, best or worst, depending on your perspective, or most pressing. It's the outermost edge.

A derivative of extreme is extremities. Our extremities, you know what those are? There are fingers, there are hands, our feet, our head. They are the outermost edge of our body.

Extremities. Is this bad stuff, folks? Or some of the most valuable stuff that we have? Some of the things that we get the kingdom work done with. What is it that holds the shield of faith up but an extremity? An extreme edge.

What is it that takes up the sword of the Spirit but an extreme edge, an extremity? What does God say are beautiful? The feet of those who bring glad tidings. The extremity. The extreme edge.

Do you want to get something done in the kingdom of God and yet you're so afraid to be extreme for Jesus? It won't happen, folks. Some of the most useful parts in the body of Christ are the extremities, the extreme edge. Now, just talking about it just stirs me.

I want to be extreme for Jesus, to lose myself in sacrifice and devotion to Him. I don't want to be way back here. I want to be out at the edge.

The extreme edge. That's where the fruit grows, folks, on a tree. It's at the extremities, out on the end of the branches.

But if you want to play it safe, it may be hard to be on that extreme edge. C.H. Spurgeon in a great little book called *The Eccentric Preacher* puts it another way, but he's talking about the same thing. He just explains that for a machinery to operate, a machine, there must be a large gear and then several other gears that are eccentric to the main gear.

In other words, the word concentric means everything to run in the same circle. But nothing gets done that way, folks. The eccentric gear, one to another, makes the machinery operate.

They're on the extreme edge. You want to be normal? You want the status quo? That's not where God's doing things. His people are eccentric of one another.

This speaks of the beauty of the body of Christ, the multifaceted members of Jesus' body. Amen. We need to be eccentric.

We need to be extreme. I hope you have a greater appreciation for those words. And don't confuse them with some others.

God's mandate is this. This is one that He laid on my heart early on as a believer. Never determine your Christian progress on the basis of the run-of-the-mill status quo religious systems.

Folks, get your eyes off what's going on around here. Never determine your Christian progress on the basis of the run-of-the-mill status quo religious systems. Surround yourselves with courageous, daring, yes, even extreme examples of faith.

This is one of the main motivations for me personally, studying the histories of revival and studying the biographies. The Lord early on said, David, don't look at this stuff that's going on, that they're calling ministry. For one thing, I was having a big trouble, a big problem.

It wasn't lining up with what I felt the Lord was showing me as a new believer. I felt Him pouring out a vision in my heart, and this wasn't making sense. And really, too, this is where some of the precious biographies of time pass, of real men of God and women of God.

You surround yourself by these folks, and they will nurture an extreme Christianity. And praise God, there's still plenty of living extreme believers to expose ourselves to. But find somebody that is pushing the edge.

This term extreme is a lot of times you'll find connected with this, something like this. They push the envelope. They're pushing the envelope.

They're not busting through it. That would be excessive. But the boundaries that God is giving, they are pushing it.

They're going to the outside edge. Find people like that to surround yourself. Let's look at some examples, though, of extreme devotion to God.

Let's start with Jesus Himself. He's the extreme Savior. The extreme Savior.

Hebrews 7, 22 to 25. And one of my famous sayings throughout the whole book of Hebrews is, Consider Jesus. It's all about pointing you back to Christ, to consider the beauty, the depth of Him as a perfect mediator between God and man.

By so much more, Jesus had become a surety of a better covenant. Also, there were many priests because they were prevented by death from continuing. But He, because He continues forever, has an unchangeable priesthood.

Therefore, He is also able to save to the uttermost those who come to God through Him since He always lives to make intercession for them. Christ right now is interceding on our behalf. And because of that, He is able, because of what He has done on the cross and being risen from the dead in His intercessory role right now at the right hand of the Father, He is able to save us to the uttermost.

To the uttermost edge. Right to the extreme. He is able to do great things in our life.

Take us from being one kind of person to the totally opposite extreme and change us in a radical way. Jesus always desires to save us extremely. To save us to the uttermost.

Jesus doesn't do anything halfway. The only reason why we have a halfway work of grace is because we got in the middle of it. It's not the will of Christ.

Hebrews 5.7 Let's back up and take a look there. While you're looking for that, let me read to you a little book that also has an extreme title. Heaven Taken by Storm Showing the Holy Violence a Christian is to put forth in the pursuit after glory.

One of my favorite Puritan preachers, Thomas Watson, he says in regard to Christ and His perfect work, His extreme work, how violent Christ was about our salvation. Remember, one of those definitions for extreme was with violence. How violent Christ was about our salvation.

He was in agony. He continued all night in prayer, Luke 6.12. He wept. He fasted.

He died a violent death. He rose violently out of the grave. Was Christ so violent for our salvation and does it not become us to be violent who are so intimately concerned in it? Christ's violence was not only satisfactory, but exemplary.

It was not only to appease God, but to teach us. Christ was violent in dying to teach us to be violent in believing. Jesus is an extreme Christ, extreme Savior.

Hebrews 5.7 Now again, we're talking about this applies to the whole gambit of our Christian life. I'm really trying to focus in here on prayer. Speaking again of Christ, who in the days of His flesh, when He had offered up prayers and supplications with vehement cries and tears to Him who was able to save Him from death and was heard because of His godly fear.

Jesus, how did He pray? Surely, the Son of God didn't need to go to any extra effort to communicate with the Father with loud crying, vehement tears, strong crying. This is how Jesus prayed? And we talk about 15 minutes along with God. Luke 22, 39-46 Of course, everybody is familiar with the passage.

Christ, before the crucifixion, going into the garden to pray. Coming out, He went to the Mount of Olives as He was accustomed. This was Jesus' habit.

He was used to going there and praying. He made prayer a habit. And His disciples also followed Him.

When He came to the place, He said to them, Pray that you may not enter into temptation. And He was withdrawn from them about a stone's throw, and He knelt down and prayed, saying, Father, if it is Your will, let this cup pass away from Me. Nevertheless, not My will, but Yours be done.

Then an angel appeared to Him from heaven, strengthening Him. You notice that? That's the direct result of prayer. What does prayer do? You want to see some angels? Start praying, folks.

Prayer is the place where you see God do miraculous things. And being in agony, He prayed more earnestly. Then His sweat became like great drops of blood falling down to the ground.

When He rose up from prayer and had come to His disciples, He found them sleeping from sorrow. Then He said to them, Why do you sleep? Rise and pray, lest you enter into temptation. Folks, I don't know about you, but the kind of agony, the kind of travail that would produce blood, or as some have interpreted it, as sweat as great drops of blood, however you want to look at it.

Either way, it does not make any difference. This is real travail. This is something that gripped Jesus' heart.

He literally was praying till He bled. The anxiety, the burden of this whole thing. He had to touch the heart of Jesus.

He wasn't afraid. He touched the heart of His Father. Excuse me.

He wasn't afraid to be called extreme. One who would go to the outermost edge in order to accomplish kingdom business, kingdom work. If it wasn't for an extreme Savior, none of us would be here in this little place tonight.

If it wasn't for extreme prayer, extreme sacrifice, taking it right out to the edge, where would we be today? Revelations 3, 14-22. Jesus sums it up nicely, what He desires from His church in this passage. And so to the angel of the church of the latest, Sian's right, these things says the Amen, the faithful, the true witness and the beginning of the creation of God, Jesus Himself.

I know your works, that you are neither cold nor hot. I would wish you were cold or hot. What does God want? How can Jesus deal with you when you're either extremely cold or extremely hot? He has a hard time reaching His people when they're lukewarm.

He can't do much with us when we want to be status quo, mediocre, middle of the road, safe. If you're extremely cold, He can break you. He can draw you back.

If you're extremely hot, He can do anything. He can turn the world upside down through you. But God would rather you be extreme one way or the other.

God wants His church extreme, not middle of the road. What does He say in the next verse? Verse 15, excuse me, 16. So then because you are lukewarm and neither cold nor hot, I will vomit you out of My mouth, spit you out, you're unpleasant to Me.

I want you to be extreme. I want you to be the outermost edge, hot for Me. What does it mean? There's all this talk about the fire of God today.

What is that? It means be extreme, folks. Be extreme in your praying, in your devotion, in your love for Jesus. The outermost edge.

But we throw these things around like they're cute little clichés today. They're little buzzwords in the church and they've kind of already lost their meaning. They were trendy last year and now we just say them and yet live quite middle of the road.

The Lord doesn't want us to be halfway. And I'm not standing up here saying that in every area of my life I'm at its extreme edge. But what I am saying is I know where the standard is.

It's out at the edge. See, and one of the things that happens is if you have shallow Christianity over here and acceptable Christianity over here, we usually fall somewhere in between. The balance, you know, falls somewhere in between.

And if we have disqualified all this part of seeking Christ as extreme or something unpleasant, something uncomfortable, something that we really would rather not have in our life, then, you see, we've distorted the whole picture of where we should be and realizing that we'll probably float more to the center, even though that may not be God's perfect will. That's the truth of how things work for us. If we chop out this big section of what we're calling extreme, we're usually going to fall way down here on the scale.

We've got to keep the thing right. How's the balance? Where is it? Is the word balance acceptable? Yeah, I believe there's truths that clarify one another. But we need to be careful about this.

I got myself in a lot of trouble trying to play the balance game, trying to always, oh yes, I must qualify all this and qualify all this, and pretty soon, I wasn't walking right with Jesus anymore. What a lot of that amounts to is trying to be four or five, maybe six or eight different members of the body of Christ a lot of times. I'm not saying that there's not a place for clarity, to see in the Scripture a healthy balance of what the truth is.

But again, the word extreme doesn't really apply. Excess would apply there better. Okay, let's look at another extreme follower of God, Moses in Exodus 32.

This is right after the incident with the golden calf and Israel's great sin and great backsliding. And Moses is here interceding for the children of Israel who had broken his heart. Then Moses returned to the Lord and said, oh, these people have committed great sin and made for themselves a God of gold.

And I want you to notice here, you can say that same thing in a lot of different ways. This was not a condemning, this was not an angry, bitter statement from an outside observer. This was something that was breaking Moses' heart.

This was something that had driven to his knees. And there's a lot of pain you can hear here in his voice. Verse 31, excuse me.

Then Moses returned to the Lord and said, oh, these people have committed great sin and have made for themselves a God of gold. Yet now if you will forgive their sin, so Lord, please forgive them. Please have mercy on them.

God be merciful. But look how quick Moses' response is. He's already got a second plan just out of his love for these folks.

But if not, I pray, blot me out of your book which you have written. I mean, is that extreme or what? Is that extreme prayer? Is that extreme intercession? It says, Lord, if you can't forgive these people, if you can't look over this, if you can't cleanse this, Lord, somehow let me be a substitute. Let me take their place.

Let me take their judgment. I don't know about you folks, but I can't even comprehend that. That is extreme.

That is out at the edge. That is an extremity. A hand way out here doing something that others can't touch.

Jacob, Genesis 32. Another extreme follower of God. 24 through 30.

Then Jacob was left alone and a man wrestled with him until the breaking of day. Now, when he saw that he did not prevail against him, he touched the socket of his hip and the socket of Jacob's hip was out of joint as he wrestled with him. And he said, let me go for the day breaks.

Speaking of Jacob here, he said, I will not let you go unless you bless me. So he said to him, what is your name? He said, Jacob. And he said, your name shall no longer be called Jacob, but Israel, for you have struggled with God and with men and have prevailed.

Then Jacob asked, saying, tell me your name, I pray. And he said, why is it that you have asked about my name? And he blessed him there. So Jacob called the name of that place Peniel.

Jacob knew without hearing it. He called the place Peniel, for I have seen God face to face and my life has been preserved. Is that extreme? Is that extreme prayer? Will we begrudge and judge one another because they perhaps do something that we don't think is acceptable in devotion to Jesus? You know, I've asked this question many times.

What is too extreme in light of a holy God, an eternal hell, an everlasting heaven, and a lost world right in the middle of it? What is too extreme? When your brother cries out and prays, when he weeps, when he worships like there's no tomorrow, is that too extreme? Rachel, Genesis 30 verse 1. Back up. Now here we see Rachel desiring a son. But she is the perfect picture of the intercessory prayer, the ministry of intercession.

She recognizes within her the incapacity to bear fruit, to produce after her own kind. This breaks her heart, shatters her. It creates reproach, a shame.

How many of us have that same shame? Unable to produce fruit. Are you a fruitful believer? Where are your works?

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