

Prayer Full Interview

JEREMY BIXLER: Hello and welcome to Youth Ministry Academy Radio this month for December, and we're concentrating on prayer. And we've got two very special guests on the line today. Brian Hull and Josh Kleinfeld. And Brian and Josh, how you doing today?

BRIAN HULL: Doing great.

JB: Awesome. Before we get started, let's hear a little bit about your background. Brian, first of all, what is your position and what led you there?

BRIAN HULL: I teach youth ministry at Asbury College and have just had a great opportunity to come here after 15 years in youth ministry in the local denominational level; so just a great opportunity here to help shape the minds of other people how to do youth ministry.

JB: And Josh, how about you?

JOSH KLEINFELD: I have been at Stillmeadow Church of the Nazarene in York, Pennsylvania for six years now. Actually I came here right out of college from Asbury where Brian is; go Eagles! So I came on as a middle school pastor and then have kind of worked into being youth pastor over 6 through 12th grade. And I love it.

JB: All right, well let's begin then by concentrating on our topic of prayer. And first of all I want to know, basically, what is prayer?

BH: Yeah, I think this is a great question and a really important one for all of us because I think often times when we hear the word prayer we think of a certain, only one way maybe of praying; on my knees for example with my hands clasped together and my head bowed and my eyes closed. But the reality is prayer is communicating with God and so that's a two-way communication, both ways that we speak to Him or communicate with Him. And sometimes that's not just through speech, and the ways that we receive from Him.

And so the Bible itself gives us all kinds of examples of different ways and places and different methods that people have used in prayer.

JB: Where do we see prayer in the Bible then?

JK: Oh man, I automatically think of the Psalms and I really love going to the Psalms. You see that, obviously, in the Old Testament. And then the New Testament you find Jesus teaching His disciples how to pray with the Lord's Prayer. You see Him getting alone by Himself. So looking at the Psalms though for me, that's one of my favorite places to go within scripture. Not only to find ways for myself to pray, but also when I'm praying to be in connection with centuries and centuries of people who've also prayed the Psalms.

BH: As Josh said there's great places in scripture. One of my favorite is the Psalms as well because they really reflect the honesty of prayer. So here you hear, you see David, and often times the Psalms you look at are the Psalms of immense praise and thanksgiving but the Psalms also echo for us the yearnings of the heart, the frustrations with God, the doubts, the places where we feel so far from God. And then there, several of those throughout, and think those really reflect the reality of our faith and the reality of many of our faith lives that there are days when we struggle. But that it's OK to communicate those things to God. And then in scripture we also see, as Josh mentioned, Jesus doing it often. Mark's Gospel in particular seems to really emphasize Jesus' attempts again and again to go off and pray, go off by himself and spend time with God. And then that models for us this need for us, even in the midst of incredible busyness, in the midst of incredible ministry to make sure we're spending time communicating with God and spending time with Him.

And then we also see it throughout the rest of the New Testament and in the Old Testament different times and different places people communicating with God, some even changing His mind, which is sort of an interesting piece to all this as well.

JB: I know specifically in Exodus chapter 32 we see a narrative there where the golden calf has just been created after Moses has been up for seemingly forever upon Mt. Sinai and God in His anger at His people creating another god wishes to destroy His chosen people that He just delivered out of Egypt. What do we see happen in this narrative after God decides to bring judgment upon His people?

BH: Yeah, that's a great account and one of the things I think it shows us is that God does listen to our prayers and that prayer can change things. And I want to be careful how I say that. It's not that prayer always makes things go the way we want them to, but I do believe there's an important piece there that God really does listen to the cries of His people and He hears our hearts. And as we pray things that are in line with God's heart that really He responds to those things.

One of the things that I think is important is to recognize that what happens though is initiated by God himself. In other words, He's always reaching out to us; He's always listening; He's always there. What I don't want to convey is that somehow it's some sort of formula that if I just pray two thanksgivings and something else and then pray for this special request that somehow I can manipulate God and make Him give me lots of money or do whatever I want or anything like that. And even though we may not talk about it quite like that, sometimes I feel like it's sort of the message we convey to people about prayer. And that's not what's going on here. What's going on is God is listening and responding to the heart of the people.

JK: Yeah, two things from, just from that story. First, the prayer, what's interesting is the prayer that, or the conversation that Moses has isn't about Moses. In praying he wasn't seeking something selfishly. I mean certainly those were his people and he had a vested interest in them. Now he's kind of the big honcho. But it was on their behalf that he was seeking God, and I don't think he was asking God to do something that was out of God's nature. That's the second thing was he was asking God to continue the grace that He had already been showing them. And I just love how Moses was like, "So you bring them out here and then you're just going to kill them?" And so I just think though in his praying, I think Moses, it's interesting how he had reached a certain point so the prayer wasn't selfish-based but it was on behalf of other people. That's just an observation; I'm not sure that that's prescriptive as much as it is describing what happened there. But I think we can probably learn in how we pray to follow Moses in that.

JB: How does that impact our prayer lives?

JK: Well the first thing I think it really encourages us to not filter our prayers. Our prayers can come from the gut and I think it challenges us to pray boldly and recklessly. It doesn't really seem like when Moses is talking with God that he's holding much back. It seems like he's throwing the story right back in God's face. You bring them out here to do this? And so that, for me, it goes back to what Brian was saying that it challenges us to be honest in our prayers and to reflect the deepest yearnings of our hearts in what we communicate to God.

JB: Brian, when we look at this narrative, we see the power of prayer and we see an outcome that I think we can agree that God's answer to Moses' prayer was favorable to Moses. Now

what happens though when God doesn't seem to answer or even answers your prayer in a negative way?

BH: Yeah, I think that's a great question, and it's one of the key issues in particular for new believers is how do I pray and what do I expect out of that? But I think Josh really hinted that he knew that earlier while in the sense that I think our prayers, when we are able to pray, it changes us. And let me talk about what I mean by that. I think as we pray a part of what that is is this communication with God and so there's an interaction there between us and God – our heart and God's heart. And of course we're not near as holy; we're not near as great or as mighty or powerful or loving as God is. And so whenever we're able to have that interaction, and really make space in our life for God, that changes us and begins to change our heart in such a way that perhaps the more that we pray, the more we know about God, the more that we're able to pray for the kinds of things that really are a part of God's heart, which is different than a sort of selfish prayer.

Having said that I also think there are times though where we have the best of intentions but God still doesn't answer us in the way that we would like or the way that we think He should. I think in those cases it's important to remember that we're trusting in God; He is God. And we have to trust that He knows best even in the midst of those things. And perhaps what's best for either us or for the world as a whole, isn't that our prayer gets answered just the way we prayed it. And so I think we have to be open to that reality and be willing to accept whatever God has for us and trust that it's the best thing. And I think the difficulty for most of us in the now, now, now, my way, my way, my way culture and world is to accept just that. And perhaps we really may not know what's best, but trust that God does.

JK: Yeah, in response to that as you were talking Brian I thought about the passage at the end of the Sermon on the Mount where Jesus is encouraging his followers not to worry and, you know, don't worry about clothes, don't worry about this, don't worry about that. And then at the end He says, "Over all these things seek first His Kingdom and His righteousness." And I think that's pretty difficult to do, but I think the more we pray the more that actually happens. And when we define prayer as encountering God, I think the more we are shaped to pray that way, seeking His kingdom, so that actually our joy begins to be found, not in our circumstances but in the One who is sustaining us through the circumstances.

JB: Let's move on then to a discussion on prayer methods, and I'd like to start with asking, what are different ways to pray, even just physically, in a physical space? How do you pray in that regard?

BH: Yeah, there are all kinds of ways to pray. First, just as far as body posture goes, you know the most talked about way of praying, sort of body posture of prayer in scripture is actually standing. And I think it's sort of interesting because we always have this picture of the little boy on his knees with his hands folded at the altar or something. But that, I think that reflects in many ways the activeness of prayer that that can be. I also know from my own experience that my body posture impacts my attitude and my heart sort of, heart's desire at those times. So I have found that there are times when kneeling is a posture that's really helpful for me in prayer and particularly when I'm maybe in intercessory prayer, when I'm praying for some things. There are other times when standing seems to be the right posture for me. Other times with hands lifted high in prayer and praise to God; other times may be laying flat. But there are all kinds of body

postures like that that I think help impact not just our mind but just our sort of heart's need towards God and towards the attitude of our prayers.

JK: Yeah, I think it's interesting historically corporate prayer in church is historically done while standing. And I know I often; many churches that I've been a part of, the prayer time in service is sitting down. And I sometimes wonder if people, I mean maybe people don't know that history, or if it's more for convenience, not wanting people to have to have their legs get tired during prayer. Brian, I think you're right though that our position, our bodily position can affect our heart. I'm also careful to say anytime we, anytime I talk about prayer or worship and about prayer positions, I think that it's, we must remember that it's God who does the impact. We do respond through the physicality but we can kneel all we want and not be changed by God if we have a hard heart. If our heart is not willing to go where God is leading us. And I didn't hear you say that if you bow, God will transform your heart.

BH: I think that's a great point, and I think the other piece of this is that we can really pray anywhere; it doesn't always have to be even an audible prayer or OK, I'm going to spend my prayer time now. It can be in a car; it can be as I walk down the street; it can be after a short conversation with someone or in the middle of a conversation with someone. It can be... but it's that communication. It's interesting to me that as I talk to people about prayer, they sort of see it only one way and that's speaking and listening. But yet in everyday life we communicate in so many different ways with the world around us; non-verbally and verbally and so I think it's important that we embrace some of those ways to pray as well. But I do think even the ways that we express ourselves it doesn't have to be a verbal expression. I know lots of people who express themselves, at least the deepest

expressions of their heart through art or through song or through music. And I think that is deep, deep prayer and we need to embrace it as such and say to people, “It’s OK to...and you should be praying that way, in those kinds of ways and whatever other ways that you feel like you communicate well and you can speak to God.”

JK: And vice versa, the realization that God is always speaking, and so like one way that I like praying is with a candle or, and you see this in various church traditions where candles are lit, just as a reminder of God’s presence. I’m not necessarily praying to the candle, but recognizing that as that candle is lighting the room or lighting the space around it, God illuminates things in my heart and so the candle being there communicates something to me, but ultimately that’s God communicating to me His light and His truth as it goes through all the corners of my life.

BH: Yeah, and an important distinction there as you’ve been careful to say Josh, which I really appreciate, is that those things, those objects, those postures, all those things are just symbols and just ways to express what we’re receiving from God and to receive it as such. It’s not a replacement of God or somehow a, something that we’re praying to, to go to God, but it is sort of a symbolic way that helps our heart and our mind remember what it is we’re about and to focus ourselves.

JB: Let’s move on now then talking about the rich history of prayer in the church. And I just want to get a quick summary of where have we been; what are some traditions of prayer in the church?

BH: Josh mentioned one earlier just lighting a candle. But there’s been all kinds of ways that the church from very early on in Christian history where they embraced different ways and methods of praying. And so there are a ton of these, and a lot of these for us Protestants

and in particular Evangelical Protestants we sort of, for a while there sort of left behind because we, I think in part because we were defined as much by who we weren't. In other words I want to make sure I wasn't confused with the Catholic Church or something else, as by what we were. Of course we are Christian and many of these different kinds of prayer are pre-date, any kind of controversy about whether we're Catholic or Protestant or anything else. So I think they're important for us. And for me in my own personal journey that's been a big piece for me to rediscover some of these ancient ways of prayer and to embrace them in my own life. It helped my own faith and my ministry in some really incredible ways.

JK: We talked about ancient prayer practices and I want to also recognize the prayer practices within our own tradition, within the Nazarene tradition. And I don't know that this goes to just Nazarene folks but I know within the Nazarene church my experience has been use of the altar, a lot of laying of hands, random times of prayer within the service where anyone's allowed to pray, and even special prayer services. I've seen prayer really practiced in my life as a Nazarene. I remember as a middle schooler joking with my friends in our vast amount of maturity as the people were praying down there, people like when you're having special healing prayers or prayer for people in their specific situations, they would have all the people come down to the front and surround someone, lay hands on them, and pray for them. And everyone would be praying at the same so it would almost be like a chorus of prayer. But it was kind of freaky for me as a middle schooler; it sounded like a bunch of ghosts because some people would be whispering, some people would be talking really loud. But now as I reflect on that, just all that I learned from that, the ability to freely approach God for all people to pray, men and

women, praying those times. And the ability to just stop the service showed me that prayer again is something that can always happen. It's not for specific time. So that, I would say that's from our angle an historic, at least within the last 100 years, prayer practice.

JB: How about in the last 2,000 years then? Where'd we come from from ancient prayer practices?

BH: There are some great, great prayer practices of the early church that I think we can rediscover and some that we already embrace. I mean we don't realize that some of those times. But little things like the Jesus prayer, just simply centering our hearts on God by when we breathe in saying a phrase in our mind like, "Jesus Christ Son of God," and when we breathe out, "Have mercy on me a sinner." There's all kinds of versions of that though. You can, maybe as you breathe in, "Be still and know," and as you exhale, "that I am God." And just that practice of repeating that over and over begins to set our heart on God and the things of God and point us towards Christ and His way. And so in so doing I think those kinds of things really help us to approach, especially in a culture of noise, of busyness, of no downtime, it begins to help us really focus on the things that are important and makes space in our lives for those things.

JK: Another way is praying the scriptures _____ and I personally love this practice for myself, and then I love this practice corporately too, just engaging a specific section of the text, reading it several times slowly and allowing specific words to surface as you read and allowing, centering on those words and then centering on a phrase and centering on the whole passage, and inviting God to speak directly to you through that passage.

JB: Looking at some of these classic prayer practices, what can be easily adapted for youth?

JK: I'll continue that _____ thing. I think as our students are really engaged with the stories of the world, with movies, with television and video games, less and less students know scripture and less and less students do not know actually how to engage with scripture. And I found that the practice of _____ to be something that is not only helpful for worship experiences but also helpful for students to take away. And so just on PowerPoint or handing out a passage of scripture printed out, we're just having people actually look at their Bibles if they bring them. I think engaging like a paragraph of the Psalms and then after reading it out loud asking them what word stuck out to you. And then allowing them to voice that for everyone to hear, and then read it again slowly, what phrase stuck out to you, and then the third time just, again, invite them to say one of those two things. I have found that to be really beneficial in our own practices and just also for my kids to take away.

BH: Yeah, and any of that kind of stuff where you make space for kids; I think a lot of time kids don't make space for themselves in their schedule. Most of us don't know how to do that so helping them do that, I mean that can be through a number of ways. Even praying through sort of our body posture, you know prayer walks, things like that students are willing to do, just a matter of doing them. Some other things; using play doh or clay or something like that and just say, "Pray with your hands." This is a way to begin to engage people into expressing things. And then I think other times maybe we can take advantage of some of the technology and some of that, especially that sort of prevalent in culture. So why don't we maybe do some Twitter prayers or some text prayers wherever we're everyone texting the same number, the same e-mail or something where we gather the prayers of people together? Why don't we allow them to express themselves in those

ways? For many of them that's their primary mode of their communication anyway. So why don't we embrace that a little bit more? There's all kinds of fun and creative things that we can do that way.

JK: I think that another thing that we've been hinting at and kind of dancing around is also offering silence. In a high-paced world kids rarely slow down, rarely don't have MP3 players in their ears or rarely not texting. And so to stop all forms of communication and invite the students just to listen to God and then in their hearts to speak to Him. I once had a student tell me that was the reason that he came to our youth services, for that alone. And I found that really affirming as far as speaking into the culture that, the super busy culture.

BH: That's a great point. I think that students are ready for us to invite them into a different kind of way like that. And so sometimes you can't do all of this in your one-hour or two-hour meeting once a week that you do. But maybe you can take a retreat and spend three hours, maybe a whole morning of a retreat just saying, "We're going to be silent and we're just going to force you just not speak, to not engage in that way and listen to God and listen to what He has." And for some students, sure it may be a struggle. But I do believe that in the midst of that many students will connect with God in ways they've never made room for Him, and maybe they'll hear a voice they've never heard before or hear God in a way they never had before.

JK: And really what we're doing by offering these practices is we're helping tune the students' hearts to the voice of God in the middle of every day. And I think Brian was hinting on that earlier. But I think that's why we as youth pastors and youth workers have to be really intentional about building prayer practices into the regular meeting times and even

retreat times that we have. If we don't place any emphasis on that on our regular gathering times, I don't think we really have any reason to expect our students to pray on their own.

BH: That's really well said and I think too as Josh said we're trying to help people really learn the voice of God. Give them that opportunity; it's true but it's sad to me that many folks who've grown up in the church when you say, "How do you know it's God?" They say, "I don't know, I don't know. I don't know if that's God speaking to me or not." And it seems to me that if there's anything that we should be about in the church it's allowing people the space to fine tune that particular gift, that hearing heart as scripture calls it. And I think that's really important in the midst of youth ministry. And there are all kinds of ways to do that – both creative ways to re-imagine old practices and old practices that we can embrace. But I think that is the key to all of this is to helping people really know His voice. Like you know the voice of a good friend that you couldn't see but was around the corner. You know they're there; you know it's them. And even if they were to call to you, you'd know they were calling you and who they were. I think we can experience a similar intimacy with God if we allow ourselves that time and space.

JK: Yeah, I really agree with you and I think; there are a couple books that have been really helpful for me. I know Mike King's Present-Centered Youth Ministry has some real basic prayer things that you can offer for students and actually for youth workers. I really like that. And then also Tony Jones' The Sacred Way. And I really, and I think, I'm trying to remember, Tony Jones has, I think, like 12 prayer practices and I love what he emphasizes. He says, "Don't offer these prayer practices until you've done them yourself." And I think that's really valuable insight. So I think the temptation for a youth

pastor or even for a person you hear something really cool and we want to take it right away to the kids because we're so excited about it. But that's, I think that finds its place in our compulsive world. But I think God's invitation is "Wait. Let this become part of your life so that as you teach it, it's not just something that you're learning with them but something that they can imitate in you."

JB: We've looked a lot at different prayer practices and ways to cultivate the prayer life of youth. However, we have neglected so far to really touch on youth workers. And so what are some prayer practices, important ways to cultivate the prayer life of youth pastors and youth leaders?

JK: Well, I'll just speak from my own personal experience, because I think that with such a wide variety of ways to pray that what I do might not work for somebody. But somebody else might find their home in some of the other prayer practices. But for me I found regular fasting to be something that has really helped me center on God. I did it at awhile ago I started just seeking God's guidance and then I found out I was so much more aware of my need for God all the time. When I was just fasting once a week, I was aware of things like inner-compulsions; I was aware of the desire to speak before actually listening. I was aware of the desire to eat and not even think about it. And the desire to just get angry and explode and fasting kind of put me in touch, and puts me in touch with my deep need and hunger for God. And so that's been something, a practice that I've found really valuable; that's aside from reading scriptures and regular prayer. I found journaling my prayers; I'm a little what you would call ADD and so I have a hard time focusing, but I find actually journaling my prayers helps. Not just focused for the time being, but I get to look back on, at my journals from like college and high school and see how God has

progressed in my prayer life and progressed in my life and how He's been faithful and how He has answered prayers and things like that. So this is some of the regular practices for me. I also try, but don't succeed very well, at having, once a month I have a prayer time that is just a day long where I just go listen. And I don't do that as often as I'd like, but that does help me; because I'm full time I have the luxury of doing that. But that's been a helpful thing for me.

BH: Yeah I do piggyback on that. I think for me making some physical space in my life and my schedule for God and for listening is an important piece to that. So as Josh mentioned trying to take a day a month and spending that in prayer, or by taking a spiritual retreat one week in the year that helps us to remember the most important things in our life and remember what it is we're really to be about. And in so doing that, that begins to shape us and allow us then to out of that overflow minister to others. And in speaking of that just observing the Christian calendar has been a really meaningful way for me to separate myself from the sort of a busyness of everything else and say, "We're going to focus our life and our seasons and our celebrations around the Christian story, the story of God's love for us and His expression of that through Christ. So the seasons of Advent and lent of course are some of the obvious ones. But I think a lot of us have sort of stepped away from those celebrations and from those remembrances. And so to recenter our rhythm on those things is really important. And certain seasons of the year I'll attempt to pray with the hour so there's lots of different ways you can do this. But the way that I found most helpful for me is to make sure I pray right when I get up, to pray everyday at noon, right at noon. And that's a big challenge and surprisingly it's amazing how many things seem to pop up right at 11:55. But being disciplined to say, while all those things may be good

and important, the most important thing is my relationship with God. So I'm going to allow that to dictate my schedule instead of everything else." And so just spending 15 to 20 minutes right at noon just in prayer and then again at night in the evening spending 15 or 20 minutes through specific prayer. But just allowing that to be the centerpieces of my life has really helped me to remember that it is for me to make some room for God. And while it's God who does the actions and God who does most of the speaking, for me it's being able to sort of spend some, to be disciplined in that way has really helped me.

JB: I'd like to add to that real quick. You know, part of that cultivating the prayer life of the youth leader involves retreat as we've talked about and I do want to mention that. Just last month in November at the Youth Ministry Academy blog we featured an article from Mark Holcomb and in the article he quotes a formula by Earl Palmer. And it says; what he suggests is that the youth worker take in retreat an hour a day, a day a week, a weekend every month, and a week every quarter. And yeah that sounds; I know especially for the full-time youth pastors out there that sounds pretty impossible. But I don't know; I think that sounds like that might be a very healthy formula for retreats.

BH: Yeah, what I'm going to just really jump on there is I think we have to be willing to step away from our self-importance and from our desire to get so much done. And while it is important to be efficient and effective in what we do, it's more important that we do that out of the right heart than anything else. And so I think prayer helps us get through those places, and so making that time is important.

JK: Yeah, I think discipline's probably one of the, in looking at the lives of my youth pastor friends and youth worker friends, discipline's one of the most difficult things. Although I'll have to say that the volunteer youth workers that I seek are many times more

disciplined than the full-time youth pastors. I don't know what that has to say. And so, but one thing that, for me that God has been working in me is using every moment as an invitation to pray, that the prayer continuance. And so just little things like when I'm stopped by a bus or, and I have the temptation to be angry because of course the kids are going home right now when I need to get, to go buy my McFlurry, right? So I have to fight that anger, but when that comes up, the Holy Spirit says, "Hey Bro, this is actually... Well let me pray for those kids getting off the bus." And so little things like that where God takes the little, the moments of the day, the observation of the things around me as invitation to prayer. And I think we could all, I think that's an experience that God takes us to as we grow in Him.

BH: Yeah, I think maybe we would be remiss in this whole conversation if we didn't really talk a little bit about the need to be intercessory prayers. I think God has entrusted us and invited us in to share in this ministry to these incredible young people. And I think a lot of times we sort of think about praying for them, or we pray for them as a group. But there's something to taking a list of students and just praying through each of their names, praying for their families, for their brothers and their sisters, their moms, dads, step-dads, whatever other family systems that we know about, and just praying through that list, spending concentrated time in prayer for those specific people. There's something really powerful in that, and if we really believe any of that stuff about God listening to Moses and Moses' heart and being willing to listen to us, then I think we really need to be about that, and on a regular basis make that a priority.

JK: I think that's well put and I think when we do pray, I think it's an awesome opportunity just to text your kid or text your youth worker or text someone on your staff just to say, "By

the way, I prayed for you right now.” Or just send a postcard and say, “Hey, I prayed for you this week.” Because when you look at the scripture and you see Paul’s prayers for people, I love that because he always prays things that people can’t do on their own and so I always try to include, when I pray I affirm what they’re doing, what God’s already doing in them and then I kind of push them into prayer, push them further in their walk. And I’ve found that to be really just, I don’t know if effective is the right word, but really meaningful.

JB: We’ve talked a lot about prayer and ways of praying, but we really haven’t concentrated much on the effects of prayer and the actual stories of how prayer has changed our lives. And so I’d like to ask each of you if you can give us a story of how prayer has changed your life.

BH: Yeah, I’ll just share a story; it’s not specifically from my life, but it’s part of my ministry. And there was a family that I was working with and through tragedy had lost one of their children. And they just really were having a very incredibly difficult time moving on past that, really just struggled to let go because every time they’d try to sort of move on with life they felt like they were somehow betraying the memory of their son and all that that meant, and that sort of felt like by letting go they were sort of cheating him. And so through a process of just spending time with them and talking with them, we sort of stumbled across this way of prayer called centering of prayer, which is just a, where you can take a simple word or phrase that may represent a deeper heart, a deeper longing, a longer prayer. So maybe it’s one word; maybe it’s just rest, or for them it was their son’s name. But by just, even in those little moments of downtime, those moments of doubt in their head they were able to say that prayer, just say that word, sometimes over and over

again. But by doing that, just doing that in their heart, that allowed them to both honor that memory but also begin to put it into perspective in the sense that God is in control here and God's still part of this process. And He still loves us and He still encourages us to move on. And through that centering prayer they were able to move on in their life as far as kind of returning to some practices in life: going back to work, be in the faith community again. But through that process it really began to open my eyes to maybe some ways that sometimes we sort of don't think about or don't open ourselves to. That has really begun to challenge me to open myself to the ways that God is around me all the time and embrace some of those ancient practices as well.

JB: Thanks Brian, and Josh how about you? What are some, a story or maybe a couple stories of how prayer has changed your life?

JK: You know, Jeremy, I think it's funny you chose the phrase 'changed your life,' and I'm going to come back to that phrase. I think, I'm not sure, yeah, changed my life. I like that phrase actually because this summer my wife and I, actually our whole family went through an experience that was pretty tumultuous. Our youngest daughter who turned one in May got e-coli, an e-coli bacteria, or virus; I always forget which one it is. And that releases a toxin called the _____ toxin, which attacks four organs in your body: your kidneys, your pancreas, your lungs and your brain. And thankfully the toxin only attacked her pancreas and her kidneys. But it shut down Eden's kidneys for two weeks. She had renal failure for two weeks. And this experience for Aubrey and I was probably the most difficult situation that we've been through together, to stare at our daughter who is in what they call a crib but looks more like a cage. It's all metal and the name of the brand is 'Hard.' Who names a crib brand 'Hard,' you know? And so this summer Aubrey

and I are staring at our daughter who's laying there listlessly, not responding, and we're really asking, "Why hasn't this happened to us?" Like, "She's done nothing to deserve this." And what was really cool was in that time of despair Aubrey and I both decided that we weren't going to let bitterness define us. We were going to let God sustain us, even if we had no idea how it was going to work out. And there were moments that were touch and go where we weren't really sure what was going to happen with Eden. And in our darkest moments when we didn't know what to pray, and actually when I didn't even feel like I had anything to pray, when I didn't have any faith to pray, I was just reminded of God's support of His love that He was showing us through the Stillmeadow community, through our local church. And in those moments when I had no idea what to pray, I just said to God, "God I have no faith right now because I'm looking at my daughter and she's not in a place where she should be, and she doesn't deserve this; you know I'm kind of angry with You, but I don't want her to stay here but I don't have much faith to ask, so I'm going to ask you to listen to the prayers of the people at Stillmeadow. I'm going to ask You to listen to the prayers of my family; I'm going to ask You to listen to the prayers of the people, all the people that You have praying for our daughter Eden." And so we, Aubrey and I, we leaned into the prayers of the people. And so in those moments the prayers of the people changed our life by giving us confidence that God was going to work in the situation even if we didn't see what was happening. And thank God our little daughter Eden is healed now. She fully recovered; her kidneys started working on the 12th hour of the 14th day, or on the 24th hour of the 14th day, which percentages drop drastically for recovery if you go beyond 14 days in renal failure. And I see God at work in the lives there because as God, God was our strength in the middle of that. We

weren't, we allowed God to be our joy so that we weren't defined by the situation and so we were able to minister to the people in the hospital. We weren't just wrapped up in our own story; we were able to get involved in the story of the lives that were around us. So that's just one way that prayer has shaped me and my family.

And there's just multiple ways. Like one of my family's favorite stories is when, I forget which holiday it was, but when I was really young for Christmas my dad and my mom didn't have much money. And so my dad got my mom a mug for Christmas and my, and they got me a little pull toy, and that was all that they had money for. My mom didn't get him anything. And I don't know where; I was there but I don't remember so they've told the story so many times that I'm probably getting the facts wrong, but they talk about opening the door and finding friends with a bunch of groceries there. People who were bringing food to my parents in their time of greatest need, and in that way those people were becoming the answer to my parents' prayer. And they said that was probably one of the best Christmases that they had. Even though they didn't have anything, they realized what they had was in God and in the community that He had given them.

JB: Wow, that's incredible. I think it's important that we realize and we can hear it through stories like this that we're not just talking to an answering machine. Prayer is actually, it does change lives. And we're not just playing around here; it's just incredible to know that we can be in contact with the God of the universe.

JK: Yeah, I just think it's really important to remember that prayer really is reciprocal; it's God. God has already offered Himself, and so prayer is just stepping into that offering. Prayer is walking into His open invitation to embrace who He is and receive what He has for us.

And so, and then also to dump on Him all that we have because He can take it. And it's really nice; it's not an answering machine where someone's going to listen to it later. It's something that's happening right now. Certainly though there's a sense, there's an eschatology to prayer where God is working but He's not quite done. And His future restoration is breaking in but it's not all the way here yet. And so I think that's important to remember as we pray as well.

JB: And we anticipate the day that will come when prayer won't just be to an invisible being but will be, actually be to the God of our universe through Jesus Christ here in the Kingdom and we anticipate that day.

JK: Yeah, face to face man; that's awesome.

JB: Well, Josh and Brian, I want to thank you so much for joining us today. Just be sure, for those listening, that you are keeping up with our Twitter accounts and with our Facebook. You can be a fan on Facebook of the Youth Ministry Academy and also find us on Twitter at YM Academy. And be sure to check out the site for the rest of the month too as we continue to bring you more on prayer. Again, Josh and Brian, thank you so much.

BH and JK: Thank you.