

Series: Real Life...Real Faith

Title: Holes in My Jeans

Texts: Ephesians 6:18, Matthew 26:39; Isaiah 64:8; John 14:12-14

Proposition: Everyone can have a vital prayer life by adopting these characteristics of Worn out Knees

Key Word: Characteristics

When I was a boy, my mother used to buy my jeans from the Sears Roebuck. I liked the feel of the jeans, the color was cool too. But I remember that I often got holes in my jeans. Either the fabric was not that durable or I simply spent a lot of time crawling around on my knees.

Later, Mom bought me some Levi's and the knees seemed to last longer. I guess Levi Strauss had a great idea. In 1829 a miner approached him and complained about the holes in his trousers. He told Levi, that they worked on their knees most of the time. Levi suggested a stronger material. He happened to have some tent canvas handy. So, a tailor cut and sewed up a pair of trousers from this fabric and then presented it to the miner. Soon miners across the West were wearing Levi Strauss jeans.

It seems to me that a radiant follower of Christ would have a similar problem. Radiant followers of Christ have pants with worn-out knees. Like the miner and the little boy, radiant followers spend most of their time on their knees in prayer. It's clear to me that Satan would be very anxious if the weakest of saint had holes in their jeans.

Yes, we can pray from all types of postures. We can pray standing up like Jesus who prayed standing up with His eyes toward heaven. We can pray face down

like He did in the Garden. The Bible tells us that King David prayed while sitting down. Some even prayed while they were lying down or walking down a road.

Effective prayer requires no specific posture, but only an attitude or desire to have a conversation with God. Real life, real faith is gained through prayer. In prayer, we acknowledge our trust in the Lord God Almighty as our defender, redeemer and friend. We witness His intervention when we possess these characteristics of holes in our jeans.

First, worn out knees come from consistent prayer. When the miners were consistently on their knees they could effectively harvest gold or other valuable metals from the depths of the earth. Consistent prayer also effectively harvests the gold of God's presence and power.

Jesus spent extended periods of time alone with His Father in prayer. In the words of Paul, He "*Prayed continually.*" 1 Thessalonians 5:17 The Bible says He prayed at His baptism, after a day of miracles, before choosing His disciples, before He told His disciples about His coming death, on the Mount of Transfiguration, before teaching the disciples to pray, when the seventy returned, in the Garden, and on the cross. This consistent prayer life enabled Jesus to acquire the certainty of His Father's presence even in the face of great adversity. This consistent prayer life gave him clarity in decision-making, power to achieve great and mighty things, contentment in moments of hunger, and courage to confront opposition.

Paul wrote, “*And pray in the Spirit on all occasions with all kinds of prayers and requests. With this in mind, be alert and always keep on praying for all the saints.*” Ephesians 6:18

Second, worn out knees conforms the heart through submissive obedience.

We pray like Jesus when we model His deepest and most touching prayer. Matthew wrote, “*Going a little farther, he fell with his face to the ground and prayed, "My Father, if it is possible, may this cup be taken from me. Yet not as I will, but as you will."* (Matthew 26:39) Jesus didn't seek to get His Father to go along with His wants and wishes. In prayer His heart conformed to His Father's plans and purposes. Our deepest and most touching prayer opens the heart and the hands, saying, Father, here is what I want and here is what I think I need; but I conform my will to your will for You know what is best for me and all your ways are good.”

Sometimes God's greatest answer to our prayers is no. Abraham prayed that God would make Ishmael his heir and the son of his covenant. But God plainly said, “No.” Later the Lord gave him Isaac. (Genesis 17)

Paul also prayed for God to heal a “*thorn in his flesh.*” But the Lord said no. He added, “*My grace is sufficient for you.*” (2 Cor. 12) We don't always know what is best for us. However, with worn out knees in our jeans, our hearts conform to His plans and purposes, trusting that the Heavenly Father knows best.

In the spring of 2006, I drove over to Justin's house to talk to him about a project I had in mind. Justin's mom, Carol, told me that he is a master potter, and I

thought he would be perfect to form a cup and a plate. Justin lived in a very simple home. It had a sign on the fence that read, “Beware of the Dog.” So I cautiously approached the gate, looking for a big dog to come around the corner of the house. Yes, a dog came barking and Justin arrived shortly. He looked like someone who came out of the 70’s with long hair pulled back in a pony tail, worn out jeans, a white collared shirt mixed with clay stains, and a shaggy beard. He greeted me warmly and invited me back into his studio.

I immediately noticed shelves of drying clay pots, vases, jars, and plates lined up along two of the walls. The floor had a thin crust of clay over it. It looked as if I was walking on dirt. Toward the back I saw large kiln. Justin told me that he and his dad had built it last year.

He took me over to his potter’s wheel, where he took a lump of clay and began to explain the process of turning this lump of clay into a vessel he imagines in his mind. He reached over to a bowl filled with water and a sponge, grabbed the sponge and gently moistened the lump of clay as it spun on the electric potter’s wheel. Sometimes he pressed the clay, other times he pulled on it, still other times he took a small stick and engraved lines in the vessel. One time he even added some more clay. All the while he kept the clay moist with the sponge of water, for it made the clay more submissive to his gentle pressure. Justin then described the critical process of baking the clay in the intense heat of the oven for setting the clay and the glaze that made the vessel a solid, beautiful, piece of pottery. We talked about life with all of

its trials, challenges and difficulties. I shared with him that I often felt like a lump of clay in the hands of the Master Potter. God continually shapes me into the likeness of His Son. He desires that I become a vessel fit for His use. Like the clay, I have to submit myself to the potter's gentle ways that either removes imperfections, or adds strengths all the while keeping my will soft with His abiding love. There comes the time when the heat of the pressures of life, though seemly unbearable, turns me into a stronger, more beautiful vessel fit for His use. Justin quietly listened taking it in, like a lump of clay receiving the moist water. I trust that the Lord used this "water of truth" to soften Justin's heart.

As we pray, let's imagine ourselves being formed, reformed, and conformed by the Master Potter. With his skilled, gentle hands, He is crafting us into a vessel of honor fit for His use. In prayer, we simply yield our heart to his gentle touch and see how He will transform it into something beautiful and useful. Pray with the prophet, *"Yet, O LORD, you are our Father. We are the clay, you are the potter; we are all the work of your hand."* Isaiah 64:8

Finally, worn out knees commissions the Church for greater works than Jesus. Pastor and author Tony Evans was in Columbia, South Carolina, to preach at a crusade being held in the University of South Carolina football stadium. Thousands had gathered for the evening session, but news reports indicated a serious thunderstorm was on the way. In fact, the storm was expected to hit at 7:00 pm—the exact time the meeting was scheduled to start.

As the sky grew darker and darker, the threat of cancellation was a valid possibility. A group of preachers and other church leaders decided to gather for a prayer meeting. Evans noted that all the preachers prayed what many would consider safe prayers—ones quite undemanding of God. Then, a woman named Linda spoke up, asking if she could pray. Linda's prayer went something like this: "Lord, thousands have gathered to hear the Good News about your Son. It would be a shame on your name for us to have all these unbelievers go without the gospel when you control the weather, and you don't stop it. In the name of Jesus Christ, address this storm!"

So ended the prayer meeting.

Everyone took their places under the dark, threatening sky. The leader of the crusade told the people, "We'll go as long as we can." Umbrellas sprouted up among the crowd. A man sitting next to Linda opened his umbrella and offered to shield her as well. Linda refused.

Evans says he and his wife watched as the rain clouds came up to the stadium and then split in two. The storm rained on both sides of the stadium and came back together on the other side. All of those gathered for the crusade stayed dry.

As Evans points out: "How did Linda get what the preachers didn't? She had the boldness, the shameless audacity, to ask."

It seems to me that Linda took these words of Jesus seriously, "*I tell you the truth, anyone who has faith in me will do what I have been doing. He will do even*

greater things than these, because I am going to the Father. And I will do whatever you ask in my name, so that the Son may bring glory to the Father. You may ask me for anything in my name, and I will do it.” John 14:12-14

Indeed, Jesus promised that those with holes in the knees of their jeans would do greater works than He had done. Yes, our ministry, our impact will be greater than His. We will have a greater reach and greater results. Certainly, Jesus' reach was limited by his physical presence. The number of people that he reached could only be numbered somewhere in the thousands.

Over the centuries, Christ followers have extended the heart and hand of Christ all over the world. I suspect that the Church have impacted billions of lives since the day of her birth. Certainly, Jesus, working through His Church, has had a greater impact than He had during His personal three year ministry in Palestine. His promise to His followers was, if we seek to continue the work He began, we can ask anything in His name and He will do it. There is no limit to what we the Church can and shall do.

The results of our witness of the Gospel will also be greater. It was fantastic that Jesus' friend, Lazarus, was raised from the dead. But he did die again. Yes, it was wonderful that many received a miracle from Jesus. But they too suffered and died again. More than physical healing Jesus healed the broken heart, the soul that which death can not destroy. Likewise our primary service to the world is not to be a

channel of God's miraculous healing, delivering grace, but to be conduits through which Jesus saves and heals spiritually.

I like what John Phillip wrote, "It's wonderful for a man's eyes to be opened physically, but it's even more wonderful for him to see and understand the Gospel. It is a beautiful thing for a leper made pure, but it's more glorious for his heart to be washed cleaned from the stain of sin and selfishness. Its fantastic for a deaf person to hear words and music, but it's even more glorious for him to hear and respond to the claims of Christ."

So if we have some spiritual mountain in our lives—or a great wall of injustice or oppression that needs to come down—we will likely erode the mountain at the same rate we put holes in our jeans.

As we consistently wear out the knees in our jeans we will see God conform our heart and commission us to do greater things than He ever did. Now that would be real life, real faith.