SO THAT…

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If you really want to keep your finger on the pulse of your incentives to pray, simply answer the question: "so that…" what? If you receive what you ask for, what happens? What is the "root motivator" behind the words you utter before the God you acknowledge in the moments you are compelled to speak to him? What kind of answer are you hoping for?

In his book, A Call To Spiritual Reformation, D.A. Carson specifically examines Paul's prayers. And full disclosure; part of me was a little cynical when I started the book. *Holy goodness! Can we not just talk to God? Can we not just open up our mouths and speak what is in our hearts? How can it be personal if it is, in fact, this deeply analyzed?!* And I believe there are moments when this straightforward honesty is exactly what God wants from us. He is simultaneously a deeply intimate God and a Holy one. So honesty and appropriate formality are both beneficial. Consider this: **if our mouths pour out words that are an overflow of our hearts, then we can be more powerful in the offering of our honest prayers if we have saturated our hearts with what is true!** If anything, I've recently discovered the glory and *freedom* in learning how to pray *intentionally*. In praying the way we were *meant* to. And learning from the

examples of the greats.

What is your incentive to pray what you pray? What is your "*so that*?"

I first heard of **"so that" prayers** in a sermon offered by Bill Hybels, — and it *gripped* me. Ever since, I *cannot* open my Bible and read a prayer from one of the characters depicted without noticing their "so that." It's remarkable. It's everywhere.

*"Answer me, Lord! Answer me **so that** this people may know that you, Lord, are God, and that you are turning back their hearts again."* — 1 Kings 18:36-37 (Elijah, in the "contest" between Baal and God)

*"I keep asking that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the glorious Father, may give you the Spirit of wisdom and revelation, **so that** you may know him better."* — Ephesians 1:17 (Paul, in his prayer for the Ephesians)

There are a *thousand* others. And whatever comes after the "so that" is always deeply revealing of motive. These lessons and leaders have driven me to ask the question; "why am I asking this? What am I after? Is God after this too? Am I ultimately interested in his glory?"

> *"The ultimate purpose of Paul's prayer is that there be glory to God, in the church and in Christ Jesus… How tragic then if our prayers for good things leave us still thinking of ourselves first, still thinking of God's will primarily in terms of its immediate effect on ourselves, still longing for blessings simply so that we will be blessed." — D.A. Carson*

Brandon prayed a long time ago, that God would make him a great leader. Not necessarily in quantity of influence, but in quality of influence. Not to get rich, not for prestige… but to use the gifts God gave him at their greatest potential, so that God would ultimately be given glory. But… on nights like the last when I see that he is exhausted from the demands he has already faced this week, and he exits to the basement (which is where all computer programers work, right?!) to manage some unexpected requests… all before he dives into what will probably be a previously

anticipated all-nighter… well, I prayed with vigor for what was currently motivating me. His sleep, a quick solution, favor, discernment, energy, brilliance… why? Because I adore him and don't want him to have a heart attack at 38. Not a *bad* prayer, it was honest. But my "so that," was ultimately for his *comfort*. When I eventually realized this, something shifted as I prayed; "direct him and sustain him in such a way that he would become more like the man you made him to be. And God, if it's possible for him to get some sleep while you do that, I would love to experience him at a higher capacity of awake tomorrow." He awoke after 2 hours of sleep having "learned a lot." Huh.

I know that there are so many demands that present themselves to you in so many ways. I am not alone in my desperation for an ideal. ***But we cannot let our desperation for a comfort driven ideal direct the course that we choose to take as we develop our character.***

What's your "so that?"

If we are going to go before God, present ourselves before the King of all Kings and speak with him… let's do it well. Let's demonstrate wisdom by taking hold of the power of knowing our "so that," in order to pray better.