

In these notes on the subject of prayer, we move gradually from David's Psalms to the Apostle Paul's prayers. Have you considered how time and again in his letters, Paul prays for the churches? Along with Psalms 1-72 (which are all called "David's prayers" in Psalm 72:20) the Apostle gives us a great foundation for understanding how to pray.

Monday: Read Psalm 18:1-3, Psalm 42:1-5 & 1 Corinthians 1:1-2 Calling on the Name

David reminds us of the greatest goal of prayer in Psalm 18:3 when he describes God as "worthy of praise." All true prayers have as their goal praising God. The hymn of praise (e.g. Psalm 100) brings glory to God by singing of God's glorious attributes, thereby magnifying who God is. The historical Psalms focus the believers' prayers on the great works of God throughout history, inspiring the church of all ages to thankfully remember God's saving deeds on her behalf (e.g. Psalm 105:5-6). Even the most plaintive cries for help in the Bible bring glory to God by their *utter dependence* on Him as the only One who can help. Such is Psalm 42, where the Psalmist longs for God and reminds himself in the midst of tears to "hope in God, whom he will yet praise" (Psalm 42:5).

Thank God for teaching us the essence of prayer, as a "direct, undiverted look towards God, and the absorption of the mind in the thought of Him" (Keil). Even our laments bring glory to God, when in our grief we turn to Him as our only comfort. This is the great secret of learning to pray always, as Paul repeatedly commands the Church to do, namely, learning to live at all times in His presence and learning to be led continually by the Holy Spirit to cry "Abba, Father" whenever this world presses in on us. Do you have that kind of boldness with God, so that you can pray as naturally, domestically and directly as that? Look at how David rushes into God's Presence in Psalm 18:1, almost blurting out, "I love you, O Lord, my strength." That's the spirit!

Meditate and Pray: Lord, whatever our circumstances and whatever time of day or night we need help, please help us to be like the Corinthians in 1 Corinthians 1:2, known as "those who call on the name of our Lord Jesus Christ" (1 Cor. 1:2). Amen.

Tuesday: Read Psalm 18:1-3, Job 27:8-10 & Ephesians 1:3 God is our Salvation

For the believer, real prayer is personal prayer, expressed via first-person prayers that are as natural as breathing: "*I* love you, O Lord, *my* strength... *my* rock, *my* fortress and *my* deliverer." Why? Because such living prayers issue from real communion with God by faith. Others may pray in times of trouble... but will the unbelieving hypocrite *persevere* in prayer through many trials? Job answers this question negatively in Job 27:10: "Will he call upon God at all times?" The answer to why the unbelieving world's prayers for help are quickly silenced is because there is no love for God at their root, only a love for deliverance and rescue. When that rescue is not forthcoming, they give up on prayer.

Carnal spirits will express a great deal of desire after salvation...but they never express any longing desire after God and Jesus Christ. They love salvation, but they care not for a Savior.

Joseph Caryl, Comments on Psalm 18:2-3

Meditate and Pray: Lord, help us to be like Paul in speaking well of you in terms of the blessed words of Ephesians 1:3ff. Help us to never grow tired of "blessing" you in prayer even though the blessings we seek *from you* may be long in coming. Help us to love you as *our* rock, fortress and deliverer more than we love the security and deliverance you give. Help us to love you so much that, in Caryl's words, "we would not care much for salvation if God were not our salvation." Thank you so much, Lord, that you are the salvation and portion of your people. Amen.

Wednesday: Read Ephesians 1:3 & 1:15-20**Spiritual Inventory Lists**

We come in prayer with empty hands to cling to Christ because we know that He alone provides us with the spiritual blessings we so desperately need. As Ephesians 1:3 puts it, all the spiritual blessings we seek are given to us only in and through Christ. This is why Paul describes the faith of the Ephesian church as completely centered in the Lord Jesus in Eph. 1:15. Paul realizes that even the most basic gift of the Christian life – knowing God (Eph. 1:17) – can be experienced only with eyes and hearts that have been opened to the “incomparably great power” of Christ’s resurrection in Eph. 1:19-20. Only the Indwelling Presence of the Mighty, Resurrected Christ can make us appreciate the great inheritance and hope of salvation which has been given to us according to Eph. 1:18. It takes the full, throbbing power of the Risen Christ *within* for us to have our eyes opened to begin to pray with appropriate thankfulness and joy for what God has done.

Meditate and Pray: Notice that Paul’s prayer for the Ephesians is not first for specific fruits, gifts, deliverances or even provisions for their temporal needs – it is for spiritual discernment to be granted them to see the breadth, depth, height, and length of the riches of their salvation! He wants the Ephesians to spend more time in adoration and worship as they pray, and therefore prays for “their eyes to be opened” to that end. This lesson offers a good counterbalance to the boldness urged in the notes from earlier this week. Though we are to be bold in our trials to turn and cry out to God whenever we need help, it is also true that we often move too quickly in our prayers from praise and adoration to petition, thereby missing something of the wonder and awe with which the Apostle prays. May God give us an appreciation for the *largeness* of His Spiritual blessings towards us, so that our prayers are *increasingly preoccupied with how rich we are*. As hymn # 525 puts it:

*My Father is rich in houses and lands,
He holdeth the wealth of the world in His hands!
Of rubies and diamonds, of silver and gold,
His coffers are full, He has riches untold.*

*I once was an outcast stranger on earth,
A sinner by choice, an alien by birth,
But I’ve been adopted, my name’s written down,
An heir to a mansion, a robe and a crown.*

*A tent or a cottage, why should I care?
They’re building a palace for me over there;
Though exiled from home, yet still may I sing:
All glory to God, I’m a child of the King.*

Thursday: Read Ephesians 2:1-3, 2:11-18 & Psalm 116:12-13**Spiritual Memory**

The first imperative in Paul’s Letter to the Ephesians is to remember (Eph. 2:11). It was important for the Ephesian Christians never to forget how they had been delivered by God’s Grace from a profound bondage to spiritual powers. Out of that great deliverance from the hostile powers described in Eph. 2:1-3, and from the alienation of Eph. 2:11-12, these Ephesians had been brought into immediate access to God the Father (Eph. 2:18) by the very Spirit of the Christ whose blood had opened the way to God (Eph. 2:13). How important for Paul to remind these Ephesians of all that God had done for them in Jesus Christ – for are not such reminders always the starting point for drawing near to God in a committed life of prayer? Look at how the Psalmist responds in Psalm 116:13 to the Lord’s goodness to him: “I will lift up the cup of salvation and *call on the name of the Lord.*”

Meditate and Pray: Ask the Lord to give you a good spiritual memory of what you used to be without Christ. Ask the Lord to help you *inventory* your spiritual storehouse of blessings, until you are able to behold *everything* you have as a free gift of grace. Spiritually as well as physically, our memories weaken over time, and our appreciation of God’s unmerited favor can easily fade. As Dr. Sinclair Ferguson writes on Ephesians 2:11: “We experience the grace of God but in our sinfulness begin to believe secretly that we were just the kind of people who merited it!” Nothing will kill a spirit of prayer faster than pride. May the Lord grant us in prayer

the blessing of a humble spirit which recognizes its absolute need of Him every day. As hymn # 430 in the Trinity Hymnal says:

*I hunger and I thirst,
Jesus, my manna be;
Ye living waters, burst
Out of the rock for me.*

*Rough paths my feet have trod
Since first their course began;
Feed me, Thou Bread of God;
Help me, Thou Son of Man.*

*Thou bruised and broken Bread,
My life-long wants supply;
As living souls are fed,
O feed me, or I die.*

*For still the desert lies
My thirsting soul before;
O living waters, rise
Within me evermore*

Friday: Read Hebrews 12:1-2, Ephesians 3:14-21 & 6:18

Christ our Treasury

John Owen, the great Puritan, wrote: “Christ alone is the treasury in which the Father disposes all the riches of His Grace, taken from the bottomless mine of His eternal love.” In other words, we cannot begin to pray with a proper appreciation and thankfulness for all our spiritual blessings unless we focus all our attention on Jesus Christ, the “treasury” of all the riches of our salvation. This is what the writer to the Hebrews commands us to do, when he says literally in Hebrews 12:2 that we are to “*look away* unto Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith.” Look away? Yes, look away from the selfish preoccupations which so often deaden and chill our times of prayer. Look away from a world whose cares constantly clamor for more attention. “Look away unto Jesus!” Of course, looking away from all our concerns down here is only possible when we are assured, with Paul, that our God will do “immeasurably more than we ask or imagine,” as Ephesians 3:20-21 promises. Once we realize that all our needs are taken care of in such an infinite way, we can turn in self-forgetfulness to pray for others, as Paul does from his prison cell.

Meditate and Pray: Thank the Lord for the eternal dimensions of His love for us in Christ, and ask Him, as Paul does, to give you power to grasp how all your needs are met by such a deep, broad and lofty love. May the Lord then enable you and me to be *set free* from the most deadening effect on our prayer lives of *self-centered* prayers. Lord, teach us the secret of praying “for all saints” (Ephesians 6:18), instead of so much for ourselves. Give us the joy of answered prayer in seeing the success of Christ’s plan in the lives of *others*, believing that our own needs will be met in due time as our prayers for others take pre-eminence. Amen. TH Hymn # 644:

*May the mind of Christ, my Savior,
Live in me from day to day,
By His love and power controlling
All I do and say.*

*May His beauty rest upon me,
As I seek the lost to win,
And may they forget the channel,
Seeing only Him.*

*May the love of Jesus fill me
As the waters fill the sea;
Him exalting, self abasing,
This is victory.*