

Last week we read how God humbled Jacob and thereby made him ready to receive the blessing of the Lord in Genesis 32:29. One of the particular ways in which God worked through that experience at Peniel was to teach him to pray. God often must humble us and change our situation into one of desperate straits before we will pour forth prayers to Him. Genesis 32:10 is at the heart of Jacob's prayer, where he declares to the Lord, "I am not worthy of the least of all the deeds of steadfast love and all the faithfulness that you have shown to your servant." May God place within us that lowly kind of spirit which will make us ready for His blessings and answered prayer.

Monday: Read Psalm 18:1-3 and Psalm 42:1-5

Hope in God

David reminds us of the greatest goal of prayer in Psalm 18:3 when he describes God as "worthy of praise." All true prayers find rest in recognizing God as He truly is. 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).

Meditate and Pray: 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 "praying always," 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 Psalm 18:1 as an example of how to pray with direct, child-like boldness and faith: "I love you, O Lord, my strength!"

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. Amen.

Tuesday: Read Psalm 18:1-3, Job 27:8-10 & Ephesians 1:3

Sincere Prayer

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 about the hypocrite's prayer in Job 27:10: "Will he call upon God at all times?" The answer as to why the unbeliever's prayers grow silent 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 1:3-20 & Romans 8:26-29 The Eyes of our Heart, Opened

One further essential for biblical prayer is that we pray through Christ alone as He mediates “every spiritual blessing” to His church. This is why Paul stresses 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. Only the Indwelling Presence of the Mighty, Resurrected Christ can make us appreciate the many blessings which form the riches of our inheritance in Ephesians 1:11 (and can teach us to pray).

But let’s be careful here. We could view our prayers as triumphalist if we stress the Resurrection Power of Christ alone as the tone-setter behind our prayers. Prayer is not merely a matter of jubilation and confidence. Nor is prayer a matter of rote recitation of the mighty deeds of the Risen Christ. To the contrary, biblical prayers are often full of heartbreak and groans. How do such prayers *uttered in weakness* fit into Paul’s victorious description of prayer in Ephesians 1?

The key word is “adoption” in Ephesians 1:5. Paul declares, “God predestined us for adoption to Himself as sons through Jesus Christ, according to the purpose of His will.” It is the Spirit of adoption who is bestowed on all who are in Christ (Romans 8:9). The Spirit gives the reverent boldness to come into God’s presence with our every need. That Spirit of adoption has been sent to live in us and to enable us to cry out, “Abba Father” (Romans 8:15).

So, when in our weakness we don’t know how to pray; when there are no words to express the depths of our grief and heaviness, *then it is that the Spirit of Adoption groans inexpressibly within us* (Romans 8:26). In this way, the Spirit of God gives power to the weakest area of our lives – our prayers – as He sums up our deepest needs to the heart-searching Father (who knows us and His Spirit so well).

Meditate and Pray: Sing hymn # 529 which speaks about the Holy Spirit’s condescending grace to fix in us “His humble dwelling” and to enter every troubled breast.

*Love divine, all loves excelling,
Joy of heaven to earth come down;
Fix in us thy humble dwelling;
All thy faithful mercies crown!
Jesus, Thou art all compassion,
Pure unbounded love Thou art;
Visit us with Thy salvation;
Enter every trembling heart*

*Breathe, O breathe Thy loving Spirit,
Into every troubled breast!
Let us all in Thee inherit;
Let us find that second rest.
Take away our bent to sinning;
Alpha and Omega be;
End of faith, as its Beginning,
Set our hearts at liberty*

*Come, Almighty to deliver,
Let us all Thy life receive;
Suddenly return and never,
Never more Thy temples leave.
Thee we would be always blessing,
Serve Thee as Thy hosts above,
Pray and praise Thee without ceasing,
Glory in Thy perfect love.*

*Finish, then, Thy new creation;
Pure and spotless let us be.
Let us see Thy great salvation
Perfectly restored in Thee;
Changed from glory into glory,
Till in heaven we take our place,
Till we cast our crowns before Thee,
Lost in wonder, love, and praise.*

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

Thankful Beggars Pray

The first imperative in Paul's Letter to the Ephesians is to "remember" (Eph. 2:11) 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). Paul focused these Ephesians on all that God had done for them in Jesus Christ – for are not such reminders always the starting point for dealing with our anxieties and worries? Look at how the Psalmist moves from anguish in Psalm 116:3 ("The cords of death entangled me") to joy in Psalm 116:13 as his memory of the Lord's goodness to him is stirred: "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**Look Away**

John Owen, the great English Puritan, wrote: “Christ alone is the treasury in which the Father deposits 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 unless we focus all our attention on Jesus Christ, the “treasury” of all the riches of our salvation. This is what Hebrews 12:2 commands, telling us 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. We must come to the Father in prayer just where we are; however, 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 in Eph 3:14ff.

Meditate and Pray: Thank the Lord for the huge 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 taken care of by such a deep, broad, and lofty love. May the Lord then enable us to be *set free* from the deadening effect 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.”

*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.*

Trinity Hymnal # 644