

Prayer is an activity that changes our priorities into God's priorities. It is much like when we take our car into the mechanic shop: though we have *our* list in hand of all the problems *we* think need to be addressed in the repair, we are told by the technician that *his* list of needed repairs must take priority. So it is in prayer. We often have in mind the areas of improvement which we assume will help our lives. But God knows best, and He directs our attention away from our prayer "to-do" lists to get to the heart of the matter. May this week's second installment on prayer increase our love and confidence in Him and enable us to accept His wise agenda for our lives.

Monday: Read Psalm 18:1 & Deuteronomy 10:12, 11:1, 13 & 13:3

The Engine of Prayer

As in any area of responsibility for the believer, our duty to pray is most closely tied to the great command of the Law -- to love the Lord our God with all our heart and soul. Love from God the Father is the engine of prayer, and our response with love to God is the heart attitude which moves us to pray boldly. We must learn to be bold with God: bold in believing that "the Father Himself loves you" (John 16:26-27) and bold in returning our love to Him as David does in Psalm 18:1. Expanding our understanding of the depth of God's love will fan our confidence to freely run to Him at all times.

Meditate and Pray: If heartfelt expressions of love to our Father are so paramount in Scripture for vital, believing prayer, why are Christians often so sheepish in speaking out-loud of their love to the Lord? Laundry lists of prayer needs are common, and many Christians are skilled at rattling off the list of prayer needs for the church body. But how is it even some of the most educated and eloquent of pray-ers seem to shy away from simply saying: "I love you, Lord." Let us strive to be open and expressive to God in prayer, speaking to Him of the love of our hearts. Let us also confess the lack of warmth or even affection for the One who gave His most precious Son for us.

Thank you again, Lord Jesus, for challenging us on the most basic level of our devotion to God the Father in love. Lord, please make us more child-like and direct in our prayers to you. Help us not to lose the *devotional* aspect of our times with you in prayer.

Tuesday: Read Psalm 18:1, Proverbs 23:22-26 & Psalm 63:3

Loving Our Father

A godly father and mother have a right to expect a return of loving devotion from their children (Prov. 23:22-26), even gently demanding of their offspring, "My son, give me your heart" (Prov. 23:26). God the Father has a simple goal when it comes to His fatherly relationship with us: that we would "love the Lord our God with all our heart, soul, strength and mind" (Luke 10:27). The Puritan John Owen points out that this is what the eternal love of God aims at in us, and works us up unto, that we would enjoy above all else this loving relationship with Him as our Father. Now, it is true that God has a right to demand our obedience in all things – but God wants far more from us than our mere obedience to Him as our Sovereign. He wants our delight in Him as our Father. He wants our hearts. He wants us to rest contented in His love for us, and wants us to sing from the heart His praises as we return our love to Him. "Wait, Pastor Carl," you may say, "I thought these Bible notes were on prayer!" Ah, yes, but you see, singing out of loving devotion to God is actually the first and most noble form of prayer. David's book is called both a book of *Psalms* (meaning *songs*) and also a book of David's *prayers* (Psalm 72:20)!

Meditate and Pray: Thank you, Father, for reminding us today, that, in the midst of all our important life activities, there is one thing better than all that life can offer. “Your love is better than life; therefore, my lips will glorify you” (Psalm 63:3). Help us to be encouraged at how invigorating and effective even the simplest prayers of devotion and love to God can be. Help us to be content, when we cannot find words to say, or when griefs and trials cause us to “lose our voice” of faith, to simply give you the love and devotion of our hearts. Amen.

*Jesus, Thou Joy of loving hearts,
Thou Fount of life, Thou Light of men,
From the best bliss that earth imparts,
We turn unfilled to Thee again.*

*Our restless spirits yearn for Thee,
Wherever our changeful lot is cast;
Glad when Thy gracious smile we see,
Blessed when our faith can hold Thee fast.*

*Thy truth unchanged hath ever stood;
Thou savest those that on Thee call;
To them that seek Thee Thou art good,
To them that find Thee all in all.*

*O Jesus, ever with us stay,
Make all our moments calm and bright;
Chase the dark night of sin away,
Shed over the world Thy holy light.*

Trinity Hymnal #646, by Bernard of Clairvaux, 12th century A.D.

Wednesday: Read Psalm 18:1, Psalm 116:1-2 & Galatians 4:19

Tender Devotion

One way to stir up our love for the Lord is by *remembrances* of His past goodness to us and *resolutions* to declare our devotion. The Psalmist says, “I love the Lord because he has heard my voice and my pleas for mercy” (Psalm 116:1). But, beyond our celebration of God’s mighty deeds on our behalf, there is something from the work of the Spirit of God within us that makes our communion with God far more intimate. David’s love is not merely the calculated debt that he owes God for saving him. In Psalm 18:1, he says, “I love you, O Lord...”, using a word for love which actually is the word for a mother’s womb, thereby expressing the tenderness of David’s devotion to his God. He loved the Lord with something akin to a mother’s delight in the most precious fruit of her body. This is precisely the difference between all other religions and biblical Christianity: intimacy with the exalted God and Creator of all.

Meditate and Pray: Thank God for the domestic intimacy of a true, living life of prayer and worship within a loving church-fellowship. No wonder Paul can speak (even to the “foolish” Galatians) like a mother in childbirth, anxious to bring her beloved child into the world (Galatians 4:19). It is because Paul knows that God loves His church in just this intimate way that he can agonize as the church’s apostle until the Christ-life of faith is born in them. Ask God to give your church fellowship the same kind of fruitful, agonizing prayer-life that prays until “Christ is born” in those for whom we pray!

Thursday: Read Galatians 4:12-20 & Matthew 11:28-30

Come, Simply Come

If love to God is the pinnacle of prayer, then Paul’s letter to the Galatians is surely one of the key antidotes for the loveless, prayerless religion which can infect so many churches – even those churches that start out with promise! In Galatians 4, Paul pleads *with* the Galatians (and we can be sure, with God *for* the Galatians) to find again the loving joy which had moved them formerly to a deep affection for the afflicted apostle. Where had their loving joy in the Lord gone? New teachers had come in and had added requirements for legalistic good

works of the flesh. They had substituted outward observances of religious days (Gal. 4:10) and rituals such as circumcision (Gal. 5:2) in place of a joyful submission to the “Grace Alone” foundation of their salvation. Paul’s solution? They needed, like expectant mothers, to go back to Gospel “bed-rest” until “Christ be formed in them” (Gal. 4:19). In other words, they had to go back to first principles, to realize that all their outward appearances of religious zeal and good works could not replace coming to Christ without ritual or human effort.

Meditate and Pray: Jesus gave us the most basic of commands with which to begin every prayer: “Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy and my burden is light” (Matthew 11:28-30). May the Lord make us see that the *heart* of real prayer is begins not with the content of our prayers, not the method or length of our prayers, but with the position of our hearts as we pray. Let us ask God to give us the ability to pray with the simplest of agendas, namely, simply obeying Christ’s command to “come to Me.” He will then show us how we should pray, and give vitality to our prayers.

*I heard the voice of Jesus say, “Come unto Me and rest;
Lay down, thou weary one, lay down Thy head upon My breast.”
I came to Jesus as I was, weary and worn and sad;
I found in Him a resting place, and He has made me glad.*

*I heard the voice of Jesus say, “Behold, I freely give
The living water; thirsty one, stoop down, and drink, and live.”
I came to Jesus, and I drank of that life giving stream;
My thirst was quenched, my soul revived, and now I live in Him.*

*I heard the voice of Jesus say, “I am this dark world’s Light;
Look unto Me, thy morn shall rise, and all thy day be bright.”
I looked to Jesus, and I found in Him my Star, my Sun;
And in that light of life I’ll walk, till traveling days are done.*

Trinity Hymnal #304 by Horatius Bonar

Friday: Read Acts 4:23-24, Galatians 5:13-15 & 5:25-26

With One Accord

What happens when a church fails to pray with and for one another and resists God’s call to “pray with one accord” (Acts 4:24)? Well, to a greater or lesser degree, sometimes publically and sometimes more privately, disunity and factions may well be the result. The Galatians, indeed, were in danger of divisions so deep and conflicts so real that they could be described as “biting and devouring each other” (Gal. 5:15). How unnatural but surely the result of a prayerless Christianity! As John Gill points out, we would expect wolves from outside the church to come in and fall upon the sheep... but Paul describes the Galatians as sheep that bite and distress each other. How dangerous! The result could be the destruction of the individual peace and security of the Galatians believers and eventually the dissolution of the whole church!

Meditate and Pray: How then can our churches be protected from such destructive behavior? Paul tells us in Gal. 5:25-26: Only by walking in formation with the Spirit could the pride and envy which lies at the root of all destructive behavior (v. 26) be rooted out. This is the reason for my stress on the humbling effect of prayer. Only by “remembering” in prayer what we once were apart from Christ (Eph. 2:11) will we treat each other graciously and overlook one another’s faults. Only by prayerfully holding each other before the Throne of

Grace and viewing each other, despite all our blemishes and sinful imperfections, in the light of the forgiving Lamb on the Throne (Rev. 5:6-10), will we love each other deeply and consistently. May God answer this, our deepest prayer for the love and unity of the church, the body of Christ. Sing to God this hymn that expresses our prayerful desire that we might serve Christ's church with all humility and devotion to our Savior-God. Amen. So let it be.

*I love Thy kingdom, Lord,
The house of Thine abode,
The church our blessed Redeemer saved
With His own precious blood.*

*I love Thy church, O God.
Her walls before Thee stand,
Dear as the apple of Thine eye,
And written on Thy hand.*

*For her my tears shall fall
For her my prayers ascend,
To her my cares and toils be given
Till toils and cares shall end.*

*Jesus, Thou Friend divine,
Our Savior and our King,
Thy hand from every snare and foe
Shall great deliverance bring.*

Trinity Hymnal # 353

And let us pray with commitment two other verses of this hymn, not included in our hymn books:

*If e'er to bless Thy sons
My voice or hands deny,
These hands let useful skills forsake,
This voice in silence die.*

*Should I with scoffers join
Her altars to abuse?
No! Better far my tongue were dumb,
My hand its skill should lose.*