

In our modern day of modern scientific findings, instant resources, and self-help, honest Christians ask heart-felt questions:

- Do our prayers ever amount to anything?
- How can prayer make any difference in the grand scheme of things?

Clearly Jesus foresaw that the “increase of wickedness” of the Last Days would cause many Christians to become discouraged in prayer. This is why He told the parable of The Persistent Widow. He wanted to encourage His disciples to “always pray and not give up” (Lk. 18:1-8). May this week’s notes on prayer help us to persist in this most important means of grace.

Monday: Read Matthew 6:5-8 and 1 Timothy 2:1-8

Come As You Are

Perhaps one of the great obstacles to our seizing hold of God’s encouragement to access His throne with bold, confident prayer is an overly formal, stiff view of what prayer is and a distant view of the God who answers prayer. Are you tempted to use a different voice when you pray? Perhaps a deeper voice or using words such as “thee” and “thou” which we would never adopt in normal conversation. This, by the way, is one of the dangers of reading too many “Puritan prayers” or trying to adopt an approach to God of a bye-gone era. We are to be ourselves when we pray, coming with *all* our weakness and demerits, believing that God will hear us, *not* for our many words (Matthew 6:7), *not* for our righteousness or holy frame of mind, *not* for the amount or purity of our faith. To be sure, God wants “men everywhere to lift up *holy* hands in prayer” (1 Timothy 2:8). The holy and effective standing come only from “the One Mediator between God and men, Jesus Christ” and His ransoming payment for all our sin (1 Timothy 2:5-6). No, wherever we are, whatever our frame of mind, whatever our state of sin, God calls on us to pray in the Name of Jesus Christ. Since we therefore have such a perfect Sacrifice for our sins having *preceded* us into the Holy Place, should we not confidently run to our Father, pleading that blood with every manner of petition and need?

Meditate and Pray: Thank God for the reality of access in prayer to God the Father which the blood of Christ brings. Thank Jesus that His blood always ensures a “living and active way” into God’s presence, as Hebrews 10:20 promises. If we know we are always heard in Jesus, we will not give up!

*Jesus, Thy blood and righteousness
My beauty are, my glorious dress;
'Midst flaming worlds, in these arrayed,
With joy shall I lift up my head.*

*Lord, I believe Thy precious blood,
Which, at the mercy seat of God,
Forever doth for sinners plead,
For me, e'en for my soul, was shed.*

*Bold shall I stand in Thy great day;
For who aught to my charge shall lay?
Fully absolved through these I am
From sin and fear, from guilt and shame.*

*This spotless robe the same appears,
When ruined nature sinks in years;
No age can change its glorious hue,
The robe of Christ is ever new.*

Trinity Hymnal # 520

Tuesday: Read Matthew 6:9-13 and Psalm 62:5-8

Come Needy

Prayer is defined by our Westminster Shorter Catechism Question 98 as “An offering up of our desires to God for things agreeable to His will, in the name of Christ, with confession of our sins, and thankful acknowledgment of His mercies.” This means that we cannot truly pray without real desire and neediness. Desire comes from the hearts of those who sense how much they lack and long to be filled with the good things of God. Praying “in the name of Christ” means constant reliance upon the saving work of Jesus Christ. Indeed, Psalm 62:8 urges us to do just that: “Pour out your heart before Him.” In a real sense, we are to pour our prayers into the priestly, spotless, but Cross-scarred hands of Jesus and let *Him* take them into Heaven to the Throne of mercy, absolutely confident that Christ knows our heart’s desires and all our wants and needs.

When you pray let your words be few, but your thoughts many, and above all let them be profound. The less you speak the better you pray External and bodily prayer is that buzzing of the lips, that outside babble that is gone through without any attention, and which strikes the ears of men; but prayer in spirit and truth is the inward desire, the motions, the sighs, which issue from the depths of the heart. The former is the prayer of hypocrites and all who trust in themselves: the latter is the prayer of the children of God, who walk in fear.

Martin Luther

Meditate and Pray: Lord, forgive us for so often approaching prayer as a mere verbal exercise, being too concerned with how long or when we pray or what words to use, etc., when our real concern should be to ask you to stir within our *hearts*, on a daily basis, a due sense of need which will then *drive* us to prayer. Thank you, Jesus, that you effectively teach us to pray “give us our daily bread” by ensuring that we are hungry enough “to offer up our desires” to God each and every day. May such God-given desires be ours each day.

*Day by day, and with each passing moment,
Strength I find, to meet my trials here;
Trusting in my Father’s wise bestowment,
I’ve no cause for worry or for fear.
He Whose heart is kind beyond all measure
Gives unto each day what He deems best—
Lovingly, its part of pain and pleasure,
Mingling toil with peace and rest.*

*Every day, the Lord Himself is near me
With a special mercy for each hour;
All my cares He fain would bear, and cheer me,
He Whose Name is Counselor and Power;
The protection of His child and treasure
Is a charge that on Himself He laid;
“As thy days, thy strength shall be in measure,”
This the pledge to me He made.*

*Help me then in every tribulation
So to trust Thy promises, O Lord,
That I lose not faith’s sweet consolation
Offered me within Thy holy Word.
Help me, Lord, when toil and trouble meeting,
Ever to take, as from a father’s hand,
One by one, the days, the moments fleeting,
Till I reach the promised land*

Trinity Hymnal # 676

Wednesday: Read Matthew 6:9 & 1 Peter 2:4-10**Come with your Family**

The Word encourages us to “offer up our desires” unto God at all times and in all places. Why is it that we so easily become discouraged? We have thus far identified 2 hindrances to prayer:

1. Formalism, as if something in our approach to God could qualify us to pray
2. Externalism, forgetting that the source of prayer lies in speaking our heart’s desire

A third reason we may become discouraged when we come to God merely as an individual and become discouraged when God doesn’t tailor His answers to our individual desires. In other words, I may measure prayer far too often in terms of *what God does for me* instead of viewing my prayers as part of the spiritual offering given to God by the whole church. But if we stepped back to view prayer in the context of the broader church, we would be far more encouraged to keep praying. God’s priorities become my priorities. As the founding pastor of our church, Ray Commeret, never tired of saying:

Christianity is not a private affair. Salvation is corporate salvation and New Testament praying for the most part is corporate praying... God in His grace is not merely saving individuals, He is re-creating a people, making a family, establishing subjects in His kingdom, building a spiritual house, a temple in which He dwells by His Holy Spirit, (1 Peter 2:4-10).

Meditate and Pray: Thank Jesus that when His disciples asked Him to teach them to pray, He began by teaching them to pray, “OUR Father.” Ask Him to make you conscious of your new status as part of the “priesthood of all believers” set forth so clearly in 1 Peter 2:5. What a marvelous privilege! We are now by grace called to be a priesthood offering sacrifices of praise and interceding for the whole, seeing our lives carried along in the community that is chosen, royal and holy. This status guarantees that God hears us and certainly is granting His will for His people and for all time. What a source of blessing – not only for ourselves, but for the world around us – to exercise such a priestly, prayerful calling.

Thursday: Read Ephesians 6:18-20 and John 11:40-44**The Weapon of All Prayer**

We have seen that properly focused prayer has two prongs: intimate communication between Father and child and intercession for the broader work of God throughout His church. In Ephesians 6:18 Paul commands us to wield the weapon of all-prayer “for ALL saints”! Moreover, Paul is careful to describe the conflict in which the weapon of prayer is used (Eph. 6:10-17) **not** in merely inward, subjective terms, but in outward, corporate, and objective terms. Scottish pastor James Philip puts it this way, in his commentary on Ephesians 6:

The weapon of all-prayer is not to be used exclusively or even primarily for our personal battle... that is to say, our prayer, first of all and primarily, is to be entirely taken up with the things of God, with the honor and glory of His great name and the coming of His kingdom; and only then, when that divine order is established, personal needs... This is an entirely safe and healthy order. And it does cut across our merely natural instinct and inclination, for in fact the tendency, in time of testing, is that we become pre-occupied with our own particular problem, or battle, or temptation, or struggle. But Paul seems to indicate here, “Do not concentrate your prayer upon that; pray not for yourself, but for all saints”... I think I can understand why Paul gives this emphasis. I think I can hear him say, “Self-preoccupying prayer leads to morbidity”... The more we pray inwardly, in an inward direction, the less help we get from our prayers, and soon we are in a morass of depression. Paul’s advice here is, “Relate your personal battle to **the** battle. Strike a blow for the larger cause in your prayer. Look at the main strategy of God, not merely at the one infinitesimal part that is your problem.”

Meditate and Pray: Thank God for this great lesson of the power of unselfish prayer. We could paraphrase it as follows: “The more we pray for the broader success of God’s purpose in His peoples’ lives and their concerns, the more we will find our prayers have been answered - *even when we haven’t had time to pray for our needs* - so busy have we been in prayer for others! Even on the night Jesus was betrayed, His prayers were taken up largely with the needs of the church. Yet did God the Father *fail* to answer any of His Son’s personal prayers in His hour of need? Not at all! As Jesus said, at the tomb of Lazarus in John 11:42, “I knew that you always hear me...”! May God grant us just such a confidence to know that God is committed to always answering our deepest needs and hearing our cries, we can leave our lives in His capable hands, liberated in prayer to focus on the needs of others!

Friday: Read Acts 1:3-9, Romans 8:33-34

The Right Man on Our Side

In these passages today we see Jesus Christ victoriously rising from the dead, when all the praise of heaven and earth was to be His inheritance forever. How quickly, nevertheless, He “forgot” His own accomplishments and turned immediately back to the needs of His suffering church. During the forty days before His ascension, Jesus Christ insisted on eating with and teaching His own (Acts 1:3-4) and (we may be sure) bearing the burdens of His own in prayer to the Father. We could excuse Jesus for forgetfulness of our plight given the glory of His coming Ascension; no one could object to those forty days being a “victory lap” for Jesus after He rose. Indeed, no objections could be lodged if Jesus had decided to focus in Heaven entirely on His own accomplishments. He nevertheless continues *even in glory* to put our needs before thoughts of Himself. And because He continues to live in Heaven a life of prayer and intercession for us (see Rom. 8:34) we know we shall also live victoriously with Him forever. Never have there been greater words of consolation and hope than John 14:19: “Because I live, you also will live.” Our Lord Jesus is so full of love that he continues in prayer for God’s glory and the needs of His church. We sinners are not like the Lord Jesus Christ, but may we glimpse and begin to practice the effective use of prayer for God’s glory and the victory of His church.

Meditate and Pray: Ask God the Holy Spirit to give you real consolation from this great doctrine of the *continuing unselfishness of the Son of God in our nature in Heaven*. Ask God to give you a bigger picture of all that Jesus does to save us “to the uttermost” (Heb. 7:25 KJV). We believe Jesus died for us; we believe Jesus lived for us a sinless life on earth; we believe Jesus rose for us. Now let us believe and know that He lives a life of glory in Heaven in order to “make intercession for us”. What a comfort!

Lord, when we are discouraged by the weakness of our prayer-lives, help us to look up with renewed hope, placing all our confidence in the prayer-life of the Son of God in our nature, interceding for us in Heaven. Help us to believe that all our preservation rests in His effectiveness in prayer on our behalf. Help us to believe what Martin Luther said in Hymn # 92 in our hymnal, speaking of Christ as the only one who can preserve us:

*Did we in our own strength confide, our striving would be losing;
Were not the right Man on our side, the Man of God’s own choosing:
Dost ask who that may be? Christ Jesus, it is He;
Lord Sabaoth, His Name, from age to age the same,
And He must win the battle.*

Amen!