

THE PLACE OF PRAYER TODAY

Mt. 18:20 where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them.

Prayer is one of the most difficult subjects to address. It ought not to be, but it is ... and perhaps that is why the prayer meeting is usually least attended. ... But if a fellowship does not give time to regular and faithful prayer, it cannot expect to receive blessing from God.

Like you, I have heard many people pray in various types of meetings. ... I was in one meeting recently with other ministers (from other denominations ... I hasten to add!), and the minister leading prayed out of a cartoon-like book which used common urban slang. ... It was most inappropriate for speaking with God ... Indeed, I doubt if God was listening!

When I was young, I used to *have* to attend prayer meetings where the prayers seemed to last almost as long as some sermons, and was often a repetition from the week before.

I have also been in meetings where prayers were presented in very liturgical language ... where the prayers were mechanically read from a book, with responses, and it all sounded so ritualistic and emotionless. ... It was not because they were read, but because they were read with no feeling.

Personally, I don't normally write out my prayers ... except perhaps for formal occasions such as weddings or funerals. It is a good practice though, to write out your prayers ... It is good to spend time considering how you speak to God ... for your words and thoughts to follow through, and to have a Biblical basis ... rather than rambling. ... We ought to prepare to speak with God, and I have been greatly helped by reading the prayers of men like Spurgeon, and the prayers of the Puritans in "The Valley of Vision". I recommend both.

The loveliest prayers, though, are the simplest ... and that is how prayer ought to be ... as a child speaking to our Heavenly Father. We are princes speaking to the King, Who is our Father. ... He understands when we sometimes get our words mixed up because we want to tell Him what is on our minds and hearts. At the basis of our prayers is the desire to be in the closest union with Him. Our prayers are couched in the humble realization we are speaking with our Creator, Lord, and Saviour.

There is no doubt about it though, - prayer can be difficult, and the reason it is difficult is not because of God, but because it is so easy to lose the intensity

required to be in touch with Him. That, in turn, affects our eagerness and passion. ... It often comes as a result of *sauntering* carelessly into His presence, rather than *preparing* attentively to meet with Him ... Imagine how far we would get if we came with such an attitude to speak with Queen Elizabeth!

It is an approach I believe we all have to contend with ... We can become so unprepared to meet with God, it can almost be insulting. Consider the holiness which He required in the Old Testament ... He had certain days and certain ways to be approached. If those stipulations were not met, severe consequences followed. Now, I know the tabernacle and the temple has gone, but the holiness of God has never changed. It has not descended to the level many would offer Him today ... Worship becomes worship only when it gives Him the honour due to His Name, and that is the only time He meets with His people, and He listens to their prayers.

... That is the priority in our praying, - we need to know Who we are addressing. He is the King of kings. He is the Creator. He is the only God. He is our Saviour, Lord, and Friend. He has purchased me, and that means He has found me worthy of belonging to Him ... and that *also* means He knows me and I know Him.

It is inevitable that as well as the good and happy times, difficult and challenging times come upon His people. Job was one of the greatest saints in Scripture, and he suffered the loss of his family and heritage ... and yet, when you read his prayers, they emphasise the glory of God, for example, [Job 26:5](#) Dead things are formed from under the waters, and the inhabitants thereof. [6](#) Hell is naked before him, and destruction hath no covering. [7](#) He stretcheth out the north over the empty place, and hangeth the earth upon nothing. [8](#) He bindeth up the waters in his thick clouds; and the cloud is not rent under them. [9](#) He holdeth back the face of his throne, and spreadeth his cloud upon it. [10](#) He hath compassed the waters with bounds, until the day and night come to an end. [11](#) The pillars of heaven tremble and are astonished at his reproof. [12](#) He divideth the sea with his power, and by his understanding he smiteth through the proud. [13](#) By his spirit he hath garnished the heavens; his hand hath formed the crooked serpent. [14](#) Lo, these are parts of his ways: but how little a portion is heard of him? but the thunder of his power who can understand? ... This same great God was not elusive for Job's confidence upheld him ... [Job 19:25](#) I know that my redeemer liveth ... And that is what maintained him throughout his pain and grief.

It is difficult though, and often the devil tells us how weak we are ... He loves to show us how frail our faith is, and sometimes we become like the psalmist , [Ps. 42:5,11; 43:5](#) Why art thou cast down, O my soul? and why art thou disquieted within me? ... Prayers are supposed to make you feel better, - "Take your burden to the

Lord and leave it there”, - but when you look around you, it can fill you with despair. ... We can take our eyes off the Lord and look at the worsening state of our country. Look at the threats we face, - from terrorists, economic, social, political, etc. Look at the next generation and see how anti-God they are being taught to become. Look at our churches, - they are dying! There are faithful men preaching sermons to just a few people ... Some are preaching to people who aren't interested, and nothing, - it seems, - is getting through. ... And some are preaching sermons without God as their focus.

Behind it all though ... God has not given up, and gone back to Heaven, and shut the gates, and stopped listening. That is not how He is. He loves His people, even when their spiritual resources are desperately on the wane ... Remember when the Hebrews were slaves in Egypt and how they had been afflicted by the enemy for so long. During those four hundred years there was no sign of a man of God, - those were spiritually dry times ... The people had given up praying, and they could see no hope for the future. ... “What can God do for us?” ... He did not hear their prayers, but He *did* hear their cries under the yoke of the taskmasters (Ex. 3:7 *And the LORD said, I have surely seen the affliction of my people which are in Egypt, and have heard their cry by reason of their taskmasters; for I know their sorrows*). He looked and saw the terrible state they were in. He felt their agonies, and He declared, ⁸ *I am come down to deliver them out of the hand of the Egyptians, and to bring them up out of that land unto a good land and a large, unto a land flowing with milk and honey*.

God never abandons His people, for where He commits His love and grace, they will never depart ... We have a great Intercessor who recognises all we are up against, - and He knows more about the opposition *than we do* ... and He prays for us, - that is what keeps us going, and that is why we still are. ... But what about how *we* ought to pray? ... We are told to seek Him and He will be found, and to call upon Him (Is. 55:6).

Consider Saul of Tarsus and the first engagement God had with him on the road to Damascus, - God spoke with Saul and Saul spoke with God ... *that's prayer*. ... And during those three days in the home of Judas in Damascus, *Saul continued to pray*. ... That is what the Lord told Ananias, Acts 9:11 *behold, he prayeth*. ... Ananias, I'm sending you to meet Saul, and you will find him praying! ... He has been praying since he was a boy ... He has prayed in the synagogue and in the temple ... He has prayed in the Sanhedrin ... but Ananias, when he prays *now*, I'm listening to him! ... And when you go along that street in Damascus, you will find Saul of Tarsus ... and he will be *praying!*

What was he praying about? Previously, his prayers were empty and hollow ... mere liturgy and ritual from the dead 'prayer-books' of Jewish tradition. ... Ananias, I never listened for His prayers were not directed towards Me. He was praying out of habit, and to be heard by others.

What a change, though, to the Saul of Tarsus the Lord had guided into that home in Damascus. *There he was, praying.* His life had been transformed, and he was in conversation with His Saviour ... continuous communion with the Lord for three days. ... He would not even have noticed the three days passing!

Do you remember when you were saved, - when you became a Christian, - ... do you remember how simply and naturally you spoke with God, and how eager you were. You talked to Him about *everything* ... about serious matters, as well as the very ordinary every-day issues. You were not afraid to trust and believe ... Praying was the ordinary speech you engaged in with God. ... And you didn't have set times to pray, or set places ... but you prayed in all kinds of places and at all times ... *What has changed? ... Why don't we pray like that anymore?*

Previously, Saul had been a stranger but God had made him into a son ... and the son was speaking to his Father. Surely, it is 'natural' a Christian wants to pray? ... If you love someone, you want to talk to them! ... What kind of a relationship would it be if you didn't?! It would soon die! ... If a person says they are a Christian and they love God, and yet they don't speak to Him, what is the implication ... other than there's nothing, - if anything, - between them.

Where is the evidence they are saved? ... Surely, one of the marks/characteristics of a Christian is that they talk with God! ... He has saved us, He walks with us, He keeps us ... what kind of a strange relationship would it be if we did not talk to Him?!!

Imagine prayer is like breathing ... To live, you have to breathe ... and to be a Christian you have to have a relationship with God, which involves speaking with Him ... not just a few breaths in the morning and a few breaths in the evening ... but you have to keep breathing all day, and is that not like the constant communion we require with God?!

And what if you don't pray but instead you only listen to someone else pray ... What if your 'breathing' depends on someone else, and you are not 'breathing'/praying for yourself?! ... You won't last very long! ... Prayer is

‘part and parcel’ of each Christian for without prayer there is no life. ... When a little baby is born, you don’t teach it how to breathe, - it breathes automatically ... and when a sinner is born again, prayer is like breathing, - you start relying on prayer rightaway. And, - because they are breathing, - you *hear* them cry ... and translate that into the life of the Christian and you will see how the crying, - praying, - ... as the hymn writer James Montgomery explains it, “is the simplest form of speech”.

When you are ‘born again’, - like Saul, - it’s all new, and you pray because you want to because you recognise your need. In a very simple way, God supplies the baby with the knowledge that when they cry their needs will be met ... And that is the same for the Christian, - God is waiting for our cries.

And that brings us up to the present time ... How can I return to praying like I used to? ... You don’t need a manual, and you don’t need special lectures on prayer, or some specially-manipulated setting, but what we *do* need is to return to realising how much we depend upon God.

There is Saul in the Damascus home ... his world has been ‘turned upside down’, he cannot see, his old life has gone ... and he is praying for *he is depending upon God!*

Maybe that is where we have to examine ... individually and as a fellowship? Maybe we have been sauntering along, content with bringing Him trivialities rather than necessities ... asking for crumbs, rather than expecting a feast! ... We need His power to help us do His work His way ... and we can only do it with His provisions. ... How did this same Saul of Tarsus, - when he became known as Paul the apostle, ... how did he manage to do all the Lord required of Him? Here’s how he explained it, **Phil. 4:19** *my God shall supply all your need according to his riches in glory by Christ Jesus.*

One final thought ... It would be fantastic if every member and friend of the fellowship was at the prayer meeting praying powerful prayers, but please forgive me if I doubt that will happen, - I would love it to, but ... It is the pattern of Scripture that normally only a few gathers, - the ones and twos and threes ... We find it is the Elijah’s and the Hosea’s and the Habakkuk’s and the Jeremiah’s, and very often they are exhausted ... but, - in their small numbers, - they are earnestly meeting with God. ... *Real* servants of Christ with *real* burdens for the glory of God. ... People with passion, who want to see the fellowship built up and continuing well into the future ... who went to see souls

saved, and God's people encouraged ... but most of all, they want to see God's name glorified. ... When that is the substance of our prayers, God hears and answers, - He grants to us the rewards of faithfulness.

And it is a taste of what awaits us for when we are committed to praying for His glory, we know our prayers will surely be answered for we know that when Jesus returns, His glory will cover every area and every region of the whole earth, **Num. 14:21** But as truly as I live, all the earth shall be filled with the glory of the Lord ... **Hab. 2:14** the earth shall be filled with the knowledge of the glory of the LORD, as the waters cover the sea. ... That is the context in how we should be praying ... confidently, with conviction, and expectancy that God, - as He has promised, - will fulfil His every purpose, to the glory of His Name. Amen.