

THOUGHTS ON PRAYER

Our church began an intensive study on prayer in January which involved more corporate prayer than usual. The messages are designed to be concise introductions (20-30 minutes), to the actual prayer time. It has been very helpful. All of them were not recorded, but we have recently started recording them, and trying to recover some of them by remakes, and placing them here on our *Sermon Audio* site.

Prayer is basically *conversation with God*. There is quiet prayer, fervent prayer, effective prayer, urgent prayer and desperate prayer. Leonard Ravenhill once said “God answers *desperate* prayer”. Prayer is the hardest work for a Christian. It is elusive. We can easily attend church, read the Bible, study, witness, preach and teach and do all our duties (all in the flesh unless we pray for the Spirit’s help). We can do all the other things relatively easy, but struggle to pray. Why is this when prayer is where our strength is energized? Leonard Ravenhill once said: “Satan laughs at our singing, witnessing, preaching and all else, but trembles when we pray”.

We cannot pray all the time, as other duties press us. We are commanded to “Pray without ceasing”. (1 Thessalonians 5:17). How can we accomplish this? It means to be in an *attitude* of prayer at all times, as well as to pray often. It seems to me that requires walking in the Spirit. Remember this verse connects with six other short admonitions (God’s perfect number of seven; could it be that all these go together, *equally* important?)

The first prayer in the Old Testament

The first *conversation* with God recorded was in Genesis 3:8-19. Remember, prayer is conversation with God, but we don’t usually think of it as this one. The first words were addressed *from* God to Adam in verse nine: “Where art thou?” Man by nature, since the fall, *does not* seek God, God seeks man.

The first prayer in the New Testament

The Magnificat (if you consider it a prayer. Certainly the virgin Mary was *praising* the Lord). *And Mary said, My soul doth magnify the Lord, And my spirit hath rejoiced in God my Saviour. For he hath regarded the low estate of his handmaiden: for, behold, from henceforth all generations shall call me blessed. For he that is mighty hath done to me great things; and holy is his name. And his mercy is on them that fear him from generation to generation. He hath shewed strength with his arm; he hath scattered the proud in the imagination of their hearts. He hath put down the mighty from their seats, and exalted them of low degree. He hath filled the hungry with good things; and the rich he hath sent empty away. He hath holpen his servant Israel, in remembrance of his mercy; As he spake to our fathers, to Abraham, and to his seed for ever. (Luke 1:46-55).*

Then the first prayer, chronologically, in Luke it is mentioned that people were praying, so maybe this was the first mention. “*And the whole multitude of the people were praying without at the time of incense*” (Luke 1:10). Praying= Greek; Strong's G4336 - *proseuchomai* (pros-yü'-kho-mi) used 90 times in 82 verses (online at *Blue Letter Bible*)

The longest prayer in the Bible

Nehemiah 9:5-38 (We won’t print it because of its length. It was prayed by a number of Levites after a rediscovery of the law of God and the awakening under Nehemiah). Daniel also had a long

prayer recorded.

The shortest prayer in the Bible

It is *very short*, but to tell the story requires a longer context.

“And in the fourth watch of the night Jesus went unto them, walking on the sea.

*And when the disciples saw him walking on the sea, they were troubled, saying, It is a spirit; and they cried out for fear. But straightway Jesus spake unto them, saying, **Be of good cheer; it is I; be not afraid.***

And Peter answered him and said, Lord, if it be thou, bid me come unto thee on the water.

*And he said, **Come.** And when Peter was come down out of the ship, he walked on the water, to go to Jesus. But when he saw the wind boisterous, he was afraid; and beginning to sink, he cried, saying, Lord, save me. <this is the shortest prayer>*

*And immediately Jesus stretched forth his hand, and caught him, and said unto him, **O thou of little faith, wherefore didst thou doubt?**” (Matthew 14:25-32 ;esp. v. 30)*

Jesus’ Prayers

The True “Lord’s Prayer”; the high priestly prayer in John 17. Let’s look a bit at this one.

Especially verses 15-17.

*“**I pray not that thou shouldest take them out of the world, but that thou shouldest keep them from the evil. They are not of the world, even as I am not of the world. Sanctify them through thy truth: thy word is truth.**”* Oh doesn’t it thrill you that Jesus Christ prays for you; and for me! Hallelujah!

Paul’s prayers

He had many, but I remember this statement in Philippians so well: *“**I thank my God upon every remembrance of you, Always in every prayer of mine for you all making request with joy, For your fellowship in the gospel from the first day until now; Being confident of this very thing, that he which hath begun a good work in you will perform it until the day of Jesus Christ**” (Philippians 1:3-6).*

John’s prayers and teaching

Here John tells us some words *about* praying; *“**And whatsoever we ask, we receive of him, because we keep his commandments, and do those things that are pleasing in his sight. And this is his commandment, That we should believe on the name of his Son Jesus Christ, and love one another, as he gave us commandment**” (1 John 3:22,23).*

Peter’s prayers

Acts 9:40 With Tabitha (Dorcas); *“**But Peter put them all forth, and kneeled down, and prayed; and turning him to the body said, Tabitha, arise. And she opened her eyes: and when she saw Peter, she sat up.**”*

Hannah’s prayer

*“**And she was in bitterness of soul, and prayed unto the LORD, and wept sore. (1 Samuel 1:9; see verse 9 through verse 19)***

Jacob’s prayer

In the figurative language, we can see that Jacob wrestled with God and was afterwards called Israel. *“**And Jacob was left alone; and there wrestled a man with him until the breaking of***

the day.” (Genesis 32:24; See Genesis 32:22-30)

The prayer of Jabez

“And Jabez called on the God of Israel, saying, Oh that thou wouldest bless me indeed, and enlarge my coast, and that thine hand might be with me, and that thou wouldest keep me from evil, that it may not grieve me! And God granted him that which he requested” (1 Chronicles 4:10) .

ADDITIONAL THOUGHTS ON PRAYER

Always respond to every impulse to pray. The impulse to pray may come when you are reading or when you are battling with a text. I would make an absolute law of this – always obey such an impulse. --Martyn Lloyd-Jones

No one is a firmer believer in the power of prayer than the devil; not that he practices it, but he suffers from it. ~Guy H. King

There is a general kind of praying which fails for lack of precision. It is as if a regiment of soldiers should all fire off their guns anywhere. Possibly somebody would be killed, but the majority of the enemy would be missed. --Charles Haddon Spurgeon

It is good for us to keep some account of our prayers, that we may not unsay them in our practice. ~Matthew Henry

God can pick sense out of a confused prayer. ~Richard Sibbes

Prayers not felt by us are seldom heard by God. ~Philip Henry

Some people pray just to pray and some people pray to know God. --Andrew Murray

"Prayer is the Christian's life. Though every other ordinance be attended to, yet if this one be neglected, all is vain. It is as impossible for the soul to be spiritually alive and active without a punctual course of fervent and believing prayer, as for the body to be alive and active without breath. Prayer has more influence on the sanctification of the soul than all other ordinances."
(From "Enoch Walked With God" a sermon by Edward Griffin, page 6)

When you pray, rather let your heart be without words than your words without heart. ~John Bunyan

Prayer requires more of the heart than of the tongue. ~Adam Clarke

Is prayer your steering wheel, or your spare tire?-- Corrie Ten Boom

“Prayer is not overcoming God's reluctance, but laying hold of His willingness.”
Martin Luther (also quoted by others including Arthur W. Pink)

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