

LET'S TALK



TEMPTATION : Don't accept the invitation

Below are the contributions that came in this Sunday's meeting and part 4 - the final part of the notes on prayer.



CONTRIBUTIONS FROM SUNDAY

Words from Sunday's Meeting

Just had a picture of a stain-glass window of Jesus and light shining through and it was beautiful... but I felt God say... don't settle for the imitation when he has made the real thing available for us. Jesus is here and he wants to meet with you. He has made the way for us to speak and see him directly. He is calling you to come, you just need to respond

I saw a picture of a dry land...but the ground cracked open and a spring of water came shooting out. I feel God is opening new ground and releasing his spirit

Just had a picture of the tide going out at the beach. How on the majority of England's beaches, the rocks are solid unless the tide is out. Where the water comes up on the beach there is soft sand instead of hard rocks.

Felt that's like us in our receptivity to God's word and His Spirit. Our hearts are soft with the spirit's daily washing over us and us letting the word wash over us. It's when we resist him that it's hard stone he's working with.



Part Four

Practicals

We can learn from those who have gone before us when it comes to the practicals of praying.

Learning from Jesus' example

The best person to look at is Jesus, of course, and we can see certain aspects of his prayer life from the Scriptures.

Luke 4 : 42

"And when it was day, he departed and went into a desolate place. And the people sought him and came to him, and would have kept him from leaving them..."

Luke 5 : 16

"But he would withdraw to desolate places and pray."

Luke 6 : 12

"In these days he went out to the mountain to pray, and all night he continued in prayer to God."

Luke 9 : 18

*"Now it happened that as he was praying alone, the disciples were with him."
(They must have come and found Him.)*

Luke 9 : 28

"Now about eight days after these sayings he took with him Peter and John and James and went up on the mountain to pray."

Luke 11 : 1

*"Now Jesus was praying in a certain place, and when he finished, one of his disciples said to him, 'Lord, teach us to pray, as John taught his disciples.'"
(Jesus expounds on the Lord's prayer after this.)*

Luke 22 : 39

"And he came out and went, as was his custom, to the Mount of Olives, and the disciples followed him."

Question: Can you see some trends in Jesus' prayer life? Discuss these.

Jesus clearly made time available to spend with His Father. He would often go to be alone. He would find a certain place to pray. He would pray before or in response to major challenges he faced. He would pray all night if it was necessary!

The Son of God needed to pray! This is both inspirational and encouraging for us. We can see that even though He was the Son of God, and He had the Holy Spirit, He still needed to make time to pray and needed to be alone to pray. He would find certain times when He could do this – early in the morning, late at night, and so forth. These are times when He could be alone, practically, without needing to worry about all of His responsibilities. There are enormous implications here when it comes to our daily life and how we should find a time and a place to pray in earnest.

Learning from the examples of other Christians

1. We don't pray because we don't plan to pray

Some people believe the best way to pray is when you are 'led' to pray. Most cite Jesus' seemingly irregular approach to prayer, but as we've seen above, it was both regular and irregular. One should remember that those mentions of Jesus' nights and early mornings in prayer were outside his usual temple prayer time, which was regular. Even in Acts 3 the disciples are seen going to a regular prayer meeting.

It's clear that Jesus always made time. He had a daily rhythm of His own, which sometimes He might change (through an early morning or a late night) depending on the situation. But He always prayed, both spontaneously and He also planned to pray.

No plan, no prayer. This isn't legalism, this is just about a spirit that is willing but is being overcome by the flesh.

2. Adopt practical ways to impede mental drift

Many find it hard to maintain focus when praying. Each person will have to find their own ways of helping them control wayward thoughts.

Four most common helps are

(1) *praying aloud*; (2) *using the Bible and other written prayers*; (3) *using a list*; (4) *posture*.

1. Talking aloud helps keep your mind focussed on what you are saying because you are actually saying it. Talk aloud, it will help.

2. The Psalms and the rest of the Scriptures can be used in our prayer times and help to get us into a mode of prayer. After all, the Psalms themselves are written as prayers!

There are also prayer books available which orders Scripture into daily themes of prayer. However, please note that some modern day prayer books may require discernment and there tends to be a lot less Scripture in them.

Some consider prayer books to be 'religiously dead', but if the prayer book makes use of Scripture and if the heart is to pray and speak to God (not just finish a liturgy, but using that liturgy as a tool to get you focused) there is no need to see prayer books in this negative light.

3. Some consider a list to be legalistic as well and against the flow of the Spirit but it needn't be. If one simply blabs through a list every morning then it has been what was not intended. A list can bring to your mind issues and people. If the Spirit stirs something else then by all means go where He is leading.

4. If you try to pray lying down after a long day, why are you surprised when you fall asleep? You can find support for many different positions in Scripture. The point is that one is not more powerful than the other, but one may help you to be engaged in prayer more than another.

3. Develop a prayer-partnership relationship

The right person can be a great blessing to prayer. Regular praying with a trusted friend is a help to many.

4. Tie it all as close to Scripture as possible

The Bible gives you a wonderful reference for what to ask and how to ask. Use it. Learn to pray the principles, words, and priorities in the Bible. It will give you so much of the right thing to say. (The Psalms are a great way to start – but even some of the letters, like 1 Peter, can be used very well in prayer.)

5. Work at public prayer

People would do well to give their public prayers careful attention. Many people are prone to repetitive statements at the end of every sentence, sometimes as long as the sentence itself. Others think that shouting, or whispering, or some other kind of method is more effective. No, the point is to pray, not to impress anyone. God answers prayer, not our formulas for prayer!

6. Pray until you Pray

Praying is challenging when it is not obvious that God is right there listening. This is when we're praying without a sense of God and without feeling the immediate help of the Holy Spirit.

But realise that prayer is a melting pot of your whole life. Tiredness, happiness, pressure, and all your faculties are involved in prayer. It's not uncommon to not be 'desperate to pray'; unfortunately, most people stop when they have this feeling. But the feeling eventually goes. Many talk of a 'space' and 'patch' that you have to journey through until you break into praying in more freedom and with a sense of God giving you words and thoughts flowing freely in the mind.

Be encouraged to push through this 'space'. Sometimes it's not there, other times it passes rather quickly. It always passes, so pray until you pray!

7. Time

Mornings seem to be a special time for people in the Bible. David seems to enjoy the mornings spent with God.

Psalm 55 : 17 *"Evening and morning and at noon I utter my complaint and moan, and he hears my voice."*

Many throughout Christian history have stated that they found the morning to be the best time. But there is no 'better' time to seek God. It depends on your job, family, life rhythms, etc. It is reasonable to say, however, that beginning and ending a day with God is sound advice. Find a time that suits you – just find a time, the best time for God.

8. In Jesus' name

John 14 : 13 – 14 "Whatever you ask in my name, this I will do, that the Father may be glorified in the Son. If you ask me anything in my name, I will do it."

What is meant by praying “in Jesus’ name”? Does this mean adding the words ‘in Jesus’ name’ at the end of any prayer?

Jesus is not teaching about adding words at the end of a prayer here. In fact, none of the prayers recorded in Scripture have the phrase ‘in Jesus’ name’ at the end of the prayer.

So what does it mean? Praying in Jesus’ name means that we pray using the authorisation of His name. It means we pray believing that we talk with God expecting Him to treat us as He would treat Jesus. In ancient times a name represented a character and an authority. We can come near, be heard and have fellowship because Jesus has said we can use his character and authority to do so. We come to the Father confidently in Jesus’ name.

It is not wrong to use the statement “in Jesus’ name” at the end of a prayer, but it isn’t necessary and it would be good if we knew what it meant when we said it.

9. To Jesus and the Holy Spirit?

Can we pray to Jesus and the Holy Spirit or only to the Father?

Surveying prayer in the New Testament, we see that the majority of them are addressed to the Father, through the Son, by the Holy Spirit. But that is not the rule, as such. There are prayers addressed to Jesus in 1 Corinthians 16:22 and Revelation 22:20. So we can address Jesus in prayer.

Likewise the Holy Spirit may be addressed in prayer. Although he is never directly addressed in the Scriptures he is called our Comforter, Counsellor and the One who will walk along side us. He will teach us and guide us and be our help and support. To say we may never address Him means that we cannot talk to Him personally which seems to violate relationship.

Overall, however, the dominant pattern in Scripture is prayer that is addressed to the Father.

Excuses

Prayer is a physically expressed value. If you value relationship with God, you will surely pray. Well, at least that is the hope. There are many who express the value but never seem to get to the practical. Let’s examine the most common excuses for prayer in light of Biblical truth.

1. I am too busy to pray

We live in a place that operates at a feverish pace. Most people simply rush from one thing to the next. We manage, settle, and service demands most of the day and night. When the time finally comes where we can take a break from that, most of us go into a semi-vegetative state in front of the TV or simply fall asleep on the spot.

We seldom take time to meditate, analyse, and pray. D.A. Carson in his book *A Call to Spiritual Reformation* tells an amusing story:

“A lady and her husband were driving along and happened to notice a late-model Cadillac with its bonnet up, parked at the side of the road. Its driver appeared agitated and somewhat perplexed. The husband and wife pulled over to see if they could offer assistance. The stranded driver hastily and somewhat sheepishly explained that he had known that he was rather low on fuel when he had left home but he had been in a great hurry to get to an important business meeting so he had not taken time to fill the tank. The Cadillac needed nothing more than refuelling. The couple happened to have a spare litre of petrol with them, so they emptied into the thirsty Cadillac and told the driver there was petrol station a few kilometres down the road. Thanking them profusely, he sped off. 10 kilometres or so later, they saw the same car, bonnet up, stranded at the side of the road. The same driver, no less bemused than the first time, and even more agitated, was pathetically grateful when they pulled over again. You guessed it: he was in such a hurry for his business meeting that he had decided to skip the station and press on in the dim hope that the few litres that were put in would take him to his destination. It’s hard to believe anyone would be so stupid, until we remember that many of us go about Christian living in exactly the same way.”

In response to being too busy Jesus says to Martha in **Luke 10:41** *“But the Lord answered her, “Martha, Martha, you are anxious and troubled about many things, but one thing is necessary. Mary has chosen the good portion, which will not be taken away from her.”*

If you are too busy to pray, you are too busy. Cut something out.

2. I feel too spiritually dry to pray

Our days are filled with a thousand emotions and events. All of them can affect our desire to pray. We can easily feel as though we don’t have enough energy to really pray. There are at least three presuppositions that are wrong here:

1. Prayer is spiritually and emotionally taxing.

While almost all Christians know of a 'difficulty' in prayer, it is essentially a place where we can be recharged. It is a place of gentleness and rest and should be in complete opposition to the performance driven world we exist in.

2. Feelings are able to dictate our future.

Which athlete feels like training every single day? Not many. Do they? Yes. Why? They don't let their feelings get in the way of what they want.

3. Misunderstanding the relationship between feeling and faith in prayer.

R.T. Kendall says there are at least four kinds of prayer:

- Praying with great feeling and little faith
- Praying with great faith but little feeling
- Praying with minimal faith and minimal feeling
- Praying with great feeling and great faith

Too many Christians are overly concerned with feelings. They do count, but faith counts more. Don't be overly concerned with how much 'passion', loudness and energy you 'feel'. Just pray.

3. I feel no need to pray

This in effect is making the statement: *"I believe in prayer, for others more than myself. I seem to be getting along just fine, nothing seems to change much whether I do or don't. I'm doing quite well actually."*

The answer to this problem is a question. What is it that you value most? If you are looking at material factors, then you may be doing well. If you are looking at godliness, spiritual power, and friendship with God, you would not be so confident.

4. I am too bitter to pray

Matt 6 : 14 – 15

For if you forgive others their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you, but if you do not forgive others their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses.

What is Jesus teaching here? He is not talking about salvation, he is talking about relationship. In other words, Jesus is saying: "If you wish to come to the Father in prayer, in friendship, expecting Him to overlook your many faults but won't do the same with others,

I can't pretend that things are right between you and I. They aren't.
I don't like that behaviour."

This will hinder your desire to pray.

5. I am too ashamed to pray

This is a common problem. Sin will make us feel as though we cannot approach God confidently. We may possess a dirty conscience. We may feel as though our sin keeps us from coming to God, and so we hide from him until we feel it's been long enough and we can talk to Him again.

This is simply wrong. It shows a poor understanding of the Gospel and Jesus' work on the cross. If you have sinned, the very place you should go is to God in prayer. He is patient, slow to anger, doesn't expect perfection and that is the very reason He sent Jesus. He just wants you to come to Him. Tell Him what you have done and that you're sorry. The truth is that He is the only one who can help you out of sin. But if you persist in not coming to him, it will only get worse.

6. I am content where I am

Some Christians profess faith and love for Jesus but actually don't want to be seriously inconvenienced with it. Jesus' words, however, will resonate with anyone who wants to know true spiritual depth.

Matthew 16 : 24

If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me.

Jesus makes an offer "if." If anyone wants to know true spiritual life and success, then he will have to walk the path of Jesus. If you are content with where you are, you may not have tasted the real thing.

At the end of it all there is one thing left: work this out for yourself.

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