

Sharpen Your Faith

Week 3, Prayer—answers

Paul T. Quelet, September 24, 2006

I. What is prayer? (round table discussions)

- Prayer is cultivation of our relationship with God.
- "God does nothing but in answer to prayer."—John Wesley
- In real prayer, we begin to think God's thoughts after Him, desire the things He desires, love the things He loves, and will the things He wills.
- All the giants of the Bible viewed prayer as the main business of their lives.
- Many of us are discouraged instead by the giants of the faith who prayed. We should not be. God wants us to talk to Him.

"Prayer is a sincere, sensible, affectionate pouring out of the heart or soul to God, through Christ, in the strength and assistance of the Holy Spirit, for such things as God has promised, or according to the Word of God, for the good of the church, with submission in faith to the will of God."—John Bunyan¹

II. Two Misunderstood Words in Prayer

- Praying "in Jesus' name" is praying with His authority (Acts 3:3-7).
- Praying Amen means a few things.
- This Hebrew Amen is derived from the root [*aman*], which means to be firm or solid in the sense of permanency. Thus by implication, it means to be sure, true or faithful.
- So whenever we see this word Amen used in scripture, it is affirming truth, or illustrating something is said that is of absolute certainty. (Revelation 3:14)
- Contemporary ways to translate amen can be:
 - "It is finished."
 - "We agree."
 - "Let it be so."
 - "It is as we say."

¹ John Bunyan, *The Pilgrim's Progress*, Universal Book and Bible House 1935, p.66

III. Listening in Prayer

- Prayer is two-way communication with God.
- Often for us, it is us talking to God. We must take time to listen.
- What God is saying to us in prayer is far more important than what we are saying to Him.

"The value of consistent prayer is not that He will hear us, but that we will hear Him."—William McGill

"A man prayed, and at first he thought that prayer was talking. But he became more and more quiet until in the end he realized that prayer is listening."—Søren Kierkegaard²

IV. Learning to Pray (Luke 11:1)

- The disciples ask Jesus to teach them to pray. They had prayed all their lives, but they must have noticed Jesus' difference when He prayed.
- We must understand that prayer is a learning process.
- God wants us to grow in prayer and not give up. It allows us from dismissing prayer as false or unreal.

"*Lord, teach us to pray.*—Luke 11:1. It is not part of the life of a natural man to pray. We hear it said that a man will suffer in his life if he does not pray; I question it. What will suffer is the life of the Son of God in him, which is nourished not by food, but by prayer. When a man is born from above, the life of the Son of God is born in him, and he can either starve that life or nourish it. Prayer is the way the life of God is nourished."—Oswald Chambers³

V. Why does God want us to pray?

"Whenever we stop short in prayer and say—'Well, I don't know; perhaps it is not God's will,' there is still another stage to go. We are not so intimately acquainted with God as Jesus was, and as He wants us to be - 'That they may be one even as we are one.' (John 17:21) Think of the last thing you prayed about—were you devoted to your desire or to God? Determined to get some

² Søren Kierkegaard, *Christian Discourses*, Oxford University Press 1940, p. 340

³ Oswald Chambers, *My Utmost for His Highest*

gift of the Spirit or to get at God? 'Your Father knows what you need of before you ask Him.' (Matthew 6:8) The point of asking is that you may get to know God better."—Oswald Chambers⁴

VI. What happens to us when we pray?

"It is not so true that 'prayer changes things' as that prayer changes *me* and I change things. God has so constituted things that prayer on the basis of Redemption alters the way in which a man looks at things. Prayer is not a question of altering things externally, but of working wonders in a man's disposition."—Oswald Chambers⁵

"To pray is to change. Prayer is the central avenue God uses to transform us. If we are unwilling to change, we will abandon prayer as a noticeable characteristic of our lives."—Richard Foster⁶

VII. Preparing our heart for prayer

- We must confess our sins, which blocks our intimacy with God (1 John 1:9).
- Ask God with a clear conscience (1 John 3:20-22).
- Ask God out of a pure heart, or else God will not hear (Psalm 66:18).

VIII. Components of good prayer (Matthew 6:9-13)—round tables examine these verses

1) Focus on God's Person

-Hallowed (key word), meaning holy or sacred

-Here we can focus on adoration (God being holy, gracious, loving, etc.), and voice God's attributes

-We can look at scripture (Psalm 150-1...going backward; Psalm 19; Isaiah 40; 1 Corinthians 13; Job 38-42; all great places to focus on God's person)

-Also, you can look at God's creation, always a good reminder of how God is good!

2) Focus on God's Purposes

⁴ Oswald Chambers, *My Utmost for His Highest*

⁵ Oswald Chambers, *My Utmost for His Highest*

⁶ Richard Foster, *The Celebration of Discipline*, p. 33

- Your kingdom come (key phrase), asking God to reign in your life
- Meaning literally Jesus coming back and reigning on earth
- Here we can focus on aligning ourselves with what God cares about (ex. loving others, the lost, etc.)

3) Focus on God's Provision

- Give us each day our daily bread (key phrase)
- Here we can focus on coming to God with our needs

4) Focus on God's Pardon

- Forgive us our sins (key phrase), our confession (agreeing with God)
- When we confess, we acknowledge that
 1. It was a sin (and it offends God)
 2. That we need His forgiveness
 3. That Jesus has dealt with our sin on the cross
 4. There is nothing we can hide (exposed to his holiness)
 5. There needs to be repentance; not to do it again

5) Focus on God's Protection

- Lead us not into temptation (key phrase)
- Acknowledging that we need help...that we can do stupid things, fall into sin, and do things we'll regret, and be tempted by Satan

IX. How do we petition God?

- Read Luke 11:11-13.

What does God want to give to us when we pray?

- God wants to bless us! He wants to give us the best gifts. God wants to give us wisdom! God wants to hear from us!

What blocks Him from doing that? (James 4:2-3)

- Asking with the wrong motives. We don't receive if our hearts are full of selfish desires.

X. Praying in the Spirit

- Romans 8:26-27. The Holy Spirit intercedes for us when we don't know how to pray. Sometimes we don't know what to pray and the Holy Spirit intercedes for us.

What comfort is there in knowing that God "searches our hearts" (v27)?

- God is deeply concerned for our well being and knowing us better. He is more concerned about the sincerity of our prayer and not the elegance.
- The Holy Spirit tells us what we ought to pray for.
- Without the guidance of the Holy Spirit, our prayers are limited to our own reason and intuition.
- The Holy Spirit convicts us to pray fervently for the things that He shows us, which are God's perfect will.
- The fact that God lays a burden of prayer on our hearts is evidence that He purposes to grant us the answer.
- Praying in the Spirit gives us supernatural power beyond our physical desire to pray at the time.

"In prayer it is better to have a heart without words than words without a heart."—John Bunyan

XI. Right Motivations in Prayer

- Read Matthew 6:5-8

Who were the Pharisees actually praying to (v5)?

- *Actually praying to MEN. They wanted men to hear their prayers and not God.*

What does it mean to "close the door" when we pray (v6)?

- *It means to get alone with God—doesn't say leave the door open or lock the door (because a door closed is a powerful witness). Corporate prayer not condemned by Jesus.*

"There is a mighty lot of difference between saying prayers and praying."—
John G. Lake

XII. How are we to approach God in prayer?

- Read 1 John 5:14-15.

Why is it significant that we can now "approach God with confidence"?

- We can pray directly to God. The pattern is to pray to the Father with the help of the Spirit on the authority of Jesus Christ.
- God is not slow to respond in prayer!!

Will God give us anything we ask for in prayer?

- No. It must be in his will. We will always receive an answer from God—yes, no, or wait (wrong motives or timing).

- Ask in God's will, not just what He is willing to grant, but with the right mindset to accept His will.
- God wants us to approach him boldly and come as little children.
- Children are:
 1. Always trusting parents for daily needs.
 2. Never embarrassed to ask their parents for something.
 3. Imagining great things.
- Imagination is an important tool to open the door of faith in prayer.

XIII. What is the key to unlocking tangible prayer answers?

- Read Luke 11:5-10. Jesus tells a parable on effectual prayer.
- **Perseverance in prayer.**
- *BOLDNESS. Difference between knocking and wrapping at the door.*
How is this type of prayer different than the Pharisees way of praying repeatedly?
 - *Pharisees thought many words were righteous. God wants a perseverant heart. This demonstrates faith.*
- Read Luke 18:1-9.
- Jesus is using a superlative analogy. Even the unjust judge gives the woman justice. How much more will God who is not unjust give great things to His children he loves?
- Also see Mark 14:38.
- Matthew 7:7. Ask, seek, and knock are verbs that increase in intensity.
- Also, present imperatives are better said, "Ask and keep on asking, seek and keep on seeking, knock and keep on knocking."

XIV. Does God answer prayer?

- When we pray, we are writing the script of life along with God. We are "colaborers with God" (1 Cor. 3:9). We are literally working with God to determine the outcomes of events.
- God does change His mind in accordance with His unchanging love. (e.g. Exodus 32:14 and Jonah 3:10)
- We must expect God to answer our prayers in faith.
- Keep watchful for God to answer your prayer (1 Peter 4:7).
- Jesus never prayed, "If it be thy will." He, along with the apostles, always believed that they were praying in the will of God and prayed in faith.

"Jesus never mentioned unanswered prayer, He had the boundless certainty that prayer is always answered. Have we by the Spirit the unspeakable certainty that Jesus had about prayer, or do we think of the times when God does not seem to have answered prayer? 'Every one that asks receives.' (Matthew 7:8) We say—'But..., but...' God answers prayer in the best way, not sometimes, but every time, although the immediate manifestation of the answer in the domain in which we want it may not always follow. Do we expect God to answer prayer?"—Oswald Chambers⁷

XV. What are God's possible responses when we pray?

- Yes.
- No.
- Wait...

→ 1.) Keep on praying, and He may show you that you didn't really need what you were asking for. You will have enough faith to know it was not best for you.

→ 2.) Keep on praying, and you will build faith. Then you will be *ready* to receive what God really has wanting to give to you all along.

XVI. Praying without ceasing

- Pray continually. 1 Thessalonians 5:17.
- Acts 1:14. The church was always praying.
- Continual prayer is not the articulation of words but the posture of the heart.
- We all can have an inner dialogue with God throughout the day.

"One single grateful thought raised to heaven is the most perfect prayer."—
G.E. Lessing

"The time of business does not differ with me from the time of prayer; and in the noise and clatter of my kitchen, while several persons are at the same time calling for different things, I possess God in as great tranquility as if I were on my knees."—Brother Lawrence⁸

XVII. The Discipline of Prayer

⁷ Oswald Chambers, *My Utmost for His Highest*

⁸ Brother Lawrence, *The Practice of the Presence of God*, Revell 1958, p. 30-31.

"But when you pray, go into your room, close the door and pray to your Father, who is unseen.—Matthew 6:6. Jesus did not say—Dream about thy Father in secret, but pray to thy Father in secret. Prayer is an effort of will. After we have entered our secret place and have shut the door, the most difficult thing to do is to pray; we cannot get our minds into working order, and the first thing that conflicts is wandering thoughts. The great battle in private prayer is the overcoming of mental wool-gathering. We have to discipline our minds and concentrate on willful prayer."—Oswald Chambers⁹

XVIII. The Passion of Prayer: Practical suggestions

- We often make prayer too complicated. We do this because we know that we must learn how to pray.
- If you do not have a prayer journal, get one and keep one. This will allow you to record answers to prayer from God.
- Keep a prayer list. This allows us to see when prayers are answered.
- A prayer list also means "I'll pray for you" means something.
- Prayers must be specific. God always spoke and answered in specific ways.
- Find a quiet place to pray. It is a discipline, but as a result, God will have us to Himself. The focus will be on Him.
- Find a sacred place where you and God can regularly meet.
- Set aside the best time of your day for prayer. God wants our very best.
- Figure out what posture works best when you pray. Let it be an outward sign of an internal reality in your heart.
- Keep your prayers short and passionate. This will help you focus to be effective.

"Look to it that you do not try to do all of it, do not try to do too much, lest your spirit grow weary. Besides, a good prayer mustn't be too long. Do not draw it out. Prayer ought to be frequent and fervent."—Martin Luther

"Prevailing prayer is that which gets an answer. Saying prayers is not offering prevailing prayer. The effectiveness of prayer does not depend so much on the quantity as the quality."—Charles Finney¹⁰

⁹ Oswald Chambers, *My Utmost for His Highest*

¹⁰ Charles Finney, *Power from God*

XIX. Intercessory Prayer

- This is to make a worthy petition for another believer in Jesus Christ.
- This is to pray on behalf of another, also called the prayer of faith.
- Listening to God must precede intercession.
- In intercession, we must always be under the guidance of God.

"The inner sense of compassion is one of the clearest indications from the Lord that *this* is a prayer project for you."—Richard Foster¹¹

XX. A Word on Corporate Prayer

- James 5:16, he says to "confess your sins to each other and pray for each other so that you may be healed." James' emphasis on confessing our sins to each other is so that we might be healed, or get better.
- Christians can focus a great deal on their personal prayer lives, but in missing this corporate element they can forfeit the empowerment and healing that is to be found within a praying community of believers.
- Even Jesus prayed corporately (e.g. for Lazarus, John 11:41-42).

XXI. Jesus' Prayer Times: (see Matthew 14:22-23, Mark 1:35, Luke 5:15-16 & 6:12-13)

What time of day did Jesus usually withdraw? Why do you think this was?

- Morning. This time is quiet, undisturbed, and gives one a fresh start and direction for the day.

How important were the decisions He made after prayer (see Luke 6:12-13)?

- Extremely. He probably spent an entire night in prayer about choosing His disciples.

XXII. If God already knows what we need, then why do we need to ask Him (Matthew 6:8)? (open question)

- God wants us to know what is in our hearts!!
- He wants us to ask, be broken, be dependent, have gratitude, connect with Him.

XXIII. Conclude with *The Difference Poem*

¹¹ Richard Foster, *The Celebration of Discipline*, p. 40

I got up early one morning
and rushed right into the day
I had so much to accomplish
that I didn't have time to pray

Problems just tumbled about me
and heavier came each task
'Why doesn't God help me?' I wondered
He answered, 'You didn't ask'

I wanted to see joy and beauty
but the day toiled on gray and bleak
I wondered why God didn't show me
He said, 'But you didn't seek'

I tried to come into God's presence
I used all my keys at the lock
God gently and lovingly chided
'My servant, you didn't knock'

I woke up early this morning
and paused before entering the day
I had so much to accomplish
that I had to take time to pray

"I have so much to do that I spend several hours in prayer before I am able to do it."—John Wesley

Bottom Line: Prayer is the key to our intimacy with God and Him releasing His power. We colabor with God to orchestrate His will when we pray.

Memory Verse: "And pray in the Spirit on all occasions with all kinds of prayers and requests. With this in mind, be alert and always keep on praying for all the saints."—Ephesians 6:18 (NIV)

Suggested Resources:

My Utmost for His Highest, Oswald Chambers

The Celebration of Discipline, Richard Foster

Disciplines of a Godly Man, R. Kent Hughes

Disciplines of a Godly Woman, Barbara Hughes
Too Busy Not to Pray, Bill Hybels