

Prayer

Bible Reading – Ephesians chapter 1 verses 16 to 23 AMP

¹⁶ I do not cease to give thanks for you, remembering you in my prayers; ¹⁷ [I always pray] that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may grant you a spirit of wisdom and of revelation [that gives you a deep and personal and intimate insight] into the true knowledge of Him [for we know the Father through the Son]. ¹⁸ And [I pray] that the eyes of your heart [the very center and core of your being] may be enlightened [flooded with light by the Holy Spirit], so that you will know and cherish the hope [the divine guarantee, the confident expectation] to which He has called you, the riches of His glorious inheritance in the saints (God's people), ¹⁹ and [so that you will begin to know] what the immeasurable and unlimited and surpassing greatness of His [active, spiritual] power is in us who believe.

These are in accordance with the working of His mighty strength ²⁰ which He produced in Christ when He raised Him from the dead and seated Him at His own right hand in the heavenly places, ²¹ far above all rule and authority and power and dominion [whether angelic or human], and [far above] every name that is named [above every title that can be conferred], not only in this age and world but also in the one to come. ²² And He put all things [in every realm] in subjection under Christ's feet, and appointed Him as [supreme and authoritative] head over all things in the church, ²³ which is His body, the fullness of Him who fills and completes all things in all [believers].

SERMON

Today I want to talk about prayer.

And I thought to myself “What is prayer?”

And I think the best definition I have heard is ‘Talking to God’

‘Talking to God....’ Some people find that phrase unimaginable. How is it possible to talk to the Awesome Creator of the Universe – all that is, seen and

unseen? He is so Almighty, pure, holy and powerful. How could it be possible to even think about just *chatting* with Him?

Surely we need to request an audience with God don't we? I mean you can't just knock on the door of Buckingham Palace and request a chat with the Queen, can you? Imagine ringing the doorbell at number Ten Downing Street to talk with the Prime Minister? Security guards would soon tell you where to go, assuming they didn't cart you off to the Police Station.

But God isn't like that. More than anything else, He craves to hear our voices, talking with Him, just like we would talk to any fellow human being.

Yes, God deserves respect and it is appropriate that we have a holy and reverential fear of Him, but He wants us to know that we can sit down and chat to Him whenever and wherever we want - about anything at all.

You want to sound off about something unfair? Sound off to God.

Are you angry about something – shout at Him, if that's what you feel you need to do. I recall a lovely vicar I knew when I was much younger tell me how he ranted at God when his Father died.

God wants us to be real, He doesn't want pretence. He knows what we're thinking and feeling anyway!

Let me give you an example.

I wasn't sure if God wanted me to talk to you about prayer today.

You see, I want to be *God's messenger*. I could just pick a subject and present it to you, but what's more important to me, is that I believe what I am telling you is directly from God, His message, not mine.

I mean I don't know about you but at a service like this, I want to hear from God, I want to know He is talking to me. I don't just want to hear the personal thoughts of the preacher, however impressive or convincing those thoughts might be. After all, preachers are no more perfect than anybody else, so our thoughts may be biased, untrue, or worse still apostate. That's why I regularly suggest you go away and check what I have said – that it is in line with what the Bible teaches.

Anyway, the night before I prepared today's talk, I chatted to God. I simply said 'Father, I am not sure if you want me to talk about Prayer at the next

service so please will you confirm it for me, if that's your will, either as I start to prepare tomorrow morning or just before I do so.

The following morning, I picked up this book which I read every morning during my quiet time and read this:

(Read 'PRAYERS FROM THE HEART' page 19, first para)

'I then knew God wanted me to talk to you about Prayer!' He spoke to me through that book. Now in case you think it was a simple coincidence, let me tell you when I became a believer, 'coincidences' happened so often that I soon stopped thinking of them as coincidences. Ever since, I now believe they are 'God-incidences'!

Going back to that quiet time, first thing in the morning, on the day of my preparation, I also read Oswald Chambers' Daily Devotional book '*My Utmost for His Highest*', and on this same morning there was also a reference to prayer in my reading and I will share some of what it said shortly.

So, my point is God **will** answer you if you chat to Him! If you pray to Him. Indeed, the Bible tells us this.

Ok, let's spend a little while seeing what the Bible tells us about prayer:

Well the first thing we see in the New Testament is that the disciples asked Jesus how they should pray, and He told them.

The prayer He shared with them has become known as '*The Lord's Prayer*' and it is an excellent framework.

I did talk to you about that prayer some time ago, but today I want to share with you what some other Scriptures tell us about prayer.

When you begin to look into the New Testament you find there is so much about prayer there simply wouldn't be time for me to do the subject justice today, so I have picked out some key points from some of the Scriptures.

In Matthew 6, Jesus said that (except for when in meetings like today) we are to pray in secret. This was to ensure we don't bring attention to ourselves for the wrong reasons. So, make a point of praying when you are alone.

Then in chapter 7, He says if you are asking God for something, if you don't immediately receive, then keep on asking. Jesus suggests that when God

delays, He is testing your seriousness of asking, as well as your faith in Him to provide.

In Matthew 21 and Mark 11 Jesus says “... **whatever things you ask for in prayer [in accordance with God’s will], believe [with confident trust] that you have received them, and they will be given to you.**” (Mark 11 v 24 AMP).

Notice what we ask for must be *within the will of God*. Indeed, Jesus taught His disciples to pray to God ***‘Thy will be done, Thy Kingdom come’***.....

This is important because we may pray earnestly, for example, for a loved one or dear friend to be healed but God may choose not to heal that person. God may have a good reason for withholding the miracle of healing which we may never understand, in this life.

But God is *love* and so if we believe that truth, it helps to make it easier to cope with the disappointment of God not answering our prayer in the way we had hoped for or expected.

This is why you will hear so many prayer warriors pray for God’s will to be done rather than pray that God will provide the wishes of the individual for whom they are praying, or a specific prayer that may, from God’s perspective be out of line with His perfect will.

How often should we pray?

Well in Luke 6 verse 12 we see that Jesus spent the *whole night* in prayer!

Luke, also the writer of the Book of Acts, tell us in chapters 1 and 2 and elsewhere in Acts that the disciples were ***‘continually devoting themselves to prayer’***.

Oswald Chambers puts it this way: ***“If we think of prayer as the breath in our lungs and the blood from our hearts, we think rightly. The blood flows ceaselessly, and breathing continues ceaselessly; we are not conscious of it but it is always going on. Prayer is not an exercise, it is the life.”***

(Excerpt from *‘My Utmost For His Highest’*, entry for May 26th).

So if we are serious about our faith, we are called to pray constantly.

What should we pray for?

In the New Testament book of Romans, we see that Paul was praying earnestly that his Jewish colleagues would come to know Christ.

Therefore, it is good for us to pray for unbelievers, that God might give them a revelation of the truth that Jesus Christ is their only Saviour.

Paul tells us in 1 Corinthians chapter 1 that prayer will deliver people - in that specific Scripture, – from death; but we also learn, more generally in other Scriptures, that prayer will deliver us from all manner of things – afflictions, disease, and demon possession to name but three.

We see prayer mentioned in the book of Ephesians and today's reading was from that book. It is believed that Paul wrote this letter whilst locked up in jail around 60 to 62 AD.

So what do we see him praying about in this Scripture?

Was he praying ***“God, get me out of this dungeon quick, I’ve got work to do for you remember”?***

NO!

The thought of being released from prison didn't even enter Paul's mind. Or if it did, he doesn't verbalise it. Paul is not into self-pity.

No, instead he is focussed on being positive and praying for others!

In verse 16 Paul says – ***“I do not cease to give thanks for you, remembering you in my prayers.”***

There we have it again, Paul praying *ceaselessly*. What is he praying for? He is thanking God for the believers in Ephesus.

When we pray for our loved ones, what do we ask God for?

“God please do this for so and so, and please do this for some-one else”.

Perhaps we should spend more time *thanking* God for those we love, for our friends, and as Paul did, thank God for fellow believers too.

Next, he says to those in the Church ***“May God grant you a spirit of wisdom and of revelation [that gives you a deep and personal and intimate insight] into the true knowledge of Him.”***

In other words, we might say: “God I pray that you will help so and so to understand you better. To know you more deeply. Give them wisdom Lord, reveal things to them that they do not know or understand. Give them insight....”

I have to confess this is not the type of prayer I pray often for friends, colleagues or loved ones. But perhaps today we can learn from God's Holy Word, how to better pray for others...

In verse 18 he says, ***"[I pray] that the eyes of your heart [the very centre and core of your being] may be enlightened [flooded with light by the Holy Spirit], so that you will know and cherish the hope [the divine guarantee, the confident expectation] to which He has called you, the riches of His glorious inheritance in the saints (God's people)"***

What's he talking about here?

He is asking God to reveal to us all the fact that if we believe and trust in Jesus Christ as our Saviour, and have confessed and repented of our sins, we have more than a hope, we have the *certainty* of salvation. We shall embrace eternal life in Heaven when we die, where we shall spend eternity with the Father and the Son and all others who share this hope. He is asking God to reveal this to us.

What a prayer to pray for others. In the New Testament, the word ***"hope"*** expresses a *cherished desire* along with the *confident assurance* of obtaining that which is longed for. (Amplified Bible footnote).

In the next verse Paul says he is praying that ***"[you will begin to know] what the immeasurable and unlimited and surpassing greatness of God's [active, spiritual] power is in us who believe"***.

You and I, if we are believers (which makes us sons and daughters of God, according to Scripture), have in us ***'immeasurable and unlimited and surpassing power'***.

Did you know that?

Did you wake up this morning feeling full of power, or like me, were you a bit lifeless?

Well, take comfort, we are not alone. If Paul had to pray this prayer for the early Christians then clearly, they didn't realise it either. But it is God's truth!

The surpassing power that Paul is talking about is a spiritual power, not necessarily a physical one. It is a fact that the devil, Satan, is very frightened of every believer, because he knows we have this power within us. The problem for us is we too easily and readily listen to Satan's lies telling us we are

powerless, useless, and will amount to nothing for God. That is a lie. This Scripture says you and I have great power within us!

Finally, in the context of prayer, Paul declares his unflinching loyalty to, and trust in, the Lord of the Universe - Jesus Christ – of whom he says ***“God raised Him by His mighty power from the dead and He is now seated at God’s right hand in the heavenly places, far above all rule and authority and power and dominion, and [far above] every name that is named [above every title that can be conferred], not only in this age and world, but also in the one to come.”***

Wow!

Remember, Paul was in a dungeon when he wrote that passage. I wonder, would you or I be able to exclaim how awesome God is and how great Jesus Christ is, if we were stuck in a cold, wet, dark, miserable stinking, prison cell (apparently sewers passed through the cells in those days). Clearly Paul was a special and very unique believer.

If we go back to the opening verse of today’s Scripture, the first prayer Paul prayed was one of thanksgiving.

And do you know that God loves to hear our words of thanks.

I don’t know about you, but I don’t like being taken for granted, do you?

Whilst the Bible says we are not to seek thanks, we are exhorted to give it. My dad called them ‘two little words’ - “Thank you.” They don’t go amiss do they?

I love thanking God for His blessings.

What sort of things can we thank Him for, especially when we are feeling poorly or down in the dumps?

Well here are some ideas from the writer of the prayer I read on 21st May when preparing for today.

‘Thank you God that you have surrounded me with love.

Thank you for both the good and the bad times I have experienced. The bad times have certainly taught me things I probably would not have learned otherwise. The good times make trusting you so much easier.

Thank you for the gifts and talents you have blessed me with. Help me acknowledge and use them to honour You.

Thank you for sending Your only Son to die in my place, to take my blame. This gift is so underserved; I am blown away by Your awesome grace.'

The writer ends like this:

'It feels so good to stop and spend time thanking You for all Your blessings. It feels like putting a long-overdue 'Thank you' note in the post-box. Lord, please receive my humble attempt at thanksgiving – my 'Thank-you' note prayer.'

Notice the simple informal language this prayer-warrior uses when speaking to God. God isn't impressed with lots of 'Thees and Thous'. He wants to hear the *REAL* you talking with Him. And He wants to know what's in your heart.

Before I close, are there any things we should **not** pray about?

I imagine many folks will think that's a strange question to ask. But actually, there are some prayers that will not get answered, no matter how often we ask.

Oswald Chambers spends some time, in effect telling mature Christians to grow up! What does he mean?

Well there are certain things that affect our behaviour that only **we** can change. God *could* change them, but He chooses not to.

This is what Chambers says:

'There are certain things in life we need not pray about – moods for instance. We will never get rid of moodiness by praying, but we will by kicking it out of our lives.... We have to pick ourselves up by the scruff of the neck and shake ourselves; then we will find we can do what we believed we were unable to do.' (Extract from his entry for May 20th (My Utmost For His Highest – An Updated Edition In Today's Language).

Self-pity is something else we need to kick into touch, rather than pray about. Self-pity is from the devil and we need to learn to stop listening to his lying voice, and instead tune in to the liberating tender voice of the Holy Spirit.

After all, Jesus was misunderstood, lied about, persecuted by His fellow Jews and the Jewish religious leaders, he was beaten, humiliated and finally crucified - but He never felt sorry for Himself - He refused to retreat into an

attitude of self-pity. Rather, He constantly gave honour and glory and thanks to His Father.

Now, if you like preachers who tell it as it is, you will like Oswald Chambers because he doesn't pull any punches. In John chapter 17, Jesus prayed to His Father and asked Him to make all believers 'one with God'. Chambers assures us that God is working hard to that end. He says this:

'God is not concerned about our plans; He doesn't ask "Do you want to go through this loss of a loved one, this difficulty, or this defeat?" No, He allows these things for His own purpose. The things we are going through are either making us sweeter, better and nobler men and women, or they are making us more critical and fault-finding, and more insistent on our own way. The things that happen either make us evil, or they make us more saintly, depending entirely on our relationship with God and its level of intimacy. If we will pray, regarding our own lives, "Your will be done", then we will be encouraged and comforted by John chapter 17, knowing that our Father is working according to His own wisdom, accomplishing what is best. When we understand God's purpose, we will not become small-minded and cynical.'

I'm going to close this time (talking about prayer) by reading to you a prayer that a 15 year-old American schoolboy wrote quite recently. He wrote it as a Christian, out of his frustration that The Lord's Prayer is no longer allowed in most Public schools in America. Why? Because the word 'God' is mentioned. Apparently, his school master gave him an A+ for this prayer. This is what he wrote...

'Now I sit me down in school where praying is against the rule

For this great nation under God finds mention of Him very odd.

If scripture now the class recites, it violates the Bill of Rights.

And anytime my head I bow becomes a Federal matter now.

Our hair can be purple, orange or green, that's no offense; it's a freedom scene.

The law is specific, the law is precise. Prayers spoken aloud are a serious vice.

For praying in a public hall might offend someone with no faith at all..

In silence alone we must meditate, God's name is prohibited by the United States.

We're allowed to cuss and dress like freaks, and pierce our noses, tongues and cheeks...

Guns are allowed, but Not the Bible. To quote the Good Book makes me liable.

We can elect a pregnant Senior Queen, and the 'unwed daddy,' our Senior King.

It's 'inappropriate' to teach right from wrong, we're taught that such 'judgments' do not belong..

We can get our condoms and birth controls, study witchcraft, vampires and totem poles...

But the Ten Commandments are not allowed, no word of God must reach this crowd.

It's scary here I must confess, when chaos reigns the school's a mess.

So, Lord, this silent plea I make: should I be shot; My soul please take!'

Sadly, the world is fast becoming a dark place to live. If ever the world needed our prayers, today is that time. And God longs to hear you, sharing your concerns with Him about the world and those you love. May He bless you as you do so.

Amen