

Prayer - The Mortar of Christian Relationships (Part 2 of 3)

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Last time I shared with you regarding prayer we looked at the nine different words found in scripture that describe prayer and the different ways we approach God in prayer. His word tells us to do all things with understanding; i.e. understand Him and His ways and live and walk according to His ways and then, then, then you will have good success.

The first word we discussed was the word for prayer which means deprecating or “tearing down” of the words of others that are sent against us.

We know from James 3 that the tongue or spoken words have great impact. Words create situations in our minds and spirits. They put forth a vision in our understanding and if we accept that picture or “spoken vision” into our spirits, the carnal mind and body begin to act upon it. It is believed by the one who sends it and the one who receives these spoken words and it “becomes alive.” It becomes a stronghold for good or evil, depending upon what was said. Proverbs 18:21 tells us that the power of life and death are in the tongue.

Isaiah 54:17 “no weapon formed against you shall prosper and every tongue that rises against you in judgement you will condemn. This is the heritage of the servants of the lord, and their vindication is from me,” declares the lord.

God himself is speaking in this passage and he is declaring that the tongue is a weapon for good or for evil and we have to recognize that words sent against us are a weapon designed to tear us down, to cause us to believe the lies of the enemy’s fiery darts. These kinds of words are “weapons” sent against us and he goes on to say that we must “condemn” them.

This word condemn means that in every courtroom or place where judgments come forth, you will have justice if you refute the lie with the word of God.

Now, the question to ask is “what courtroom are we speaking of?”

The courtroom that is before the throne of the Lord God himself.

This word prayer, meaning deprecating, or a tearing down of what has been said against you, gives us the picture of a courtroom trial where the prosecuting attorney, or the accuser of the brethren is sending out words that will shape the decision of the judge one way or the other.

If we believe the words and make no defense against them, we abdicate our position of authority in the situation. However according to Is 54:17, we are being told to “condemn” these words being spoken against us, which is where this deprecating prayer comes into play. We begin to do the same thing that David did when he cried out to the “just and living God” to deliver him from his enemies.

David makes a plea to God in Psalm 64, just one of many places in scripture, for protection from his enemies. He is speaking just like a lawyer standing in front of a jury, repeating the charges lodged against him and then refutes them and states what God will do on his behalf. He lines his speech and words up with what the word of God says about the situation.

**the second word for prayer had the meaning of judging, or to decide by comparing with; i.e. our words of prayer go up before the lord, asking him to judge and answer according to the words that have come forth from our mouths. This is why the new covenant teaches us that we will be judged forever idle, or spiritually unproductive word that comes forth from our mouths. Our words bring life or death. We are judged by God by the intent of our hearts. We must keep a clean heart before the lord.

**the third meaning for prayer was to produce with the mouth, to bring forth life, to lift oneself up with our own mouths. That is why we are told in the word to “stir ourselves up” by praying in tongues and to speak only what edifies and strengthens and encourages, not death and destruction.

**the fourth word for prayer was that of the prayers being spoken or uttered by whispering or even silently and the assurance was that God hears these prayers “of the heart” just as he hears the louder prayers of supplication and intercession.

**the fifth word had the meaning of great intimacy by stroking the face of another in order to entreat or ask or implore their favor. God wants us to come to him in this intimacy and understanding that we have the right to ask, implore and entreat on behalf of ourselves or others. There are times when God has changed his mind because of this kind of prayer; i.e. Moses defending the Israelites when they went into idol worship; Abraham defending the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah on behalf of Lot; King Hezekiah, in 2 Kings 20, having been given a word about his death through the prophet Isaiah, turns his face to the wall and cries out to God to spare him and he does so based upon his right standing with God.

He entreats God to spare his life and because he has been just and upright before God and because he has the right to ask God for this, God changes his mind and sends the prophet back to tell him he has 15 years more. When Hezekiah asks God for confirmation of this promise God tells him he can choose to have the sun move forward, speeding up time, or slowing it down, causing the sun to go backwards fifteen steps on the temple stairs. Hezekiah chooses for the sun to not only stand still, but to reverse itself and God honors his faith.

That’s what I call a major confirmation of what was heard in the prayer closet, no? However, the king had to have a tremendous faith and trust in his God in order to have that kind of response. Prayer is the mortar in this relationship. He was able to believe God because he had a good on-going relationship with God, just as those with a stable and strong marriage relationship can ask their partner for anything and receive an answer they can trust.

**the sixth word, found in the New Testament had the meaning of prayer addressed directly to God, no longer having to go through a priest. Direct communication with God. We get our daily marching orders directly from God, via the Holy Spirit, just as Jesus did. We don't do things based on someone else's experiences, but based on our own relationship with God.

**the seventh word for prayer meant to implore God's aid in some particular matter; i.e. Specific intercession for someone or something. Our latest example of this was the confirmation of John Ashcroft as attorney general of the United States and just prior to that the national election and the on-going battle that ensued over votes in Florida.

**number 8 was falling in with someone or meeting with them for an interview, a coming together with a purpose and the example we spoke of was the prayer over food. A time that God has ordained for us to meet with him for a specific purpose; to bless the food we eat so that it is sanctified, cleansed and set apart for the use of the priests of the lord.

**number 9 was the "prayer of faith." This prayer means having faith in the almighty God, not in faith itself. A simple, childlike faith that he is who he says he is and he will do what he said he will do. In faith in him and his word we pray over the sick, trusting him to deliver us from the weapon that was formed against us. If you remember, nothing in that scripture indicates a miraculous, instantaneous healing. It is possible for God to do so, but it is not the norm in this kind of prayer.

Those of you who know what happened to Bill Greer last December 21st have seen this kind of prayer and response of the lord happen over a period of time. They had dinner at our home a week ago yesterday. On-going, fervent prayer and God, using his people to pray his will into the situation literally kept him from death and brought him back into life. His healing is still manifesting daily, but it's happening!

How do we come to this place, where we can ask from God and receive from God our needs and the desires of our hearts? What is ok to ask for and what is it not ok to ask for and how do I know the difference? What is from my flesh and what is from the spirit of God? Does he answer my prayers for the things of this world? Is it wrong to ask for these things? How do I know that I have the right to ask him at all?

The answers to all of these questions is found in the word of the Lord to us, so let's not look at what someone else says about prayer and asking, let's look directly at the source. "When all else fails, read the instructions."

If we, as finite beings are going to communicate with an infinite God, there need to be parameters whereby we know that "real prayer" is taking place. We need to know when prayer is not some vain and silly exercise in delusion. Those parameters are found in scripture.

In order to be led in prayer by God, we must be of God and believe that he exists and that his word is truth. If my perception of God is distorted, then my prayers are going to be distorted. If I want to know what truth is then we must read his word. We must go back to the God revealed in the bible.

If we receive no hope, no comfort, no love and no understanding during our prayer times, that isn't the God of the Bible and we are not in communication with him.

If our prayer lives causes us to become angry, critical, and judgmental of others who don't always see things the way we do, we need to go back to the truth of God revealed in the Bible.

Just as the truths of mathematics will allow us to check out the accuracy of the profit and loss statement of our businesses or checkbooks, the truths of the bible will allow you to check out the truths of your prayer life.

We must come to him in prayer from a position of helplessness. This is the first and the surest indication of a praying heart. Your helplessness is your best prayer. It calls from your heart to the heart of God with greater effect than all your spoken pleas. He hears even the silent prayers uttered from the very moment that you are seized with helplessness and he becomes actively engaged at once in hearing and answering the prayer of the helpless.

When talking about prayer, what does it mean to be helpless?

To be helpless means that in prayer we can make no demands.

We cannot come to God telling him what we expect from the encounter. To bring one's own agenda before God and to define his existence, his character and the effectiveness of prayer by whether or not he accepts and affirms our agendas is not only silly, it is sinful.

Are we saying that God does not hear our cries of pain and request for deliverance and help? Absolutely not! What is being said is this; God is God and the most basic understanding of our requests is that they are just that-----requests! We must be very careful about making our belief in the effectiveness of prayer dependent upon whether or not God does what we ask him to do.

When we pray this way, setting an agenda for God in our prayer life and saying God doesn't care and doesn't love me if he doesn't answer the way I wanted him to is just a tad prideful, no?

However, many people do this and then become angry with God or even deny his existence because they didn't receive what they demanded from God, in order to prove his existence to themselves.

Then they say I'm never going to believe in you again. What kind of a God are you that would not answer this perfectly good prayer! I'm leaving and not coming back!

That's not only arrogance, it's like the fly that was sitting on the cow's tail and announced to the cow it was leaving. The cow replied, "oh really? I didn't even know you were there!"

Silly? Of course it's silly! But take the silly illustration and apply it to some of the very serious work of prayer. God is God and demands upon him are inappropriate. One simply comes to him understanding that his agenda is the only relevant agenda. We must start properly and the proper place to start is in the realization that God is God and we aren't.

F. W. Faber said this:

We must wait for God, long, meekly, in the wind and the wet, in the midst of the thunder and the lightening, in the cold and the dark. Wait and he will come. He never comes to those who do not wait. When he comes, go with him, but go slowly, fall a little behind; when he quickens his pace, be sure of it before you quicken yours. But when he slackens, slacken at once and do not be slow only, but silent, very silent, for he is God.

To be helpless before God is to know that you can't do much for yourself and to trust in the mercy and goodness of the one before whom one goes for help.

Was Jesus helpless before God when it came to prayer? He wouldn't do anything unless he had direction from the lord.

How many of you would say that Jesus is the perfect example to follow in this? Then let's look at Matthew 6:5-12 and see what his answer was when his disciples questioned him about prayer. Read

Verses 5-6 praying, like giving, is to be done unto the lord, not unto man. Many professing Christians, if they were honest, would have to admit that they pray to be heard of men. In this passage in Matthew Jesus is not condemning public prayer, he is condemning the misuse of it.

Because of the statement enter into thy closet some have suggested that all public prayer is wrong. But this would be contrary to the rest of New Testament statements about prayer. I.e. (acts 12:12)

The principle given here is that the a believer should not make a show of his or her prayers, nor of the answers they receive to prayer in such a way that calls unnecessary attention to themselves.

Again, it is the principle that God who sees us secretly rewards us openly. This is touching on the intimate father-child relationship between God and man that is being spoken of and emphasized. It is the experience of private devotional prayer that ultimately prepares one to pray effectively in public. Most people, who say they cannot pray in public, do not pray effectively in private either.

Verse 7 Jesus warned that we are not use vain repetitions or constant repetition of many words and denotes babbling or speaking without thinking. This kind of praying was characteristic of the heathen.

A good example of this is found in the ecstatic babblings of the false prophets of the Old Testament and in the prophets of Baal who confronted Elijah on Mount. Carmel (I kings 18:26-29).

The reason Jesus condemns the use of empty repetition is because it was being done in an attempt to overcome the will of God by wearing him out. He is stressing that it is not the length of prayer, but the strength of the prayer that prevails with God; i.e. the effective, fervent prayer of a righteous man prevaieth much." It doesn't say the long-winded prayer or the loud prayer or the silent prayer, it says the effective and fervent prayer.

Jesus himself on the eve of his crucifixion prayed all night, but most other occasions prayed very briefly. He is not condemning lengthy prayer, although there is nothing particularly spiritual about it. He is merely emphasizing that prayer must be a sincere

expression of the heart, not just a lot of words. God is not impressed with a lot of words, but with the genuine outcry of the heart.

Verse 8 be ye not therefore like unto them; like unto who? The heathen, who constantly ask for things for themselves from their false God. Don't be like them, constantly talking at me about your needs,

Be not ye therefore like unto them; for your father knoweth what things ye have need of, before you ask him.

Jesus is speaking now of the intimate relationship within a family who has a wonderful father. A father who is always mindful of the needs of each family member, even before they come to make a request. He pays attention to them even when they do not know that he is watching over them. Jesus is speaking to them of their heavenly father who knows what they need even before they do.

This is the bottom line: prayer is initiated by God and it's purpose is to bring us into agreement with his will, not to get all the goodies we want from him.

Many have questioned the meaning of this statement in verse 8. Your Father knoweth what things you have need of before you ask him. They have said "then why should we pray? Prayer is not man's attempt to change the will of God. It is God changing our understanding of his ways. God's method of changing our will is to bring it into conformity with his will through praying his will.

More than changing things and situations, prayer changes people. Prayer is not conquering God's reluctance to answer, as the heathen go about it, but it is laying hold of his willingness to help us! He does not cast his pearls before swine!

Prayer, in the life of a true believer, is an act of total confidence and assurance in the plan and purpose of God. It is not an expression of panic and desperation.

When Jesus gave this example of prayer for his disciples to follow he was giving an example of a suitable way to pray and suitable words to say.

It is neither too long nor irreverent. It has a depth of faith and a peak of power in it. This prayer, often called "the lord's prayer," is, in all reality, the disciples' prayer, for Jesus gave it to his disciples as a sample of the true principle of spiritual prayer. We are to pray in the spirit, not the flesh. Praying in the spirit means to pray according to the will of the father, not always in tongues. Tongues is prayer for when you do not know what to pray for or the situation is too intense and deep for human words.

Jesus did not mean for us to recite this prayer in a meaningless fashion, which he stated back in verse 7. It isn't wrong to repeat it as he gave it, but it must be from the heart, with the understanding that you are speaking to your "abba, daddy" and he hears you if you are in right standing with him.

Remember, God judges us by the intent of the heart, so we are to pray from the heart, out of the spirit of God, not just in the mind in useless repetition as the heathen do.

The late A.W. Tozer one of the most insightful Christian of the 20th century, wrote: we pursue God because, and only because, he has first put an urge within us that spurs us to the pursuit. "not man can come to me," said our lord, "except the Father which hath sent me to draw Him," and it is by His first drawing of us that God takes from us every

bit of the possibility of our taking the credit for the act of coming to Him. The impulse to pursue God comes from God, but the outworking of that impulse is our following hard after him. All the time we are pursuing Him we are already in His hand: "thy right hand upholdeth me."

Blaise Pascal prayed, "I would not have searched for thee, had thou not already found me." In other words, prayer is the natural response of the creature to the creator who calls. It's like that old fashioned saying: "I chased her until she finally caught me." It applies to our coming to God in prayer. We really did chase him until He finally caught us.

The second presupposition in this issue of prayer is relationship. Before God calls us to a conversation, He calls us to a relationship with Him. Jesus said this very clearly, "but you do not believe, because you are not of my sheep, as I said to you, my sheep hear my voice and I know them, and they follow me. (John 10: 26-27) in other words, a conversation follows a relationship. If we don't have relationship we find it hard to carry on a conversation. Just as prayer is initiated by God, relationship is initiated by God also.

When a child approaches a father the reaction to them will be very different depending upon whether or not the child belongs to that father. The reaction of the father will be quite different to his own children than to the children of another man.

There is a wonderful true story about a young man during the civil war who wanted to return to the family farm to help his mother with the harvest. He had lost two brothers and his father in the war and there was no one left to help his mother. He went to his commanding officer and asked permission to return home during harvest time.

The captain said that he did not have the authority to grant that kind of a request saying, "it must come from a higher authority." However, he did give the young man time off to seek out those who could grant his request.

The young man, with the presumption of youth, decided to go to the highest authority, the President of the United States, Abraham Lincoln. He went to Washington and boldly made his way to the steps of the White House. He was stopped by an army officer who was serving as a guard there. The guard asked him his reason for coming and the young man told him his story.

The guard responded by saying, "son, don't you know there is a war on? This is not a time to leave. Lots of us have lost those we love and face many hardships. You are a soldier. Go back to your unit and serve your mother and country by fighting for freedom.

The young man was devastated. He turned and walked away. He was walking through the streets of Washington when a little boy saw him and noticed the depression on his face and asked if he could help. The young man needed to tell someone, so he told the little boy the story.

"Sir", said the little boy, "I think I can help."

With that the little boy took the soldier's hand and proceeded back to the white house, past the guard, up the steps and directly into the Oval Office of the President. They walked into the office without knocking and Lincoln, working at his desk, looked up and said, "yes, Tad, what can I do for you."

The point, of course, is that a son or daughter can make more headway with a father than can a stranger. And this is true in prayer also.

Therefore, if we desire to be heard of the Father in heaven, we must first of all be his sons and daughter in rightstanding with him. Just as prayer is initiated by God, relationship is also. And the only qualification for being in right relationship with God is to be unqualified.

When Jesus led them in this prayer in Matthew 6 his first words to them in verse 9 were:

Our father. This phrase is completely uncommon to the prayers of the Old Testament. Jesus goes on to say "Hallowed (gr hagiozo) means to be held in reverence and awe of holiness. God's name was so sacred to the Old Testament Jew that it was never pronounced by human lips. Thus his name is the expression of his essence.

The biblical usage of the concept of a name is a description of the character of the person to whom the name is applied. Since the prayer is directed to our spiritual Father, only the child of God, who has been born again, can rightly pray this prayer. Jesus is speaking prophetically to his disciples, telling them of the position they will hold before God in prayer, that of beloved children of his heavenly father.

Verse 10 the phrase "thy kingdom come" refers to the future kingdom of God upon the earth. We see from this that Jesus is telling us to pray for the kingdom of God to be fully established upon the earth. The kingdom represents the full and effective reign of God through the highly priestly work of mediation between men and God represented by our high priest, Jesus the Messiah of God.

The disciples were not to think of their own convenience as their foremost expression in prayer, but the full and quick realization of the effective rule of God on earth in the hearts of men. That rule of God comes only through the regenerating process of the new birth in the lives of individuals. It will reach its pinnacle when the last enemy (sin and death,

I Cor. 15:24-28) has been destroyed at the Lord's return.

The recognition of thy will be done emphasizes the idea that prayer is to bring about the conformity of the will of the believer to the will of God. Prayer, therefore, is an act of spiritual expression which brings us into conformity to the very nature and purpose of God. As we yield our souls, our bodies our minds and our wills unto the will of the Father day by day we begin to hear the very heartbeat of God for this earth. We begin to understand his ways and his patterns which bring great encouragement to us.

Join now with the great band of saints around the world and even with those in heaven who are exalting the heavenly father in all they do and say by walking in obedience in prayer.

Blessings & Love,
Rev. Gerie Martin