

The Power of Prayer Feb 6, 2011

A number of years ago there was a small town in Oklahoma that had two churches and one notorious saloon. Members of both churches complained that this saloon was giving their town a bad name. And to make matters worse the saloon keeper was an out spoken atheist.

For years the church people had unsuccessfully tried to shut down the saloon. One day the two churches decided that they would hold a joint prayer meeting the following Saturday night to ask God to intervene in this situation and settle the matter.

Saturday night came and there was a terrible thunderstorm raging outside while the church people were praying. What a surprise they were in for when they left the meeting. They found out that the saloon had been struck by lightning and had burned to the ground. The saloon keeper was furious when he found out the insurance company was not going to pay for the damages because it was an act of God that was excluded in their policy. His only recourse was to sue the churches. In court he claimed that the two churches had conspired with God to destroy his business. The two churches claimed they had nothing to do with it.

The Judge opened the trial with these words, "This is a most perplexing situation, the plaintiff, who claims he is an atheist is professing his belief in God and the power of Prayer and the defendants who proclaim belief in God and the power of prayer are denying that same power.

There is a lot of confusion surrounding prayer. Have you ever thought about your prayer life? Have you ever examined it and wished that you

could be better at communicating with God? Do you sometimes feel that your prayers hit the ceiling and bounce back?

The disciples had been with Jesus for some time when they began to understand the connection between Jesus public life and his prayer time. They had observed Jesus praying many times and realized that their prayers did not have the power that Jesus prayers had. And so they asked him to teach them to pray. Jesus provided them with a simple structure to use when praying. We know this as the Lord's Prayer. We recite this prayer each Sunday when we come together. This reminds us that we need to use this model in our prayers to be effective. As we understand the meaning of this prayer it will change our lives. Often we do not understand how prayer is answered or why it is not answered. Prayer does not always change our situation but prayer changes us. Through prayer we begin to recognize the presence of God around us.

We must learn to pray to God in spirit and in truth. Because God is spirit we must worship him in spirit. Spirit is not bound by time or space so we should not confine our prayers to place or form. If we only pray in church we are spending the greater part of time in an environment that is at cross purposes with what God desires for us. Jesus is grace and truth and through his spirit by faith he reveals himself to us.

The first thing that Jesus teaches his disciples is that we develop individual prayer life by having a place away from distractions where we can meet him. How often in the scriptures did Jesus withdraw to a secret place to communion with the father? In our secret place we can meet God with child like simplicity knowing that we will not be ridiculed

or discouraged by anything we say. The blessings we will receive from God is not dependent on how fervently or strong our feelings are when we pray but on the love and power of Jesus Christ to whom we entrust our needs. Since God already knows our needs it should give us the liberty to bring all our needs to him with the assurance that they will be meant.

Now let us look specifically of the Lord's Prayer. "Our Father which art in heaven hallowed is thy name." Prayer begins in a relationship to God as father. There are two types of prayer, individual and intercessory or prayers for ourselves and prayers for the needs of others. His glory is for all the children of the world. His name is hallowed in our prayers and in how we live. The Father has a Kingdom and all of us are his heirs. We are here on this earth in the enemy's territory but one day we will be in the Kingdom of God where all his glory will be revealed. The salvation of the world depends on our prayers.

"Your will be done, as it is in heaven." In heaven the will of God is his glory. As we do his will here on this earth through obedience the Kingdom of heaven comes into our hearts and we are blessed.

"Give us this day our daily bread." When we have yielded to the Father in his name and through his Kingdom we have full liberty to ask God for whatever we need.

"And forgive us debts as we also have forgiven our debtors. Just as bread is necessary for the body forgiveness is necessary for the soul. We are God's Children but we are often disobedient, but if we sincerely confess our sins the Father forgives us. We need to be gracious enough to accept that forgiveness. On acceptance of his forgiveness we are

filled with a love that enables us to forgive those who have mistreated us.

“And lead us not into temptation but deliver us from the evil one.” The prayer for bread and forgiveness must be accompanied by willingness to follow Christ in all things. In order to keep the evil one from us we must allow the Holy Spirit to dwell within us. You will notice that in the order of this prayer God, His name, his kingdom and his will come first. In response God will provide for us, forgive us and love us. In turn that brings us back to Him; He is the beginning and the end. “For thine is the kingdom and glory forever and ever. Amen.

Prayer is like a tree. Our individual prayers that we do in secret are like the roots of the tree. They center us so that new growth can happen. The growth above ground is the prayers that we have in community when we gather with other Christians. Both are needed for a healthy plant.

After the Lord’s Prayer Jesus tells a parable about a man who has an unexpected visitor’s and has nothing to give them so he goes to borrow from a neighbor at midnight. At first the neighbor refuses because of the hour. After all him and his family have already settled down for the night and don’t want to be bothered. But, when the man does not give up but continues to ask for bread the neighbor eventually gives in and gives him what he wants. This parable explains intercessory prayer. First there is the love of this man who wants to help someone in need. The need gives rise to the cry that, “I have nothing to give.” Then there is the confidence that help is available, “I will go to my friend.” There is an unexpected refusal.

“I cannot give it to you.” Then there is the perseverance that will not accept a refusal.” Because of his importunity. Then there is the reward, “I will give him what he needs.”

Often we have friends in need, sometimes we know how to help them but many times we do not. When we go to God as a friend of the poor, the sick, the abused and forgotten we can count on Him to guide us. Through our relationships with others God will test our faith. Is our need to help our friends so important that we would go to someone at midnight to get help? Our relationship with God should be so strong that we can depend on him not to turn us away. In the face of rejection from others we will be bold enough to persist in prayer until our request is answered. If our prayers were always answered immediately we would not have the need to continue a deep relationship with our Father. We have all known children that were given everything they wanted but never learned to function in society. God wants us to be deep, strong, Christians that can handle hardship as well as blessings. There is a faith that can see the promises and even embrace it without the answers. It is in our trials that we are purified, strengthened and prepared to receive what God has for us. God loves to give us what we ask for but is often held back by our unfitness or incapacity to process what he has to give us. The Israelites in deed found Canaan to be a land of milk and honey but were afraid when they found out what it would take to possess the land. When we have unanswered prayers, instead of complaining let us ask him what he is training us for.

Our prayers need to be for definite needs not vague appeals for mercy or indefinite cries to be blessed. When our prayers are more definitive we are taught to know our own needs better. World peace is an

admirable goal but you can pray better if you are praying for something specific like “Lord, I am angry with my spouse for not listening to me, show me how to talk to him in a way that brings listening and peace to our home.” Time, thought and looking at ourselves are needed so we can find out what our real needs are. Such looking within lets us know if our desires are honest and real according to God’s plan. It also helps us when we are waiting for an answer.

The questions we need to be asking are:

What is my real desire in asking for this?

Do I desire it in faith expecting an answer?

Am I ready to request it, and not give up until an answer comes?

Pray so that God can see what you want and you will know what to expect. In Andrew Murray’s books on prayer He says there is a difference between wishing for something and willing it. When Jesus says, “What wilt thou?” He is asking what our intentions are. What price are we willing to pay? Are we willing to sacrifice? How persistent in prayer will we be until we receive it? How many of our prayers are sent up as wishes and then forgotten? How many prayers are offered year after year out of duty, not really expecting an answer? The prayer of faith finds God’s will in the promises of his word and pleads for that promise until it comes. We must search for the will of God and then claim it. A child that is not born deaf and later becomes deaf will lose his words or ability to speak if there is not some intervention. A child learns to speak by hearing the words. If we do not read or listen to God’s word we will lose the ability to hear God’s voice.

The words of God are not just words in a book but they are spirit, truth, life and power. They will allow thoughts to come into our minds as we are under the influence of the Holy Spirit. As the words enter our mind through God they enter into our hearts. As we yield ourselves to the living God we will be able to hear and accept the answers he has for us.

Lord teach us to take time to wait and worship in your presence until our faith absorbs everything you have to offer us. The sure ground for answered prayer is God's forgiving love. If we feel like we have received a grave injustice try to assume God's disposition. Try to avoid the sense of wounded honor, the desire to maintain your rights, or the wish to punish the offender. Forgiveness opens the door to all of God's blessings. In the little annoyances of daily life do not excuse your sharp words, quick temper, or hasty judgments by saying I didn't mean anything by that. Our daily life is the evidence of God's forgiveness. Our relationship with God is not separate from the world but part of our relationship to our fellow traveler. Our unloving words and thoughts are a hindrance to our ability to pray. The spirit of forgiveness is the spirit of love. This love has special consequences especially for those we pray for. Sometimes we commit ourselves to God out of zeal for a cause or our own spiritual needs without giving ourselves in self sacrificing love for those we wish to help. Love is the root of forgiveness and forgiveness is the root of believing prayer.