

QUALITY PRAYER

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I spoke last week on the importance of the WORD OF GOD ... using the Bible as our foundation from where we get our views and standards.

We are surrounded by many opinions and ideas in the world ... and even in The Church.

We need to be careful both of WHAT WE HEAR ... AND WHOM WE HEAR.

Are we accepting customs ... traditions (man-made) ... rather than the Truth? Jesus said talking to the Father ... "Thy Word is truth". "To The Law and To The Testimony".

We all recognise the importance of being familiar with the Word of God. Spending a decent amount of time in the scriptures whatever that might be ... like Timothy ... "A workman who need not be ashamed, rightly dividing The Word of God". Okay ... we can do that.

Of the tools that you and I use every day ... looking to the scriptures for guidance and help is a foundational key. We should avoid becoming complacent when it comes to spending some decent quality time in God's Word.

The other key to making our calling effective is ... we'd probably all agree ... the subject of PRAYER. Today we will cover a couple of important aspects. It is worth us all remembering that spending time in God's Word is important ... but ... practical Christian living isn't

merely about “studying” the Bible and gaining technical head knowledge.

It’s good to be familiar with Bible facts and very good to be confident of our doctrinal understanding ... but ... that’s not the most important aspect of studying the Word of God.

The bigger question or challenge is: Do We know God? Do we have an authentic relationship with the Father and Jesus? Do we know Them? Does our Bible Study help us to get better acquainted with the Son and The Father? Lead us to have a better walk with The Father and The Son?

John 17:3 (NKJV)

3 And this is eternal life, that they may know You, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom You have sent.

Greek: Ginosko “refers not merely to abstract knowledge (of The Father) ... but to an intimate fellowship with His person”. To be acquainted with. It’s not just knowing about God. It’s about having a relationship with familiarity ... closeness.

Spending time in the Word plays a part in getting to know God better ... we get to know what He is like ... What He has said ... What He has done ... What He likes ... What He hates.

But perhaps the main way to develop our relationship ... on a personal level is ... PRAYER.

It is probably good that every so often ... like today ... that we check our prayer life ... so that we avoid getting complacent ... losing our enthusiasm ... prayer time dwindles to a few meaningless minutes every other day. You have to be careful ... it’s so easy to gradually ... slowly ... slip away.

Hebrews 2:1-4 (NKJV)

1 **Therefore we must give the more earnest heed to the things we have heard, lest we drift away.** *(That's a challenge we all have to face)*

2 For if the word spoken through angels proved steadfast, and every transgression and disobedience received a just reward,

3 **how shall we escape if we neglect so great a salvation,** which at the first began to be spoken by the Lord, and was confirmed to us by those who heard Him, *(neglect = to make light of)*

4 **God also bearing witness both with signs and wonders, with various miracles, and gifts of the Holy Spirit, according to His own will?**

It's not a case of major sins like adultery ... theft ... outright blatant rebellion. But a gradual decline ... perhaps once upon a time we were once hot? But as the years pass ... now lukewarm?

PRAYER IS IMPORTANT!

The minister who baptised me stressed early on ... the importance of prayer. In his opinion: so and so stopped praying and left the Church. They were gone ... not just to another splinter group. And ...it was also his opinion that the Holy Spirit is given only during prayer. It makes sense that God gives His Holy Spirit to us when we are kneeling and communing with Him.

Of course ... if we are talking about how long we should spend in prayer ... "duration" isn't necessarily the most important aspect. The Bible doesn't stipulate a time-period. It is down to us. It is quality of prayer rather than quantity.

But ... the Father and Jesus ... the two most important personalities in the universe ... who've sacrificed enormously ... how much time

would we want to spend in Their company? Two minutes per day? Sound about right? What about 5 minutes? 15? An hour? There is no specified period of time.

Some days we may be very busy ... other days quieter with more time available. We can't specify an exact period of time. But ...

- You can't pray too much ... impossible. However ... the converse is not true ...
- You can pray too little

So ... be serious. What genuinely feels right to you? Again ... not "just" quantity.

Someone's said: there are 2 times when you should pray. When you feel like it ... and when you don't! It makes perfect sense.

God knows our heart ... whether we value our time with Him ... or it's just a burden ... a duty ... to just get "over with".

There is a story of 2 young girls in Church. "Do you pray every day"? The other girl answers, "Every day? No! Some days I don't want anything".

When we talk of prayer we should remember there are different types of prayer. Obviously prayer is essentially talking to God ... but slightly different "rules" apply for different types/kinds.

Ephesians 6:10-13, 18 (NKJV)

10 Finally, my brethren, be strong in the Lord and in the power of His might.

11 Put on the whole armour of God, that you may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil.

12 For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this age, against spiritual hosts of wickedness in the heavenly places.

(We have a spiritual battle. We have spiritual enemies)

13 Therefore take up the whole armour of God, that you may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand.

18 ***praying always with all kinds of prayer and supplication in the Spirit***, being watchful to this end with all perseverance and supplication for all the saints—

God's Word Version: "use **every kind of prayer** and request there is"

NCV: "pray in the spirit at all times with **all kinds of prayers**

NIV: "pray in the spirit on all occasions with **all kinds of prayers and requests**"

I'm not going down this road today ... but you may remember: Prayer of Faith; Prayer of Intercession; Prayer of Commitment; Prayer of simple "fellowship". But there are different kinds of prayer. It's like sport. Sport is "sport" ... but different rules for golf ... tennis ... football ... basketball.

Now if I was a betting man ... I would guess that for many people prayer can be a little lack-lustre at times. Perhaps they pray because they know they've "got to" or they feel guilty. Out of a sense of duty ... or find it tedious? Or it's just a tick-box exercise; "**have you done your prayer today**"? Have you got rid of it for the day? :)

That type of prayer can be nothing other than just a religious act ... all image ... no real heart or substance (Pharisees love to pray and it's completely worthless).

The thing is... that scripture shows us that prayer can have a big impact ... a dramatic effect ... on our lives. So ... why wouldn't you want to pray?

Matthew 21:21-22 (NKJV)

21 So Jesus answered and said to them, "Assuredly, I say to you, **if you have faith and do not doubt, you will not only do what was done to the fig tree, but also if you say to this mountain, 'Be removed and be cast into the sea,' it will be done.** (*Speak to your mountain and watch it shift!*)

22 And **whatever things you ask in prayer, believing, you will receive.**"

ALL THINGS ... WHATEVER ... YOU ASK FOR ... BELIEVING ... YOU WILL RECEIVE. Is this our experience?

For many ... they may not be able to remember the last time a prayer was answered?

What do we do? Most are tempted to gloss over that verse and pretend it's not there. Or ... Jesus didn't mean it. He's exaggerating for some mysterious reason ... need to "spiritualise" the verse. Essentially ... we TURN THE WINE OF GOD'S WORD INTO WATER!! It becomes meaningless!

Jesus is well able to say what He means! And I think He means what He says. If there's a gap between God's Word and our experience ... let's not seek to add to/subtract from the Word ... dilute it. "To The Law and The Testimony".

Watch out for customs ... traditions ... that water-down the Plain Truth.

Mark 11:24 (NKJV)

24 **Therefore I say to you, whatever things you ask when you pray, believe that you receive them, and you will have them.**

Mark 11:24 (NASB)

24 ... **all things for which you pray and ask, believe that you have received them, and they will be granted you.**

We can see that faith is a key to this kind of prayer.

It is curious that some Christians (us?) would consider prayer to be pointless ... boring ... when Jesus says we can have whatever we ask?! Wouldn't we think that is exciting? (Now there are conditions, covered elsewhere. But don't change the basic point Jesus is making).

1 John 5:14-15 (NKJV)

14 **Now this is the confidence that we have in Him, that if we ask anything according to His will, He hears us.**

15 **And if we know that He hears us, whatever we ask, we know that we have the petitions that we have asked of Him.**

Ask anything? We know? The immediate response is: Yes ... but!! How do we know God's Will? "To The Law and To The Testimony!" The Word of God is able to show us God's Will.

There are many situations where we can absolutely know God's Will.

It seems like there are some really positive reasons that would encourage us to pray plenty? But ... it seems common to ignore ... or "re-write" the scriptures ... to drag them down to the level of our experience.

We can miss out on God's best. Prayers become humdrum ... lifeless?

Jesus spoke about this on multiple occasions.

John 16:23-24 (NKJV) ... The Charter Promise of Prayer

23 "And in that day you will ask Me nothing. Most assuredly, I say to you, *whatever you ask the Father in My name He will give you.*

24 *Until now you have asked nothing in My name. Ask, and you will receive, that your joy may be full.*

Most Assuredly = Verily, verily (KJV) ... Greek = Amen, Amen.

(Weymouth NT): "*In most solemn truth I tell you that whatever you ask the Father for in my name He will give you*".

(God's Word): "*I can guarantee this truth*"

So. If our own experience falls short ... maybe we should just accept the challenge ... and seek to move our experience closer to what God describes? And not just turn our back on it.

One key understanding we need to have on the topic of prayer is that GOD IS NOT THE PROBLEM! He isn't!!

It may be unspoken ... but I think there is often a feeling that if there's a prayer problem in getting my prayers answered ... it's at God's end ... because of His reluctance ... His unwillingness ... His remoteness. Who can get close to God?

Perhaps God doesn't really care ... so I've got to work hard to convince Him to help me ... I've got to bombard Him ... beg Him ... bawl ... squall ... jump up and down. Maybe ... if it comes to it ... fast?

It's almost like we think God is hard of hearing. We used to hear about "storming the gates of Heaven" ... giving the impression that we're not welcome in Heaven ... locked out ... we need to break through ... fight ... overcome God's defences ... His reluctance. I'll wear Him down. Then ... maybe ... on rare occasions ... get an answer.

This isn't scriptural! GOD IS NOT THE PROBLEM!

Firstly. God already knows our situation before we go to Him. He probably saw it long before we figured it out.

Hebrews 4:12-13 (NKJV)

12 For the word of God is living and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing even to the division of soul and spirit, and of joints and marrow, and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart.

13 And there is no creature hidden from His sight, but *all things are naked and open to the eyes of Him to whom we must give account.*

God sees it all. We don't need to storm the gates ... to alert God to our circumstances. They are open to Him.

Matthew 6:25-33 (NKJV)

25 "Therefore I say to you, do not worry about your life, what you will eat or what you will drink; nor about your body, what you will put on. Is not life more than food and the body more than clothing?

26 Look at the birds of the air, for they neither sow nor reap nor gather into barns; yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not of more value than they? (*Wouldn't you think that He would look after you?*)

27 Which of you by worrying can add one cubit to his stature?

28 "So why do you worry about clothing? Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow: they neither toil nor spin;

29 and yet I say to you that even Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these.

30 Now if God so clothes the grass of the field, which today is, and tomorrow is thrown into the oven, **will He not much more** *(He's a much more God)* clothe you, O you of little faith?

31 "Therefore do not worry, saying, 'What shall we eat?' or 'What shall we drink?' or 'What shall we wear?'

32 For after all these things the Gentiles seek. For your heavenly Father knows that you need all these things.

33 **But seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added to you.**

Our Father already knows our need! There is no need to storm the gates of Heaven ... no need to persuade Him "against His will" ... to help. He's a good Father ... watching out for us and over us.

1 Peter 3:10-12 (NKJV)

10 For "He who would love life

And see good days,

Let him refrain his tongue from evil,

And his lips from speaking deceit.

11 Let him turn away from evil and do good;

Let him seek peace and pursue it.

12 ***For the eyes of the Lord are on the righteous,***

And ***His ears are open to their prayers;***

But the face of the Lord is against those who do evil."

It is important not to approach God with a view to start a wrestling match ... a long struggle to get His attention ... once we say, "Father" ... we've got His attention. We shouldn't be thinking "how can I persuade God to get involved ... how can I get Him to pay attention at least this one time?"

And ... we shouldn't play at being pathetic. "Okay God I don't often ask for things ... and I know You're very busy and very important and I'm such an unworthy worm ... but if You could just please please this once give me this tiny little request".

Or maybe we try to make God feel guilty ... or obliged to help us. "I've always served You. I always go to Church ... I fast lots ... I'm really a good person ... if anyone deserves their prayers to be answered ... it should be me". I suspect that God doesn't hear any of that.

This type of attitude makes God the problem. He's uncaring ... uninterested ... reluctant ... distant ... too busy. He only deals with universe-wide major issues ... not the tiny little problems that effect our day-to-day lives.

So ... our thinking is: HOW DO I MOVE OR PERSUADE GOD?

Sometimes we escalate. Let's get a prayer chain going ... get 500 others to bombard God. Why? Trying to gang up on God ... use brute force? Or hope at least one person is 500 has some faith ... knows God's private telephone number and can get through? God's already disposed to show favour. No need to twist His arm up His back!

GOD'S EARS ARE OPEN!

Psalms 145:8-9 (NKJV)

8 The Lord is gracious and full of compassion,
Slow to anger and great in mercy.

9 The Lord is good to all,
And His tender mercies are over all His works.

This is God's nature! It's His disposition to show favour. "To The Law and To The Testimony". He sympathises and is ready to move.

Hebrews 4:14-16 (NKJV)

14 Seeing then that we have a great High Priest who has passed through the heavens, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold fast our confession.

15 **For we do not have a High Priest who cannot sympathise with our weaknesses, but was in all points tempted as we are, yet without sin.**

16 **Let us therefore come boldly to the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy and find grace to help in time of need.**

Jesus understands ... He can sympathise. So we can come boldly ... fearless ... with confidence ... to the Place of Grace ... to The Throne.

Not bawling and squalling. Viewing God as an awkward ... reluctant being ... an obstacle for us to overcome (or us and the other 499 in our prayer chain).

And. Because God is so easy to approach ... the red-carpet is out for us ... we are His sons and daughters ... we don't need to keep endlessly going over and over the same thing ... as if we're trying to wear God down. He already knows the situation ... we don't need to go on and on about something He is completely familiar with. Going over and over like a broken record ... is a pointless exercise.

Matthew 6:5-8 (NKJV)

5 **"And when you pray, you shall not be like the hypocrites. For they love to pray standing in the synagogues and on the corners of the streets, that they may be seen by men.** Assuredly, I say to you, they have their reward.

6 But you, when you pray, go into your room, and when you have shut your door, pray to your Father who is in the secret place; and your Father who sees in secret will reward you openly.

7 *And when you pray, do not use vain repetitions as the heathen do. For they think that they will be heard for their many words. (Quality time!)*

8 "Therefore do not be like them. For your Father knows the things you have need of before you ask Him.

(RSV): "Do not heap up empty phrases as Gentiles do"

We shouldn't be thinking: If I go on long enough ... day after day ... eventually ... I'll overcome God's reluctance if I demonstrate how persistent I am ... and ...finally wear Him down. GOD IS NOT THE PROBLEM!

Multiplying words of doubt ... frustration and unbelief ... "why don't you do anything" ... isn't going to change God. HE DOESN'T NEED TO CHANGE!

2 Chronicles 16:7-10 (NKJV)

7 And at that time Hanani the seer came to Asa king of Judah, and said to him: "Because you have relied on the king of Syria, and have not relied on the Lord your God, therefore the army of the king of Syria has escaped from your hand.

8 Were the Ethiopians and the Lubim not a huge army with very many chariots and horsemen? Yet, because you relied on the Lord, He delivered them into your hand.

9 For the eyes of the Lord run to and fro throughout the whole earth, to show Himself strong on behalf of those whose heart is loyal to Him. In this you have done foolishly; therefore from now on you shall have wars."

10 Then Asa was angry with the seer, and put him in prison, for he was enraged at him because of this. And Asa oppressed some of the people at that time.

So ... the point here is ... God is not reluctant ... He is looking for opportunities ... but ... that is dependant on us!

God is not looking for beggars ... He is looking for believers who come boldly to Him ... with confidence ... assurance. (We are family).
Believing God will get some action.

Hebrews 10:19-23 (NKJV)

19 Therefore, brethren, **having boldness to enter the Holiest by the blood of Jesus,**

20 **by a new and living way which He consecrated for us, through the veil, that is, His flesh,**

21 **and having a High Priest over the house of God,**

22 **let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled from an evil conscience and our bodies washed with pure water.**

23 **Let us hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering, for He who promised is faithful.**

The scriptures do not tell us about coming before God timidly ... fearfully ... wondering whether God will give us any time ... pay any attention ... be in a good mood that day ... or extremely awkward/cantankerous.

No storming of the gates ... no pathetic beggars ... no reliance on our performance. That's nonsense. We get an instant audience if we come to the Father through the Son. Through the precious Blood of Jesus.

Romans 8:31-32 (NKJV)

31 What then shall we say to these things? **If God is for us, who can be against us?**

32 **He who did not spare His own Son, but delivered Him up for us all, how shall He not with Him also *freely give us all things?***

There is no hint of a God who is reluctant ... miserly ... aloof? God freely gives. Gives us all things whatever we desire.

So ... in conclusion ... whenever we come in prayer: our understanding should be: God's looking forward to our visit ... He's completely approachable ... He's for us ... not against us. We can approach confidently and boldly.

Remember: **GOD IS NOT THE PROBLEM!**

If we want to be better acquainted with the Father and with Jesus let us make sure we spend quality time with both.