



MISC. WRITERS

MEN OUGHT ALWAYS TO PRAY

A COLLECTION OF ARTICLES

PUBLISHED BY TRUTH AND TIDINGS



Higgins, A. J.

Few subjects absorb so much time in the Christian life as prayer yet receive so little attention in ministry.



Objections Raised

Perhaps there is no difficulty for you in this matter of prayer. But for many, there arises a flood of questions which challenge faith and overwhelm reason:

Why pray if God already knows everything?

What good is prayer if God's will is going to be done anyway?

Who am I to tell God anything?

I'm already doing what He wants me to do. Why do I need to pray about it?

God is more concerned about me than I can ever be, so I will just leave it with Him.

It is likely that most believers, if not all, have faced these and similar questions at one time or another. But set over against this, who cannot testify that prayer is the most natural and native activity of Christian life? To deprive a believer of prayer would be to remove the very life-line, a spiritual "pulling-of-the-plug" which would signal the end of spiritual life.

Yet these and similar questions must be faced. Young believers, in a skeptical and scornful world, are confronted with them by classmates, professors, and an educational system which analyzes and rejects all which does not fit into water-tight, convenient, cause and effect answers.



Obstacles Faced

In concert with the rationalism which challenges the practice of prayer, there exists inherent obstacles to prayer.

Listen to one young believer as she opines: “I’ve asked for so many things, spiritual and good things. But nothing happens. I gave up praying.” A silent heaven seems to mock many as they pray. Years of asking for the salvation of relatives, friends, and contacts have yielded nothing but an increased sense of frustration and an iron curtain over heaven.

Another young man says, “When I pray my mind strays and not only gets distracted, but sometimes even entertains evil thoughts. Why should I continue to offend God?” It has been observed that the more spiritual the activity, the more difficult the task. We can talk about spiritual things without feeling a great barrier. We can even read our Bibles and not find much opposition. But we cannot pray without encountering opposition. Prayer demands concentration and effort. Epaphras was a man who labored fervently in prayer (Col 4:12). James (5:16) reminds us of Elijah and “effectual *fervent* prayer.”

All this serves to remind us of a sinister foe who does battle in the heavenlies. Paul reminds us that our warfare is in the spiritual realm. The wiles, the carefully thought out strategies of Satan, are to keep us from enjoying and appreciating our inheritance (Eph 6:11). Paul reminds the believers that linked intimately with their spiritual armor is the need to maintain contact with headquarters. “Praying always with all prayer and supplication in the Spirit...” (Eph 6:18). Are we so naive as to think that the demands of a pressure-filled business world, the information overload of the media, the lurid and provocative advertisements which bombard our eyes, and the body-wearingly demands of life are somehow just “the way things are?” Are they not all the carefully worked out tactics of Satan to weaken us in prayer, to drain every ounce of physical energy and divert it to what we consider the essentials of life? All this is legitimate and normal yet leaves us with no spiritual energy for prayer.

A silent heaven, a straying mind, a struggling flesh, and a sinister foe all combine to hinder our path to the throne of grace.



Opportunities Grasped

Answers to the objections, and solutions to the obstacles would be prized. As in all spiritual issues, we are cast back upon the Word of God. We are not given full “explanations” of how prayer works and where it fits into God’s great program, but it is clear that prayer is a vital part of the believer’s life. Look at the first book in the Bible and notice some of the answers. We pray:

To Spend time with our Father – In Genesis 21:33, Abraham planted a grove (a tamarisk tree), and called upon the name of the Lord, the everlasting God. No request is detailed; no plea is heard arising. He is simply enjoying the fellowship of God. One of the tragic marks of our private prayer life is that it is just all about our requests and needs. Little time is spent just enjoying and speaking with our Father. The development of every relationship depends upon time spent together and mutual interests shared. The spiritual relationship demands the same.

To Submit to His Request – He has requested that I pray. Abraham was instructed to pray for Abimelech (Gen 20:7) and he did (20:17). In the New Testament, there are numerous exhortations to pray (1 Thess 5:17, 25; Luke 18:1; 1 Tim 2:1-3; Eph 6:18 – to name only a few). So, when we pray, we are obeying God.

To Share in His Work – God Who ordains the ends, also ordains the means. He has given me the great privilege to have a share in it through prayer. He has chosen to use my prayer as the fulcrum which moves His omnipotence. Explain it? I can’t. Believe it? I do! Consider Abraham in Genesis 18. Did God “need” Abraham to be able to save Lot out of Sodom?

To Show our Dependency – When Rebekah did not conceive, Isaac entreated the Lord for her. He owned that natural power was helpless here; divine power was needed (Gen 25:21). How pleasing to the heart of God to see men who willingly take a place of dependence on God in a world marked by smug independence of God.

To Shape our Will – Perhaps one of the greatest reasons we are exhorted to pray is that in praying, our wills are molded and conformed to His will. It is a case where the process is as important as the product. As we pray, God begins to probe our motives and hearts. As we feel His probing hand uncover long hidden (and some not so hidden) motives and desires, we confess our failure and refine our requests.



Slabaugh, John

David and His Prayers

We know David as “the sweet Psalmist of Israel.” He is remembered for the songs he wrote. Many of his songs also contain elements of prayer such as confession, worship, thanksgiving, praise, intercession, and supplication. He is renowned as well as “the man after God’s own heart” (1 Sam 13:14; Acts 13:22).

David is best known for two events in his life: his conquest of the giant, Goliath, and his sin with Bathsheba. The first established his reputation as a warrior. Many Psalms reflect his appreciation for divine protection in battle and for victory over his adversaries. As for the second event, we will look at three of the seven Penitential Psalms relating to his sin with Bathsheba. These are Psalms 38, 51, and 32, where we see David the Penitent.

Psalm 38 – The Penitent’s Conviction

We are not told the occasion when David penned the lines of this Psalm, but his words do reflect the remorse of one who has confronted the reality of his sin. Nathan the prophet was sent by the LORD with the parable about the rich man with many flocks who took his poor neighbor’s single little ewe lamb to make a meal for a traveler (2 Sam 12:1-4). The story Nathan related caused David to become angry and pronounce judgment on the rich man. Though the KJV reads, “the man...shall surely die,” the sense of what David said was, “that man is a son of (“worthy of”) death.” Had David spoken what we read in the KJV, he would likely have pronounced sentence upon himself! Nathan’s next words, “Thou art the man!” shattered David’s cover-up and exposed his sin in all of its stark ugliness.

In this Psalm David is smitten by the arrow of conviction and he is now burdened with guilt because of his deeds. “For mine iniquities are gone over mine head: as a heavy burden they are too heavy for

me” (v 4). He is filled with grief because of troubles that have come upon him. Then he is filled with his groaning (v 9) because of the sense of isolation from others he feels plus the recognition that his enemies now rejoice over him and mock because of his failure in testimony.

Though we know David will ultimately experience the gladness of forgiveness for what he has done, no relief is mentioned in this Psalm. David entreats the LORD, “Rebuke me not in Thy wrath: neither chasten me in Thy hot displeasure.” “Forsake me not... be not far from me,” and “Make haste to help me, O Lord my salvation.” These are sentiments we readily understand as we ponder his circumstances.



Psalm 51 – The Penitent’s Confession

The title of this Psalm clearly states it was written of David’s sin with Bathsheba. David’s language here, though he still acknowledges his guilt, is not marked by the darkness and distress of Psalm 38. The work of restoration is underway, and he looks ahead to that restoration.

He pleads for God’s mercy and the blotting out of his sin and then requests cleansing. He confesses the dark character of his guilt before God and acknowledges that he was born a sinner. In this he justifies God and His judgment upon him.

Then he renews his plea for cleansing, “purge me...wash me...” (vs 7-10). In this section, he expresses remarkable faith in his God to effect this in spite of His righteous judgment against his sin. In verses 16-17, he declares, “For Thou desirest not sacrifice; else would I give it: Thou delightest not in burnt offering. The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit: a broken and a contrite heart, O God, Thou wilt not despise.” Under the law there was no sacrifice for willful sin. With a broken spirit and a contrite heart, David is trusting God’s grace to effect this cleansing.

In verses 12-15, David anticipates the restoration of the joy of God’s salvation and his opportunity to encourage others as a result of his

own experience. Once again, he will have opportunity to sing, to give praise unto his God.



Psalm 32 – The Penitent’s Forgiveness

The title here does not tell us this Psalm was written as a result of David’s sin with Bathsheba, but most commentators agree that it was. David begins this Psalm rejoicing in the knowledge of the forgiveness of sins. He then recounts again the distress he had known with the burden of guilt and the pressure of God’s judging hand upon him. He relates how he confessed his sin to the Lord and the Lord forgave him. Then he launches into praise to his Benefactor (vs 6-10) and closes with counsel to his readers to enter into the same blessedness he has come to know. “Be glad in the Lord, and rejoice, ye righteous: and shout for joy, all ye that are upright in heart.”

There are no petitions in this Psalm, but David does address the Lord directly, as one does when he prays. Rather than petition, this Psalm abounds with praise, another exercise appropriate to prayer.

There are two vital lessons we may learn from consideration of David’s experience in his sin: his burden of guilt and his forgiveness. First, which of us is free of sin or clear from the necessity for repentance and seeking forgiveness? Too often and too long we may be like David when he covered his sin rather than confronting it. Let us soberly acknowledge that reality, address it and put it behind us. Second, not one of us is beyond the same sins of the flesh David committed. “Let him that thinketh he standeth take heed lest he fall” (1 Cor 10:12). We too, as David, have known grace abounding. May the Lord enhance our appreciation for this rich grace in restoration!



Slabaugh, John

David and His Prayers

Prayer is a Christian's great privilege, but it is largely underused because of a spirit of self-satisfaction and self-confidence that marks many of us. Too often it takes adversity and extreme need to turn God's people to exercise their privilege. Prayer betokens dependence upon God and confidence in God.

Prayer has numerous elements. Prayer is more than petition. Confession, worship, thanksgiving, praise, intercession, and supplication should also be in our prayers. There are more than forty different petitions of David's recorded for us, including some he made for others. There are overlapping themes in them. We have space to consider only a few.

Preservation from his Enemies

David was likely anointed king by Samuel at age 22. He did not become king until after the death of Saul seven years later. For the greater part of that seven years, he was a fugitive fleeing from Saul who wanted to kill him. Though already anointed to succeed Saul, though Saul was his enemy, and though God on two occasions brought Saul into circumstances where David could easily have slain his enemy (1 Sam 24 and 26), David refused to "stretch forth mine hand against the Lord's anointed" (1 Sam 24:6, 10; 26:9, 11). In spite of David's forbearance, Saul continued to pursue him. No wonder David prayed (Ps. 57:1), "Be merciful unto me, O God, be merciful unto me: for my soul trusteth in Thee: yea, in the shadow of Thy wings will I make my refuge, until these calamities be over past."

David knew an important principle of which Christians must also be aware. God has raised up men to govern and will not look lightly upon rejecting or disregarding them even when they are unworthy, as

Saul surely was. There is government in God's assembly. Rebellion against this is very serious and God will not honor that rebellion.

Preservation from Harm

Saul was not David's only enemy. David was a warrior who fought many literal battles with those who would kill him. No wonder he prayed for safety as in Psalm 25:2, "O my God, I trust in Thee: let me not be ashamed, let not mine enemies' triumph over me." He prayed similarly on other occasions.

Though most Christians are not fighting physical battles, they are exposed to many dangers in their lives and do well to pray as David did to be delivered and preserved in safety. They should be grateful and thankful to the Lord for His grace to them in this way.

Preservation from Evil

David was aware of evil in the form of temptations on every hand, plus his own nature so prone to sin. He did well to pray, "Keep back Thy servant also from presumptuous sins; let them not have dominion over me" (Ps 19:13). He also prayed, "Search me, O God, and know my heart: try me, and know my thoughts" (Ps 139:23).

It is sad to note that though David prayed rightly that the Lord would preserve him from evil without and within, he did give way to his flesh and sinned with Bathsheba. Christians may learn to pray as he prayed but they should also avoid making any "provision for the flesh, to fulfil the lusts thereof" (Rom 13:14).

Supplication for Others

David is remembered as "the man after God's own heart" (1 Sam 13:14; Acts 13:22). This led to many features seen in David that remind us of the Lord Jesus Christ. One of the most winsome of these features was a willingness to suffer himself instead of others. This caused him to pray for his people after he had personally sinned in numbering the people and God brought judgment upon the nation (2 Sam 24; 1 Chron 21). David's conscience smote him, and he

prayed, “Lo, I have sinned, and I have done wickedly: but these sheep, what have they done? let Thine hand, I pray thee, be against me, and against my father’s house” (2 Sam 24:17).

Christians, when praying, are too often only self-centered, forgetting the needs of others. They may be too preoccupied with their own circumstances to take note of others. Christians pray for the salvation of their own loved ones and that is surely right. They should remember to pray for the loved ones of others as well.

Application

David’s petitions are certainly appropriate for believers today. But David also made some petitions which are not appropriate for Christians. David prayed, “Hide not Thy face far from me; put not Thy servant away in anger: Thou hast been my help; leave me not, neither forsake me, O God of my salvation.” Believers today should ever bear in mind the Lord’s words in Matthew 28:20, “Lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the world.” He never will forsake them!

David also prayed, “Take not Thy Holy Spirit from me” (Ps 51:11). The Holy Spirit indwells each believer and never departs from him. That was not true for Old Testament believers. The Spirit of God did come upon David and other Old Testament believers from time to time. He inspired David in the writing of the Psalms and David must have realized that and longed for the Spirit’s presence with him at all times. We have noted how David prayed for preservation from evil but sinned grievously in spite of that prayer. He did not have the resource of the indwelling Holy Spirit to assist in answering that prayer. Believers today must be sensitive to the prompting of the Holy Spirit against yielding to temptation for they have the same sinful nature within that David had.

May we all learn and profit from the examples of David’s petitions!



Slabaugh, John

David and His Prayers

There are three psalms that are titled, “A Prayer of David”: Psalms 17, 86 and 142. Psalm 102, most likely also a Psalm of David, falling as it does between two others ascribed to him, is titled, “A Prayer of the afflicted, when he is overwhelmed, and poureth out his complaint before the Lord.” David had manifold trials. Difficulties drew out his deepest inner feelings. His words resonate in the hearts of believers in trial today. Another has written, “If David’s heart had ne’er been wrung, David’s Psalms had ne’er been sung.”

Christians empathize with David in his trials, but we also need a right perspective. 2 Corinthians 4:17 reminds us, “Our light affliction, which is but for a moment, worketh for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory.” Let us remember that our sorrows and afflictions pale alongside those of “the Man of Sorrows,” Who could say prophetically, “Remembering Mine affliction and My misery, the wormwood and the gall. My soul hath them still in remembrance and is humbled in Me (Lam 3:19-20). Affliction is God’s means of producing likeness to His Son!

The Resource of Contact with the Lord: Psalm 17

In Psalm 102:1, the Psalmist cries out, “Hear my prayer, O Lord, and let my cry come unto Thee.” In this psalm, David similarly petitions the Lord to hear him (v 1). Is there doubt that God does or will hear? Without question, God hears all our words, but He may not grant every request we make. He will withhold what is not for our good and His time to grant what we ask may not be the time we would choose. If it is in His will, He will grant it in His time, when He will receive the greatest glory. Let us never doubt that He hears.

David prays for preservation (v 5), “Hold up my goings in Thy paths, that my footsteps slip not,” and for preservation from harm (v 8),

“Keep me as the apple of the eye, hide me under the shadow of Thy wings.” We must be aware of the danger of missteps before the ungodly. Like David, we also desire divine safekeeping. We shall not know till we reach heaven how much we owe to God’s preserving care for us.

David expresses his desire for divine blessing (v 7), “Shew Thy marvelous loving-kindness, O Thou that savest by Thy right hand...” Very likely, petitions for God’s blessing are the most frequent requests we make. David closes with an expression of confidence in the ultimate deliverance from his trials (v 15), “As for me, I will behold Thy face in righteousness: I shall be satisfied, when I awake, with Thy likeness.”



The Resource of Conversation about the Lord: Psalm 86

David makes supplications and petitions in this Psalm, but he also renders praise for the goodness and blessing of the Lord to him. His requests are similar to those in Psalm 17, for God to hear him (v 1), for preservation (v 2), and for His mercy (v 3). Then he turns from preoccupation with problems and breaks out in praise and thanksgiving for the Lord’s goodness, forgiveness, and mercy “unto all them that call upon Thee” (v 5). We too easily forget to render thanksgiving and praise. These are vital components of prayer. The lack of thanksgiving suggests ingratitude or taking too much for granted. Praise is an indicator of how well we have come to know God’s greatness, majesty, and power. Praise stems from knowing God through reading and meditating upon His Word.

David states the Lord hears and will answer him (v 6-7). Does his thankfulness and praise, just expressed, strengthen his confidence that this is true? He extols the Lord as incomparable to heathen deities (v 8) and counsels others to join in worshiping and glorifying the name of the Lord (v 9). This is a good example for us, speaking well of the One we have come to know. He returns to the theme of praise again because of deliverance from the lowest hell (v 13) and for the Lord’s compassion, longsuffering, mercy, and truth (v 15).

David ends the Psalm with a request for a sign others can recognize, that the Lord is with him and has helped him. The issue of our lives should also be to honor and glorify our God.



The Resource of Confidence in the Lord: Psalm 142

The setting for this Psalm is Saul's deadly pursuit of David. As David hid in a cave, Saul personally entered that very cave. While Saul was within, David secretly cut off the skirt of Saul's robe, but his conscience smote him, and he shouted after Saul when he departed and showed Saul that he had spared his life. Saul only temporarily suspended his pursuit of David. In danger for his life, David continued to hide from Saul.

We can readily understand why David "cried unto the Lord" (v 1). He related his concerns to the Lord (v 2). Here we learn that when in trouble, do as he did, and turn to the Lord and tell Him our troubles. Does He not already know? Indeed, He does, for David, though distressed, takes comfort in the knowledge the Lord knew all about his path and Saul's cruel designs. Here then is rest (v 3).

David relates that wherever he looked, he found none willing to take his part and provide refuge for him (v 4). But then he cries to the Lord and recognizes that He, not another man, is the refuge and portion for him (v 5). Again, he pleads for deliverance (v 6) and then expresses his confidence the Lord will undertake for him. Like David we need to keep on praying but we can also expect the outcome will ultimately be all the Lord has purposed for us in His love to us.



Slabaugh, John

David and His Prayers

David is introduced to us in 1 Samuel 16 when he is anointed by Samuel to be the King of Israel. He was likely 22 years old at that time. A few months later, he won his renowned victory over Goliath. He spent most of the next eight years as a fugitive, pursued by Saul who intended to kill him. However, God's purposes for him must come to pass and when Saul was dead, David came to the throne of Judah at the age of 30. Many Israelites remained loyal to Saul's son, Ishbosheth, and this led to a seven-year civil war. Ishbosheth died and the Israelites came to David to make him king over all Israel at the age of 37. Six years later David and the Israelites had subdued all his enemies and we read, "The Lord had given him rest round about from all his enemies" (2Sa 7:1).

God's Message to David

2 Samuel 7 and 1 Chronicles 17 record that David purposed at that time, to build a House for God in Jerusalem. He spoke to the prophet, Nathan, of this purpose. The Lord sent Nathan to tell David:

"Thou shalt not build Me an house to dwell in" (1Ch 17:4).

"I took thee from the sheeppcote, from following the sheep, to be ruler over My people, over Israel. I was with thee whithersoever thou wentest and have cut off all thine enemies out of thy sight."

"Moreover, I will appoint a place for My people Israel."

"Also, the Lord telleth thee that He will make thee an house."

"I will set up thy seed after thee...and I will establish his kingdom."

“He shall build an house for My name, and I will stablish the throne of his kingdom for ever” (2Sa 7:8-13).

“Thy throne shall be established for ever” (2Sa 7:16).

These promises from God were given to David nine years before Solomon, who was to fulfill some of them, was born! Later God revealed to David why he was not to build the house. “...thou shalt not build an house unto My name, because thou hast shed much blood upon the earth in My sight” (1Ch 22:8). To his credit, David did not pout about God’s decision that Solomon would build the house, but he prepared an abundance of materials and gave lavishly of his wealth for the Temple he would never see in its beauty and glory.

God reminded David of his past, how God had taken him up as a shepherd lad and raised him up as king over His people. We will rejoice also when we recall where God found us and where we are now.

God also reminded David of His purposes for His people and the place to which He had brought them. Let us remember the assembly is God’s assembly, unique in its calling and position before Him; and it is our privilege to be part of that exalted company.

Then follows God’s threefold promise of blessing to David’s household: God will build it for him, his son will rule in his place, and his throne will be eternal. Solomon’s throne is also David’s throne that will be established for ever. Without doubt, this promise of an eternal throne, refers to David’s greater Son, our Lord Jesus Christ, the Anointed One, the Messiah. God had revealed to Adam and Eve, to Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, and Judah, and now to David and to his seed, that the Redeemer would come through his line of descendants.



David’s Response to God’s Message

Nathan retired from the king’s presence after delivering this message from God. No wonder we read in the next verse, “Then went king

David in, and sat before the Lord, and he said, Who am I, O Lord God? and what is my house, that Thou hast brought me hitherto?" David's heart is filled with wonder and worship. We read of his wonder at the riches of God's grace to him in 2 Samuel 7:18-21 and then of his worship in v 22, "Wherefore Thou art great, O Lord God: for there is none like Thee, neither is there any God beside Thee, according to all that we have heard with our ears."

David not only rejoices in God's personal blessings, but he recalls God's blessings upon His people in v 23-24. God redeemed them out of Egypt to be His people and He had become their God. David concludes his worship in prayer for God's further blessing upon himself and his house in v 25-29. He recites the promises God made to him as the basis for his petitions and expresses his faith that God will do as He promised. "And now, O Lord God, Thou art that God, and Thy words be true, and Thou hast promised this goodness unto Thy servant" (v 28).

It is interesting to note that the first time we find the word "prayer" in the King James translation of the Bible is in 2 Samuel 7:27, "For thou, O Lord of hosts, God of Israel, hast revealed to Thy servant, saying, I will build thee an house: therefore hath Thy servant found in his heart to pray this prayer unto Thee." We do read of Abraham, his nameless servant, Moses, Hannah, and Samuel praying before this occasion.

From our consideration of this occasion in the life of David as he prayed with rejoicing, we may learn to recall the Lord's blessings and promises to us. Surely this will lead to rejoicing as we claim His promised presence in the midst of His own today. Rejoicing is an element of worship and when we rejoice before Him we shall also find our hearts welling up with thanksgiving and praise, not only for what He has done for us but for Who He is in all His power and greatness. Let us ponder our blessings beforehand and meet together, prepared to praise Him at the Lord's table.

Men Ought Always to Pray:
Communion with the Almighty



Slabaugh, John

 **Daniel**

The well-known Sunday School chorus relates:

Daniel was a man of prayer,
Praying three times daily
Even when they had him cast
In the den of lions ...

Daniel well deserved the accolade, “man of prayer,” just as the chorus relates. As a lad in his teens, he prayed when he and his companions desired “mercies of the God of heaven” to enable Daniel to know and interpret Nebuchadnezzar’s dream to him. In chapter 6, when Daniel was 85, he was cast into the den of lions. We read in verse 10, when the king’s decree forbade petitions to anyone but himself, Daniel “went into his house; and his windows being open in his chamber toward Jerusalem, he kneeled upon his knees three times a day, and prayed, and gave thanks before his God, as he did aforetime.” His example affords at least three lessons for us: pray consistently every day; do not refrain from praying when others may observe us doing so; trust God for protection when adversity looms.

Daniel was renowned for godliness and prayerfulness. Ezekiel, a contemporary fellow-exile, twice records that because of Israel’s sins and departure from God, He would not hear any prayers, even were they the prayers of Noah, Daniel, or Job for their deliverance (Ez 14:14, 20). This surely tells us of his reputation as a man who prayed. It is interesting to note Ezekiel wrote this of him when Daniel was not yet thirty years old! Ezekiel knew how he prayed God would reveal Nebuchadnezzar’s dream and its interpretation to him. George Mueller in a later day was also renowned for effectual prayer.



Daniel's History

We have no details of Daniel's birth nor who his parents were. In Daniel 1:3 we read he was "of the king's seed, and of the princes." King Nebuchadnezzar conquered Jerusalem in 606 B.C. and gave instructions that some of these young princes should be taken as hostages to Babylon. These princes were to be trained for service in the king's palace.

Daniel was among those taken to Babylon (Dan 1:6). We are not told his age. It is likely he was in his early teens when he was removed from his home and country to a foreign land where he lived the rest of his long life. He may have been past 90 at his death. Tradition tells us he died in Shushan. His gentle spirit in trial, his steadfast faithfulness to God, and his faithful service to his superiors are well known and require no further comment.



Daniel's Prayer

In view of Daniel's reputation as a man who prayed, it is remarkable that we have the record of only one of his prayers apart from what we already noted that he prayed to interpret Nebuchadnezzar's dream and when he knew prayer had been forbidden. This prayer is found in Daniel 9 when Daniel was 84. The chapter opens with Daniel's reading God's Word in Jeremiah 29:10 (Jeremiah had died 45-50 years prior to Daniel's reading this writing). Daniel wrote in verse 2 what he discovered in his reading: "I Daniel understood by books the number of the years, whereof the word of the LORD came to Jeremiah the prophet, that He would accomplish seventy years in the desolations of Jerusalem."

God spoke to Daniel through this verse and Daniel, stirred in his soul, realized the seventy years would be up in two more years! Now he speaks to God. This is communion, conversation between Daniel and his God! He writes, "I set my face unto the Lord God, to seek by prayer and supplications, with fasting, and sackcloth, and ashes" (v 3). Mark his humility and confession as he begins. "We have sinned..." (v 5). Note how he links himself with his people though not personally guilty of the sins he confesses in verses 5 to 15.

He goes on to ascribe righteousness to God in His judgments upon His people in verse 7. He also reminds God of His mercies and forgiveness's in verse 9 and His mighty power that had delivered His people out of Egypt in verse 15. Here in describing God's greatness and majesty, he is worshipping.

Then he turns to intercession for his people in verses 16-20. "O Lord, according to all Thy righteousness, I beseech Thee, let Thine anger and Thy fury be turned away from Thy city Jerusalem, Thy holy mountain ... and cause Thy face to shine upon Thy sanctuary that is desolate, for the Lord's sake. O Lord hear; O Lord, forgive; O Lord, hearken and do; defer not, for Thy own sake, O my God: for Thy city and Thy people are called by Thy name." We have noted communion, humility, confession, worship, and intercession in this short prayer!



God's Response

It is striking to read that while Daniel was praying God sent Gabriel to him to inform him in verses 20-27 of what God was about to do. As with Daniel here, when we pray, God may bring us into the knowledge of His will. Gabriel informs Daniel he is "greatly beloved" in verse 23. Surely this denotes God is pleased when believers pray. Believers do not "earn" God's love by praying. His love to each of His own is eternal, causeless, and changeless. We may suggest that when believers pray, as Daniel did here, it affords opportunity for God to declare His love to them.

Gabriel goes on to give to Daniel that wonderful prophetic revelation of the Seventy Weeks till the Messiah will come. When believers enter into the communion of prayer, God will reveal His truth, just as He longs to do.

Two years later, "the LORD stirred up the spirit of Cyrus king of Persia, that he made a proclamation throughout all his kingdom..." enabling the Jews to return again to their land and rebuild their temple. Surely this was a direct answer to the supplication of Daniel.

Men Ought Always to Pray: The Spirit of Paul's Exercise



Bentley, Tom

How a person is introduced upon the page of Holy Writ often indicates the character and nature of his subsequent ministry. Gideon is threshing wheat (Judges 6), Saul is searching for lost asses which he never found (1 Samuel 9), David is keeping sheep (1 Samuel 16), Elisha is ploughing (1 Kings 19), Peter and Andrew are casting nets while John and James are mending nets when called by the Lord (Matthew 4). One of the first observations of one named Saul, a man of Tarsus, is, "Behold, he prayeth" (Acts 9:11). It will become truly characteristic of the man as Paul, the apostle, whose prayer exercise was as constant as it was consistent, and as steadfast as it was specific. Nor is this the first time the newly converted Saul prayed. Visualize him as a pious Jew in the Temple for the time of prayer, or in a synagogue when he must have prayed to the God of Whom he says, "I serve from my forefathers with a pure conscience" (2 Timothy 1:3). But the occasion observed in Acts 9 is surely the first time he directed his prayer to the Lord Jesus of Stephen's prayer (Acts 7:59-60).

The impressions made upon the mind of Saul as he viewed Stephen being stoned and listened carefully to his prayer exercise must surely have left an indelible impact. Saul is witnessing and, I believe, pondering things that Gamaliel never taught him. Four issues of spiritual significance contribute to Paul's prayer life as seen in Stephen's final moments on earth. Namely: A Holy Spirit fullness, an open heaven, a glorified Lord, and a kneeling, praying, pleading servant in touch with heaven.

Apart from David, few writers of Holy Scripture have recorded so much of their personal devotions in prayer as has the Apostle. Many certainly have recorded their prayers. Such expressions of exercise in the presence of God deserve our attention and consideration. Nor would we ever wish to overlook the recorded prayers of the Lord

Jesus during His time on earth (e.g. Matt 11, 27; Mark 14; Luke 23; John 11, 17). This remarkable feature of Paul's writing is not intended to reveal his way of approach into the presence of his God or to show how holy a man he was. That would defeat the purpose of his prayer exercise. His spiritual way of weaving of prayer and precept, of exercise and exposition, of desire and definition is graciously simple and essentially spiritual and if it does reveal so much of that private intimacy, it is unintentional.

Pondering the prayers of Paul as recorded in his epistles, it may be possible to conceive how he would address the Lord when opening a gathering of the saints. The following order is a suggestion: He would begin by invoking the benediction of the God of grace through Jesus Christ the Lord. He would then present his thanksgivings and praises for the common ground shared in Christ and for the spiritual history of the assembly thus gathered. He would offer prayer for the sanctification and spiritual prosperity of the saints in a general way. He would then enlarge in specific petitions and intercessions for the company that would reflect upon the peculiar need of the saints as well as reveal his particular exercise on their behalf. He would crown his devotion in prayer by offering, on the part of the worshiping company, a full doxology in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ to God the Father.

By suggesting five headings for the ordered paragraphs that follow, we can highlight the rich matter that lies within the scope of Paul's prayers.

Invocatory Prayer

As we read Paul's writings the principle of invocatory prayer is discernable. It is seen as the blessing of God is called down upon the saints at the commencement of the letter where it takes the form of introductory greetings and at the close of the letter where it takes the form of valedictory blessings. These are usually referred to respectively as salutations and benedictions. In the one it is all that the goodness of God can bestow. In the other it is all that the weakness of man requires. The seal of Paul's authority is in the word "grace." It is the hallmark of genuineness (Rom 1:7; 1Co 1:3;

2Co 1:2; Gal 1:3; Eph 1:2; Phi 1:2; Col 1:2; 1Th 1:1; 2Th 1:2; 1Ti 1:2; 2Ti 1:2; Tit 1:4 and Phe 3). If it is his hallmark at the beginning, so it is at the end. In all his benedictions the keynote is grace, grace as the source of a full salvation, the spring of full growth and the strength of spontaneous thanksgiving. Hence the practical inference is that nothing should begin our prayers without drawing upon grace and nothing should end our prayers without desiring grace.

Gratulatory Prayer

Paul always offered thanks to God as the Author of all the blessings of His people. Paul's thanksgivings usually have a direct bearing upon the specific experience of the saints to whom he writes. Note the following examples with due consideration: Rom 1:8; 1Co 1:4; Eph 1:15; Phi 1:3; Col 1:3; 1Th 1:2, 3:9; 2Th 1:3. One striking exception is that of the Galatian Epistle. There is, however, a high note reached in a strange deviation from his usual thanksgiving, for what he fails to find in the Galatians for praise, he finds in God (Gal 1:3-5).

Ejaculatory Prayer

This feature of Paul's prayers cannot be overlooked even though it may not find a place in a formal outline of his recorded devotions. Any consideration of the Epistle of Paul to the Romans that would miss out on observing the term "God forbid" (Rom 3:4, 6, 31; 6:2, 15; 7:7, 13; 9:14; 11:1, 11) must deprive the saint of tremendous value. Other examples of this form of prayer in Romans are found in 6:17 and 7:25.

Supplicatory Prayer

The line between supplicatory prayer and intercession is at times not easily drawn. Supplication often calls forth the worth and greatness of the One to Whom our prayers ascend, while intercession lays stress upon the character of the one who offers the plea. Under the category of what may specifically be termed supplicatory prayer, the following examples can be considered: Rom 9:3; Gal 4:19; 2Ti 1:18; 2:7; 4:16 and Phe 6.



Valedictory Prayer

We come now to doxologies, an aspect of prayer seldom reached in either private or public exercise. Each doxology has a setting which commands our interest. The context usually supplies the cause for the outburst of praise. Paul's doxologies afford the worshiping heart reasons to continually adore and praise our God. The following classification is intended to promote this exercise continually:

- **To the God of Revelation** (Rom 11:33-36) when the marvels of His revelation overwhelm and even cause us to wonder.
- **To the God of Redemption** (Gal 1:3-5) when the saints do not rise to their expected stature in Christ.
- **To the God of Declaration** (Rom 16: 25-27) when the fulness of His purpose is grasped and truly appreciated by faith.
- **To the God of Provision** (Phil 4:19) when all created streams run dry.
- **To the God of Dispensations** (1 Tim 1:17) when life's little day appears to be insignificant.
- **To the God of Vindication** (1 Tim 6:15-16) when suffering's flame burns the soul and vengeance would rise.
- **To the God of Preservation** (2 Tim 4:18) when the gate of heaven is within reach.
- **To the God of Consummation** (Eph 3:20-21) when we feel that there is the slightest possibility His purpose may not be realized.

All these ended with Amen. Where there is no Amen, the spirit of prayer is lost. It is one sad absence in multitudes of assemblies today. Neither private nor public prayer should end without voicing the Amen!

From this baptism in prayer Paul must have learned how Stephen had (i) an ability to possess himself amid suffering; (ii) an ability to perceive the ministry of a glorified Man in heaven; and (iii) an ability to plead on the behalf of others, with a Christ-like compassion.

Stephen's preaching was prolific, but it is not this the new convert imitates. It is his praying he emulates. For the first time the newborn soul breathes the holy name of Jesus his Lord, and the Lord in heaven is as conscious of this remarkable touch of devotion as He was when the woman touched the hem of His garment for healing. The Lord Jesus says to Ananias "Behold, he prayeth," which indicates that the conscious exercise of the newly born again soul was felt by Him Who saved him by His grace on the Damascus Road. Thus, begins Paul's spirit of prayer. It never left him and what a blessing that has proved to be for the household of faith!

Men Ought Always to Pray: The Prayers of the Apostle (2)

Bentley, Tom



The Exceeding Greatness of His Power

Paul's concern for the churches of Galatia was as intense as for any of the churches that were his daily solicitude before the Lord (2Co 11:28). While the words in Galatians 1:19 carry a hint of prayer, there is no actual prayer expressed by Paul on behalf of the Galatian saints. Often, he must surely have carried them in his heart in prayer to God, but his language and sentiment expressed are never recorded. Elements of prayer do, however, appear in the epistle. The salutation of 1:3, instead of widening to include thanksgiving on behalf of the saints, concludes with a doxology to the God of Redemption. What is absent in the saints is gloriously adequate and abounding in Him.

The Ephesian letter, on the other hand, pulsates with prayer, displaying the evident characteristics of Paul's exercise.

Salutation (1:2): The familiar Pauline inscription assumes as well as affirms the equality of the Father and the Son, hence the deity of the Lord Jesus is accepted beyond doubt. Both the Father and the Son form the one Source of grace and peace.

Benediction (6:23-24): Here are words of such rich moment and meaning as to engage our attention beyond the scope of these lines: **peace**, Paul desires that there will be *no disturbing element* among the saints at Ephesus; **love**, *no dividing element*; **faith**, *no doubting element*; and **grace**, *no defecting element*.

Thanksgiving (1:16): Paul always lives out his own exhortative ministry when it comes to this theme. Chapter 5:4 supplies a much better exercise for the tongue: "but rather giving of thanks." Chapter 5:20 indicates how all-embracing thanksgiving can really be: "giving of thanks for all things."

Mutuality (1:16): The Apostle's note of his constant remembrance is not vain repetition. He prayed unceasingly for the saints. Yet at the same time he ever had the utmost respect and placed essential value upon the prayers of the saints on his behalf (6:19-20). How striking are the words of 3:13: "Wherefore I desire that ye faint not at my tribulations for you, which is your glory"! The formal use of this word "desire" conveys an asking in prayer.

Doxology (3:20 -21): Paul exults in this ascription of praise to the God of Consummation.

Prayer is an essential component of the Christian's panoply. Paul places it along with the armory of the victorious combatant in the spiritual warfare (6:13-18).

Two prayers in the Epistle of Paul to the Ephesians call for a more detailed analysis than these lines could offer: 1:17-23 and 3:14-19. They are the longest of His recorded prayers and are suited to the themes he espouses in the Epistle. Occupation with the material in these prayers will provide valuable aid in living above the depressive defeats of earth and will provide a life of mastery and victory.



Mood of the Prayer

The state of mind prevailing in the Apostle as he prays is one of praise and thanksgiving (1:3-14; 1:15-16). Paul has been occupied with **divine choice**, the Will of the Father (1:3-6); **divine cost**, the Work of the Son (1:7-12); **divine claim**, the Witness of the Holy Spirit of Promise (1:13-14). Each of these distinct stanzas in Paul's song blend in a refrain of glory (1:6, 12, 14). It would be impossible to fathom the depths or reach the height of this paean of praise with which Paul begins the epistle, but in heart we surely appreciate it. This great sentence moves from eternity to eternity as he embraces aspects of doctrine we find incomprehensibly great, such as election, redemption, sonship, forgiveness, sealing, faith, gospel, salvation, inheritance, purpose, counsel, will, and grace. His added joy lies in the assurance that the Ephesians find incorporation in the purpose of God through faith. This knowledge releases prayer in a positive

pleading for a serene and sublime apprehension of it all in the heart and mind of the saints.

Matter of the Prayer

The pattern in the prayer is typical. Something before it must be considered, and something after makes it really what it is, so the matter is threefold in v 18:

- i. What is the hope of His calling: compare to the Will of the Father
- ii. What is the riches of His glory: compare to the Work of the Son
- iii. What is the exceeding greatness of His power: compare to the Witness of the Holy Spirit of Promise.

Abraham, a picture of the first, responded to the call which gave him hope. Jacob appreciated the promises of inheritance. Isaac, in figure, displayed something of the power of resurrection.

Medium of the Prayer

Person Addressed: “The God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of Glory” (v 17). Divine titles are always significant, deserving our attention and demanding our acceptance.

As “God of our Lord Jesus Christ,” the Father acknowledges the perfect Man Whose walk, will, and work carry unlimited and unquestioned divine approbation. As “Father of our Lord Jesus Christ,” God owns Him as the perfect Son Who reveals Him completely and fully. Earlier God appeared to Abraham as the God of Glory (Acts 7:2) but we in wondrous grace approach Him as the Father of Glory. We may ask: What glory? Clearly and unmistakably, it is the glory of verses 6, 12 and 14, for He is the Father of that glory. It originates in His purpose for His Own, which the resurrection makes real and recognizable (John 20:17).

Petition Asked: (i) “That He may give” (v 17); (ii) “That ye may know” (v 18). Is the medium the Holy Spirit of God or a prevailing condition in the spirit of man? Assuming that before us is a title of the Holy Spirit, He then is the medium of the prayer, for He is

essentially and eternally the Spirit of Wisdom and Revelation. Full integration is desired, and, though Paul often sees a merging of the Holy Spirit and the human spirit, it is frequently not so in actual experience. Eternal distinctions exist. Revelation comes first, for it is what the Spirit gives objectively. Wisdom follows, as the same Spirit is the source of wisdom subjectively. The operation produces “acknowledgment of Him” (RV mg.). The glorious purpose of God will know ultimate and eternal fruition in Christ.



Bentley, Tom

Marvel of the Prayer in Ephesians 1:17-23

1. **Encouraging:** the hope of His calling. Something expected but not desired is dread. Something desired, but not expected is despair. Here something both expected and desired is divine. Christ is the sum of all history and the focus of all prophecy; everything is fulfilled in Him.

2. **Enriching:** The riches of the glory of the inheritance in the saints. *Riches* suggests wealth; *glory* suggests abounding wealth. Christ is rich in us, because of what we have become through Him and for Him.

3. **Energizing:** The exceeding greatness of His power. Without this power we could see nothing. It is one thing to see His purpose and derive high hopes, but if it were not fulfilled, hope deferred would make the heart sick. We might even exult in wealth, but if marked by base carnalities and tragic defeats, what would it mean? Thankfully the vital answer is “the exceeding greatness of His power to us ward who believe.” We measure that power by resurrection power (raised Him), ascension power (seated Him), dominion power (put all under His feet), sovereign power (made Him Head over all to the Church).

The four words for power used here confirm full accomplishment:

(i) **Power** (5 times in Eph) denotes the ability to achieve.

(ii) **Working** and **wrought** (3 times and 4 times respectively in Eph) suggest activity in achieving.

(iii) **Mighty** (2 times in Eph) acclaims the authority that subdues in achieving.

(iv) **Power** (2 times in Eph) displays absolute inherent power in all His achievements.

This encouragement, enrichment, and energy enables us to apprehend the purpose, appreciate the possession, and appropriate the power to acknowledge Him Who will ultimately, eternally effect it all.

Men Ought Always to Pray:

Nehemiah—A Man of Action



Slabaugh, John

Nehemiah was used by God to bring great blessing to the Jewish people. The nation had turned away from Jehovah. God delivered them into captivity in Babylon. At the end of seventy years over 40,000 of the Jews returned from Babylon to Jerusalem.

Their first task was the building of a temple to replace Solomon's temple which had been destroyed at the beginning of their captivity in Babylon. The temple was completed in twenty years in spite of delays stemming from opposition from the Samaritans dwelling in the land. The prophets Haggai and Zechariah, with messages from God, stirred up the people to complete the temple project.

Seventy-eight years after the first Jews returned to the land, Ezra came from Babylon with about 5000 more exiles. Eleven years later, Nehemiah also came to Jerusalem to rebuild the walls. These two godly men were a great blessing to the Jewish people in their day.

Nehemiah was of the royal seed, a descendant of David. He was the cupbearer to King Artaxerxes, a high position in the king's administration. From his brother, Hanani, he learned of the sad state of affairs in Jerusalem where, eighty-nine years after the first Jews returned from Babylon, the walls and gates of the city still lay in rubble and ruin (Neh 1:3). He was deeply stirred by this news and he "wept, and mourned certain days, and fasted and prayed before the God of heaven" (1:4).

He prayed for four months until a day when he stood before the king. The king marked his sad countenance and inquired of the cause of his sorrow. To be sad in the king's presence could have meant his death in that era and he "was very sore afraid" (2:2). He informed the king of the desolate state of Jerusalem, the city of his fathers. The king asked, "For what dost thou make request?" Nehemiah prayed to

the God of heaven” (2:4), then requested to be sent to Jerusalem so he could relieve the suffering of God’s people.

In a most remarkable way that request was honored by the king. Nehemiah was sent to Judea as the governor of the province with letters instructing other officials to cooperate with him and assist him in the project of building the walls and a house for his own use. This incident illustrates perfectly the truth of Proverbs 21:1, “The king’s heart is in the hand of the LORD, as the rivers of water: He turneth it whithersoever He will.”

When Nehemiah arrived in Jerusalem, without disclosing why he had come, he viewed the desolation of the city walls. Then he called his countrymen to him and told his mission and how the king had commissioned him to do the work of rebuilding the walls. “And they said, Let us rise up and build. So, they strengthened their hands for this good work” (2:18). In spite of bitter opposition, slander, intrigue, and even the threat of military attack, the rebuilding of the wall was completed in the remarkable time of 52 days.

Nehemiah, the Man of Prayer

The hand of God is very manifestly seen in this book. Nehemiah was a “man of action” who had God with him. There can be no doubt this is the reason for the remarkable evidence of God’s hand with him in his labors for the welfare of God’s people. He was a man of prayer.

The first of Nehemiah’s prayers is found in chapter one (v 4-11) when his compassions were stirred for his people upon learning of their plight in Jerusalem. His own personal circumstances were luxurious and untouched by adversity, but he prayed earnestly for his countrymen. This prayer is marked by entreaty for them (v 5-6), confession of sin (v 6-7), claiming of divine promises (v 8-10), and a specific request for favor with the king. In his confession of sins, he prays corporately. He does not except himself. There is no smug self-satisfaction here but true humility.

There is a second, even longer prayer recorded in chapter 9. We are not told who led in this prayer. It could have been either Ezra or Nehemiah, but we are not told this. It begins with praise and worship (v 6-15) and was also marked by confession of Israel's sins in contrast to God's mercy and goodness to His people (v 16-26). This prayer rehearses the righteousness of God's judgments that led to their captivity and ends with the acknowledgment they are God's servants (v 37-38). All these elements are worth meditating on for insights into how Christians also should pray.

Nehemiah was also marked by the habit of short concise prayers right at the point when a need arose. When King Artaxerxes graciously asked him what he would request of the king, he prayed before he answered the king. Surely, he did not excuse himself, go into his closet and spend some time in prayer before responding. He was always "in touch." Instances such as chapters 4:9, 5:19, 6:9, 14, and 13:14 are examples of such short-pointed prayers and illustrate our Savior's words in Luke 18:1, "that meab ought always to pray, and not to faint."

Lessons for Us Today

Nehemiah provides abundant lessons for us today. We may mark his exercise over an extended time period behind his first prayer. Out of his exercise came also his resolve to do the work of building the wall when God opened the way for him to do it.

We also do well to cultivate a prayerful spirit that links us to God's throne at any given moment we are in need. Like the Jews of old, we are marked by great weakness, spiritually, but who can tell what great things God can and will do for us? Like the Jews, we face much opposition from the world outside, but our God is limitless in His power to effect His purposes through His people who will carry out His will.

"Wherefore lift up the hands which hang down, and the feeble knees; And make straight paths for your feet, lest that which is lame be turned out of the way; but let it rather be healed" (Heb 12:12-13).