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How Should We Be Praying?

Psalms 40:8: (KJV) *I delight to do thy will, O my God: yea, thy law is within my heart.*

For many religions, prayer is a mainstay and a staple of ritual and lifestyle. Whatever the religion, prayer is a lifeline to a higher power, a calming factor in individual experiences and a connector to others who share the same faith. Prayer can and should permeate the life of a Christian. So, if this is the case, then the question is, do we know how we should be praying, why we should be praying and for what we should be praying? Stay with us as we explore some of the many teachings on prayer from Jesus!

Today we will discuss two parables of Jesus to give us some practical groundwork on prayer. Our basic query is how, why and for what should we pray?



Luke 18:1-8: (NASB) *¹Now he was telling them a parable to show that at all times they ought to pray and not to lose heart, ²saying, In a certain city there was a judge who did not fear God and did not respect man. ³There was a widow in that city, and she kept coming to him, saying, Give me legal protection from my opponent. ⁴For a while he was unwilling; but afterward he said to himself, Even though I do not fear God nor respect man, ⁵yet because this widow bothers me, I will give her legal protection, otherwise by continually coming she will wear me out. ⁶And the Lord said, Hear what the unrighteous judge said; ⁷now, will not God bring about justice for His elect who cry to Him day and night, and will He delay long over them? ⁸I tell you that He will bring about justice for them quickly. However, when the Son of Man comes, will he find faith on the earth?*

There was a two-fold reason for the story: Luke 18:1: (NASB) *Now he was telling them a parable to show that **at all times they ought to pray and not to lose heart...***

Why the first lesson of praying at all times? Luke 17:25-27

Luke 17 is all about the conditions that would develop before and at the time of Jesus' return. The lesson was simple - the trouble that surrounds you will be such that an instinctive prayer life should be in place.

Romans 12:12: (NASB) *rejoicing in hope, persevering in tribulation, devoted to prayer...*

1 Thessalonians 5:17: (NASB) *pray without ceasing;*

How should we pray? Why should we pray? For what should we pray?

So, we haven't even discussed the parable and we already have a few answers: **WHY?** The world brings a level of trouble that we cannot cope with on our own. The trouble is bigger than we are! **HOW?** As we go through our experiences, we do not necessarily need an *outward* posture of prayer but need to be always in the mode of an *inner* posture of prayer. While being on our knees is certainly appropriate, it is not required. No one even needs to know we are always praying.

So we should pray always, but why the second lesson of praying to not lose heart?

When we lose heart in anything we do, we lose focus, determination, strength and inevitably the battle. We have to have the internal drive that pushes us through the experiences of life.

Psalms 43:5: (NRSV) *Why are you cast down, O my soul, and why are you disquieted within me? Hope in God; for I shall again praise him, my help and my God.*

Our personal experiences can drain us emotionally unless we continually refill ourselves *spiritually*.

Ephesians 6:18: (KJV) *Praying always with all prayer and supplication in the Spirit, and watching thereunto with all perseverance and supplication for all saints;*

The brotherhood's experiences can drain us emotionally unless we continually refill *spiritually*.

So, we haven't even discussed the parable and we already have another answer: **FOR WHAT?** The sustaining, refilling and balancing of our hearts! It is not all about "how you feel." It is about what you are capable of doing under the conditions no matter what you feel. Prayer can level us out even if we do not feel like fighting the battle.

Now the parable: Luke 18:2-3: (NASB) ²saying, *In a certain city there was a judge who did not fear God and did not respect man.* ³*There was a widow in that city, and she kept coming to him, saying, Give me legal protection from my opponent.*

Observations:

- The judge had no reverence for God and no respect for man. He was a grumbling kind of judge who did not care.
- A widow from his jurisdiction brought him a matter of legal protection.

The Jewish Law was very particular about protecting those who could not protect themselves: Isaiah 1:17: (KJV) *Learn to do well; seek judgment, relieve the oppressed, judge the fatherless, plead for the widow.* Jeremiah 22:3 Luke 18:4-5

- Having no reverence or respect - he refused again and again.
- The widow persisted relentlessly, perhaps day after day after day.
- The judge granted justice - he did the right thing for the wrong reason.

Is this parable telling us to wear God out so He will finally listen to us? Of course not! The example is one of persistence.

Prayer is the subject of deep respect. We go before God Almighty sometimes with a sense of helplessness and hopelessness. Luke 18:6-8

The Lesson: If an irreverent and disrespectful judge can do the right thing because he is pressed into action, how much more will God Almighty - who loves you and knows your needs before you do - hear and respond to your most pressing circumstances when you go to Him!

In our distress, we sometimes forget that we have a faithful God! **HOW?** With intensity and focus. **WHY?** We are as helpless as widows and cannot overcome without help. **FOR WHAT?** Not anything that our heart desires, but first things first - just protection from our enemies.

Sometimes the answer from God is simply, “Wait. I’m not done with your experience yet.” A lot of times the real answer for prayer is in not only our persistence but in our patience to see how God might open a door. He might be opening a window when we are looking for Him to open a door!

Being a Christian is being a footstep follower of Jesus. Jesus’ life was not easy...ever...at any time. But he walked through each experience because he was doing the will of God and not his own will. We, too, must follow in Jesus’ footsteps and it is not easy. God wants us to be crystallized to the character of Jesus and that is why we have these difficult trials and tribulations.

Sometimes we think God is like Santa Claus and we can just write out a list of what we want. Treating God like this is not a real approach either. He is not a personal genie to grant our wishes. That is not what prayer is for.

Next, the verses (that are often ignored) that precede the Lord’s Prayer: Matthew 6:5-8: (NASB) ⁵*When you pray, you are not to be like the hypocrites; for they love to stand and pray in the synagogues and on the street corners so that they may be seen by men. Truly I say to you, they have their reward in full.* ⁶*But you, when you pray, go into your inner room, close your door and pray to your Father who is in secret, and your Father who sees what is done in secret will reward you.* ⁷*And when you are praying, do not use meaningless repetition as the Gentiles do, for they suppose that they will be heard for their many words.* ⁸*So do not be like them; for your Father knows what you need before you ask Him.*

Do not use meaningless repetition: The Lord’s Prayer was not given to us as a prayer to recite over and over again as our prayer life. When we repeat rote prayers, they lose their meaning.

Prayer is a changing experience for our lives. There is more to prayer than just an emotional outlet.

...Luke 18:8: *However, when the Son of Man comes, will he find faith on the earth?*

This is an important question. Remember the parable was given so we do not lose heart. There is a direct application of this parable to our time here and now. Perhaps these lessons on prayer were given not only to establish each follower of Christ in their own personal walk of

sacrifice, but to establish a culture of prayer for the body of Christ that could be passed down through time until the time of the end in which we now live. So this is about our responsibility to learn how to pray, why to pray and what to pray for and then to pass that incredibly important knowledge and understanding to others.

Prayer should be a way of life no matter which way our life is going.

How should we pray? Why should we pray? For what should we pray?

Another parable of Jesus that illustrates these three points: Luke 18:9-14: (NASB) ⁹And he also told this parable to some people who trusted in themselves that they were righteous, and viewed others with contempt: ¹⁰Two men went up into the temple to pray, one a Pharisee and the other a tax collector. ¹¹The Pharisee stood and was praying this to himself: God, I thank You that I am not like other people: swindlers, unjust, adulterers, or even like this tax collector. ¹²I fast twice a week; I pay tithes of all that I get. ¹³But the tax collector, standing some distance away, was even unwilling to lift up his eyes to heaven, but was beating his breast, saying, God, be merciful to me, the sinner! ¹⁴I tell you, this man went to his house justified rather than the other; for everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, but he who humbles himself will be exalted.

This parable is addressed to a very different audience than our first parable: Luke 18:9
Who were these people? Luke 16:15

Luke 18:10: (NASB) *Two men went up into the temple to pray, one a Pharisee and the other a tax collector. Both parties went to the Temple indicating they knew where to seek God. So, they were in the right place and doing the right thing, but the results would not both come out right because of attitude. Here we had the complete opposites of Jewish society: The Pharisee who was supposed to be the most righteous and the tax collector whom nobody liked.*

Luke 15:1-3: (NASB) *¹Now all the tax collectors and the sinners were coming near him to listen to him. ²Both the Pharisees and the scribes began to grumble, saying, This man receives sinners and eats with them. ³So he told them this parable, saying... (Jesus goes on to give the Parable of the Lost Sheep, the Parable of the Lost Coin, the Prodigal Son, the Unjust Steward, etc.) These people were dirty in the eyes of the Pharisees and Scribes but not in the eyes of Jesus.*

Luke 18:11: (NASB) *The Pharisee stood and was praying this to himself...This actually is the meaning of the phrase - to pray to - or towards. So he was praying towards himself about himself for the benefit of himself. Nothing else mattered. **This was not at all new for Israel:** Isaiah 65:2-5*

Our prayers should be thankful!

Does that include thanking God that we are better than others?

Continuing the parable - here we learn how not to pray: Luke 18:11-12: (NASB) *...God, I thank You that I am not like other people: swindlers, unjust, adulterers, or even like this tax collector. ¹²I fast twice a week; I pay tithes of all that I get.*

So, what does this “prayer” consist of? Thankfulness! Too bad it was about thankfulness for self-proclamation and ego! 1 Corinthians 4:7-8

We have to make sure we are focused on the right things with prayer. **HOW?** Don’t pray thankfully as one who proudly stands above the crowd. We should NOT pray to justify oneself by focusing on the sins around you... (In fact, the Pharisees were committing these very sins they were focusing on, but on a spiritual level!) Do not pray in brazen self-assurance that your station on earth is equivalent to your standing before God!

The Pharisee had a station on earth that was truly privileged and important. They were the spiritual teachers of Israel. But let us not think for one second that because we have a privileged position here on earth that we automatically are privileged before God. What do we do *with* that privileged position? We should NOT pray for acceptance to God based upon the things we do. The pride of man puts himself in the place of God.

So, how do we become more like this tax collector?

Luke 18:13-14: (NASB) ¹³*But the tax collector, standing some distance away, was even unwilling to lift up his eyes to heaven, but was beating his breast, saying, God, be merciful to me, the sinner! ¹⁴I tell you, this man went to his house justified rather than the other; for everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, but he who humbles himself will be exalted.*

The elements of this prayer are external humility, outwardly expressing gratitude and need with deep personal and public reverence.

Psalms 40:11-12: (NASB) ¹¹*You, O LORD, will not withhold Your compassion from me; Your lovingkindness and Your truth will continually preserve me. ¹²For evils beyond number have surrounded me; My iniquities have overtaken me, so that I am not able to see; They are more numerous than the hairs of my head, and my heart has failed me.*

HOW? Clothed in humility so that it can be perceived from the outside as well as the inside. Our lives should be a living worship of God.

That is what the tax collector was actually looking for: Luke 18:15: (NASB) *...but was beating his breast, saying, God, be merciful to me, the sinner!*

The elements of this prayer include inward humility, the passionate acknowledgment of who we are, how far short we fall and the plea for God’s unearned mercy. We do not deserve anything! We have the ability and privilege to seek God’s mercy because Jesus died for us.

Hebrews 4:14-16: (NASB) ¹⁴*Therefore, since we have a great high priest who has passed through the heavens, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold fast our confession. ¹⁵For we do not have a high priest who cannot sympathize with our weaknesses, but one who has been tempted in all things as we are, yet without sin. ¹⁶Therefore let us draw near with confidence (Not confidence in ourselves, or with arrogance or ego) to the throne of grace, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need.*

FOR WHAT? For God to see us as we are through the eyes of His mercy. The pathway to His mercy is through the blood of Jesus’ sacrifice.

The Apostle Paul thought he could serve the Lord better if he did not have a physical deficiency (thought to be his eyesight): 2 Corinthians 12:7-10: Paul was already strong in the Lord, yet undergoing hardship, so he prayed. But the answer was NO!

Jesus concludes the parable: Luke 18:14: *I tell you, this man went to his house justified rather than the other; for everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, but he who humbles himself will be exalted.*

The Lesson: True blessing (the **WHAT**) can only come when we deeply desire it (the **WHY**) and can only come through true faith, honesty and humility (the **HOW**).

Sometimes emotionally we get disturbed and destroyed by the experiences of our lives and the lives of others. Take heart in the fact that if we feed ourselves spiritually, it will give us strength through the distress to be able to bear the burden God has put upon us for our benefit and perhaps for the benefit of those around us. That is the true power of prayer and bringing things before God with sincerity and humility. We want to find His blessing and do His will and not ours.

**So, how should we be praying?
For Jonathan and Rick and Christian Questions...
Think about it...!**