

Biblical Praying

What Is Your Way of Praying?

The other day I was praying for God to heal my back and I stopped. The pain was terrible, and I was having a tough time getting through it. But then I remembered the awful suffering of my wife and her rib injury as well as her much worse back condition. While still in prayer others came to mind who contacted me from Liberia and the Philippines who had horrific living conditions and poverty. Several names came to mind of those whose husband had cheated on them and the depression it brought was debilitating. Late on a Monday night, with pain crippling my attempts to sleep, the Lord brought to mind numbers of people who were suffering worse than me and I prayed for each until I drifted off to sleep for a couple of hours. When I first became a Christian, I was quite formulaic in my praying, and I am grateful for it because it taught me a certain discipline of praying. As I am much older, I have discovered that prayer is much more than a formula or a system, it is a way of life as we will discover in our key verse for today. Recently I was speaking on the phone with a friend who is doing a crucial work in Christian ministry, and he has several obstacles he is facing. As the conversation was ending, I sensed the need to pray for him over the phone but did not. After hanging up, I wondered why I didn't. My theology on prayer seemed to not match in that moment my practice of prayer. The Big Idea is this. The more you pray, the bigger your life.

As we have gone through the armor of God, we shall take a couple of weeks looking at the teaching in Ephesians that goes along with the armor of God material. Here is our key verse. **And pray in the Spirit on all occasions with all kinds of prayers and requests. With this in mind, be alert and always keep on praying for all the saints.** (Ephesians 6: 18 NIV) A more literal translation reads this way.. **Through all prayer and supplication, praying ones, in every time in the Spirit, and into this, being vigilant ones in all perseverance and supplications concerning all the holy ones.** (Ephesians 6: 18) What we have here are the characteristics of the faithful follower of Jesus Christ and it is profound. Keep in mind that God has put you on this earth to pray. Of course there is much more to your life with God, but prayer runs all through what you do and how you think as you live in Christ. It is your lifeline to God and your connection to Him living through you and in all you do. Without prayer, you become spiritually isolated and many of the wonderful benefits of having Jesus as your Savior are lost to you. Imagine living in a great mansion but staying just in the closet day after day, never knowing what else is in the majestic home of yours. Prayer opens up a whole new world for you, moving you along so that you can tap into the potential you have as a child of God

Our passage lists six characteristics of the faithful follower of Jesus Christ. The first is that person engages in personal, or as I like to put it, "please praying". We see an example of this when a pagan woman came to Jesus begging Him to heal her demon possessed daughter. At first Jesus did not respond to her. Have you ever felt like that? "Where is the God I've read about in the Bible?" In fact the disciples took His silence to indicate Jesus didn't care about her. Why would that be that they would assume God couldn't be bothered with the woman's daughter? Because she wasn't an Israelite? Because they could not relate to her? Was she unattractive to them, didn't warm their hearts by her personality? Did they assume she was immoral or too warped by sin or had bad theology? The disciples perfectly illustrate the way many see the thoughts of God. He goes through a list of qualifications that must be met before He does anything for them. If you match up to what God expects, then you have a shot at winning the lottery, at having the Lord for you in your please praying. If you don't qualify, you are sunk. But Jesus wasn't shutting the woman down. He was just giving her the opportunity to stretch her faith. When she came and knelt before Jesus, begging him to help her daughter, Jesus seemed to shove her aside. **He replied, "It is not right to take the children's bread and toss it to their dogs."** (Matthew 15: 26 NIV) It seemed like Jesus was just parroting the warped theology of many religious people. "You have to measure up to a standard if you are to have your prayers answered." But that is not the theology of God. **"Yes, Lord," she said, "but even the dogs eat the crumbs that fall from their masters' table." Then Jesus answered, "Woman, you have great faith! Your request is granted." And her daughter was healed from that very hour.** (Matthew 15: 27-28 NIV)

Please praying is the desperate call of the soul for God to intervene. Most examples of this are the prayers of those who are broken hearted, in great pain, whether it be physical or psychological, panicking over what is ahead, or in a circumstance that is overwhelming and mind numbing. Sometimes please praying is done for someone so close that it is like praying for yourself. It could be a son or daughter, a spouse or a close friend. The sense is that in please praying, you are calling on Christ to help you in the same sort of desperation the poor Canaanite woman prayed. Did you notice the honor Jesus bestowed on the please praying mom. "Great faith" He said she had, and I picture Jesus

smiling joyfully over her belief that God would help her. Please praying is just as honorable as any other sort of praying and it pushes you perhaps more than any other sort of human experience to live by faith. Think of Hezekiah praying for deliverance from the king of Assyria and the blood-thirsty Assyrian hoards invading Judah. **Now, O Lord our God, deliver us from his hand, so that all kingdoms on earth may know that you alone, O Lord, are God.**" (2 Kings 19: 19 NIV) What is not mentioned is how Hezekiah tore his robes in distress over what he faced. Use the example of Hannah for taking please praying to the next level. **In bitterness of soul Hannah wept much and prayed to the Lord. And she made a vow, saying, "O Lord Almighty, if you will only look upon your servant's misery and remember me, and not forget your servant but give her a son, then I will give him to the Lord for all the days of his life, and no razor will ever be used on his head."** (1 Samuel 1: 10-11 NIV) Perhaps you wouldn't take Hannah's pledge to God, but the same desperation can get in you and our Savior is ready to welcome with open arms your please praying. "Please God, help me." "Please Jesus answer my prayer!" Please praying is the sense of the term supplication in our verse and it is panic praying, desperation praying, I have no one else to turn to praying and the Lord welcomes those prayers with love and affection. He knows your pain. He feels your fear. Beyond all that, Christ loves you.

Along this same line, let me share a second characteristic of a faithful follower of Jesus Christ. It is perseverance praying. Our praying we are told is to be "in all perseverance". This is one of the hardest teachings to present in the Christian faith because it means you have really gone through it for what seems like an eternity, and you may be starting to lose hope. I receive hundreds of prayer requests from around the world and many of them come from lovely people who have been praying for the same matter for years and even decades and they have stumbled upon me, hoping I will join them in praying. Perhaps you should take a closer look at Anna, the prophetess who for decades prayed for God's intervention. **There was also a prophetess, Anna, the daughter of Phanuel, of the tribe of Asher. She was very old; she had lived with her husband seven years after her marriage, and then was a widow until she was eighty-four. She never left the temple but worshiped night and day, fasting and praying. Coming up to them at that very moment, she gave thanks to God and spoke about the child to all who were looking forward to the redemption of Jerusalem.** (Luke 2: 36-38 NIV) There is something quite beautiful about this. Of course only one of us can be Anna coming upon the infant Jesus in the Temple and it is hard to relate to that but consider this. Hundreds of strangers were in Jerusalem and Mary and Joseph holding Jesus must have passed many of them as they wandered about. Only Anna and someone we will discuss at a later date knew what a great treasure was before them. Hundreds walked all around not seeing the Messiah, not knowing the hope of Israel was right there within touching distance but it was the one who was persevere praying who really saw Him.

I wonder how many perseverance praying saints we will meet in heaven who will have great honor and be legendary for their faithfulness. There is no shame in praying for the salvation of your son for thirty or fifty years. There is only honor. There is no shame in praying for your father to give up alcohol for twenty or thirty years. There is only honor. Jeremiah is known as the weeping prophet because of all the sorrow in his life. Imagine being a prophet who is despised by nearly everyone in town for simply saying what God told him to say, who prays for the people of his nation to turn to God, but they don't. He prayed for them up until Jerusalem was destroyed and only a tiny remnant of the Hebrews remained. Then, when this small collection of survivors had the opportunity to restart the nation in Israel, they decided to take off for Egypt and drag him with them. Still Jeremiah prayed for his people. Still he prayed for his nation to turn back to God. Tradition says that Jeremiah died in Egypt, never being able to see his beloved Judah again. Yet he prayed. Perseverance prayer. Perseverance prayer is for those who will be honored by Jesus, for those who will be celebrated in heaven by God.

Let me share the great benefit of perseverance prayer. Each day that you pray for the same request you have brought to God perhaps hundreds of times before, something supernatural develops within you. A trust in God that washes away fear, that shakes off your soul discouragement and despair takes place when you return to God with your ongoing request. Never think that perseverance prayer is just about your entreaty. It is about the health of your soul, psychologically and spiritually. Perseverance prayer brings you what the Bible calls a peace that passes all understanding, and it is like a pearl of great price for your soul. The Big Idea is this. The more you pray, the bigger your life. Gain all the joy and peace God has for you this week, going to Him in prayer by please praying and perseverance praying and may this be a blessed period in your life.