



Real Strength

What Do You Need Right Now?

Recently I had an appointment with a surgeon to go over with me a procedure that he would perform removing a lump from my back. The appointment was at 8:30 in the morning and when I arrived in the office, there was a stand in the waiting room with a sign that said patients weren't to enter any further before a staff member checked their temperature. I waited but no one came to see me. An elderly woman who was seated in the room motioned for me to go to the window that was only about twenty feet away. I walked over to the window and stuck my head in and greeted the receptionist who was on the other side of the wall. I told her that I had an appointment and she ushered me back to where the stand was so I could wait until she came back there and checked my temperature. I obediently followed her instruction but she didn't come. It was then that I noticed a little bell on the stand, the kind you would see on teachers' desks fifty years ago. I called out to the receptionist and asked her if I was supposed to ring the bell and she said I was. So, I rang the bell and out she came with her thermometer. Why did she wait until I rang the little bell? What protocol was she following that did not enable her to come see me, even though she knew I was there and waiting for her just ten steps away, until she heard the little "ping"?

I have a much more important question to ask. Why is it that if we have free access to the Lord of the universe, the King of Kings and God Almighty, we don't pray more? It really is most irrational. It cannot be the difficulty of it because it is as simple as breathing or blinking your eyes. It's not a matter of a busy schedule as we can pray even while conducting the most complicated and mind grabbing of tasks. A heart surgeon can still pray while operating. A mechanic can pray while working on a carburetor. A parent can pray while reading a children's book to a son or daughter. We are all perfectly equipped to do whatever we have before us and still pray at the same time. It is the ultimate multi-tasking skill. Your brain is perfectly designed to pray at any moment during the most taxing of times.

So why is it that you and I don't pray more? I am intrigued by the accounts in the eyewitness reports of Matthew, Mark, and Luke of what took place just before Jesus was arrested. Matthew the apostle gives the most detailed description. Jesus brought His disciples up to an olive grove called Gethsemane and had them wait while he walked off a short distance to pray. He called for Peter, James and John to go further into the grove with Him and asked them to stay with Him and "keep watch". **He took Peter and the two sons of Zebedee along with him, and he began to be sorrowful and troubled. Then he said to them, "My soul is overwhelmed with sorrow to the point of death. Stay here and keep watch with me."** (Matthew 26:37-38 NIV) Later Christ told them, when He went back and found them asleep, to keep watch and pray. In other words, being alert and attentive meant to pray. He wasn't asking these close disciples to keep guard in case the Jewish authorities came to arrest Him, which of course they did. Jesus wanted their minds fully on God and ready for whatever the Father gave them. Twice Jesus went back and found them not doing it and each time He rebuked them for falling asleep instead.

What is fascinating is that clearly Jesus was wanting something to happen when those disciples prayed. He told them that it was so they wouldn't fall into temptation. That is of course a part of the model prayer Christ shared with us. "And lead us not into temptation." Was Jesus telling the disciples to pray watchfully so that events would change such as Him being arrested or even crucified? Of course not. That was already decided by God. So what was it? Jesus was looking for His friends to be given God's own capacity to withstand the temptations before them. How could they gain that great power? It was by praying. Prayer, with your mind alert for God, makes it possible for you to acquire the nature of God, to be transformed by Him for a better and more joyful life. Prayer is how God infuses you with what you need that comes directly from Him. Think of prayer as the spicket that opens the flow of God into your life.

For most, prayer is the way you get something concrete and visible. The Old Testament gives us plenty of examples of this. When Hannah, the childless wife of Elkanah in great sorrow over her infertility prayed, it was so God would enable her to bear a son. **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) God did give her a son and he was Samuel, the great priest and prophet of Israel.

The same sort of praying was practiced by the Jewish governor of Israel. Nehemiah had been a critical member of the Persian emperor's support staff but when he heard about how ruined his country's capital was, Nehemiah felt compelled to do what he could to help rebuild it. He wrote of the effect the report of Jerusalem's state was upon him. **When I heard these things, I sat down and wept. For some days I mourned and fasted and prayed before the God of heaven.** (Nehemiah 1:4 NIV) Nehemiah was afraid to go to the emperor to request a leave of absence to join in the work at Jerusalem so he pleaded with God to give him favor with the king. We all pray like this. We want something and so we go to God for His favor. King David, who after he committed adultery and murder, prayed and begged for God's forgiveness. You may have prayed this way too. And we see in the Psalms, many prayers just exalting and glorifying God for how good He is. You might express those kinds of prayers. There is though another aspect of praying that needs to be taken into account!

Consider the Apostle Paul's admonition. **Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.** (Philippians 4:6-7 NIV) You have to carefully read it to grasp the immensity of the declaration. He is talking to those like you who sometimes are anxious about something and maybe really anxious. You might be struggling with debt or an illness, problems with your kids or your marriage. Work may be overwhelming right now or your classwork is overwhelming. We all have those times when life is just rough and we realize we need God...we need whatever He can offer us. Notice what the Apostle Paul says to do. Pray and bring your concerns, your requests to God. What follows is critical. He promises that the peace of God, His own peace, the peace that comes out of Him, peace that is incomprehensible to the human imagination, peace that cannot be developed on your own, that peace will guard your heart and your mind in or by means of Christ Jesus.

What prayer generates, any sort of prayer, is the working of God in you so that His characteristics become yours. His peace, joy and moral strength become yours. As you pray, you become aligned with Christ and His personality becomes a part of yours. Listen to the great declaration made in Ephesians 3:16. **I pray that out of his glorious riches he may strengthen you with power through his Spirit in your inner being, so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith.** (Ephesians 3:16-17 NIV) What sort of day is possible for those who has taken time to get a full dose of God working in them by simply praying. I challenge you to give priority to praying this week, maybe up your intake so that with just a bit more time devoted to it, an abundance of God can be yours to access as you make it through your day.