

QUANTOCK MINISTRIES

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*A Bible teaching and preaching ministry
for the Christian community*

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PRAYER

It is a well-established principle in biblical Christianity that indifferent praying leads to undisciplined living and ineffective witnessing. In this study on prayer, we are addressing two basic questions:

- i) Are we serious about our relationship with God?
- ii) Are we serious about being effective in the world today?

When the disciples were unable to get to grips with real spiritual warfare Jesus informed them “this kind can come out only by prayer (and fasting)” (Mark 9 v 29). In other words, the Lord is pointing to a direct link between our earnestness in prayer and our effectiveness in defeating Satan’s power. Here are three introductory points:

- a) The Holy Spirit’s work of conviction is through the Church. John 16 v 7 – 8 shows that the presence of the Holy Spirit in the lives of those who follow Jesus will convict the world of sin, righteousness, and judgement, subject to God’s sovereignty. The lack of these convictions in those around us suggests that we may not be doing our job properly as a channel for the Holy Spirit’s work, which in turn suggests our prayer life is probably not what it should be. When we complain about the state of our society we are really complaining about the state of the Church - our own lack of power and impact.
- b) Satan’s deceptions are a great injustice to millions around us. Ephesians 6 v 11 tells us we are to stand against the devil’s schemes. John 8 v 44 shows that his schemes are his lies, which deceive people into believing anything that is not the truth of the Word of God. These deceptions lead millions into sin, chaos, fear, disaster, and create enormous unhappiness in so many individual lives. Thus our “stand” is powerfully, and prayerfully to proclaim the truth over against all deception, because our concern for miserable and lost souls compels us to do so (John 8 v 32).
- c) The passion to see God’s answer. In our passionate concern that others will come to see the truth, recognising the deceptions that are devastating their lives and the whole fabric of our society, we cry out (pray) for justice against all the injustice of satanic deception. Luke 18 v 1 – 8 is all about faithful, persistent prayer for justice, for even the unjust judge must bow before the force of justice (God’s Truth). But will such faith be about in the last days (v8)?

Here are three principles of effective prayer.

1. Prayer is a conversation with God.

We must think carefully about our concept of effective prayer. There are misunderstandings about the true biblical idea of prayer. It is not:

- a) A religious duty (“official” prayers)
- b) An act of therapy (“try prayer if it makes you feel better”)
- c) A magic formula (“get the right formula and God is bound to bless”)
- d) Twisting God’s arm to do what we ask (expecting Him to jump to our act of “faith”)
- e) A small slot in a busy day (then forgetting to pray for the rest of the day)

Prayer is the intimate part of our relationship with the most important person in our lives.

- i) Ephesians 6 v 18. Prayer is a spiritual activity. It is our means of communicating with the spiritual world in the correct way (there are many incorrect ways). God is spirit; we have an immortal spirit; the Holy Spirit lives within each Christian; worship is a spiritual activity; etc. Because the spiritual sphere is such an important part of our existence, prayer is a wonderful, privileged facility that enables us to function as spiritual people.
- ii) Micah 6 v 8. God requires of us (among other things) to walk humbly with Him. A walk implies friendship and that implies two-way conversation. By faith Enoch knew this and walked with God. Moses was described as the friend of God. Part of the essence of God, being a Trinity (three persons in perfect harmony), is fellowship and so He knows all about the perfect love that is such an essential ingredient of true fellowship. This makes our God so different from all other so-called gods, such as Allah. God is love and loves fellowship. The heart of our walk with God, in love, is to listen to Him as well as to talk to Him.
- iii) John 15 v 15. Jesus shows us clearly His desire for love and fellowship; Jesus is looking for friends. Again, this implies talking with Him as we walk with Him, and this should be a two-way business.
- iv) Hebrews 11 v 6. Those who by faith earnestly seek this sort of relationship with God will be rewarded, which simply means there will always be a response. A “reward” in this sense is due recognition of the effort made. Our earnestness in seeking to walk with Him will never go unrewarded. This makes prayer so worthwhile.
- v) Matthew 6 v 5. When we do converse with God (especially public prayer) we must be totally sincere as we address God, and not use the prayer as an opportunity to talk at someone else, such as those listening to us, or even as a pretext to talk to ourselves. We need to be oblivious to whoever else might be listening and concentrate on talking to Him.
- vi) Matthew 6 v 9. Despite the wonderful sense of familiarity, we enjoy in prayer, we always remember the duty of respect for Him; “Hallowed be Thy Name”. We must never treat God as a mere equal, or take Him for granted.
- vii) 1 Thessalonians 5 v 17. Constant prayer. We must remember that He is always with us as a friend and companion. This means we can talk to Him all the time about everything that is going on and seek His help in every situation we encounter; our friendship with Him is “moment by moment”. Beats talking to ourselves!

2. God is the leading partner in our prayer life.

We have this relationship with Him by His grace, so prayer is all about His will, not ours. We sometimes lose our sense of the sovereignty of God – He has provided the “line” for prayer! This conversation and relationship is all by His grace. We must never take advantage and demand that God does this or does that.

- i) Our walk with God is entirely due to His grace:
 - a) Our salvation is by grace – Ephesians 2 v 4 – 9,
 - b) Our standing is by grace – 1 Corinthians 15 v 10,
 - c) Our strength is by grace – 2 Timothy 2 v 1,
 - d) Our service is by grace – 1 Corinthians 12 v 7, also v 8 – 31).
- ii) We depend on the essential work of the Holy Spirit.

Isaiah 55 v 8 – 9 tells us that God’s thoughts and ways are much higher than ours, so how are we really able to listen to God and understand when He speaks? We can also feel very inadequate when it comes to our side of the conversation. We need help in prayer, and that is what we have through the Holy Spirit. He does not simply translate the conversation but interprets our words and feelings when we speak to God and God’s intentions when He speaks to us:

- a) Romans 8 v 26 – 27. However difficult we find prayer, including the expression of our true thoughts and feelings, the Holy Spirit does the work for us, perfectly.
- b) John 16 v 13 – 15 (esp. Amplified Bible). The Holy Spirit reveals to us the mind and heart of God, in a way that is just right for us individually, guiding us into all the truth we need as we go along.

- iii) Our prayer requests should only be made after listening to what the Lord is saying.

John chapters 14 – 16 are all about the way we relate to the Lord now, following His return to Heaven and the Holy Spirit being sent. Five times he says that whatever we ask in His name will be granted (14 v 13, 14 v 14, 15 v 7, 15 v 16, 16 v 23). But by saying that we will receive what we ask, “in His name” He shows He is not giving us a book of blank cheques. This phrase means “by His authority”. In other words, we first ascertain what His will is and then we pray accordingly.

We are His followers, and it is His work, not ours. Our prayers should be the expression of His mind and heart. 1 Corinthians 2 v 6 – 16 shows how important this is. I can pray confidently for the Lord’s blessing on my hopes and plans, my service and fellowship, when I have first been open to the Holy Spirit’s guidance as to the Lord’s heart and mind. Indeed, John 16 v 23 & 24 shows that no longer will we desire to ask what we want, but only what He wants. See also 1 John 5 v 14. Listening to God is not a matter of bland meditation, but quietly and earnestly keeping our minds focussed on Him, meditating on the Word, and checking what we feel the Lord is saying in the quietness of our spirits.

3. Prayer is a lifestyle, not a technique.

Prayer is a natural part of our life rather than a spiritual ritual and should embrace the following features.

- i) Intimate - Matthew 6 v 6. We can pray either to Father or Jesus, but always spending time in the “quiet place”.
- ii) Intelligent - Matthew 6 v 7. We should think about what we are saying and use natural language and expression. We should avoid unnatural tones of voice and strange verbal expressions when we pray.
- iii) Honest - Matthew 6 v 8. He already knows. This does not mean prayer is pointless, but that we must be totally honest with Him when we pray. Also, as Father He loves to hear us, His children, tell Him all about it.
- iv) Submissive - Matthew 6 v 10. “Thy will be done”. See also:
 - a) 1 John 5 v 14. As we ask according to His will, rather than our own, we can have great confidence.
 - b) Mark 9 v 23 & 1 Corinthians 10 v 23. All things are possible, but He alone knows what is beneficial.
 - c) Mark 11 v 22 – 24. We are first to have faith in the revelation of God’s will, and then we can believe He will remove whatever obstacles get in the way of the outworking of His purposes (not ours).
 - d) James 5 v 16. This applies mainly to illnesses caused by church and personal disciplinary problems, the subject of this epistle. The healing is linked to confession of the sins between and among us.
- v) Practical - Matthew 6 v 11. We can talk to Him about everything, however mundane.
- vi) Just - Matthew 6 v 12, 14 – 15 & 7 v 12. It is basic justice that we adopt the same standards that we expect God to use with us; we must treat others as we expect others to treat us (also Matthew 18 v 21 – 35 & Mark 11 v 25).
- vii) Security - Matthew 6 v 13. Guidance and prompting in matters of temptation, lest we fall (also Isaiah 30 v 21).
- viii) Earnest - Matthew 6 v 16 – 17. We show our real sincerity by making our prayer life a top priority over all else, demonstrating to God our earnestness. Fasting is not just about food (e.g., 1 Corinthians 7 v 5).
- ix) Trusting - Matthew 7 v 7 – 11. We trust Father to know how to answer our prayers in the best way.
- x) Faith in Jesus - Matthew 9 v 27 – 31. Answers to prayer are designed to display and confirm our faith in Jesus.
- xi) Open to testing - Matthew 14 v 25 – 31. Sometimes God will take us at our word in order to teach us a lesson. Peter had the shock of his life when Jesus told him to do what he had challenged Jesus to let him do.
- xii) Discerning - Matthew 20 v 20 – 22. We must always think and listen before opening our mouth in prayer.