

The Life of Prayer

Texts: Genesis 17:1-3; James 2:23

Genesis 17:1b-3a: "...the LORD appeared to Abram, and said unto him, I *am* the Almighty God; walk before me, and be thou perfect. And I will make my covenant between me and thee, and will multiply thee exceedingly. And Abram fell on his face: and God talked with him...." This is the passage of Scripture I was reading while yet a teen, when I sensed a call from God. God desired a walk with Abram, which comprised a covenantal life of communication with His servant Abram (later named Abraham). In this passage, I sensed many years ago that the Lord desired me to have this very real and personal prayer communication with Him as well. This was not a call to preach, but a call from God to a deeper life. A life with Him; a life of friendship with the Almighty God. When I read, "...And Abram fell on his face: and God talked with him..." I, too, fell on my face and declared this was my utmost desire to have the Lord talk with me and walk with me. And thus I began my journey to cultivate a life of prayer and intimacy with God. I had much to learn. And now after a half a century of prayer, I am still learning.

Allow me to share with you things I have learned and still cultivating after fifty years of a life of prayer.

I. I STILL HAVE MUCH TO LEARN ABOUT PRAYER

Paul said in Philippians 3:12, "Not as though I had already attained, either were already perfect: but I follow after, if that I may apprehend that for which also I am apprehended of Christ Jesus."

Here are some basics that we know:

A. God delights in prayer. Psalm 65:2a, 64a: "O thou that hearest prayer... Blessed is the man whom thou choosest, and causest to approach unto thee, that he may dwell in thy courts...." Psalm 149:4: "For the LORD taketh pleasure in his people: he will beautify the meek with salvation." God wants to spend time with us, more than we want to spend time with Him. God wants to answer our prayers more than we want to pray.

B. We are commanded to pray. Luke 18:1: "And he spake a parable unto them to this end, that men ought always to pray, and not to faint." I Thessalonians 5:17: "Pray without ceasing." Prayer is not a suggestion, nor a commendation; prayer is a direct command from God.

C. God releases wisdom and understanding to the individual who prays. Isaiah 64:4: "For since the beginning of the world men have not heard, nor perceived by the ear, neither hath the eye seen, O God, beside thee, what he hath prepared for him that waiteth for him." I Corinthians 2:9,10: "But as it is written, Eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man, the things which God hath prepared for them that love him. But God hath

revealed them unto us by his Spirit: for the Spirit searcheth all things, yea, the deep things of God.”

Deuteronomy 29:29: “The secret things belong unto the LORD our God: but those things which are revealed belong unto us and to our children for ever, that we may do all the words of this law.” Daniel 2:22: “He revealeth the deep and secret things: he knoweth what *is* in the darkness, and the light dwelleth with him.”

II. TRUE PRAYER REQUIRES WORK

Remember Jesus said in Matthew 21:13, “...It is written, My house shall be called the house of prayer...” During a time of severe apostasy, the house of God fell into disrepair. King Joash raised money and commissioned masons, carpenters, iron and brass workers to repair and mend the house of the Lord. And II Chronicles 24:13 reads, “So the workmen wrought, and the work was perfected by them, and they set the house of God in his state, and strengthened it.” It required hard work to prepare the house of God and make it presentable to worship. I Corinthians 6:19a: “What? know ye not that your body is the temple of the Holy Ghost which is in you...” In a very real sense, when you are saved, your body is the temple of the Lord in this dispensation. Let us therefore work on preparing our body, soul and spirit a welcome place of meeting with God in prayer. An appropriate prayer to pray is, “Lord, give us a mind to work in this matter of prayer.” Nehemiah 4:6 expressed the value of work and the willingness to do so: “So built we the wall; and all the wall was joined together unto the half thereof: for the people had a mind to work.”

When the professional golfer, Gary Player had made a fantastic shot, one of his opponents said, “Gary, you are one of the luckiest players in the game of golf.” Player responded, “You know, it’s the strangest thing about golf - the harder I practice, the luckier I get.”

III. IMAGINATION IS A KINDLING POINT TO PRAYER

Jesus said in Mark 12:30, “And thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind, and with all thy strength: this *is* the first commandment.”

In this, the greatest commandment, our Lord added a word to the Old Testament command (Deuteronomy 6:5) in the way in which we are to love the Lord - *dianoia*, translated “mind.” This is a word packed with meaning. It means deep and full breadth thought that reaches to the other side of a matter. And this synonym stands out in the definition, “imagination.” Pulled together, this word means exercise your full imagination when you love the Lord.

Let me share with you two verses in which *dianoia* is used. II Peter 3:1: “This second epistle, beloved, I now write unto you; in both which I stir up your pure minds by way of remembrance.” Peter is saying he is “...stirring up...” the pure mind (or imagination). I John 5:20: “And we know that the Son of God is come, and hath given us an understanding, that we may know him that is true, and we are in him that is true, even in his Son Jesus Christ. This is the true God,

and eternal life.” John is telling us that Jesus is gives “...an understanding (imagination)...” to better know Him.

The human imagination is a very powerful tool. Before great inventions are invented, they were imagined. Before beautiful music is composed it was imagined. Before a captivating story is told, it was imagined. James 5:16b says, “...The effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man availeth much.” I submit that the first step into prayer becoming effectual is by loving our Lord through the mode of imagination.

IV. FAITH, HOPE AND CHARITY KEEPS PRAYER OPERATIVE

I Corinthians 13:13: “And now abideth faith, hope, charity, these three; but the greatest of these *is* charity.” Imagination naturally leads us into embracing faith. The inventor imagines the invention, then he believes it will work and by faith he begins to construct. The composer imagines the music, then he, by faith composes. The writer imagines the story, then by faith begins to write. We imagine a manifestation of the Lord or an answer to prayer and by faith in prayer we speak to the Lord, believing He will respond as so promised (Hebrews 11:6; I John 5:14, 15).

Hope is believing and knowing in our hearts that tomorrow is not simply another day - it eventually shall be better day. Romans 12:12 tells us that we can be and should be, “Rejoicing in hope; patient in tribulation; continuing instant in prayer.” To pray without hope nullifies faith. To pray with hope is to pray with great expectations (Jeremiah 33:3; Jeremiah 29:11).

“...But the greatest of these *is* charity [*agape*]” (I Corinthians 13:13b). Nicholas of Cusa said over seven centuries ago, “And what, Lord, more is my life, save the embrace wherein Thy delightful sweetness doth so lovingly enfold me.” Love is the key. We stay faithful in prayer, because we love Him. Love keep us going when faith and hope grow dim. And it is love that stirs us back into faith and hope.

-Pastor Pope-