

10. The Promise of Prayer (1Q 2012—Glimpses of Our God)

Biblical material: Col. 4:2; Rom. 12:12; Matt. 26:34–44; Heb. 11:6; James 4:2; John 14:15; 1 Thess. 4:3; Ps. 55:17.

Quotes

- What men usually ask for when they pray to God is that two and two may not make four. *Proverb*
- I find it interesting that the meanest life, the poorest existence, is attributed to God's will, but as human beings become more affluent, as their living standard and style begin to ascend the material scale, God descends the scale of responsibility at a commensurate speed. *Maya Angelou*
- Some of God's greatest gifts are unanswered prayers. *Garth Brooks*
- When thou prayest, rather be thy heart without words than words without heart. *John Bunyan*
- Prayer is the key of heaven; faith is the hand that turns it. *Thomas Watson*
- All the storehouses of God are open to the voice of faith in prayer. *D.M.McIntyre*
- If you are too busy to pray, you are too busy. *W.E. Sangster*
- For what is prayer in the last analysis? It is a conscious spreading out of my helplessness before God. *Al Martin*

Questions

How do we understand prayer? How would you explain to non-believers what you think prayer really does? If you don't pray, does God not get involved? In what way can we make prayer "better"? Why is God interested in our praying? How does prayer really "work"? How would you explain what prayer is *for*?

Bible summary

Col. 4:2 tells us to devote ourselves to prayer, while Rom. 12:12 says we are to be faithful in prayer. We might pause to ask what that means... At the time of Jesus' greatest conflict—Gethsemane—he spent his time in prayer (Matt. 26:34-44). Sadly his disciples were not able to join Jesus and watch with him. Heb. 11:6 tells us God rewards those who earnestly seek him (again, let us ask what this means). James 4:2 explains that we don't have because we don't ask. Jesus tells us that if we love him we will obey what he commands (John 14:15)—but is love (or prayer) subject to being commanded? If it was, what would this mean? God wants us to become holy (1 Thess. 4:3), knowing that he hears us when we cry out to him in prayer (Ps. 55:17).

Comment

If Jesus felt the need to pray, then what about us? Jesus understood the importance prayer, and spent much time talking to his Father. While he wished to minister to everyone, he also recognized that this was physically impossible. He drew lines—he preached from a boat when the crowd was too large, and he chose to separate himself and his disciples in order to rest, and he spent time alone in prayer, gaining strength from his Heavenly Father.

Prayer is an expression of God's gift of freedom. God does not force, he waits to be asked. Not as some kind of demand, for he will never cross the line of compulsion. He invites, he pleads, he waits—for us to come to him and ask for the limitless gifts he wants to give. Prayer in the end is primarily for us—to help us understand how close we can be to our loving Lord—to share together with him in all our experiences of life.

It's ironic that when the disciples asked Jesus to teach them to pray, and he gave them thoughtful insights with which to begin, we the disciples took such guidelines and turned them into a chant to be recited! Vain repetitions of prayers gain nothing, said Jesus: "When you pray, do not keep on babbling like pagans, for they think they will be heard because of their many words. Do not be like them, for your Father knows what you need before you ask him." (Mt. 6:7, 8 NIV).

Prayer is much misunderstood. The formalism that has invaded prayer, turning it into chants and mantras, familiar phrases and repetitive lines, means that we often "do" prayers than really mean what we say! Imagine how one of your friends would react if you said you were going to "do" a conversation with him/her...

The lesson refers us to John 14:15. Why not begin at verse 6 and see the whole picture? In these words Jesus is describing the heart of his mission—to show us the Father. Once we see God in Christ, then we can have confidence in such a trustworthy God, and want to spend time learning from him and sharing our lives with him.

To Isaiah 53:12 we should also add Isaiah 1:18—"Come let us reason together." For this is what our prayers are meant to be, talking to God as to a friend. God's desire is that we understand—and that's what we gain through our thoughtful prayers

The concept of a mediator is brought up in the lesson, and is mentioned in the texts. How do you understand the term? Could it be that we think of Jesus as the mediator because we have a poor view of our heavenly Father and want to have someone in-between? Certainly this has been the view of some, even perhaps the majority, all down through history... In fact, could this be the reason for prayers to Mary or the saints, because God is seen as too holy/distant/hostile? We need to make sure that we realize it was not that God the Father needed reconciling. In fact it was his desire for us to come home, to be reconciled, that led to Jesus' coming to earth in the first place.

As we talk to our loving Lord as to a friend, let us take these words seriously and practice what we preach. For what is the point of going through all the rituals, "saying" prayers, when we miss the wonderful opportunity of conversation with the God of the Universe?

Ellen White Comments

Prayer is the opening of the heart to God as to a friend. Not that it is necessary in order to make known to God what we are, but in order to enable us to receive Him. Prayer does not bring God down to us, but brings us up to Him. {SC 93}

Say to your heart, "God has invited me to come. He has heard my prayer. He has pledged His word that he will receive me, and He will fulfill His promise. I can trust God; for He so loved me that He gave His only-begotten Son to die for me. The Son of God is my Redeemer." {FE 299}

Pray with humble hearts. Seek the Lord often in prayer. In the secret place, alone, the eye sees Jesus and the ear is opened to Jesus. You come forth from the secret place of prayer to abide under the shadow of the Almighty. {HP 86}

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