

## **Developing an Effective Prayer Life**

### **Learning how to grow a regular two-way conversation with God**

How do we develop a prayer life? – a great question with some real answers!!!

Last week, we began exploring the God-realm of Spirit/spirit and the relationship between the Holy Spirit and our human spirit.

Put simply, prayer is one of the avenues available to us for communicating with God. And prayer is intended to become a two-way conversation between us and God, lifting it out of the realm of mere ritual.

#### **1. Our challenge is that we now live in two different realms simultaneously**

This is the part we sometimes find difficult to recognise. We are reborn spiritual beings in Christ – *new creations*; who are, however, still living in the *old creation* of the physical world.

- Outward and inward – 2Cor 4:16
- Visible and invisible – Col 1:15-18; 2Ki 6:16-17
- Natural and spiritual – 1Cor 15:42-58
- Temporal and eternal – 2Cor 4:17-18

So, to 'be in the Spirit'; to 'walk in the Spirit'; to 'live by the Spirit'; to 'pray in the Spirit' – are simply to be in tune with God's realm, which is spiritual and eternal.

As born-again children of God, we already have the necessary equipment we need to be in frequent communication with our Lord and Saviour.

#### **2. A Practical Realisation**

I made an important discovery one day – I had invited a friend who I was in an accountability relationship with to join me for prayer one morning each week. It was a second marriage for both he and his wife, and they both had children to their previous spouses – they had multiple problems. It had become my practice to go to work an hour early each workday morning and use my office as a quiet prayer-place, which I had learned to value and love.

On the first morning that my friend arrived, I explained briefly what I normally did, and suggested he do the same. I launched into my usual pattern of thanksgiving for all God's blessings in my life, praying out different Scripture pieces as they came to mind, and then praying for specific issues as they also came to my mind.

But I soon realised that my friend had quit after about five minutes. When I asked why he had stopped praying, he said he had run out of things to say. It was then that I realised he really did not know how to pray or what to pray about! So, I gave him some practical

suggestions, and recommended that he just follow me around and listen to the things I prayed about.

**How I had learned to pray:** As I reflected on that experience, I began to think about how I had learned to pray the way I do. I realised I had learned to pray by listening to somebody else who had a strong prayer life – Jack Kooy, the Dutch evangelist whom I had had the privilege of travelling with in Europe for 11 months in 1973.

After further reflection, I realised that many people only hear others pray when they come to a Sunday morning service, or a mid-week small group, and so the only modelling of prayer that many hear, are the formal prayers prayed 'up front', which are usually not anything like the deeply personal prayers that one needs to learn how to pray in the intensely intimate setting of a genuine prayer life.

### **3. Three Simple Things to Help Us Focus – Desire, Discipline, & Delight**

I going to suggest three simple steps, or stages, that may help us in the process of developing a more meaningful, intimate, and productive prayer experience in our daily lives.

**Desire** – a motivating driver

Every significant thing we do in our lives begins with a desire that, put simply, is either motivated by an internal sense of need for change of some kind, or an external circumstance pressing in on us causing frustration, restriction, or stress.

When it comes to prayer, it may begin with a need for:

- a greater sense of inner peace
- a need for direction or a fresh sense of purpose in life
- addressing a lack of some kind – financial, health, job satisfaction
- a need for wisdom in a difficult circumstance
- a relationship difficulty that requires attention
- a desire for greater understanding of Scripture
- or, simply to know God better

However, we all know from practical and personal experience, that desire alone is not enough – a dream without a plan is simply a daydream. It is a great start, but it must be followed up with persistent actions!!!

**Discipline** – the learned process of persistent application

Every great achievement did not just happen – it took planning and persistent execution. I remember listening to George Verwer, the founder of Operation Mobilisation, speaking at a seminar many years ago. He made the stark comment that nobody has ever climbed Mt Everest on a Sunday afternoon stroll! It takes years of planning and training!!!

If we are wanting to become good at anything, it will require the disciplines of time and committed practice – why should we think it would be any different in developing an engaging prayer experience?

As Jesus said, not only to his sleepy disciples but just as much to himself, during that gruelling Gethsemane watch as he endured the extreme temptation to find an easier option:

*"Watch and pray so that you will not fall into temptation.  
The spirit is willing, but the body is weak!"* (Matt 26:41).

Most people benefit from some sort of framework around which to build their prayer-life  
Here are a number of good examples of this:

**A.C.T.S.** – Adoration – Confession – Thanksgiving – Supplication

**The Beatitudes** – eight progressive insights around living with Jesus

**The Lord's Prayer** – praying through the seven topics in the Lord's Prayer

**Delight** – basking in the sunshine of God's presence; enjoying his love!!!

Listen to what David had learned from his many experiences in life:

*<sup>14</sup> Delight yourself in the LORD and he will give you the desires of your heart.  
<sup>5</sup> Commit your way to the LORD; trust in him and he will do this: <sup>6</sup> He will make  
your righteousness shine like the dawn; the justice of your cause like the noonday  
sun."*

(Ps 37:4-6)

The Apostle Paul said:

*"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."*  
4:6-7) (Phil

Did you notice the relational interaction that takes place in what Paul is recommending that leads us to the transformational experience of God's peace guarding our hearts and minds?

As we engage with God in passionate conversation he fills and guards us with his peace –

- the peace of knowing he has heard us,
- that he is with us, and
- that he is acting on our behalf.