



M o n d a y

Psalm 31; Skim Job 38-42:6

The psalmist consistently floats back and forth between confident reliance on God's care and protection and desperate pleading that hoped-for deliverance will quickly materialize. His desire seems to be more for an abiding sense of spiritual and emotional protection than for a complete escape from the dangers that surround him. Often when the world comes crashing in on us we ask: "what have I done wrong?" The Psalmist, like Job, has done nothing wrong, though others believe that because of his problems he must somehow have offended God. Much of the preaching of the last few decades has revolved around: "if you are walking with God, everything will go right, all your needs will be met and you will be blessed." The biblical witness does not support this. We live in a broken world, and the people God uses most often go through severe trials or what the ancients called "dark nights of the soul." Like Job, the Psalmist cries out for God's justification. And like Job, what he receives is not immediate deliverance but a renewed confidence in the greatness, power and presence protection of our God. Prayer is often seen as a means of receiving. In actuality, it is really an opportunity to see God's work in our lives, to have a renewed confidence in who He is and what He is doing, and His power to accomplish His will, including His will for our lives. One of the reasons we do not allow God's deep work in our lives is that we try to be "put together people." We try to avoid all guilt and shame. Throughout the book of Job, Job defends himself; but after seeing God, he repents. Healing, confidence and hope comes when we reach the end of ourselves and discover a loving God who is present in the midst of our darkness. Prayer helps us discover a God who loves us in the midst of our weaknesses, our fears, our shame and our guilt. We are broken people living in a broken world with a God who is working to set both right. Prayer gets us in touch with God's love, work and purposes. It allows us to be honest about ourselves, our circumstance and the world around us. It renews our hope. In this Psalm we see the Psalmist clinging to (reciting) the truths of God and committing himself anew into God's loving hands. What difference would it make if you saw prayer in this light or if you prayed the way the Psalmist prays?

Daily Prayer

God, I praise you, for my every breath and movement is from you.

T u e s d a y

Matthew 6:5-14; Luke 11:1-13

One of the reasons God says to go into the closet and shut the door when we pray is because he wants us to set aside and prioritize time alone with God. He wants us to be intentional. Undisciplined prayer often results in our babbling or praying for the wrong reasons. Intentional prayer gets results. "O. Hallesby has developed a list of the dangerous results of prayerlessness:

- We have more "world" in our thoughts.
- We feel farther away from God.

- We have less "God" talk in our conversations with others
- Slowly an unwilling or rebellious spirit creeps into our personality.
- Sin doesn't sting as much, because it is less honestly confessed.
- We deal with sin, as the world does, by hiding it."*

Someone once said that we should not pray about anything we are not willing to become the answer to. Thus, I should not pray for the homeless unless I am willing to become involved myself in the problems the homeless face. When Jesus invites us to pray for God's kingdom to come, this is exactly what he is saying. Do not only invite God's rule and power into your life, but be an influencer for God's rule in this world and be a person who forgives others as much as you seek your own forgiveness. Prayer includes our lists of request, the request for bread and the basic's of life; but it also includes confession and a request to guard against temptation and the evils of life. Prayer is so much more than telling God what we want. It involves being strengthened in our faith, receiving a vision for God's will for the day and protection and power to navigate our way into successfully fulfilling God's will and the confidence to walk with peace and joy. When you learned this prayer, did you pray to forgive us our debts or trespasses? Have you ever wondered which tradition was right? Well, both. Matthew and Luke use different words. Matthew's focus is on sins of omission while Luke's focus is on Sins of commission. What is your greatest struggle with prayer? In what ways does prayerlessness affect you?

**Releasing God's Power, Let Prayer Change Your Life, Becky*

Daily Prayer

Forgive me for the things I have done and left undone.

W e d n e s d a y

James 4:1-10

"We don't have because we don't ask." Learning to pray begins with learning to listen. It begins with just sitting quietly before God and reflecting on His goodness. We call this "A" doration. Like Job, when I see how great God is, I see how far short I fall. This leads to "C" onfession. But when I confess, I am reminded of God's forgiveness, which lead to "T" hanksgiving for that forgiveness and for all of God's other blessings. Being reminded of God's blessings allows me to have the confidence that I can bring to God where I am presently. Often it is best to begin this time by asking for guidance. It is also good to be specific in your prayers. Start small. George Washington Carver once gazed at the universe and asked, "Lord, why did you create the universe?" To which God replied: "Little man, that question is too big for you." To which Carver replied: "Why did you make man?" only to get the same reply. The dialogue went on until Carver finally asked: "Why did you make the peanut?" To which God replied: "Little man, that question is just the right size for you; listen and I will tell you." Carver found over 300 uses for the peanut. Start small in your dialogue with God, but also be specific. This last Christmas, in frustration, I found myself crying out to God about the simplest, most insignificant, stupid (yet emotionally significant) thing. "God, I would really love to find this," to which he graciously allowed me to do so. Now, I have prayed about more important things and received a "no," but in this case God showed me how He hears and listens and even cares about the details of our lives. My immediate response to God's graciousness was to thank Him. Richard Foster once reminded a class how important it is to say thank you to God. "It's the only gracious thing to do. We write thank you notes. We should thank God." Today pray for something small and specific. And then write a thank you note to God. Try this week to use the "ACTS" approach in your prayers and see if it makes a difference.

Daily Prayer

God, there is one specific thing that has been annoying me or worrying me. God, take it away from me.

T h u r s d a y

Hebrews 6:1-3, Acts 13:1-13; Acts 28:7-10; 1 Timothy 4:14

One of the elementary teachings in the New Testament church was the laying on of hands. This idea of laying on hands goes all the way back to the book of Genesis. When Isaac blessed Jacob, he laid hands on him as did Jacob when he blessed Joseph's children. Jesus laid hands on and blessed the children brought to Him. In Acts we see the Holy Spirit coming upon people through obedience, through the proclamation of the word and through the laying on of hands. When Jesus healed people he often touched them. The laying on of hands does not magically bring healings as much as it is a simple act of obedience that quickens one's faith and gives God the opportunity to allow His Spirit to flow through one person and touch another. Often what keeps us from laying hands on another when we pray is pride and fear. But we are called to be "cracked pots" that allow God's Spirit to flow through the cracks of our lives into the lives of others. God often does not work directly (i.e. His working directly in my life to answer a prayer) but indirectly (i.e. His working through another person in the body to bring about an answer to prayer). Spiritual gifts are often given through the "laying on of hands" in order to underscore the fact that the gifts are given and exercised within the context of community. Is it necessary to lay hands on someone when you pray? No. But that is a little like asking if it is necessary for a Christian to go to church. No. But God's desire is that we not be lone Christians. He works through community. And so we go to church out of obedience and as an act of faith. That is God's way. The laying on of hands is a deliberate act of faith where we bring another person before God and ask that His Spirit work in a significant way in that person's life. It is an act of faith. Next time you pray with someone, ask them if you can lay a hand on them while you pray; and see if it doesn't make a difference.

Daily Prayer

In the name of Jesus, God, heal _____ (friend or family).

F r i d a y

Psalm 79; Romans 15:1-6; 2 Timothy 3:10-17; Acts 17:10-12

One of the important elements in worship is the reading and exposition of the scriptures. In the scriptures we see a God who not only is Holy, above all creations and working all things to His glorious ends, but we also see a God who is with us in the midst of our broken world, working to set things right. The scriptures do not present perfect people or an idealistic view of God and the world. The scriptures are true to life presenting people in the midst of their struggles, questions and doubts. One of my great discoveries was seeing that Paul wrote the letters in the New Testament about people committing outrages sins and the church turning its back on God. He writes about jealousy and power struggles. He talks of people easily leaving the orthodox faith in order to believe something that was false and less demanding. These were first century Christians who, in many ways, represent a church that is very much like the church today. I love reading about David, a man after God's own heart, who commits adultery and premeditated murder. I love reading how Adam blamed God for giving him Eve and how Jacob deceived his dad and father-in-law in order to get ahead. These are real people struggling, growing and learning about God just as I do. Scripture comes alive as I see a God who is right there watching over and using every good and bad decision to bring about His perfect will while loving those who will allow themselves to be loved and having open arms ready to love those who have not yet discovered Him. I love how the scriptures were written over many centuries by many different people and yet tell one story with great accuracy and detail. Find some time this weekend to sit and read some significant portion of scripture such as the book of Joshua, Judges, or one of the New Testament letters.

Daily Prayer

Help me to discover more of you, God, as I read the Bible today.

Psalm 31 and Prayer

David spent significant parts of his life being hunted by people who wished him dead. He knew the anguish that comes with the ups and downs of life, especially those that are undeserved. David's response is to cry out to the Lord in prayer trusting in God's resurrection power available in death as well as in life, as doors that seem shut are miraculously opened. The Psalm begins with a cry for help (verses 1-5) followed by a confession of confidence in God (6-8), which leads to the heart of prayer: a plea for mercy and a confession of the psalmist's weakness and anguish (9-13) and a statement of trust and anticipation of deliverance (14-18). The Psalm concludes with a proclamation of God's goodness, a statement of faith where David is certain of God's protection (19-20) and a call for all of Israel to join him praising God (21-24).

When the disciples asked Jesus to teach them to pray, Jesus responds with what we call the Lord's Prayer. It is a model for prayer with some similarities to Psalm 31. It begins with a statement of confident faith: "Our Father..." Our loving approachable Father is sitting on His throne of power ruling over the earth. God is above all the muck of everyday life, holy, seeking to put back together our broken world. "Thy Kingdom come, thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven." is a call for help; but much more. It is a declaration of obedient discipleship. Lord, I want to work with you to bring your kingdom's rule to this earth as it is in heaven. I want to live and teach others to live as we will all one day live in heaven. The second half of the prayer involves our recognizing our dependence on God for all we have (even the most basic needs of life), our desire to be released and to release others from all that might prevent us from being completely free, and our commitment to be obedient to God's ways. It is appropriate that prayer begins focusing on God and His desires and ways in order that we might have confidence to bring to Him our needs and also the ability to ask according to His will and not just our selfish desires.

Prayer is a gift from God making available the resources of Heaven to us. It invites Father God to be an active part in our lives. Why don't we pray more often? I believe one reason is because we do not like being dependant; we are more comfortable jumping in and doing things our way. But I also believe that we are often not really convinced that our prayers make that much of a difference (oh, maybe the prayers of a more Godly person, but not mine). Then there is the whole issue of feeling like God has already decided what is going to happen so what difference will it make. At times we do not pray because of indifference or because we let other priorities get in the way. Sometimes we pray and do not get answers because of unconfessed sin in our lives or unforgiveness. Finally, I believe we have some serious misconceptions. We believe that prayer is about asking rather than listening, that it is a gift some have and others do not have. Prayer actually is like anything in life. We learn how to pray by practice.