

SERMON – THE ELEMENTS OF PRAYER

May 24, 2008

By Ken Kreider

Scripture Reading: **1 Thessalonians 5:16-18**

16Rejoice evermore. **17**Pray without ceasing. **18**In every thing give thanks: for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus concerning you.

I heard an interesting prayer a few years ago. It went something like this. "Dear God, I'm having a good day so far. I haven't lied or cheated or cursed or lost my temper. But I'm about to get out of bed and then I'm really going to need your help!"

If you're anything like me, your day is usually determined by how it starts. Your emotional state or frame of mind will determine what kind of day you have. If I start my day in prayer mode I find that I'm more patient, more proactive, and more compassionate. I'm more conscious of what God is doing in me and around me. If I'm energized by my time with God then I'm energized the entire day.

Prayer is Communication with God

Prayer is communion with God. Prayer is the breath of the soul. I like how Ellen White puts it, "Prayer is the key in the hand of faith to unlock Heaven's storehouse." If prayer is the breath of the soul, then it stands to reason that we can die spiritually without it.

Martin Luther once wrote these words in his journal. "I had so much to do today that I had to pray for four hours." I think most of us operate the exact opposite way. If it's a busy day God gets squeezed into the margin. Luther recommended the exact opposite. The more you have to do the more you have to pray.

The book Desire of Ages has this to say about the devotional life:

“It would be well for us to spend a thoughtful hour each day in contemplation of the life of Christ. We should take it point by point, and let the imagination grasp each scene, especially the closing ones. As we thus dwell upon His great sacrifice for us, our confidence in Him will be more constant, our love will be quickened, and we shall be more deeply imbued with His spirit. If we would be saved at last, we must learn the lesson of penitence and humiliation at the foot of the cross.” DA83

The Psalmist had a Morning Prayer. Psalm 5:3 says, “In the morning, O Lord, you hear my voice; in the morning I lay my requests before you and wait in expectation.” Jesus said in Matthew 7:7, “Ask and it will be given to you; seek and you will find; knock and the door will be opened to you. For everyone who asks receives; he who seeks finds; and to him who knocks, the door will be opened.”

Steps To Christ reads, “Consecrate yourself to God in the morning; make this your very first work. Let your prayer be, “Take me, O Lord, as wholly Thine. I lay all my plans at Thy feet. Use me today in Thy service. Abide with me, and let all my work be wrought in Thee.” This is a daily matter. Each morning consecrate yourself to God for that day. Surrender all your plans to Him, to be carried out or given up as His providence shall indicate. Thus day by day you may be giving your life into the hands of God, and thus your life will be molded more and more after the life of Christ.” Steps To Christ, Ch. 8

OUR TIME WITH GOD

To talk about giving our lives to Jesus, to talk about living the Christian life and all that goes with it, is ultimately to talk about how we spend our time. We do not all have the ability to give God the same quantity of money, just as we do not all have the ability to dedicate to Him the same talents. But we do all have the same amount of time at any particular moment.

We have, it would seem, two choices. We can choose to dedicate what time we have either to God or to ourselves. Jesus told a story about a man who went out to plant a field (Luke 8:5-15). In those days they didn’t drill the wheat into the ground with machinery; rather, they spread it. That is, they simply threw it out by hand. Those with practice could accomplish this in a fairly even manner. Of course, no matter how proficient a person became at

spreading the seed evenly in the prepared areas, some of the seed would fly into out-of-the-way places.

PARABLE OF THE STONY GROUND

In Jesus' parable, some seed fell on the roadway, where the birds ate it. Others fell on the stones by the edge of the field and dried up because there was no soil for the roots. Others fell among thorns. The thorns overshadowed the plants and choked them out.

Jesus explained that the seed in the story represents the Word of God. The various environments where the seed fell are the situations of our lives.

Think for a moment about the seed that fell among the thorns, or we could say, among the weeds. Jesus later explained to His disciples that by thorns He meant the cares of this life that choke out spiritual growth.

GRASS ANALOGY

A popular grass often used on Florida lawns is called St. Augustine. It is very thick and grows by sending runners across the top of the ground. A person can plant plugs of this grass, which will soon spread until it covers the whole area. The lawns in many Florida neighborhoods are seeded with a fast-growing, common native grass called Bahia. Bahia is thin and not particularly pretty. If you happen to have a neighbor who invested his money in the St. Augustine variety, believe it or not, in a few years your neighbor's nice St. Augustine grass will simply spread across your front lawn and choke out the Bahia. Of course, you can speed up the process if you also put in some plugs to encourage things along.

So now your lawn is the coveted St. Augustine grass. But you have to be careful, because there are other grasses continually trying to choke out the St. Augustine. One of these is called India crab grass. This grass is very persistent. If it is allowed even a small start, it will climb across the top of the St. Augustine. As it gets thicker and thicker, the sun isn't able to reach the St. Augustine, and it dies out.

For many people, their spiritual life isn't going anywhere because it is simply being choked out by the cares of this life.

Remember, life is about time. If we are going to have a spiritual life that is thriving, we will have to spend time at it.

SPENDING TIME IMPROVES QUALITY OF RELATIONSHIP

A fellow student in my college ask how a certain other student got so good at engineering mechanics, which was one of the classes I took – a very difficult class, by the way. Another student responded, "If you spend 6 hours a day at anything, you're gonna get good at it." The truth is, our lives are reflected in what we spend time on. It may sound too simple, but the person who

seems to have a growing, meaningful Christian life is the person who is spending time at it.

SUMMARY OF TIME WITH GOD

What it boils down to is this: To be able to pray effectively, we must allocate time. Remember, time is the raw material of life. If we want a spiritual life that means anything, if we want to experience what it means to be a victorious and growing Christian, we must set aside time to make it happen. Everything takes time, and the Christian life is no exception.

Anything we do in our life requires time, and so we must provide it a time slot. If God is going to have a place in our lives, we must give Him time. This means if we wish to spend time with God, we will have to give up time we used to spend doing something less important. We will have to give prayer and time with God a priority we have not given it before. Inasmuch as we have time for the things we consider important, we will have time for God when God is seen as important to us.

When we give our tithes, we make that the first bill we pay in order to put God first. It's the same way when we pray. We give God the FIRSTFRUITS of our time.

Our heavenly Father wishes we would give Him back some of the time He has given us.

A Place for Prayer

To experience the true joy of communion with God, we also need to have a special place for prayer. The Bible says Jesus would often go off to a place where He could be alone. The Bible says this: "But while the city was still wrapped in slumber, the Savior, "rising up a great while before day,...went out, and departed into a solitary place, and there prayed." This is logical, because when a person is trying to spend quality time with someone, they should be alone with them. The two go off someplace where there are no other people and things to distract them. Of course, we can pray to God in any place and at any time. But the most effective and meaningful time is that which we have spent alone with God in a special place.

It is no secret that marriages thrive when the husband and wife have special quality time together at special places. It is the same in our relationship with Jesus. Jesus had special places for prayer. Others must have known where those places were, because Judas knew where He would be praying when he led the crowd to arrest Jesus.

The text in Matthew 6:6 says, "But thou when thou prayest, enter into thy closet, and when thou has shut thy door, pray to thy Father which is in secret; and thy Father which seeth in secret shall reward thee openly."

Of course, Jesus is talking here about a special place to be alone without distractions. He often went out to the Garden of Gethsemene or some solitary place.

To be alone with God is not easy. Prayer and time spent alone with God is a discipline. We have to work at it to make it happen.

When we pray, we need to concentrate. It is very hard to concentrate in this day and age. We are more accustomed to being distracted. We are so used to being distracted that many of us do not know how to be alone and may even feel uncomfortable when we are alone. This is because we are used to having the radio playing, the TV on, or the kids interrupting. We are not accustomed to being in the silence of our own contemplation.

But when we are alone with God, we must learn how to be silent and endure and enjoy silence. Remember, the Scriptures tell us, "Be still and know that I am God."

TYPES OF PRAYER

The following are some types of prayer.

- I. **Praise** - Psalms 50:23: "Whoso offereth praise glorifieth Me: and to him that ordereth his conversation aright will I shew the salvation of God."

Confession and Repentance - 1 John 1: 9: "If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness."

Story of blind man of Jericho – Luke 18:35-41. Notice that Jesus asked the blind man what he wanted Him to do. Did Jesus see that he was blind? Jesus knew.

Jesus wanted to hear the man admit that he was blind and then **request what he needed**. Sometimes we confess some sins and not others. We have pet sins that we don't want to give up.

- a. The next time you ask Jesus to forgive your sins, He has a question for you: "Which ones?"
- b. There will not be much change in our lives until we begin to see sin as Jesus sees it.

Intercession - Jeremiah 27:18: "But if they be prophets, and if the word of the Lord be with them, let them now make **intercession** to the Lord of hosts, that the vessels which are left in the house of the Lord, and in the house of the king of Judah, and at Jerusalem, go not to Babylon."

Petitions – Requests - Philippians 4:6: "Be careful for nothing; but in every thing by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known unto God."

- a. We need to pray that God will teach us what we really need.
- b. Remember, He puts first things first. So must we. Matthew 6:33: "But seek ye first the kingdom of God, and His righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you."

Giving thanks - Ephesians 5:20: "Giving thanks always for all things unto God and the Father in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ."

Don't thank Him just for the good things only, inasmuch as all things work together for good to them that are called according to His purpose.

What Are The Hindrances to Answered Prayer?

Hindrance One: Selfishness – James 4:3: "Ye ask amiss."

- What we ask may be proper, may be the will of God. Yet it is the motive that matters. The true purpose of prayer is that God may be glorified in the answer.
- If it is for our pleasure or gratification, we ask amiss.

Hindrance Two: Sin - Isaiah 59:1, 2: "Your iniquities have separated you." Psalm 66:18: "If I regard iniquity in my heart, He will not hear."

So you say, "But the only way I can get the sin out of my heart is if He will hear me. True? We cannot save ourselves. "Can the Ethiopian change his skin, or the leopard his spots? Then may ye also do good, who are accustomed to do evil." (Jer. 13:23)

No, we cannot save ourselves, but we still have a work to do in securing our salvation. We must come to Christ at the foot of the cross. "Him that cometh to Me," says Christ, "I will in no wise cast out." John 6:37. But we must come to Him; and when we repent of our sins, we must believe that He accepts and pardons us. We come to Him; and we rely upon His merits as a sin-pardoning Savior. That is our work. And at that point, we can receive all the help we want.

We must look away from self. Jesus is an all-sufficient Saviour. We must not think that our own merits will save us; Christ is our only hope of salvation. "For there is none other name under heaven given among men, whereby we must be saved." Acts 4:12.

- We are all sinners. Isaiah 59 is talking about known and cherished sin--the sins we are not sorry for or are justifying, the sin we rationalize, the sin we know is wrong or we excuse. (You may have heard someone rationalize and say, "Well, no one is perfect").

Hindrance Three: Putting Others or Other Things Before God – see the first of the 10 Commandments Deut 5 Worship God and serve Him only.

Hindrance Four: An Ungenerous Spirit - Proverbs. 21:13: "Whoso stoppeth his ears at the cry of the poor, he also shall cry himself, but shall not be heard."

- How can we pray, "Give us this day our daily bread," and withhold from those who are in need?
- James 2:15-16: "If a brother or a sister be naked, and destitute of daily food...", etc.

When you were a child, did you ever hear the story of the Little Red Hen? The hen kept asking the duck, the cat, and the dog who would help plant the wheat, cut the wheat, grind the wheat etc., and they kept answering "Not I!" "Not I!", said the duck. "Not I!", said the cat. "Not I!", said the dog. But when it came time to eat the bread, she said, "Who will help me eat the bread?" "Oh! I will! I will!" "Oh no you won't", said the Little Red Hen. "I will."

That's a reasonable story, wouldn't you say? The same goes for us. If we stop our ears to the cry of the poor and needy, how do we expect God to hear us and supply OUR needs?

Proverbs. 21:13: "Whoso stoppeth his ears at the cry of the poor, he also shall cry himself, but shall not be heard."

Hindrance Five: An Unforgiving Spirit – Mark 11:26: “But if ye do not forgive, neither will your Father which is in heaven forgive your trespasses.”

- A person who refuses to forgive is living in the past.

Hindrance Six: Problems Between Husbands and Wives – 1 Peter 3:7: The text suggests that not honoring our wives and husbands will hinder our prayers.

- If Christianity doesn't work in the home, it doesn't work at all.

Hindrance Seven: Not Praying Sincerely – Psalm 145:18: Refers to them that call upon the Lord in truth - sincerity.

- Churches even pray for revival and don't mean it, because revival would bring a radical transformation of individuals' domestic and social lives.
- The point is, "Tis not enough to bend the knee and words of prayer to say. The heart must with the lips agree or else we do not pray."

Hindrance Eight: The Wandering Mind

"Sin begins in allowing the mind to wander." Have you ever been talking with someone when the person says, "How's that again?" Maybe you were the one to say it. "How's that again?" We lose our focus. This often means that momentarily while you were talking to them they lost their focus and began to think of something else. This same situation can happen when we're praying. And some of you are probably out there right now saying, "How's that again?"

You may want to consider writing your prayers. David wrote his prayers. That's where we get the Psalms. I'd like to invite you to try it. Some have said that they like to do this because it helps them to keep focused. You may even want to keep a journal and include your prayer requests, and answers to prayer as well. When you start seeing your list of answered prayers grow, it can boost your faith.

CONDITIONS TO ANSWERED PRAYER

There are seven general conditions to answered prayer. I learned these seven conditions when I took the course called The Positive Way with Bob and Elsie Law. Some of you may remember them. First I will give you the seven conditions and then I will share with you the verses that these seven conditions came from.

These are the seven conditions:

- 1) there must be a need
- 2) there must be renunciation of sin
- 3) you must have faith
- 4) you must persevere
- 5) you must be diligent
- 6) obedience
- 7) you must have the right motive.

Now I will give you the scripture references:

- 1) there must be a need Is 44:7 "I will pour water upon him that is thirsty, and floods upon the dry ground"
- 2) there must be renunciation of sin Ps 66:18 If I regard iniquity in my heart, the Lord will not hear me"
- 3) you must have faith Heb 11:6 Without faith, it is impossible to please Him. For whoever would draw near to God must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who seek Him." By the way, we have each been given a measure of faith. Romans 12:3

Another side note about faith – "Presumption is Satan's counterfeit of faith. A belief that does not lead to obedience is presumption." See DA126

- 4) you must persevere "continue in prayer" Romans 12:12, Col 4:2
- 5) you must be diligent "Continue steadfastly in prayer" Col 4:2
The little book Steps To Christ says, "There is necessity for diligence in prayer; let nothing hinder you... Those who are really seeking for communion with God will be seen in the prayer meeting... We should pray in the family circle, ... we must not neglect secret prayer... Pray in your closet, and as you go about your daily labor.... There is no time or place in which it is inappropriate to offer up a petition to God."
SC98

6) obedience "We receive from him whatever we ask, because we keep his commandments and do what pleases Him.: 1 Jn 3:22

7) you must have the right motive. "You ask and do not receive, because you ask wrongly, to spend it on your passions." James 4:3

There are also three vocal conditions:

- 1) you must ask "Ask, and it will be given you" Mt 7:7
- 2) you must believe "Believe that you will receive it, and you will." Mark 11:24
- 3) you must be thankful "Tell God your needs and don't forget to thank Him for His answers." Jn 5:14,15, Philippians 4:6

CLAIM GOD'S PROMISES IN PRAYER

Be sure to claim God's promises in prayer. In the Positive Way, they suggested that when it is possible, to actually open your Bible up to that promise, and point to it while you are praying. And by the way, every command of God is actually a promise. "All his biddings are enablings." He would not ask us to do something without giving us the power to do so. For example, the Bible says, "Thou shalt not steal." Not only is it asking us not to steal, but it is also saying, "When you follow me, you will not steal. I'm giving you the power."

"Every command is a promise accepted by the will, received into the soul. It brings with it the life of the Infinite One. It transforms the nature and recreates the soul in the image of God." "In every command or injunction that God gives, there is a promise, the most positive, underlying the command. God has made provision that we may become like unto Him, and He will accomplish this for all who do not interpose a perverse will and this frustrate His grace." COL333, Ed126, TMB76

In the *Positive Way* Course, they suggested that in order to pray for a claimed promise, quote the text, and pray twice a day for at least two weeks. I don't know where they got those numbers, but it certainly makes for being persistent.

One promise that I like to claim is for protection in Ps 121:7,8. When we first moved here almost four years ago, we did not have medical insurance. Then Faith who was age two

at the time slipped in the bathroom and knocked herself out. It scared me to death and I immediately called 911. We lived in an apartment very close to the hospital, and they came. But she was fine by the time they got there. I let them take her anyway to check her over and we were charged over \$700 for the short little ambulance ride which amounted to about a half a mile. We also had another medical problem that cost us another \$300. Shortly after that, I began praying regularly claiming God's promise of protection in Ps 121:7,8 and we stopped having accidents.

Read the Bible

Of course, a major component of our morning devotional time should be spent in reading the Word. Prayer is two way communication and one of the ways that God speaks to us is through His Word.

Read Devotional Books

The time we spend alone with God is an opportunity to read some of the great classics that have to do with prayer or the practical aspects of the Christian life. There are a large number of books to choose from.

Some of my favorites are:

Steps to Christ,

Christ's Object Lessons,

Thoughts From the Mount of Blessing,

Sons and Daughters of God,

And of course, *The Desire of Ages*

It is most helpful to read those which will feed the practical Christian life.

The subject of prayer is very deep and very wide. Prayer and the time we spend alone with God is like a spiritual umbilical cord that keeps us connected to the Almighty. **Don't let our cord become stiff...**

There are many things the Lord will not do for us simply because we do not ask. "It is a part of God's plan to grant us in answer to the prayer of faith that which He would not bestow did we not thus ask." GC525

In closing, I'd like to share with you a vision that Ellen White had. You can find it in Early Writings p. 79-81.

She says, "I seemed to be sitting in abject despair, with my face in my hands, reflecting like this: If Jesus were upon earth, I would go

to Him, throw myself at His feet, and tell Him all my sufferings. He would not turn away from me, He would have mercy upon me, and I should love and serve Him always. Just then the door opened, and a person of beautiful form and countenance entered. He looked upon me pityingly and said: "Do you wish to see Jesus? He is here and you can see Him if you desire to do so...."

[and skipping down she writes:]

In a moment I stood before Jesus. There was no mistaking that beautiful countenance. Such a radiant expression of benevolence and majesty could belong to no other. As His gaze rested upon me, I knew at once that He was acquainted with every circumstance of my life and all my inner thoughts and feelings.

I tried to shield myself from His gaze, feeling unable to endure His searching eyes, but He drew near with a smile, and, laying His hand upon my head, said: "Fear not." The sound of His sweet voice thrilled my heart with a happiness it had never before experienced. I was too joyful to utter a word, but, overcome with ineffable happiness, sank prostrate at His feet. While I was lying helpless there, scenes of beauty and glory passed before me, and I seemed to have reached the safety and peace of heaven.

At length my strength returned, and I arose. The loving eyes of Jesus were still upon me, and His smile filled my soul with gladness. His presence filled me with holy reverence and an inexpressible love.

[at one point she says:]

...He handed me a green cord coiled up closely. This he directed me to place next my heart, and when I wished to see Jesus, take from my bosom and stretch it to the utmost. He cautioned me not to let it remain coiled for any length of time, lest it should become knotted and difficult to straighten."

And so I urge you, do not let your cord become difficult to straighten. But keep the lines of communication open with Jesus.

Like I have mentioned before, our goal is not to have a month of prayer and revival this month. Our goal is to have a month of prayer and revival next month, and the month after that, and the month after that until Jesus comes.

May the Lord richly bless you in your personal devotional life. Draw
nigh to God and He will draw nigh to you.

Shall we pray.

Father in Heaven,

Teach us to pray. Help us each to have a closer walk with You.

You promised in Your Word that if we would draw close to
You, that you would draw close to us. Lord, we claim that
promise here today. May we all be ready when Jesus
comes.

In Jesus name, Amen.

HYMN #305 [Give Me Jesus](#)