

218 Pray without ceasing

We concentrate in this Reflection on our prayers of Supplication, our “asking prayers”, lifted by ourselves or with others. We know that God our Father welcomes these prayers and thus we come with reverent confidence to His “throne of grace” through His Son and our Saviour Jesus Christ, in the power of the indwelling Holy Spirit.

Now it is helpful to realise that there are different categories of pray-ers. For some, intercessory prayer is a specific, crucial gift and calling, taking up the bulk of their time and energies. These are the great “prayer warriors”, such as Moses, and the Old Testament prophets, and Anna, “a prophetess ... of a great age ... who departed not from the temple but served God with fastings and prayers night and day” (Luke 2.36-38); and then in Christian history we can think of such folk as “Praying Hyde”, Madame Guyon, Hudson Taylor, George Muller, Rees Howells and others. The difference made by such intercessors in both the spiritual and earthly realms will only be fully clear when we are in heaven, but for now, if you are aware that the Lord has entrusted you with such a calling, you know what to do about it!

Then there are the rest of us! – perhaps more the foot-soldiers in matters of prayer but still with an essential part to play. Often in our daily asking prayers we will be praying for a wide range of people and needs, sincerely but at no great length or depth. Here we can simply name each concern before the throne of grace, one by one – “Lord I name before You my neighbour over the road, Mr Jones; and the situation in the Middle East; and Her Majesty the Queen; and so-and-so’s job interview tomorrow ...” and so on – no depth or detail on this occasion, but still a genuine registering of our concerns where it matters.

When possible it is obviously better for us to pray for fewer concerns but with more depth. This involves us in time, patience and listening: for example, my neighbour over the road – what exactly am I praying FOR? For a start we can work out in our own minds what our specific requests are concerning this neighbour, and then lift these to the Father, emphasising these are only our wishes; in Ephesians 3.14-19 for instance see how Paul is very specific in his prayer for the Ephesian Christians – he doesn’t just say “I pray for you”.

A step further on for us, and still before we take our prayer through to God the Father more “officially”, we can ask - “Lord Jesus, please, what is Your prayer for Mr Jones the widower over the road?”. Such a prayer ushers us into the Lord’s perspective, and when we are clearer on this, that is the prayer we can take through to the Father; and because it is hopefully Jesus’ own prayer for Mr Jones being voiced by us, we are then justified in saying that we are indeed praying “in

Jesus' name", that is, in accordance with Jesus' own wishes and with His authority.

In Gethsemane, we see the Lord Jesus praying earnestly to His Father as to His own wishes (eg Matthew 26.39); but He ends with the proviso that when all is said and done, may the Father's will prevail rather than His own. So for our part, we do well to distinguish in our asking prayers between our own wishes, and then what we hope are Jesus' wishes, and then ultimately the Father's wishes which, if there are any doubts in the matter, are the ones we wish to prevail.

In our asking prayers we are not to waffle on and on! (Matthew 6.5-8), but equally we are to keep asking, seeking and knocking with persistence (Luke 11.5-13 and 18.1-8) – for that shows the Father that we mean this. We can also show our seriousness by fasting over specific matters (eg., Matthew 17.21 / Mark 2.20 / Acts 14.23), by our involving the church leadership when appropriate (James 5.14-15), and by our willingness to play our part in helping to answer our prayers: it is no good my praying for God to help Mr Jones with his loneliness if I never drop by myself.

Next time God willing we can consider some detailed prayer examples to help us further in our own praying, but for now we simply thank the Lord afresh for His great gift of prayer, and continue to put it to good use for everyone's sake.

Let us indeed - "pray without ceasing" (I Thessalonians 5.17).

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