

THE GIFTS OF PRAYER

We are in the season when the giving and receiving of gifts is on the minds of most everyone. Today we would like to consider the privilege we have, of receiving the greatest gifts in all the world, - and all we have to do is ask.

Matt. 7:7-11 "Ask, and it shall be given you; seek, and ye shall find; knock, and it shall be opened unto you: For every one that asketh receiveth; and he that seeketh findeth; and to him that knocketh it shall be opened. Or what man is there of you, whom if his son ask bread, will he give him a stone? Or if he ask a fish, will he give him a serpent? If ye then, being evil, know how to give good gifts unto your children, how much more shall your Father which is in heaven give good things to them that ask him?"

Here we see the anxious willingness of our Heavenly Father to bless us as His little children, with grand gifts, when we come to Him humbly in prayer.

We thought it would be well to consider our prayer life together because we realize it is of such a repetitive nature that it's possible to loose some of the rich blessings that God intended for us to receive from this precious privilege of communion with our loving Father, creator, and ruler of the universe.

In the first portion of our study we would like to consider what we might call our more lengthy "Reflective Prayers Of The Day," and later we will consider our short instantaneous prayers.

ADORATION

It's well that we begin our overall reflective prayers with Adoration. Not because God needs our praise as much as we need to give it. We need to have communion with our Father, a close continual realization and appreciation of what our lives are all about.

That we are in a covenant relationship with the King of the universe. How God who is our Father, Provider, Guardian has invited us to the grandest privilege of eternity.

How our every experience is permitted and is overruled for our eternal welfare. We can't help but want to express our praise, honor and love for Him.

From time to time read Psalms 95 thru 108 to get the feel of full adoration and praise to God.

Note just a few of David's prayers of Adoration.

Psa. 103:1-5 David reminds himself as well as us to consider: "Bless the LORD, O my soul: and all that is within me, bless his holy name. Bless the LORD, O my soul, and forget not all his benefits: Who forgiveth all thine iniquities; who healeth all thy diseases; Who redeemeth thy life from destruction; who crowneth thee with loving kindness and tender mercies; Who satisfieth thy mouth with good things; so that thy youth is renewed like the eagle's.

Psalms 96:2-9

Bless the LORD'S name; shew forth his salvation from day to day. Declare his glory among the heathen, his wonders among all people. For the LORD is great, and greatly to be praised: Give unto the LORD the glory due unto his name:

Like David, may we speak words of adoration, (oh, it may not be as eloquent as David's, not being poets,) but do tell God with feeling, what he truly means to you, pouring out your heart with love and praise.

SELF EXAMINATION

Another very important aspect of prayer, is it causes us to examine ourselves, and to pray for forgiveness where we have come short.

As John tells us: 1 John 1:8-9 If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.

When this scripture tells us to confess our sins, we believe it means to confess our sins **specifically in prayer.**

That is to recall the days events and then to specifically mention the individual sins or shortcomings by name, rather than just in a general overall statement.

For instance we could just get into the habit of praying, "Father forgive me for anything I have sinned in or come short this day."

I think we could readily see that this type of overall request for forgiveness is all right, but it will not produce anywhere near the close scrutiny of our walk, as compared to reflecting on our individual specific sins and shortcomings by name.

It is only when we specifically recall our shortcomings that they will register and prompt our conscience to do better the next time. We can't improve a fault until we admit to ourselves and to God that a fault exists. This is often difficult to do. It's so easy to see the faults of others, and so difficult to see our own.

It therefore seems that self evaluation is one of the prime purposes of prayer. Our Father wants us to be continually attentive to our present spiritual condition. To be examining ourselves, to recognize our weak points, and then to bring them to Him, requesting His forgiveness and for His help to overcome them.

In addition it would be well to follow the example of David. Psalm 19:12-13 Who can understand (or discern) his errors? **Cleanse thou me from secret faults.** Keep back thy servant also from presumptuous (or willful sins NIV) sins; let them not have dominion over me: then shall I be upright, and I shall be innocent from the great transgression.

From this scripture we see how we are not only to make every effort to discern our errors, but recognizing it's a difficult thing to see them all, we are to pray that our Father will bring to our attention those secret faults that we don't even recognize, and then help to cleanse us from them.

THANKSGIVING

Another aspect of our prayers is thanksgiving. Here too specific ness would be important. We could just pray, "Father we thank thee for all our blessings," and leave it at that, which would be fine, but how much better to reflect on the specific blessings of that day. It impresses them so much more and prompts us to have more of an overall thankful, attentive attitude to the many blessings God showers upon us.

Then from time to time reflect on the many blessings that we just kind of take for granted. Our knowledge of God and His plan, our relationship as God's children, the measure of health that we have, opportunities of service, the sunrise of a beautiful day, the fact that we can see and hear the beauties of God's creation. The trees the flowers the birds the animals, all given by God for the enjoyment of God's children.

Thank Him for the brethren, the ecclesia, conventions, for a victory over self, for an answer to prayer, for a promise that sustained thru a trial, in fact we are admonished to give thanks in everything even our trials.

As Sr. Sundbom used to say our trials are worth millions, lets not waste any of them. She knew that it was only thru trials that we could be developed, that one day we might shine as the sun.

Again reading some of the beautiful Psalms of David will help us in our prayers, as we see how he at times poured out His heart in joyful exuberant appreciation for all the countless blessings from God.

Psm. 95:2-7 NIV

Let us come before Him with thanksgiving,
For the Lord is the great God
the great King above all gods,
In his hand are the depths of the earth,
and the mountain peaks belong to Him.
The sea is his, for he made it,
and His hands formed the dry land.
Come, let us bow down in worship,
let us kneel before the Lord our Maker,
for He is our God,
and we are the people of his pasture,
the flock under His care.

Psa. 100:3-5

Know ye that the LORD he is God: it is he that hath made us, and not we ourselves; we are his people, and the sheep of his pasture. Enter into his gates with thanksgiving, and into his courts with praise: be thankful unto him, and bless his name. For the LORD is good; his mercy is everlasting; and his truth endureth to all generations.

INTERCESSORY PRAYERS FOR OTHERS

In James 5:16 we read, Confess your faults one to another, and pray one for another, that ye may be healed. The effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man availeth much.

For many years I believe I misunderstood this scripture. "The prayers of a righteous man availeth much." I viewed it somewhat as a responsibility that God desired and appreciated, and that somehow in some way the fact that I prayed as well as other brethren for someone, -- that God would then react to our prayers and provide what was needed in the life of another. That once having prayed for them God was pleased and it fulfilled my responsibility. That our prayers for a righteous man would thus avail much because it would cause God's blessing and intervention to take place.

As I thought about it further, I realized that if that's all this scripture meant, - then something wasn't quite right. For by extension, this concept would imply, that the more who prayed the greater would be the blessing, - and the opposite, - that if I and others **failed to pray** for an individual, they would then be deprived of God's intervening blessing. Could that be true?

I realized that could not be so. The attributes of God would of necessity always provide according to His unerring judgment, - everything necessary for the overall best eternal interest of each of His children. That's what agape Love is all about.

Thus of necessity because of God's attributes, He would always provide what would be for the best spiritual interests of each of His children, even if nobody prayed for the individual.

For we realize that there must be countless needs of brethren that nobody is even aware of, would God deprive them of their needed blessing because no one prayed for them?
WE THINK NOT?

But then why does God want us to pray for one another? And in what sense does "the effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man availeth much?"

What Jesus desires for all the church is that we be one. JOH 17:20-22 Neither pray I for these alone, but for them also which shall believe on me through their word; That they all may be one; as thou, Father, art in me, and I in thee, that they also may be one in us: that the world may believe that thou hast sent me. And the glory which thou gavest me I have given them; that they may be one, even as we are one:

The Lord knows far better than we what is necessary to help another. But the reason He wants us to pray for them is He wants us to be to one another what He has been to us in love, forgiveness, and unlimited concern. He wants us to have that oneness Jesus prayed about.

We are members of one family. The Lord wants us to have a continual interest in our brethren's welfare. In our prayers we are not to be concerned only with ourselves, but we must express a desire for our Lord to bless, to guide, to encourage, to give opportunities of service, to enlighten with his spirit, or to provide whatever it is that is needed to help one of our brethren.

As we are thus praying for another needs, our hearts will be touched with the realization that perhaps in some small way we could be used of the Lord to help bless and fulfill the need of the one we are praying for.

Perhaps in encouragement by sending a card or making a phone call, or providing material needs, or a service opportunity, or comfort, or what ever.

There is also a blessing conveyed when we pray for some one in their presence such as in a hospital room. Or at other times, just by telling someone we are praying for them. For in essence it's telling them we love them, we're concerned, we're here to help you if we can.

In other words God wants us to pray for our brethren that we in turn can become the instrument of conveying part of God's blessing to them.

(Perhaps we could look at it this way.) Many of the ways brethren need assistance can only be thru a human instrumentality. God will bless and provide the assistance necessary one way or another, whether we pray or not.

But He admonishes us that it's His desire for us to show our love and concern for them, by praying for them. Then if we have a willing heart, He will lead us by His spirit to give us the wisdom to know how we can be the instrument to help fulfill the required need. It is in this way the prayers of a righteous man availeth much.

With this thought in mind, we again can see the need of specific reference to individuals who need our prayers. Praying for all the brethren known or unknown to us in a general way is good, showing our love, our concern, our oneness for our family, but in addition we want to specifically by name, bear to the thrown of grace individuals who have a special need, and then be open to God's leadings of how we could be used to help carry out God's will for their life.

This same reason is why God wants us to pray for our enemies, or for our brethren that we have ought with, or those that may have hurt of injured us, or one of our family members that we have differences with.

We may be inclined to come in prayer mentioning more or less what we would like for God to do. But God doesn't need to be told what needs to be done, He already knows.

Again the basic purpose of prayer is not to inform God or to cause Him to act, but to bring about a change in ourselves, that will cause us to act.

After sincerely praying for those we have differences with may find something gradually happening within us. Our attitude of judgmentalism, impatience, and perhaps even a bit of anger will begin to change. We begin to feel differently about the person.

For we begin to see them more thru the eyes of our Lord, rather than our own. We may still dislike the error or hate the sin, but not the individual. We begin to feel more love, understanding, and compassion.

And often we may find our changed attitude gives them the desire to change. But even if they remain the same, we are able to cope much more effectively because of the difference in our attitudes.

Thus we can see that intercessory prayer for others, is not for the purpose of having God change His will for them - He already knows what's best, but for us to be led by God's spirit to see the privilege if necessary of changing ourselves, and then be used as His instruments to bless the one we pray for.

PETITIONS

We have many promises that our petitions to God in prayer will be granted, as long as they follow certain prerequisites

John 14:14 And whatsoever ye shall ask in my name, that will I do, that the Father may be glorified in the Son. If ye shall ask any thing in my name, I will do it.

Our prayer must be in Jesus name.

Mark 11:24 Therefore I say unto you, Whatsoever things ye desire, when ye pray, **believe** that ye shall receive them, and ye shall have them.

We must truly have faith that we will receive what we requested.

John 15:7 If ye abide in me, and my words abide in you, ye shall ask what ye will, and it shall be done unto you.

In Reprint 1999 we have a comment on this scripture, If God should say without limitation, Ask what you will, and your will shall be done, sensible ones would shrink from so grave a responsibility and cry, "Not so, oh Lord," I dare not touch things that involve so much.

But we see, It's only if we abide in Christ as new creatures, and His words abide in us, that is our entire being is governed and motivated by His teachings and principals, that we can ask what we will and it shall be done.

This in turn will cause us to only ask for those things that are in complete harmony with what His word tells us to pray for.

What should we pray for? Perhaps it would be well to first consider first what we shouldn't pray for.

Often when we, or one of loved ones is going thru a very difficult trial, or gets a serious illness or suffers some form of physical hardship there is a tendency to pray for the Lord to remove the trial or to restore ourselves or others to health.

From our studies we realize the apostles never used the gift of healing on themselves. Paul before he understood fully prayed to have his thorn in the flesh removed, we recall God's answer.

2 Cor.12:7-10 And lest I should be exalted above measure through the abundance of the revelations, there was given to me a thorn in the flesh, the messenger of Satan to buffet me, lest I should be exalted above measure. For this thing I besought the Lord thrice, that it might depart from me.

And he said unto me, My grace is sufficient for thee: for my strength is made perfect in weakness. Most gladly therefore will I rather glory in my infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon me. Therefore I take pleasure in infirmities, in reproaches, in necessities, in persecutions, in distresses for Christ's sake: for when I am weak, then am I strong.

We see from Paul's comment that God permitted his trial for his development as well as others. It was for his eternal welfare. God promised that His grace would be sufficient for Paul.

So it is with us. 1 Cor.10:13 Diaglott "No trial has assailed you except what belongs to Man; and God is faithful. who will not permit you to be tried beyond your ability; but with the trial will also direct the issue, that you may ne able to bear it."

We know our lives are to be lives of trial and sacrifice, so to pray for God to remove them would be contrary to what we know God is permitting for our eternal good, but rather we can pray for God to direct the issue and to give His grace and strength that we may be able to bear it.

R-5202 The Editor does not recall having from childhood asked the Lord for physical strength or health. He has known times when his physical strength was not great and when there were opportunities for service which seemed to require more strength than he had. Then he has taken pleasure in going before the Lord in prayer and saying that he was trusting that the necessary strength and all else which the Lord saw best to give would be provided. ...This course has always been sufficient. In forty years of active service, he has never missed a meeting because of lack of strength although there have been times when his friends have said, "You can't possibly speak tonight!" His reply invariably has been, "If the Lord gives me strength, I will go to the meeting place, and will trust him for strength to speak." At one time he almost fainted on the platform; but grace sufficient has always been his portion.

Sometimes we are inclined to pray in such a way as if we are giving instructions as to what we would like God to do. Lord help me to get that Job, or that house, or a passing grade, or Sr. or Bro. so and so to be my wife or husband, or countless other similar type requests. Should we pray in this way? WE THINK NOT!

God doesn't need to be instructed by us as to what He should do. His foreknowledge knows the end from the beginning. He already knows what is best, - WE DO NOT!

The specific job we're asking for God to provide, or the specific house, or the passing grade, or the specific Brother or Sister we would like to be our husband or wife, - may not be what would be for our eternal best interest, and God therefore would not provide them.

WHAT THEN SHOULD OUR PETITIONS BE FOR?

Primarily they will be in four areas:

1. For God's holy spirit to show us His will, to guide and direct us in evry decision we have to make.
2. That His spirit help us to have the conviction, zeal and determination to be willing to do His will as He reveals it to us.
3. For God's sustaining grace to help us thru every trying experience that we might feel His presence, giving us courage to continue pressing on.

4. For God's spirit to help us develop the fruits and graces of the spirit especially those we see we are deficient in.

R-1999 "As you come to see the bountifulness of the Father's provisions, and the wisdom and care exercised by him touching your earthly interests; as you come to realize that he who has clothed the lilies of the field with beauty, and who provides food for the sparrows, loves and cares much more for you than for them, and knoweth better than you do what things you have need of;--what would strengthen and benefit, and what might injure you, as runners in the race for the great prize he has offered through Christ--as you realize these things your prayers for temporal things must become very modest and moderate. Indeed, you will by and by, as you realize his wisdom and care, use prayer principally as the avenue for spiritual communion. Contenting yourself with laying the cares and burdens of life at the Master's feet, you will tell him of your confidence in his love and wisdom, saying, Thy will be done; and instead of your cares you will "bear a song away." More than ever your prayers will be for the spiritual gifts, graces, fruits and blessings, singing in your hearts -- "Content whatever lot I see, Since 'tis my God that leadeth me."

But may we not in all our trials and perplexities take them to the Lord in prayer? Yes, yes; truly we can. And no comfort will be greater to the perplexed or sorrowing than the privilege of telling all to the Lord. His ear is ever open to the cry of his "little ones;" and the very telling of them to him and realization of his interest in all our affairs will refresh and cheer us. It will bring to remembrance his promises never to leave nor forsake us, and his wisdom and love and ability to cause all things, favorable and unfavorable, to work together for our good. Casting all our care upon him, and realizing that according to his promise, present trouble and all other things may be over-ruled for the good of all concerned, and to his praise, we may arise from our knees stronger, happier and more confident, as well as in closer fellowship and communion with the Lord, than if we had attempted to order our own affairs, and to get the great Jehovah to become our servant to execute our plans, which doubtless often are foolish in his sight, and would, if permitted, work injuriously to us or to others.

PRAYING-WATCHING-MEDITATING

We're told in Phil. 2:12-13 "Wherefore, my beloved, ...work out your own salvation with fear and trembling. For it is God which worketh in you both to will and to do of his good pleasure.

This scripture tells us that God works within us to show us his will, the question is HOW?

First: When we come in prayer asking God to show us His will, we must truly try to have a completely open willing mind to accept what ever God will reveal to us. This is not easy, for so often we have our own preconceived idea of what we would like God to approve.

Second: We are admonished several times in scripture to watch and pray. The thought of watching in the Greek is to be fully awake, attentive. Be attentive and pray! Praying and then being attentive to see how God would answer.

Having surrendered our will in prayer, God will use various ways to show us His will. Scriptures, people, circumstances, providences, brethren, and prayerful meditation. What do we mean by prayerful meditation?

All prayer is not the same! Many of our prayers, perhaps most are our just talking to God, with one thought immediately following after another, like in our opening prayer for this service.

Prayerful meditation however is where we not only talk to God, but then we pause, reflect, meditate, on some specific decision before us, all the while we are still in communion with our Father in prayer.

For instance, after we mention a hard decision we have to make, perhaps on choosing one of several job offers, and we ask the lord to help us to know what to do, we could pause and dwell on it, thinking about the pros and cons of each, weighing it before the Lord, thinking of the spiritual effect of each, and so on, and it may very well be the Lord thru His holy spirit will implant a thought in our minds that will be the crux of the answer.

Many times we find ourselves at night when we can't sleep, going over weighing this idea with that, Lord what will you have me to do, and we think some more and quite often suddenly a new thought will arise that we had never thought of before that was obviously better than any of the ones I had thought of. Where did it come from?

The holy spirit will often thus guide us as we develop the habitual communion of prayer and listening meditation. When our hearts are right, - truly wanting to do God's will our Father will show us the way.

We realize that sometimes stumbling blocks are suggested to our minds as well, so in this regard we need to read the sum total of the Lord's leadings, to see that they are in harmony with God's principals and our consecration vows.

SHORT INSTANTANEOUS PRAYERS

Up till now we have been considering our more lengthy reflective prayers. Now we would like to touch upon the short instantaneous prayers that keep us with divine companionship throughout the day.

Paul tells us in 1Thes.5:17-18 "Pray without ceasing. In every thing give thanks: for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus concerning you.

The thought here of praying without ceasing seems to be that the Lord wants us to be in a continual awareness of our Lord's presence, to feel like the Psalmist in 16:8 "I have set the LORD always before me: because he is at my right hand, I shall not be moved.

If we can develop the feeling that the Lord is ever at our side, right at our right hand, then thru out the day we can be continually talking to Him at our side.

We have a happy unexpected experience, Our response could be "Oh Thank you Lord,"

We may be having a conversation with someone and realize we need wisdom to answer, and in a moment we pray, "Lord help me! Give me wisdom!"

At another time we say something to someone and realize we spoke to harshly, We instantly can talk to the one at our side, "oh Lord I'm sorry, forgive me, I didn't want to hurt them.

We are in a testimony meeting and someone is going thru a hard experience again we quickly pray, Lord help them, and if there's something I can do to help show me.

Phil. 4:6 says, "Be anxious for nothing; but in every thing by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known unto God.

Here were told that any time we feel a bit of anxiety about anything, we should immediately pray for the lord to help us to "lay our cares our anxieties upon Him," to seek His guidance, and thank him for it.

As we develop this quality more and more we will be able to say with David of old, "I have set the LORD always before me: because he is at my right hand, I shall not be moved.

PRAYING TO JESUS

We would like to consider for a few moments the propriety of praying to Jesus.

In 1 John 2:1 we read, "My little children, these things write I unto you, that ye sin not. And if any man sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous:

Advocate means one who will plead our cause, one who will speak to the Father on our behalf. The inference here is that it is proper to pray to Jesus who as our Advocate will plead our case as it were.

We have a similar thought in Heb. 4:15-16: "For we have not an high priest which cannot be touched with the feeling of our infirmities; but was in all points tempted like as we are, yet without sin. Let us therefore come boldly unto the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy, and find grace to help in time of need.

R-5966 "Coming to the Savior's throne is not the same as coming directly to the Father's throne. Jehovah's throne is a throne of justice, but Jesus' throne is a throne of mercy. Here we can obtain mercy if we fail to come up to the highest standard...He knows how to make allowance for us and to be very sympathetic. Therefore we should never grow discouraged, but come to him again and again, remember that he is never weary of our coming and that he will not turn us away."

WHEN YOUR TEMPTED TO GIVE UP

Probably most of us from time to time have experienced a measure of uncompleted goals, unfulfilled assignments, or unhealed relationships.

In God's providential guidance He leads each of us to certain tasks that are costumed designed for us. And in our efforts to fulfill what we believe the Lord led us to do, we may become wearied and tempted to give up before we are finished.

While we are working hard to accomplish it, we may face criticism that takes away some of our enthusiasm. Or things take longer than we expected. We become impatient with ourselves, with others. Discouragement sets in. We wish we could be free of the responsibility. We are tempted to give up.

Perhaps we are in one of these situations right now. Almost out of breath wondering if we are going to make it.

Don't give up! Pour out your heart to God in prayer. Beseech the Lord to help you overcome your discouragement. To give you sustaining strength, to continue on.

And He who gave you the vision to start with, will also grant you the perseverance.

PHI 1:6 Being confident of this very thing, that he which hath begun a good work in you will perform it.

GAL 6:9 And let us not be weary in well doing: for in due season we shall reap, if we faint not.

HEB 6:10 For God is not unrighteous to forget your work and labour of love, which ye have showed toward his name, in that ye have ministered to the saints, and do minister.

Thru prayer God will give us the renewed determination, the perseverance to carry on. For we know deep down in our hearts God gave us the assignment and He has promised to give us the wisdom and strength to complete it.

The task may be one that only we can complete, or often we realize when the Lord gives one a vision, he sets others on fire with the same vision, that together His will can be carried out.

WE realize hardly any good work is accomplished without someone finding fault with it. It may hurt especially if it comes from the one who God has given us the task of helping.

But thru prayer we will receive the assurance that we are to please God and not the temporary feelings of others. When our only desire is to know and do the Lord's will, we need not be overly concerned with criticism or about what others might think, but only of what the Lord thinks.

When on our knees we tell the Lord we are tempted to give up, that we are on the verge of being overwhelmed with our problem, He will give us the strength and stamina to carry it out, or He will excite others with the vision to help, or as we are promised in 1 Cor. 10:13 He will direct the issue of every trial, that you may be able to bear it.

We have many examples of God's people in the past that had an unshakeable vision, that continued pressing on in unimaginable trying circumstances, because they knew God delighted in helping them accomplish the seeming impossible vision He gave them. They had impressed on their mind the promise "With God all things are possible!"

They realized there is no limit to the perseverance the Lord will give when our hearts desire is only to do His will and glorify His name.

The Apostle James reminds us that, "Faith without works is dead." We might add "Prayer without work or responsive action on our part will be ineffective." And equally so works, without continual prayer for guidance will be left wanting.

The Lord never assigns us more to do than we accomplish with His replenishing power. He gave us the vision. He will guide the task, He will give us the strength to do it, until we finish!

I appreciated a quote from Winston Churchill that Bro. Gene Burns gave recently in a discourse. It was during the 2nd world war when England was being bombarded daily and the British people were becoming discouraged.

Winston Churchill went on the radio and broadcast to the entire nation, **Never give in! Never give in! Never! Never! Never!**

We believe this is our Fathers desire for each of us. Never give up! Never give up! Never! Never! Never!