

# Tips on Prayer

## **"Prayer as Relationship"**

You may remember the oldest and best definition of prayer: *"raising the mind and heart to God."* I suspect that most of us practice the first part, *"raising our mind to God"*, better than the second part, *"lifting up our hearts"*. That imbalance can too often make the experience of praying, "dry" or "unfulfilling."

What this definition probably intended to say was that **prayer involves our whole person in a relationship with God**. Using the various relationships of our lives as a guide, we can come to new insights about prayer.

A wise spiritual guide once said, *"We are as good at praying as we are at the other relationships of our lives. If you want to get better at prayer, work on the key relationships in your life."*

Take a close friendship or marriage, as an example. We wouldn't imagine that what makes the relationship work is trying to find a half an hour, early in the morning, to sit in a chair and close our eyes and think heavy thoughts about the other person! We know instinctively, even if we hadn't ever put it into words, that a key relationship in our life **is a matter of the heart**. The other person means a lot to me. I'm not just attracted to the other, but the other is someone whose desires and dreams and vision are very important to me. And, if this relationship is one that is growing in love, the other is one I want to serve - give of myself for.

Relationship always involves a strong desire "to be with". A relationship will fade if we have no continuing interest in spending time with the other, or connect with the other. Even when our time together might be limited, we have feelings for the other which sustain the relationship. The closer the relationship, the stronger those feelings. In a marriage relationship, I might not see my spouse as much as I'd like, but I know that my job or my care for our children or time shopping - whatever I do when we are apart - is all done because of our relationship, to further the goals of our life together and our mission together. Intimacy in the bedroom is an important, but small part of the relationship's bond. If the other intimacy and connections are there, then the bedroom time is wondrous. If the relationship of the heart is not connecting us when we are apart, intimacy in the bedroom can become quite problematic.

Words, gestures and rituals express and give shape to the relationship of the heart. *"I love you."* *"Thank you."* *"You are wonderful."* *"I need you."* *"I'm sorry."* It's the culmination of many small things -- a smile, an embrace, a gesture of vulnerability, a self-revealing story, sincere attentiveness, a gift full of meaning, doing something together, sharing a special song, our favourite place, a special reading, a special menu, a tradition we've developed – that develop love. These are just a few examples of the hundreds of ways a relationship develops, grows and becomes truly passionate.

How could prayer be a relationship with God, if it only remains a lifting of our minds to God? We need very special times of intimacy with God, but that time needs to be prepared for and built up to. **To enrich your relationship with God, engage your heart**. That involves finding intimacy with God in the midst of our everyday busy lives, much like we do with the other important relationships of our lives. Perhaps as we pay more attention to what gives life and intimacy to these relationships, we might grow in the affective side of our relationship with God.

If this tip stirs a desire for that kind of relationship with God, one place to begin is to let God tell me about how much God loves me. The God who says, *"You are precious in my eyes and I love you."* [Isaiah 43:4] If I'm open to God's expressions of affection toward me, that can open my heart to stir up affection in the form of grateful response. Love needs only a spark to get started. It takes ongoing care to keep the fire

from going out. With special care, it can become a long-lasting, warm, comforting, and life-long relationship of the heart.

## ***Digesting the Word through Prayer***

Notice the following verses that tie both prayer and God's Word together in the dynamic of praying...

*"If you abide in Me and **My words** abide in you, **ask** whatever you will, and it shall be done for you."* (RcV John 15:7)

*"And receive the helmet of salvation and the sword of the Spirit, which Spirit is the **word of God**, (18) By means of all prayer and petition, **praying at every time in spirit...**"* (RcV Ephesians 6:17)

In the first verse, Jesus teaches us that His word is essential to true prayer.

In the second verse, Paul connects the word of God (the sword of the spirit) with *"praying... in spirit"*.

Someone has rightly said that the Bible is God's part in our prayer life. So often our prayers are ineffective because we are focused on praying and rehearsing the problems instead of the answers. But God's Word contains the answer to every problem we face. If we would spend more time in God's word, meditating on what He says and then praying those answers back to Him we would solve two important issues in believing prayer. First, we would settle the issue about what God's will is in any situation. *God's word is His will for us.* Second, we would align our souls – our mind, will and emotions – with what is true in our situation. Faith at this point becomes easy, effortless and spontaneous.

This brings us to an important issue in Biblical prayer. The very essence of true prayer is not that we ask God to fulfill our requests (James 4:3), but that we discern His will through His word and in turn, pray back to Him His own desire. This is true fellowship and communion with the Lord. Someone once said, ***"prayer is the discipline of transforming our mind to think God's thoughts and then talking to the King in the King's own language."***

But there is an element of getting God's Word into our heart that very few Christians understand. To get His Word into our hearts requires a spiritual discipline that is dynamic and effective, but rarely practiced. We must not only read the Bible or memorize its truths, but we must also ***"Pray-Read"*** the Word. This means turning what we are reading into prayer and into fellowship with the Lord around His thoughts. Such prayer is taken out of the static realm of mere intellectual perusal and into the dynamic realm of spirit to Spirit communion with the Lord Himself. Jesus rebuked the religious leaders of His day for separating the Scriptures from His presence: *"You diligently study the Scriptures because you think that by them you possess eternal life. These are the Scriptures that testify about me, yet you refuse to come to me to have life."* (John 5:39-40)

Many Christians have stored up much knowledge of the Word in their minds but have digested very little of it. To make Bible reading a dynamic, living contact with the Lord we should pray-read it -- line upon line -- and in this way open up a wonderfully rich inner dialogue with the Lord over it. To pray in a living way we must practice a new discipline and digest the Word each day a little at a time. We need to pray ***with*** and ***over*** the Word sentence-by-sentence, clause-by-clause, phrase-by-phrase, and even word-by-word, digesting what we read. If we pray over the words that we read, and call on the Lord's Name, spiritual nourishment will come forth, and we shall be nourished and strengthened in the spirit. We will also have *"rhema's"* (truths spoken directly to our hearts by God's Spirit) which becomes the basis of dynamic prayers to God.

*"If you abide in Me, and My words (rhema's) abide in you, you will ask what you desire, and it shall be done for you." (John 15:7)*

As we read God's Word, the Spirit Himself is actively at work through that Word to search out our inner most being and illuminate the secret thoughts and motives of our heart. *"For the Word of God is **living and powerful**, and sharper than any two-edged sword, **piercing** even to the division of soul and spirit, and of joints and marrow, and is a **discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart.**" (Heb. 4:12)*

So while the Lord is moving, revealing, acting, motivating, and energizing within us, what shall we do? Should we keep our mouths closed? No, we should certainly feel impelled to utter something in response to Him. We should humbly express what we feel within turning His Word into our own desire and prayer. This is spiritual prayer, prayer in the spirit – and it opens up a living and dynamic relationship with the Lord that supplies us with spiritual vitality and authenticity.

This kind of spiritual prayer expresses the moving and activity of the Spirit of Christ within us. Christ becomes to us the living Lord who expresses Himself to us in, through, and as the Word which is itself moving, acting, motivating, and energizing us from within. When this happens, we cannot be silent... We become the mouthpiece for the Lord to utter what is within us at that very moment. Then, whatever we ask, it is not only we who are praying but also He who is praying in our praying.

If we abide in the Lord, keep ourselves always in contact and in fellowship with the Lord, and let the Lord with His word live, move, motivate, and energize within us, we will be unable to keep our mouths shut! We will want to speak! We will want to praise! We will want to call upon His Name and relate to Him in a real way. When we speak in this way to Him, what we speak will be a real prayer in the spirit and it will fill our lives with tremendous spiritual fruitfulness.