

Prayer

Praying for Yourself - 1

January 23, 2011

- I. Review of Previous Teaching on Prayer
 - A. We have been talking about prayer for nine Sunday's and have covered some general characteristics of prayer, intercessory prayer, and the first two of the three Psalms I have encouraged you to consider as templates or examples for prayer. Last Sunday we finished our look at Psalm 25.
 1. Each Sunday of this series I have stated at least once that all prayer is a form of fellowship and communion with God. And I have encouraged you to think of prayer as including both need based praying and fellowship based praying.
 2. And each Sunday of this series, I have said something about one or more of the three important characteristics of prayer, which are: humility, honesty, and fervency or persistence.
 - B. Today, I want us to begin looking at praying for ourselves.
 - C. Prayer

- II. Before digging into self prayers, I want to say a few words about humble honesty in prayer and fervency in prayer.
 - A. An example of someone, who lacking humble honesty – or failing to humbly and honestly survey the situation to see what was really needful – gained physical healing at the cost of spiritual health, an untimely death, and a kingdom. **I Kings 13:1-6** . . . Now behold, there came a man of God from Judah to Bethel by the word of the LORD, while Jeroboam was standing by the altar to burn incense. [2] He cried against the altar by the word of the LORD, and said, "O altar, altar, thus says the LORD, 'Behold, a son shall be born to the house of David, Josiah by name; and on you he shall sacrifice the priests of the high places who burn incense on you, and human bones shall be burned on you.' " [3] Then he gave a sign the same day, saying, "This is the sign which the LORD has spoken, 'Behold, the altar shall be split apart and the ashes which are on it shall be poured out.' " [4] Now when the king heard the saying of the man of God, which he cried against the altar in Bethel, Jeroboam stretched out his hand from the altar, saying, "Seize him." But his hand which he stretched out against him dried up, so that he could not draw it back to himself. [5] The altar also was split apart and the ashes were poured out from the altar, according to the sign which the man of God had given by the word of the LORD. [6] **The king said to the man of God, "Please**

entreat the LORD your God, and pray for me, that my hand may be restored to me." So the man of God entreated the LORD, and the king's hand was restored to him, and it became as it was before.

- B. Fervency is as important to prayer as is humility and honesty. And I want to show us the importance of fervency by using persistence as an example of fervency.
1. Now I suspect we all understand that communication expressed with passion conveys strength of desire. Yet who of us always or even regularly prays with passion when making our requests to God?
 - a. So if we generally lack passion in our praying, how do we know if what we are praying for is a passing fancy, or simply one more request on the list of requests that we feel we ought to pray for, or a genuine longing that won't go away until it is satisfied? The answer is **persistence**.
 - b. And if we generally lack passion in our praying, what reason does God have to conclude our request is a genuine longing and not a passing fancy? Again, the answer is **persistence**.
 2. Without question, there is a kind of prayer that is a passionate crying out to God at a moment in time – which conveys as clearly as can be conveyed that our prayer comes from the depths of our heart. And such prayers, when sincere and appropriate, usually need to be expressed only once. But there is also the kind of prayer that is shown to be just as important to us by its persistence. This is the kind of prayer we bring before God hour after hour and even day after day until it is answered.
 - a. It is said that George Muller – who was a great man of faith – testified in 1844, that five individuals were laid on his heart, and he began to pray for them. Eighteen months later one of them was converted. He prayed on for five years more, and another was converted. At the end of twelve years and a half, a third was converted. And at the time he gave this testimony, he had been praying for forty years for the other two, without missing one single day – but they were still unconverted. He said he felt encouraged to continue in prayer; and he was sure of receiving an answer in relation to the two who were still resisting the Spirit.
 - b. Now here is the point. Though you may not feel a strong passion in relation to something you are praying for, if it is truly important to you, show your fervency by persisting in bringing it before God until you receive the answer.

III. A Look At Praying for Ourselves

- A. To begin this part of our study on prayer, I want to put before you – for your consideration – three things that I believe are important to praying for ourselves. The **first** one is a list of categories to give us direction in praying for ourselves. The **second** one is a list of examples from the scriptures of God answering self-focused prayers. And I am giving you this list in order to encourage you in such praying. And the **third** is a look at why praying for ourselves is wise rather than selfish.
- B. **First**, I want to introduce different categories of prayer that can and maybe even ought to be part of praying for ourselves. This is not an exhaustive list, and it is possible I will add to it as we work through the list in future weeks. However, this is the list I have today and I am giving it to you in hopes you will begin considering the items on the list.
1. Help me Prayers,
 2. Teach me Prayers,
 3. Proactive or Preparatory Prayers,
 4. Corrective Prayers,
 5. Confession Prayers,
 6. Bible Reading and Meditation Prayers,
 7. Fellowship Prayers.
- C. **Second**, I want to give you examples from God's word of those who prayed for themselves. My primary purpose in this is to encourage all of us to pray for ourselves – and preferably in wise and spiritually profitable ways.
1. **Abraham** - for Ishmael. **Genesis 17:15-21** . . . Then God said to Abraham, "As for Sarai your wife, you shall not call her name Sarai, but Sarah shall be her name. [16] "I will bless her, and indeed I will give you a son by her. Then I will bless her, and she shall be a mother of nations; kings of peoples will come from her." [17] Then Abraham fell on his face and laughed, and said in his heart, "Will a child be born to a man one hundred years old? And will Sarah, who is ninety years old, bear a child?" [18] And Abraham said to God, "**Oh that Ishmael might live before You!**" [19] But God said, "No, but Sarah your wife will bear you a son, and you shall call his name Isaac; and I will establish My covenant with him for an everlasting covenant for his descendants after him. [20] "As for Ishmael, I have heard you; behold, I will bless him, and will make him fruitful and will multiply him exceedingly. He shall become the father of twelve princes, and

- I will make him a great nation. [21] "But My covenant I will establish with Isaac, whom Sarah will bear to you at this season next year."
2. **Abraham's servant** - for guidance. **Genesis 24:10-15** . . . Then the servant took ten camels from the camels of his master, and set out with a variety of good things of his master's in his hand; and he arose and went to Mesopotamia, to the city of Nahor. [11] He made the camels kneel down outside the city by the well of water at evening time, the time when women go out to draw water. [12] He said, "O LORD, the God of my master Abraham, please grant me success today, and show lovingkindness to my master Abraham. [13] "Behold, I am standing by the spring, and the daughters of the men of the city are coming out to draw water; [14] now may it be that the girl to whom I say, 'Please let down your jar so that I may drink,' **and who answers, 'Drink, and I will water your camels also'**—may she be the one whom You have appointed for Your servant Isaac; and by this I will know that You have shown lovingkindness to my master." [15] Before he had finished speaking, behold, Rebekah who was born to Bethuel the son of Milcah, the wife of Abraham's brother Nahor, came out with her jar on her shoulder.
 3. **Isaac** - for children. **Genesis 25:21** . . . Isaac prayed to the LORD on behalf of his wife Rebekah, because she was barren; and the LORD answered him and his wife conceived.
 4. **Jacob** - deliverance from Esau. **Genesis 32:9-12** . . . Jacob said, "O God of my father Abraham and God of my father Isaac, O LORD, who said to me, 'Return to your country and to your relatives, and I will prosper you,' [10] I am unworthy of all the lovingkindness and of all the faithfulness which You have shown to Your servant; for with my staff only I crossed this Jordan, and now I have become two companies. [11] "**Deliver me, I pray, from the hand of my brother, from the hand of Esau; for I fear him**, that he will come and attack me and the mothers with the children. [12] "For You said, 'I will surely prosper you and make your descendants as the sand of the sea, which is too great to be numbered.' "
 5. **Gideon** - for proof of God's call. **Judges 6:36-40** . . . Then Gideon said to God, "If You will deliver Israel through me, as You have spoken, [37] behold, I will put a fleece of wool on the threshing floor. If there is dew on the fleece only, and it is dry on all the ground, then I will know that You will deliver Israel through me, as You have spoken." [38] And it was so. When he arose early the next morning and squeezed the fleece, he drained the dew from the fleece, a bowl

full of water. [39] Then Gideon said to God, "Do not let Your anger burn against me that I may speak once more; please let me make a test once more with the fleece, let it now be dry only on the fleece, and let there be dew on all the ground." [40] God did so that night; for it was dry only on the fleece, and dew was on all the ground.

6. **Samson** - for strength. **Judges 16:23-30** . . . Now the lords of the Philistines assembled to offer a great sacrifice to Dagon their god, and to rejoice, for they said, "Our god has given Samson our enemy into our hands." [24] When the people saw him, they praised their god, for they said, "Our god has given our enemy into our hands, Even the destroyer of our country, Who has slain many of us." [25] It so happened when they were in high spirits, that they said, "Call for Samson, that he may amuse us." So they called for Samson from the prison, and he entertained them. And they made him stand between the pillars. [26] Then Samson said to the boy who was holding his hand, "Let me feel the pillars on which the house rests, that I may lean against them." [27] Now the house was full of men and women, and all the lords of the Philistines were there. And about 3,000 men and women were on the roof looking on while Samson was amusing them. [28] Then Samson called to the LORD and said, "**O Lord GOD, please remember me and please strengthen me just this time,** O God, that I may at once be avenged of the Philistines for my two eyes." [29] Samson grasped the two middle pillars on which the house rested, and braced himself against them, the one with his right hand and the other with his left. [30] And Samson said, "Let me die with the Philistines!" And he bent with all his might so that the house fell on the lords and all the people who were in it. So the dead whom he killed at his death were more than those whom he killed in his life.
7. **Hannah** - for a son. **I Samuel 1:9-18** . . . Then Hannah rose after eating and drinking in Shiloh. Now Eli the priest was sitting on the seat by the doorpost of the temple of the LORD. [10] She, greatly distressed, prayed to the LORD and wept bitterly. [11] **She made a vow and said, "O LORD of hosts, if You will indeed look on the affliction of Your maidservant and remember me, and not forget Your maidservant, but will give Your maidservant a son, then I will give him to the LORD all the days of his life, and a razor shall never come on his head."** [12] Now it came about, as she continued praying before the LORD, that Eli was watching her mouth. [13] As for Hannah, she was speaking in her heart, only her lips were moving, but her voice was not heard. So Eli thought

she was drunk. [14] Then Eli said to her, "How long will you make yourself drunk? Put away your wine from you." [15] But Hannah replied, "No, my lord, I am a woman oppressed in spirit; I have drunk neither wine nor strong drink, but I have poured out my soul before the LORD. [16] "Do not consider your maidservant as a worthless woman, for I have spoken until now out of my great concern and provocation." [17] Then Eli answered and said, "Go in peace; and may the God of Israel grant your petition that you have asked of Him." [18] She said, "Let your maidservant find favor in your sight." So the woman went her way and ate, and her face was no longer sad.

8. **Hezekiah** - for health. **II Kings 20:1-7** . . . In those days Hezekiah became mortally ill. And Isaiah the prophet the son of Amoz came to him and said to him, "Thus says the LORD, 'Set your house in order, for you shall die and not live.'" [2] Then he turned his face to the wall and prayed to the LORD, saying, [3] "**Remember now, O LORD, I beseech You, how I have walked before You in truth and with a whole heart and have done what is good in Your sight.**" And Hezekiah wept bitterly. [4] Before Isaiah had gone out of the middle court, the word of the LORD came to him, saying, [5] "Return and say to Hezekiah the leader of My people, 'Thus says the LORD, the God of your father David, "I have heard your prayer, I have seen your tears; behold, I will heal you. On the third day you shall go up to the house of the LORD. [6] "I will add fifteen years to your life, and I will deliver you and this city from the hand of the king of Assyria; and I will defend this city for My own sake and for My servant David's sake.'" [7] Then Isaiah said, "Take a cake of figs." And they took and laid it on the boil, and he recovered.
9. **Manasseh** - for deliverance. **II Chronicles 33:10-13** . . . The LORD spoke to Manasseh and his people, but they paid no attention. [11] Therefore the LORD brought the commanders of the army of the king of Assyria against them, and they captured Manasseh with hooks, bound him with bronze chains and took him to Babylon. [12] When he was in distress, **he entreated the LORD his God and humbled himself greatly before the God of his fathers.** [13] When he prayed to Him, He was moved by his entreaty and heard his supplication, and brought him again to Jerusalem to his kingdom. Then Manasseh knew that the LORD was God.
10. **Daniel** - for dream interpretation. **Daniel 2:12-23** . . . Because of this the king became indignant and very furious and gave orders to destroy all the wise men of Babylon. [13] So the decree went forth

that the wise men should be slain; and they looked for Daniel and his friends to kill them. [14] Then Daniel replied with discretion and discernment to Arioch, the captain of the king's bodyguard, who had gone forth to slay the wise men of Babylon; [15] he said to Arioch, the king's commander, "For what reason is the decree from the king so urgent?" Then Arioch informed Daniel about the matter. [16] So Daniel went in and requested of the king that he would give him time, in order that he might declare the interpretation to the king. [17] Then Daniel went to his house and informed his friends, Hananiah, Mishael and Azariah, about the matter, [18] so that they might request compassion from the God of heaven concerning this mystery, so that Daniel and his friends would not be destroyed with the rest of the wise men of Babylon. [19] Then the mystery was revealed to Daniel in a night vision. Then Daniel blessed the God of heaven; [20] Daniel said, "Let the name of God be blessed forever and ever, For wisdom and power belong to Him. [21] "It is He who changes the times and the epochs; He removes kings and establishes kings; He gives wisdom to wise men And knowledge to men of understanding. [22] "It is He who reveals the profound and hidden things; He knows what is in the darkness, And the light dwells with Him. [23] "To You, O God of my fathers, I give thanks and praise, For You have given me wisdom and power; Even now You have made known to me what we requested of You, For You have made known to us the king's matter."

11. **Jonah** - for deliverance from the fish. **Jonah 2:1-10** . . . Then Jonah prayed to the LORD his God from the stomach of the fish, [2] and he said, "I called out of my distress to the LORD, And He answered me. I cried for help from the depth of Sheol; You heard my voice. [3] "For You had cast me into the deep, Into the heart of the seas, And the current engulfed me. All Your breakers and billows passed over me. [4] "So I said, 'I have been expelled from Your sight. Nevertheless I will look again toward Your holy temple.' [5] "Water encompassed me to the point of death. The great deep engulfed me, Weeds were wrapped around my head. [6] "I descended to the roots of the mountains. The earth with its bars was around me forever, But You have brought up my life from the pit, O LORD my God. [7] "While I was fainting away, I remembered the LORD, And my prayer came to You, Into Your holy temple. [8] "Those who regard vain idols Forsake their faithfulness, [9] But I will sacrifice to You With the voice of thanksgiving. **That which I have vowed I will**

pay. Salvation is from the LORD." [10] Then the LORD commanded the fish, and it vomited Jonah up onto the dry land.

12. **Zacharias** - for a son. **Luke 1:5-17** . . . In the days of Herod, king of Judea, there was a priest named Zacharias, of the division of Abijah; and he had a wife from the daughters of Aaron, and her name was Elizabeth. [6] They were both righteous in the sight of God, walking blamelessly in all the commandments and requirements of the Lord. [7] But they had no child, because Elizabeth was barren, and they were both advanced in years. [8] Now it happened that while he was performing his priestly service before God in the appointed order of his division, [9] according to the custom of the priestly office, he was chosen by lot to enter the temple of the Lord and burn incense. [10] And the whole multitude of the people were in prayer outside at the hour of the incense offering. [11] And an angel of the Lord appeared to him, standing to the right of the altar of incense. [12] Zacharias was troubled when he saw the angel, and fear gripped him. [13] But the angel said to him, "**Do not be afraid, Zacharias, for your petition has been heard,** and your wife Elizabeth will bear you a son, and you will give him the name John. [14] "You will have joy and gladness, and many will rejoice at his birth. [15] "For he will be great in the sight of the Lord; and he will drink no wine or liquor, and he will be filled with the Holy Spirit while yet in his mother's womb. [16] "And he will turn many of the sons of Israel back to the Lord their God. [17] "It is he who will go as a forerunner before Him in the spirit and power of Elijah, to turn the hearts of the fathers back to the children, and the disobedient to the attitude of the righteous, so as to make ready a people prepared for the Lord."
13. **Leper** - for healing. **Matthew 8:2-3** . . . And a leper came to Him and bowed down before Him, and said, "**Lord, if You are willing, You can make me clean.**" [3] Jesus stretched out His hand and touched him, saying, "I am willing; be cleansed." And immediately his leprosy was cleansed.
14. **Centurion** - for his servant. **Matthew 8:5-13** . . . And when Jesus entered Capernaum, a centurion came to Him, imploring Him, [6] and saying, "**Lord, my servant is lying paralyzed at home, fearfully tormented.**" [7] Jesus said* to him, "I will come and heal him." [8] But the centurion said, "Lord, I am not worthy for You to come under my roof, but just say the word, and my servant will be healed. [9] "For I also am a man under authority, with soldiers under me; and I say to this one, 'Go!' and he goes, and to another, 'Come!' and

he comes, and to my slave, 'Do this!' and he does it." [10] Now when Jesus heard this, He marveled and said to those who were following, "Truly I say to you, I have not found such great faith with anyone in Israel. [11] "I say to you that many will come from east and west, and recline at the table with Abraham, Isaac and Jacob in the kingdom of heaven; [12] but the sons of the kingdom will be cast out into the outer darkness; in that place there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth." [13] And Jesus said to the centurion, "Go; it shall be done for you as you have believed." And the servant was healed that very moment.

15. **Thief on the cross** - for salvation. **Luke 23:39-43** . . . One of the criminals who were hanged there was hurling abuse at Him, saying, "Are You not the Christ? Save Yourself and us!" [40] But the other answered, and rebuking him said, "Do you not even fear God, since you are under the same sentence of condemnation? [41] "And we indeed are suffering justly, for we are receiving what we deserve for our deeds; but this man has done nothing wrong." [42] And he was saying, "**Jesus, remember me when You come in Your kingdom!**" [43] And He said to him, "Truly I say to you, today you shall be with Me in Paradise."

D. **Third**, it is sometimes thought that praying for ourselves is selfish and therefore not to be commended to Christians as something we ought to do.

1. Without a doubt, we are easily tempted to pray selfishly rather than humbly and wisely. James speaks to this problem when he says: "You ask and do not receive because you ask with wrong motives so you may spend the answer on your pleasures (**James 4:3**). The point God is making in James is that – for the most part – He will have no part of our selfish prayers. On those rare occasions when God does answer a selfish prayer, we will gain what we want at great cost to what we truly need and would be best for us.
2. And yet, praying for ourselves is not forbidden. It's commended. It is selfish prayer that is spoken against.
 - a. For example, we just finished a review of prayers recorded in the Bible where the request was focused on the one praying and answered according to the request.
 - b. Added to the list of prayers we just reviewed are the Psalms which are full of David's prayers and pleadings, with many of them focused on himself. Surely, if David is a man after God's own

heart, and if David prayed this much for himself, we can confidently follow his example.

3. And the last two examples I want to give you as encouragement in praying for yourself come from Jesus.
 - a. First, in teaching His disciples how to pray, Jesus gave them a model in the Lord's Prayer – which is made up of seven statements, four of which are requests for one's self.
 - b. Second, on the night He was betrayed, Jesus urged the disciples, and especially Peter, James, and John, to continue watching and praying so that they would not enter into temptation – because their spirit was willing, but their flesh was weak (Matthew 26:41).

IV. Conclusion

A. A prayer by Thomas a Kempis (1380-1471) ... Plunging into God's love.

B. Dear God:

As yet my love is weak, my heart imperfect, and so I have great need of Your strength and comfort.

Visit me often, I pray, and instruct me in the ways of Your laws.

Give me strength and set me free from all evil passions, and heal my heart from all immoral desires.

And thus healed and cleansed in spirit, may I learn how blissful it is to plunge into the depths of Your love.

Let Your love dissolve my heart, let Your love raise me above myself.

Let Your love reveal to me joy beyond imagination.

Let my soul exhaust itself in singing the praises of Your love.

Let me love You more than I love myself, and let me love myself for Your sake.

And let me see Your love shining in the hearts of all people that I may love them as I love You.

Amen."