

Prayer

Praying for Yourself - 3

February 06, 2011

- I. Review of Previous Teaching on Prayer
 - A. Prayer Quotes
 1. Some people pray just to pray and some people pray to know God. (Andrew Murray)
 2. There is a vast difference between saying prayers and praying.
 3. In prayer it is better to have a heart without words than words without a heart. (John Bunyan)
 - B. Today, we will continue looking at prayer in relation to praying for ourselves. Last Sunday, we looked at the first two of seven categories to help you have direction in praying for yourself. They were:
 1. Help me Prayers,
 2. Teach me Prayers,
 - C. Today we are going to look at Proactive and Preparatory Prayers. It is my hope and prayer that this will be of benefit to all of us.
 - D. Prayer
- II. A Look At Praying for Ourselves
 - A. **Proactive Prayers** – have to do with an intentional pursuit of God and godliness. The value of proactive prayers is determined by how Christian or spiritual or mature in your Christian faith you want to be. The specifics of proactive prayers is determined by what areas and in what ways you need to grow or change in order to become the Christian God saved you to be.
 1. Those who truly want to love God with all their heart, soul, mind, and strength, and who hunger and thirst after righteousness know that prayer is a vital part of any spiritual growth and are therefore driven by their desires and recognized weaknesses to pray proactive prayers.
 2. Proactive prayers often grow out of a specific set of values and several activities in the Christian's life. For example, they grow out of:
 - a. **Values** – (1) a hunger and thirst for purity of heart and godliness of life, (2) a compelling longing to love God as He ought to be loved, (3) a driving desire to put away sin and all that is connected with sin and to put Christ-likeness in its place.
 - b. **Studying God's Word:** To study God's word is to give diligent consideration to what it says. Such consideration requires:

- (1) praying over it by asking God to speak through it to you and to show you what you need to see – as you study it;
 - (2) looking up words in the dictionary to make sure you know what they mean;
 - (3) looking at the overall context so as to see how the smaller pieces of truth fit into the bigger picture;
 - (4) seeking outside assistance from commentaries, and Bible dictionaries, and others in the church who may know more about the portion you are studying than you know;
 - (5) considering what to apply and how to apply it in your own life. It is in considering the **what** and **how** to apply that especially drives PROACTIVE PRAYERS in your pursuit of God and godliness.
- c. **Meditating on God’s Word:** To meditate on God’s word is to review it day after day for weeks or months or even longer; praying as you review it and mull it over so as to see in it what God has to say to you through it. Meditating on a particular scripture opens it up to you, part by part, idea by idea, truth by truth, until you see in it what God has in it for you.
- (1) If you select scriptures for meditation that deal with a specific area of sin or weakness or bad habit or ungodly thinking pattern or unbelief or some other need that you realize needs to be brought into conformity to the likeness of Christ, you will find that meditating on your selected scripture will speak to you in an expanding, progressive way about God and your need as you continue to meditate on it.
 - (2) And as the scripture you are meditating on speaks to you, you will see ever more clearly the need to talk to God about what you are seeing – which in turn will drive PROACTIVE PRAYERS as you seek to apply God’s revealed truth in specific ways to your life.
- d. Proactive prayers also grow out of listening to sermons, attending Bible studies, reading or listening to **good** Christian literature and music, having an accountability partner or someone to disciple you, and talking with other believers about spiritual growth.
3. One of David’s proactive prayers is recorded in **Psalm 139:23-24** . . . Search me, O God, and know my heart; try me and know my anxious thoughts; [24] and see if there be any hurtful way in me, and lead me in the everlasting way.

- a. What is David asking? Now before answering that, let's look at the context. This request makes up the last two verses of **Psalm 139**. When we read the entire Psalm, it becomes apparent that David is making two primary points: (1) God knows everything about him, and (2) evil people are evil because they have willfully turned against God.
- b. So the context of David's request is this: God knows everything about him, and doing what we **know is wrong** is never accidental, but always deliberate.
- c. So what is David asking? He is asking God to protect him from self-delusion, or self-deceit, or living in denial, or blocking from his mind the ugly truth about himself.
 - (1) Why? Because self-delusion leads to willful rebellion against God, which leads to deliberate doing what is evil.
 - (2) In other words, David is asking God to search his heart, his mind, and his behavior to see if he is deceiving himself anywhere, and if so, to expose it to David so he can take appropriate action in the direction of truth and righteousness, and in so doing, kill off self-delusion and hence avoid the deliberate evil that comes from lying to ourselves about ourselves.
- d. Let's apply this example of a **PROACTIVE PRAYER** to ourselves.
 - (1) If you know you are prone to self-deception,
 - (2) or if you know you don't like to look at the ugly truth about yourself,
 - (3) or if you know you don't use God's language to describe the sin in your life but rather describe it in much nicer ways so as to blunt its ugliness,
 - (4) or if you know that defending yourself is usually your first response when someone comes to you with a complaint or criticism,
 - (5) then you are in need of such a prayer if you are going to move forward in facing reality about yourself, and in applying God's truth to your life in specific areas where you have been living in denial. Having deceived yourself and having lived for a time in that delusion of reality, you are wise to seek God's help in exposing your self-deception and facing the truth so that can make progress in living in the truth.

4. **Open My Eyes That I May See** – (Clara H. Scott, 1841-1897)

Open my eyes, that I may see
Glimpses of truth Thou hast for me;
Place in my hands the wonderful key
That shall unclasp and set me free.

Open my ears, that I may hear
Voices of truth Thou sendest clear;
And while the wave notes fall on my ear,
Everything false will disappear.

Open my mouth, and let me bear,
Gladly the warm truth everywhere;
Open my heart and let me prepare
Love with Thy children thus to share.

Refrain: Silently now I wait for Thee, Ready my God, Thy will to see,
Open my heart, illumine me, Spirit divine!

5. I am convinced that we can hunger and thirst after righteousness to the degree that we want to find new areas for growth and discover old ways that need to be put off and replaced with godliness.

a. And if you are not at this place in your Christian life, I am – right here and now – encouraging you to push yourself to begin the practice of self-examination – with prayer for God’s help – for the purpose of discerning sinful thinking, ungodly desires, bad habits, bad attitudes, inappropriate communication, and unholy behavior.

b. And when you see something that needs to be changed, look to God’s word to see what it says you ought to put on in those areas of recognized sinfulness – and in so doing, replace wrongdoing with godliness.

c. And of course, do all this with prayer as a significant part of the process.

6. **Breathe On Me, Breath Of God** – (Edwin Hatch, 1835-1889)

Breathe on me, Breath of God, fill me with life anew,
That I may love what Thou dost love, and do what Thou wouldst do.

Breathe on me, Breath of God, until my heart is pure,
Until with Thee I will one will, to do and to endure.

Breathe on me, Breath of God, till I am wholly Thine,
Until this earthly part of me glows with Thy fire divine.

Breathe on me, Breath of God, so shall I never die,
But live with Thee the perfect life of Thine eternity.

- B. Preparatory Prayers** – have to do with looking ahead – be it an hour, a day, several days, a week, or more – and talking to God about the things that are necessary for you to be prepared to meet what is coming – be it a temptation or trial or financial difficulty or dealing with someone with whom you have an unresolved conflict or some other challenge to your faith and godliness or to living a peaceable and quiet life.
1. These prayers grow out of looking down the road, in light of the past, so that you have a reasonably accurate perception of how you are likely to act if you make no changes before that future challenge comes.
 2. Just to help you in this process let me give you some suggestions of what you can look for in the past in order to look into the future to see where and how you could better prepare:
 - a. Preparing for temptation – related to a known weakness or weaknesses that you are working at changing, such as: impatience, anger, immorality, unkindness in response to unkindness, withholding love in response to not being loved, resentment, bitterness, defensiveness when criticized, blaming others instead of taking responsibility for your part, foolishness in relation to what you talk about or what activities you get involved in, etc.
 - b. Preparing for difficult communication – with a spouse, child, parent, sibling, friend, co-worker, neighbor, brother or sister in Christ, boss, etc.
 - c. Preparing for an uncomfortable social situation – be it a family gathering, or a church setting where we all know something is wrong but no one will talk about it, or a meeting with a boss, or the need to confront someone over their wrong behavior or lack of responsibility, or going someplace where you know people don't think well of you – yet you need to be there, etc.
 - d. Preparing for a spiritual gathering – be it church, or a bible study, or a conversation with a family member or a friend or a co-worker about spiritual matters, or an evangelistic effort with someone. Do you pray in advance for yourself and others who will take part in any instruction or teaching from God's word?

3. I am convinced we all can look into the next ten or twelve hours, or even further, and in seeing what we expect to happen, prepare, and in preparing, use prayer as a significant part of our preparation.
4. I am convinced that we all can look into the hours ahead of us, and based on our past, make at least some predictions of what temptations we will face.
 - a. We each know at least some of our weaknesses and we know that given the right set of circumstances, we will be tempted to resort to old, sinful ways instead of pressing on in godliness.
 - b. An example from my own life – coming home from work wanting to be left alone for a bit when my boys and my wife wanted to be paid attention to immediately.
 - c. And so I am urging you today to start this practice of looking ahead and making proactive prayers a significant part of preparing to meet and resist future temptation so as to remain faithful to the truth of God and to continued growth in righteousness.

5. **Unfaithfulness Lamented** – (William Cowper)

O for a closer walk with God, a calm and heavenly frame;
A light to shine upon the road that leads me to the Lamb!

Where is the blessedness I knew, when first I saw the Lord?
Where is the soul-refreshing view of Jesus and His word?

What peaceful hours I once enjoyed! How sweet their memory still!
But they have left an aching void the world can never fill.

Return, O Holy Dove, return, sweet messenger of rest!
I hate the sins that made Thee mourn, and drove Thee from my breast.

The dearest idol I have known, whate'er that idol be,
Help me to tear it from Thy throne and worship only Thee

So shall my walk be close with God, calm and serene my frame;
So purer light shall mark the road that leads me to the Lamb.

III. Conclusion

A. Proactive and Preparatory Prayers!