

Partnering with God in Prayer



By David Butts

It's very obvious in Scripture that the Lord wants us to pray. There are many commands given to us concerning prayer: "Then Jesus told his disciples a parable to show them that they should always pray and not give up" (Luke 18:1); "And pray in the Spirit on all occasions with all kinds of prayers and requests. With this in mind, be alert and always keep on praying for all the saints" (Ephesians 6:18); "Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God" (Philippians 4:6).

These are just a few of many such injunctions in God's Word concerning prayer in our lives. Why is it then, that so many Christians feel so inadequate in their prayer lives? Christians everywhere confess their prayerlessness and long to become people of prayer. Yet, the life of prayer evades so many. How can this be turned around in our lives?

I believe that one important key is to understand the reason behind God's commands to us to pray. It can be difficult to discern the mind of God on a matter, but He has given us much

in Scripture to help us understand. My friend Alvin VanderGriend has suggested that there are three reasons given for prayer in God's Word: intimacy, enrichment and partnership. Another way of stating these is: knowing God, obeying God and partnering with God.

There is a passage of Scripture that combines all of these in one place: "This is love for God: to obey his commands. And his commands are not burdensome, for everyone born of God overcomes the world. This is the victory that has overcome the world, even our faith. Who is it that overcomes the world? Only he who believes that Jesus is the Son of God" (1 John 5: 3-5).

The first reason for prayer is the simple need we all have to know God. There is no way to draw near to the Lord apart from prayer. It is in prayer that we express to the Lord our love for Him, our faith in Him, our worship of Him, and our surrender to Him. If for no other reason, the desire for intimacy with Christ ought to bring us daily to our knees.

The second reason for praying is simple obedience. God says to pray...so we pray. This is especially important during those times in our lives when we don't feel like praying. These spiritual "dry times" can happen to us all. Often, the only thing that will lead us out of such dryness is sticking with the routine of daily prayer and time in God's Word. Developing a spiritual discipline out of obedience to the Lord is a bulwark against spiritual dryness, laziness, and busyness.

One of the areas that I believe is least understood by Christians is the partnership that God has called us to with Himself in the area of prayer. God, in His wisdom and sovereign power, has chosen to accomplish His will on this planet through the prayers of His people. God has decided not to arbitrarily move in and out of situations on earth, even though He is able to do just that. Instead, He waits on His people to pray and then pours out His power in response to

those prayers.

Ezekiel 22:30 is a passage of Scripture that illustrates this principle of how the Lord works. "I looked for a man among them who would build up the wall and stand before me in the gap on behalf of the land so I would not have to destroy it, but I found none." God uses the illustration of a walled city to demonstrate His commitment to prayer. The walls protect a city from enemy attack. But through neglect (sin), the walls can begin to crumble and a gap or opening in the wall can create a dangerous situation where the enemy can come in. God said of Israel in Ezekiel's day, that they had allowed such a situation to develop. It was going to result in the destruction of the land, unless someone stood before the Lord in the gap on behalf of the land. This is a clear picture of God's desire for us to engage in intercessory prayer.

What is absolutely heartbreaking is that God Himself was looking for an intercessor. He was looking for someone who would stand before Him in prayer on behalf of Israel so that He would not have to destroy her because of sin and rebellion. God's desire is made clear here. He did not want to destroy Israel. He was waiting for an intercessor so He wouldn't have to. God had chosen to reserve His power to save the nation of Israel for those who prayed. But no intercessor was to be found. Israel was defeated by the Babylonians and her people were in exile for 70 years.

Isaiah 59 reflects a similar situation. The chapter speaks of a nation that was in trouble. There was no justice, violence was in the streets and the righteous were being preyed upon by the wicked. Verses 15 and 16 show us the Lord's response to the evil that was going on. "The LORD looked and was displeased that there was no justice. He saw that there was no one, he was appalled that there was no one to intercede."

Once again, the Lord made His will very clear. He was displeased by what was happening in Israel and desired for

matters to be made right. He was waiting for His people to pray, so that salvation and righteousness might be poured out upon the people. But again, there was no one to intercede. In this case, however, the Lord allowed Israel to suffer in sin for hundreds of years until His people were redeemed by the coming of the Messiah. God always looks first for an intercessor. It is His plan to accomplish His will on this planet through the prayers of the saints.

It is for this reason that Jesus taught us to pray, "Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven." God has given us the awesome privilege of partnering with Him in bringing about the advance of His Kingdom on earth.

As we ask ourselves, "why pray?" we can move from a lethargic attitude about prayer to a place of tremendous excitement as we join with God in what He is doing on this planet. Understanding the place of prayer in God's plan can give us greater motivation and commitment to be the people of prayer that God is calling us to become.

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