

KNOWING WHAT TO PRAY ABOUT

INTRODUCTION

Seeking to learn how to pray. Looked at reasons for learning to pray, and at rich range of subjects that should constitute our communication with heaven: invocation, adoration, praise, confession, supplication, petition, intercession, pleading, thanksgiving & amen. **What practical steps can we take to ensure our prayers have a suitable blend of all these parts?** That our content is correct.

1. RECOGNISE THAT SOME PREPARATION WILL BE REQUIRED

If we are going to be in a position to be able to come before God expressing ourselves in the best way for our souls & his glory we will need to think about what we are going to say & how to say it.

There are two extremes to avoid: i) Just following pre-composed written prayers - own or prayer book.

ii) An entire dependence on sudden motions & suggestions - will find we do not know what to pray.

Our danger is generally not that of following pre-composed written forms, but in reacting against such formalism we go to other extreme of believing that as prayer is entirely spiritual, no preparation is required. ⇒ Some have a similar view of preaching - pray as go up pulpit steps for a word from God!

We must make a distinction between free prayer & extemporary prayer. Extemporaneous prayer is when, without any reflection or meditation beforehand, we address ourselves to God and speak the thoughts of our hearts as fast as we conceive them. This is fine for those moments through the day when we lift our hearts to God with immediate requests & thanksgivings - but is inadequate for all our prayers.

Free prayer is when words are not formed beforehand - but we know subjects & substance of our address to God. We give some thought to what we are going to pray & to some expressions may use.

Let me give you 3 reasons to encourage you to prepare your thoughts for prayer before you pray:

i) Because of greatness of God we speaking to. Ecclesiastes 5:1-3 - warning about being too hasty.

ii) Because Jesus gave us a model prayer to help us in this task of knowing what to pray - Matt 6

iii) Because God wants us to use our minds as well as our hearts when we pray - 1 Cor 14:15.

Apply: Need to allow time in our quiet time for this - not see it as unspiritual. Part of effective prayer.

Apply: Need to see this as part of our preparation for coming to prayer meeting - plan to pray!

Apply: For those of us who lead services - need to give time to this as part of our preparation.

2. LEARN THE ART OF MEDITATION

How do we practically take time to furnish ourselves with proper content for prayer? Meditation.

Meditation is often the link we miss between Bible intake (reading, preaching, study) and prayer. The two are often disjointed when they should be united. We read Bible, or hear a sermon and try shift straight into prayer - but often it seems as if the gears between the two won't mesh. Link is meditation.

Psalm 19:14 - with ref to v7-11. The process works like this: after the input of a passage of Scripture, meditation allows us to take what God has said to us and think deeply on it, digest it, and then speak to God about it in meaningful prayer. As a result, we pray about what we have encountered in the Bible,

now personalised through meditation. Puritans were experts at this: William Bridge: *'As it is the sister of reading, so it is the mother of prayer.'* John Owen: *'Pray as you think. Consciously embrace with your heart every gleam of light and truth that comes to your mind. Thank God for and pray about everything that strikes you powerfully.'* Matthew Henry on Ps 19:14 *'David's prayers were not his words only, but his meditations; as meditation is the best preparation for prayer, so prayer is the best issue of meditation. Meditation and prayer go together.'* Isaac Watts: *"We may borrow content for prayer from the word which we read, from inward reflections of our own souls, or from holy conferences. Many a saint has found it true that while he mused the fire burned within him - Ps 39:3"*

What is involved with meditation? Packer: *"Meditation is the activity of calling to mind, and thinking over, and dwelling on, and applying to oneself, the various things that one knows about the works and ways and purposes and promises of God.* Augustine: *"The hearer of God's Word ought to be like those animals that chew the cud; he ought not only to feed upon it, but ruminate upon it."*

How do we meditate? i) Repeat the text in different ways - emphasising a different word each time. ii) Re-write the verse or phrase in your own words. iii) Ask the Philippians 4:8 questions of the text. iv) Look for applications in the text - ask questions about what text is teaching & expecting of you. v) Make comparisons between what text is saying & your own heart & life. Sum: using our minds. When we meditate on scripture & things relating to God very quickly we will have content to pray.

3. BE ORGANISED & DISCIPLINED

Consider these texts: Eph 6:18, 1 Peter 4:7 - both place a responsibility on us about praying.

John Piper: "Unless I am badly mistaken, one of the reasons so many of God's children don't have a significant life of prayer is not so much we don't want to, but that we don't plan to. If you want to take a four week vacation, you don't just get up one summer morning and say, 'Hey, let's go today!' You won't have anything ready. You won't know where to go. Nothing has been planned.

But that is how many of us treat prayer. We get up day after day and realise that significant times of prayer should be part of our life, but nothing's ever ready. We don't know where to go. Nothing has been planned. No time. No place. No procedure. And we all know that the opposite of planning is not a wonderful flow of deep, spontaneous experiences in prayer. The opposite of planning is the rut. If don't plan a vacation you will probably stay home and watch TV. The natural, unplanned flow of spiritual life sinks to the lowest ebb of vitality. There is a race to be run and fight to be fought. If you want renewal in your life of prayer you must plan to see it.

Therefore, my simple exhortation is this: Let us take time this very day to rethink our priorities and how prayer fits in. Make some new resolve. Try some new venture with God. Set a time. Set a place. Choose a portion of Scripture to guide you. Don't be tyrannised by the press of busy days. We all need mid-course corrections. Make this a day of turning to prayer - for the glory of God and for fullness of your joy." Practical ways: Build it into our daily routine. Book / journal / diary - things to pray for daily, weekly, monthly. Ways of recording fruits of our meditation on God's word. Need a system.

CONCLUSION: Trying to be practical not mechanical. Aim is that we might know reality of 1Jn 1:3