

REMEDIES FOR PRAYER PROBLEMS

INTRODUCTION

A final study in this short series called 'learning how to pray'. Subject tonight: 'Remedies for prayer problems.' Look at three difficulties, struggles, issues - things that stop us praying and suggest solutions to those problems. Some of the things we will mention, will be aspects of prayer we have already touched on - in that way this study should also act as a summary and conclusion to series.

3 things that can stop us praying: i) lack of feelings, ii) lack of concentration, iii) uncertainty about God's will. Prayer is a spiritual work & we have an enemy who wants to stop us - these his methods.

1. LACK OF FEELINGS

There are several different things that may stop our emotions from being stirred when we come to pray, it maybe: i) a lack of assurance, ii) a general coldness of heart or lack of desire or enthusiasm, iii) lack of any sense of God's presence. Whatever it maybe connected to, the problem is a lack of heartfelt feelings when we try to pray. When this happens, what are we to do?

a) Realise we are not the first to experience this. In fact every Christian will have times when their feelings seem to become disconnected from their minds, whilst they may think & believe certain things - they feel far away. Heart does not seem to be as enthused as it should. This will vary from person to person - but let us not think we are first to experience this difficulty: Psalms 42 & 43

b) Remember that we can pray without feelings - with our minds alone. We do not need to feel in order to pray effectively. Whilst we desire to sense that we are really engaging with God when we pray - prayer itself does not depend upon it to be classed as true prayer. Our feelings are not be final test of anything: 1 Cor 13:1-3. Emotions are unreliable - maybe present & not from God. If there is no place for our feelings then our Christianity is dead. We can still pray with our minds - this is where Bible puts great emphasis - upon us using our minds as we pray: 1 Cor 14:15, Col 4:2. Palace of soul.

c) Pray in faith and in dependence upon Holy Spirit. God is same gracious God however we may feel - he has not changed. He still hears & answers prayer - is that not promise of His word? He calls us to trust him, pray with faith. When we don't have our emotions to help us, our sense of vulnerability & need of help is greater - so we cast ourselves upon God Holy Spirit more & more. The command of scripture is to continue 'steadfastly' (Col 4:2) sometimes it will be a struggle. But failure to pray is steal praise from God that is His due. We may not feel as we ought to, but we still owe him a debt of thanksgiving & praise. We must not deny Him that - give it with our minds & lives.

2. LACK OF CONCENTRATION

Once again the exact symptoms will vary, but what we find is that when we come to pray our mind wanders, or our concentration span is very short, or we fall asleep - sometimes these things only occur when we pray. Lack of concentration may also be caused by our worries crowding into our minds when we pray - we seem to be able to think of little else. For others lack of concentration means total

blackout of things to pray for when they come to prayer. How are we to keep our minds focused?

a) Pray more briefly, more often. We should perhaps try praying several times in the day as opportunity arises, rather than attempting one longer time. e.g. Psalm 55 - one of David's psalms of distress - says in v17 "Evening and morning and at noon". Frequency can help tiredness problem.

⇒ Same with food - if people are struggling to keep their food down, we give them little often.

b) Pray using Scripture. Learn art of meditation (see study 3). By using scripture as basis of our prayers, not only helps us furnish our prayers with the good content, but it also directs the mind and gives us something definite to focus our minds upon, and can be a great help to 'wondering thoughts.'

c) Pray using notes & lists. As we go through life we think of people & situations we should pray for - but when we come to pray we can't remember them. Having a list of things, organised in a structured way helps us pray for all the things that need our intercessions, and helps guide our wandering minds.

d) Stop praying about your cravings. Sometimes our prayer times can be dominated by one issue - something we feel passionately about and really want to have, raises within us all sorts of frustrations when God does not give us our requests. We seem unable to pray about anything else. Maybe that request has turned into a craving that needs to be put out of our mind, become a distraction & hindrance to effective prayer. Ps 106:13-15. We must exercise great care & caution concerning purely personal requests. ⇒ Lloyd-Jones quote. [p153, ROMANS 'Exposition of Chapter 8:17-39']

3. UNCERTAINTY ABOUT GOD'S WILL

How do we know what is God's will for us to pray about? If God knows everything, and knows what is best for us why do we need to pray? If it is God's Holy Spirit who helps us pray, does it really matter? We know we should pray, because we are told to in Bible: 1 Thess 5:17, Col 4:2, Phil 4:6 - but when we don't know what the right thing to pray for is, we find ourselves drawing a blank. When prayer is more of a struggle, and good habits break down, we can use sovereignty of God as an excuse.

a) There are many things we know we should pray for because the Bible tells us we should!

i) Matt 6:9-13 - Lord's Prayer - giving us a pattern of things to pray for. ii) Eph 6:18 - prayer for other Christians. In Paul's letters we have many examples of how to pray for other believers: Eph 1:16f, Phil 1:3f, Col 1:3f, 1 Thess 1:2. iii) Col 4:3-4 - praying for gospel success - preachers in particular.

iv) 1 Thes 5:17 - Our own spiritual development: rejoicing, praying always, giving thanks at all times.

b) We must pray for wisdom and for the 'mind of Christ'. James 1:5, 1 Cor 2:16; Col 3:16-17. In this way our thinking will increasingly be in tune with God's desires and will, we will know what to pray for and what is the right decision to make. That is why we pray 'in Jesus name' - we should be asking for things that are consistent with what he stands for and wants. Too often we pray selfishly. We have no claims on God in and of ourselves, but Christ does, and so we go on basis of his claims.

c) God loves his children to ask. Matt 7:7, John 14:13-14, 1John 5:14. He wants us to be reminded every day that He is God, He is governor & provider. Without prayer we would soon forget this.

CONCLUSION: Hope these things have been helpful. I have found preparation challenging, stimulating & reforming. Col 4:12 - there will always be an element of struggle. Will you battle on?