

## Prayer Is Work

By Jane Titrud

It has always been God's desire for His people to be people of prayer. The psalmist David, a man after God's own heart, was a man of prayer, for he wrote: "*Give ear to my prayer, O God; And do not hide Thyself from my supplication*" (Psalm 55:1, NASB). Speaking through the prophet Isaiah, God also told the Jews that He intended His house to be a "*house of prayer for all the peoples*" (Isaiah 56:7). After the advent of the Messiah, those who desired to become disciples of Jesus were furthermore told to "*...love your enemies, and pray for those who persecute you in order that you may be sons of your Father who is in heaven*" (Matthew 5:44-45a). As a man of prayer Himself, Jesus likewise instructed His disciples to "*Keep watching and praying that you may not enter into temptation; the spirit is willing, but the flesh is weak*" (Matthew 26:41). Later, the Apostle Paul instructed the Colossian church to "*Devote yourselves to prayer, keeping alert in it with an attitude of thanksgiving*" (Colossians 4:2), and he told the Thessalonian church to "*pray without ceasing*" (1 Thessalonians 5:17). The will of God thus seems plain enough. He wants us to pray.

The trouble is that prayer is work. It takes time and effort just like any other job. However, there is a difference between the work of prayer and that which exists in the natural, physical realm. For one thing, immediate, tangible results are often lacking when it comes to prayer, for its ways are mysterious, being ultimately subject to the will of the Father. It can, therefore, be difficult at times to judge one's effectiveness. By contrast, "work" done in the physical realm lends itself better to a sense of human accomplishment. In this case, "work" has a scientific definition and yields results that can easily be measured. The amount of work done is merely equal to the force applied to an object multiplied by the distance the object is moved by that force. A farmer who is plowing a field, for instance, is doing work because he is dragging a plow through a field to break up the land. In other words, he is applying force through a distance. The distance traveled is merely the sum of all the lengths of the rows plowed. Applying the formula, one can thus come up with a number that accurately measures the amount of work accomplished by plowing. Of course, trying to use a tractor beyond its capabilities to move a massive, permanently placed object would simply be a waste of time. With no apparent movement of the object taking place, no work would be accomplished, and all the energy expended would be lost. And, sometimes, that is the way it seems with prayer as well.

Prayer operates in a realm that may or may not have consequences in the immediate here and now. And, since we do not have the means to measure what prayer is accomplishing in the spiritual realm, it may not always appear as if it is truly achieving anything. A lack of obvious feedback and results may thus give one the impression that energy is being expended for nothing—like pushing against an immovable wall. People can thus become discouraged or even give up entirely.

Nevertheless, prayer is not just about trying to move the heavens in response to a need. So often, prayer does things in the heart and life of a believer that can only be discerned via the Spirit.

For instance, the Bible says to "*Enter His gates with thanksgiving, And His courts with praise. Give thanks to Him; bless His name. For the LORD is good; His lovingkindness is everlasting, And His faithfulness to all generations*" (Psalm 100:4-5). If one follows these instructions, therefore, and enters into prayer properly, this encourages the exercise of faith. It does this by causing one to focus on Whom one is addressing instead of merely the problem or

the request at hand. This type of praying, moreover, cultivates an attitude of thanksgiving and reverence, which also boosts confidence.

In addition, praying for others, especially those who are not exactly friendly towards us, can lead to spiritual growth by encouraging Christ-like love and minimizing the problem of self-centeredness at the same time. For it is quite difficult to be at odds with one for whom you are earnestly praying. You may even end up rejoicing in the wellbeing of an “enemy” if their life or walk with the Lord ends up improving, at least in part, because you prayed for them.

Another thing that an active prayer life can do is to encourage cleansing through regular confession of sin and walking in holiness. For the Bible says, *“If I regard wickedness in my heart, The Lord will not hear; But certainly God has heard; He has given heed to the voice of my prayer”* (Psalm 66:18-19). The idea that all our prayerful efforts could be in vain because of sin in our life can be quite effective in bringing about change. No one wants to put effort in something for nothing.

But what about the time element involved? Prayer is not only work, it takes time—sometimes a significant amount of time that one may feel one simply does not have. For this reason, some think prayer is fine for little old ladies in nursing homes or for the retired who do not “work” anymore, but not for them. Or, you may find yourself in the company of those who do not appreciate the fact that prayer is work and be ridiculed for not “doing” anything. This has happened to me, and it can be very discouraging. It is not like you are going to advertise how much time you spend in prayer anyways, for the Bible discourages such things: *“Beware of practicing your righteousness before men to be noticed by them; otherwise you have no reward with your Father who is in heaven...But you, when you pray, go into your inner room, and when you have shut your door, pray to your Father who is in secret, and your Father who sees in secret will repay you”* (Matthew 6:1, 6).

All I can say when it comes to time is that I have seen the Lord make a way where there seems to be no way. I have personally been amazed at what the Lord can accomplish by way of granting me stamina when I feel like I have nothing left to give. So, if you are determined in your heart to make it work, establish a pattern in the best time slot available and just start praying.

Finally, routine prayer can lead to a very sweet pattern of regular fellowship with the Lord. Those who have not discovered this yet are really missing out. I often think of the story of Mary and Martha in Luke 10:38–42 wherein Martha was so busy and concerned about the work of serving Jesus—whereas Mary was seated at the Lord’s feet listening to His word: *“But the Lord answered and said to her, ‘Martha, Martha, you are worried and bothered about so many things; but only a few things are necessary, really only one, for Mary has chosen the good part, which shall not be taken away from her’”* (Luke 10:41-42). This may relate more to spending time with God in His Word, but there is something to say for just praising Him, loving Him, and asking for His help and guidance as well.

Christianity is not about religion or rules but rather relationship anyway. And one does not have to neglect prayer in favor of the Word. Regular prayer coupled with regular reading of His Word is perhaps the very best way to maintain the relationship that keeps Him your first love. So, let us not be like those of the church of Ephesus in Revelation who seemed very zealous with respect to working for the Lord but, at the same time, ended up leaving their first love: *“I know your deeds and your toil and perseverance, and that you cannot endure evil men, and you put to the test those who call themselves apostles, and they are not, and you found them to be false, and you have perseverance and have endured for My name’s sake, and have not grown weary. But I*

*have this against you, that you have left your first love*” (Revelation 2:2–4). Let us rather value the work of prayer and not neglect this fellowship time with the Lord that keeps Him so close in heart.