

A Personal Prayer Pilgrimage

My own personal prayer pilgrimage began fifty years ago when I told the Lord, "Yes, I do believe." Having been clearly presented with the love of Christ and His sacrifice on my behalf, that first prayer sprang forth straight from my heart. I am not sure I knew it was a prayer. I just knew I was speaking to God. I needed Him and I told Him so.

Since then, especially in the last few years, I have been on a quest to know more about prayer. I have prayed about prayer, asking God exactly what prayer is and how He wants me to pray. I have studied the subject of prayer in the Bible, even writing a book about the prayers of the apostle Paul. I have read everything I can find written on the subject of prayer. I collect quotes on prayer. I read autobiographies of great prayer warriors. I continue to search the Bible for every clue about the wonderful, mysterious gift of prayer.

Here are some things about prayer I know to be true.

- Authentic prayer is not complicated. It is a two-way conversation between God and His people. He speaks and I listen. I talk to Him and He hears me.
- Unless prayer is rooted in a relationship with God through His Son Christ Jesus, it is not true prayer. It is pretense.
- As my Creator, God already knows everything there is to know about me. He designed prayer as a means for me to get to know Him.
- Since God is not limited by time or space, He is always accessible. I can talk to Him any time, anywhere in any circumstance.
- I don't have to say anything. I can pray silently in my mind, out loud or even in writing. That's why we have the prayers of the great men of faith in the Bible. God, by whatever means He communicated with them, told them to write their prayers down.
- Prayer is easier when my focus is on God. Whenever I catch myself thinking, "I wish I had prayed about that," I realize I have taken my focus off of Him.
- I have a hard time hearing Him speak when I am disobedient or stubbornly resisting His will. Recognizing His sovereignty is a prerequisite to being able to hear Him when He speaks. Jesus called this having *ears to hear*.
- Prayer should be the first thing I do, not the last.
- When I try to do something by myself, in my own strength, He lets me do it, but I often regret it. The best way to live my life is to talk to Him about everything.
- If there is ever a temporary loss of communication, it is not on His part. It is on mine.
- Jesus taught us to pray to our Father. It helps me to know that He is my Father and there is nothing too small or too big to talk to Him about. I am His child. If it concerns me, it concerns Him.
- Taking part in corporate prayer - prayer with others - is a privilege and honors God. He calls the place where His people gather a house of prayer.
- Most of my prayer life is extremely personal. There is no need for pretense with God and no excuse for ignoring Him. I can disappoint Him, but I can never surprise Him. He knows me too well.
- He delights in hearing from me, just as He does each one of His children.

God can do anything and does what is necessary to bring glory to Himself, but inexplicably (this is part of the mystery), He often chooses to act on the prayers of His people. More than once, He said He searched for someone to pray for others - to stand in the gap - and found no one. He wants us to pray not only for ourselves, but for others as well.

He proved that He would listen to His people who did stand in the gap - who pled with Him on the behalf of others: Abraham for the people of Sodom and Gomorrah, Moses for the sins of the Israelites, Stephen for those who were stoning him, Paul who prayed specific prayers for the churches and people he knew and loved. God justly punishes those who do not trust Him, but He allows His children to stand in the gap for those who have yet to do so and to stand in the gap for brothers and sisters who are disobedient.

As I pray, I continue to discover new truths about God. I often wish I could hear Him speak clearly and instantly about a certain matter, but know that if there is a delay in an answer, He has a good reason. He sees things from an eternal perspective. Often the delay is a timing issue concerning other people or circumstances.

Some prayers do have immediate answers. I pray about a range of small things during the day and see Him directing as I face the day, look for a bargain while shopping, protection while I run errands, write a blog post, prepare a meal, make or receive a telephone call, write a letter or answer an email.

While I am waiting for specific direction about a very important decision - sometimes life changing ones - these are the things I can count on.

- I can trust Him. He knows best and if I am truly seeking His will, He will not let me stumble.
- This life is not all there is. What I am asking for may not be the best thing ultimately for me or for my family. I can't see what God can see. I don't know what He knows.
- His plan is best. It may differ from my idea, but He will change my desires if what I want is not best.
- God and I have a relationship - a history. When I am faced with a major decision, I reflect on what He has done in the past and thank Him for His gentle direction.

In my own personal prayer pilgrimage, I have discovered that the closer I get to God - the better I know Him - the less formal my prayers are. With utmost respect, I talk to Him like I would my daddy. I find myself saying "thank you" all day long for things I did not even know to pray about. He was looking out for me all along.

God knows me so well that the life verse He gave me helps still my nerves and stop my panic while I am waiting for His answer and watching Him work. I need Him. I tell Him so.

Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known to God; and the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus (Philippians 4:6-7).