

WHY PRAY?

Dear Friend,

Psalm 109:1-4 tells us what to do when people lie about us, attack us without cause and repay evil for good. It declares, “O God, whom I praise, do not remain silent, for the wicked and deceitful men have opened their mouths against me; they have spoken with lying tongues. With words of hatred they surround me; they attack me without cause. In return for my friendship they accuse me, but I am a man of prayer.”

In the midst of the daily battles of life it is the woman and man of prayer who continue to remain standing strong. The relationship they have developed with the Almighty through the communication of prayer grants them the inner assurance that they are not alone even when those they have trusted turn against them. Henry Nouwen in his book With Open Hands explains this relationship with God that results from prayer in this way. “If you address yourself in prayer to God who is completely the other, you are searching for true peace in your life. When God asked Adam, the man, ‘Where are you?’ Adam answered, ‘I was hiding’ (Gen 3:9-10) and here he was confessing his true condition. But this confession set him on his way to God. The praying man (or woman) is he (or she) who comes out of his (or her) shelter and not only has the courage to see his (or her) own poverty but also sees that there is no enemy to hide from, only a friend who would like nothing better than to clothe him (or her) with His own coat.”

Prayer is a relationship, a relationship with the Creator of Heaven and Earth. Prayer involves both listening as well as talking to God. The end result of such a prayerful relationship with the divine is expressed in Isaiah 26:3 when it says, “Thou will keep him (or her) in perfect peace, whose mind is stayed on Thee; because he trusted in Thee.”

It is the man or woman of prayer who is able to remain strong and be at peace in spite of the adversities. He or she knows that God is in control and that He answers prayer.

The question is, “if God is in control why pray?” Peter Kreeft in his book, *Prayer for Beginners* answers this question by pointing out that, “God commands us to pray, in fact to “pray constantly” (1 Thess. 5:17). He yearns and longs for us to pray more passionately than any earthly lover yearns for his beloved to turn her

eyes and her attention to him. (All earthly lovers are tiny droplets of His infinite sea of love; he is where all love comes from, whether we receive it pure or whether we pollute it.) We pray to obey God, not to ‘play God.’ We pray not to change God’s mind, but to change our own; not to command God, but to let God command us. We pray to ‘let God be God.’” We see throughout the Scriptures where God commands us to pray. In Psalm 50:15 He says, “Call upon Me in the day of trouble.” In Matt 7:7 we are told, Ask, and it shall be given you; seek, and ye shall find; knock, and it shall be opened unto you.” Then in Matt. 26:41 it declares, “Watch and pray, that ye enter not into temptation.”

What a joy it is to pray. Brother Lawrence stated in his work, The Practice of the Presence of God, “There is not in the world a kind of life more sweet and delightful than that of a continual conversation with God. Those only can comprehend it who practice and experience it.”

Peter Kreeft goes on to say, “the single most important piece of advice about prayer is one word: Begin! God makes it easy to begin: just do it! God also makes it easy to progress in prayer, for He rewards our efforts with peace and joy. And He makes it easiest of all at the end, for it gradually becomes more natural and more delightful.”

Prayer is simply talking to God. Let’s do it now by praying. Some say, Lord you are unseeable but I have seen you this day in the light of the skies, in the green of the earth, in flowing waters. To those who say You are untouchable I would say I have felt you this day in the warmth of the sun, in the wildness of the wind, and in the touch of another. In and beyond my senses, in taste and touch and sound, your mystery has been made know. At the ending of the day, in the darkness of the night, in and beyond my senses let me know your presence, O God in the name of Jesus.

Pray, pray and pray some more knowing that all of creation is proclaiming the presence of God. “The crash of your thunder was in the whirlwind; your lightning’s lit up the world. Your path was through the mighty waters, yet your footprints were unseen” Ps 77:18-19.

Praying also involves being still and becoming aware of God’s presence in a new way. It is hungering for a deeper relationship with the Almighty “As a deer longs for flowing streams, so my soul longs for you, O God” Ps 42:1. Remember prayer also involves listening to God as He speaks to us through the wonders of

creation and His written word. “The mountains may depart and the hills be removed, but my steadfast love shall not depart from you” Is.54:10.

E.M. Bounds in his book, The Necessity of Prayer, states, “prayer draws its very life from the Bible. It places its security on the firm ground of Scripture. Its very existence and character depend on revelation made by God to man in His holy Word. Prayer, in turn, exalts this same revelation and turns men (and women) toward that Word.”

In the Word of God we see Jesus telling us, “this, then, is how you should pray: ‘Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name, your kingdom come, your will be done on earth as it is in heaven. Give us today our daily bread. Forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors. And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from the evil one’” (Matt.6:9-13). When we look closely at the Lord’s Prayer we see it combines every desire of the praying heart. It gives glory to God with the words, “Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name.” It involves surrender to God’s will not our selfish wills with the declaration, “your kingdom come, your will be done on earth as it is in heaven.” Once such surrender takes place then the request is made for the meeting of our daily bread along with the desire to forgive and be forgiven as well as deliverance from temptation and the devil. How we need to carefully study each phrase of this prayer and how it applies to our personal lives. Martin Luther said, “They who merely recite the words of the Lord’s Prayer without praying them with their heart are like a book which reproduce the thoughts of another but itself is without any understanding; such people are like the pipes of an organ which play a beautiful melody but lack all appreciation.” J.W. Acker in his book, Teach Us to Pray, has this to say about the Lord’s Prayer, “The man (or woman) who truly prays this prayer is a person of power. When the Christian offers this prayer, ‘Satan trembles when he sees the weakest Christian on his knees.’ Never was nor ever shall there be another prayer like it. Let us therefore employ it frequently, fervently, profitably.”

Unanswered prayer should cause us to stop and ask what God is trying to show us at this time? Are we completely trusting that God is in control and has our best interest in mind? (See Jer.32:17; Heb. 11:6). Jesus tells us that once we put first the kingdom of God then we are to believe God will answer our prayers. In Mark 11:24 He declares, “Therefore I tell you, whatever you ask for in prayer believe that you have received it, and it will be yours.” Then Jesus goes on to tell us how unforgiveness can hinder our prayers. “And when you stand praying, if you hold anything against anyone, forgive him. So that your Father in heaven may forgive you your sins” (Mark 11:25).

God is not a genie in a jar just waiting for the right prayer to be uttered before He will act. God will not answer prayers to aid the idols we create in our lives. May we pray as St. Augustine did when he declared, “Almighty God, in whom we live and move and have our being? You have made us for yourself, so our hearts are restless until they rest in you. Grant us purity of heart and strength of purpose that no selfish passion may hinder us from knowing your will and no weakness from doing it. But that in your light we may see clearly, and in your service find perfect freedom, through Jesus Christ our Lord.”

There is not just the power of praying individually but also that of praying with others. Jesus promised that when people prayed together in his name things would get done. “Again I say to you that if two of you agree on earth concerning anything they ask, it will be done for them by My Father in heaven. For where two or three are gathered in My name, I am there in the midst of them” (Matt. 18:19, 20).

Everyday we face crises of every different kind. Social injustice, environment destruction, family and personal problems, the list goes on and on. Yet as men and women of prayer we can not only remain strong but also actually be more than conquerors through Christ who strengthens us.

As men and women of prayer we pray in faith and we pray in the name of Jesus. Peter Kreeft points out that, “The prayer of Jesus name actually brings God closer, makes Him more present. He is always present in some way, since He knows and loves each of us at every moment; but he is not present to those who do not pray as intimately as He is present to those who do. Prayer makes a difference; ‘prayer changes things.’ It may or may not change our external circumstances. (It does if God sees that change is good for us; it does not if God sees that it is not.) But it always changes our relationship to God, which is infinitely more important than external circumstances, however pressing they may seem, because it’s eternal but they are temporary, and because it is our very self but they are not.”

Since prayer is one of the most powerful forces in the universe the question is why aren’t we praying more? As a person of prayer we will be able to be instruments of change, hope and help. Through prayer we will be awakened to the eternal presence of God and the changes He wants to bring about in our lives. Don’t you think it is time you started making prayer a priority in your life.

Mother Teresa tells us to “love to pray – feel the need to pray often during the day and take the trouble to pray. If you want to pray better, you must pray more. Prayer enlarges the heart until it is capable of containing God’s gift of himself. We need to find God and He cannot be found in noise and restlessness. See how nature, the trees, the flowers, the grass grow in perfect silence. See the stars, the moon and the sun, how they move in silence. Is not our mission to give God to the poor? Not a dead God but a Living, Loving God. The more we receive in silent prayer, the more we can give in our active life.”

Prayer birthed in the compassion of Jesus moves us among those in need, enabling us to experience that need in the depths of our souls. It causes us to obey our Lord’s command when He says “Ask the Lord of the harvest to send workers into His harvest field.” Please pray for additional NLEC workers to come forth at this time. As we see the magnitude of need around us, let us cry out with the prophet, ***“My eyes fail from weeping, I am in torment within, my heart is poured out on the ground because my people are destroyed, because children and infants faint in the streets of the city”(Lam.2:11)***. Compassion causes me to ask what would happen if I became desperate enough to wrestle with God like Jacob, if necessary, until my heart was broken over the pain of this generation of children and youth whom Satan has ravaged? As I hear story after story about the terrible things people are doing to each other, I find myself asking what would happen if I were prepared to engage in the spiritual warfare necessary to see people set free from satanic chains that hold them in bondage?

I must accept the fact that I can’t really pray effectively without the Holy Spirit’s help for, “The Spirit helps us in our weakness. We do not know what we ought to pray for.” (Romans 8:26) As we begin to pray in the power of the Spirit, we must aggressively come against Satan in the powerful name of Jesus and with the sword which is the word of God. In James 4:7 we are told, “Submit yourselves, then, to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you.”(James 4:7)

When you are praying don’t be surprised if your mind starts going in every direction with one anxious thought after another. As this happens don’t panic or stop praying. Instead, remember Is.26: 3 which says, “You (Oh Lord) will keep him (and her) in perfect peace whose mind is stayed upon You because (he or she) trusts in You.” With our minds at peace, trusting in the Lord, we are then able to pray with power as we intercede in the name of Jesus who, “Having disarmed the powers and authorities, made a public spectacle of them, triumphing over them by the cross” (Col.2:15). We can pray with the authority of Jesus knowing that through His work of redemption the powers and authorities have been disarmed.

He has truly triumphed over them by His death on the cross and His resurrection from the dead.

Jesus makes it clear that earnest intercessory prayer performs a vital role in destroying the citadels of injustice as He asks, “Will not God bring about justice for His chosen ones, who cry out to Him day and night? Will He keep putting them off? I tell you, He will see that they get justice, and quickly. However, when the Son of Man comes, will He find faith on the earth?”(Luke 18:6-8). Prayer is not an alibi for indifference to the plight of the poor (Is 58:2, James 2:14-26). As we care for those God cares for, He will take care of our cares as we put our faith in Him. Faith is an essential element in prayer. Jesus, knowing the love of many will grow cold in the last days, asks, “When the Son of Man comes, will He find faith on the earth?” Many today claim to believe God is everywhere while they live like He is nowhere. No wonder their prayer life is so powerless for, “without faith it is impossible to please God, because anyone who comes to Him must believe that He exists and that He rewards those who earnestly seek Him” (Heb.11:6).

How we need more men and women like Epaphras who interceded “Always wrestling in prayer for you, that you may stand firm in all the will of God, mature and fully assured” (Col. 4:12). To wrestle in prayer means to engage in prayer in an agonizing way with an intense desire. New Testament believers not only devoted themselves to but also agonized in prayer with intense desires. The needs we are facing today are no less significant. As you pray earnestly, know that as you wrestle in prayer, Christ’s power is working powerfully in you.

Please continue to pray earnestly for New Life Evangelistic Center’s financial needs, the NLEC staff and for the needs of the multitudes that come to us daily. Let us believe God for a mighty outpouring of His Spirit!

Yours in Christ,

Larry Rice

