

Take it to the Lord in Prayer

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Scripture: Ephesians 1

Yesterday, I had a call from a dear friend who, from the moment he began to talk to me, didn't stop for about 20-25 minutes. He just kept going on and on, and it was very unlike him. I've had many conversations with him and it just didn't seem to fit his profile. Something was going on with him; he needed to talk and so he just talked non-stop. It seemed like he didn't take a breath for anything, just kept going on. And I listened. At the end of it, I prayed with him and put the phone down.

But it made me think about how good it is to sometimes talk to someone, to be able to unpack, to be able to have a conversation about what's going on without being judged or maybe even without any advice coming your way. I was reminded that when we go to the Lord in prayer, very often it's the same equation. God listens to the things that go on in our lives. He's a good listener.

I have told you before, but it bears mentioning again, one of my favorite songs is:

I talk to Jesus every day,
He's interested in every work I say.
No secretary ever tells me
He's been called away.
I talk to Jesus every day.

I look at my first cup of coffee as a conversation with God. When I get to my office, I get my coffee going, and then I just sit and I chat with Him. I tell Him about what my day looks like, and where I think I'm going to have problems, and where I'm unsure and uncertain. I just have this conversation even before I open my Bible and begin to read. It's such a beautiful time – one that I cherish, because it's a freeing thing for me to be able to talk like that to the Lord.

I was looking at some of the prayers, and I'll get into that, but a line in a prayer that Paul prayed when he was talking to the church at Ephesus. He says: *I prayed that the eyes of your heart may be enlightened in order that you may know the hope to which He has called you, the riches of His glorious inheritance in His holy people and His incomparably great power for us who believe.* (Ephesians 1:18-19)

Sometimes when we read Paul, and we come across these long sentences that don't seem to stop, we kind of gloss over and move on. But I was reading each of them and I thought to myself – My goodness! It's not like he's saying, "I pray that you will have a good life, and that you'll enjoy the day and the sun will shine upon you, and all will be good." He's praying something much deeper, and this particular phrase caught my attention. He says, "*I pray that the eyes of your heart may be enlightened in order that you may know the hope which has called you...* (Leave that aside, I'll come back to it).

But then he says, "*The riches of His glorious inheritance in His holy people.*" The riches of His glorious inheritance – 'H' is capitalized, which means that it is talking about God. He is saying, "I wish that you would know the riches of His i.e. God's glorious inheritance in His holy people. In other words, the inheritance that God has, is you and me. God's inheritance is

us. Every time I've read it, it seems very easy to say, "God is our inheritance." We came to know Jesus as Savior and we inherited this. And yet, Paul is saying here that we are God's inheritance, that you may know the riches of His, God's glorious inheritance in His (God's) holy people.

I wonder whether that knowledge, that you and I are God's inheritance, will change the dynamic in which we relate to Him – that somehow the Almighty God has an inheritance which is you and me.

Deuteronomy 4:20 – *The Lord took you and brought you out of Egypt to be the people of His inheritance.*

Right through the Old Testament, that is how we are referred to. The children of Israel were referred to as God's inheritance. And we, who are now the new Israel, are also God's inheritance.

Deuteronomy 32:9-10 – *The Lord's portion in His people, Jacob His allotted inheritance. In a desert land he found him, in a barren and howling waste. He shielded him and cared for him; God guarded him as the apple of his eye. God guarded him as the apple of His eye.*

Isaiah 5:1 – the Lord sings a love song about His people.

I will sing for the one I love a song about his vineyard:

My loved one had a vineyard on a fertile hillside.

5:7 – *The vineyard of the Lord Almighty is the nation of Israel and the people of Judah are the vines He delighted in.*

We are God's inheritance. Amazing! Just as I was reading that and soaking it in, I was thinking: My goodness! What a wonderful, wonderful thought - to be God's inheritance.

In the first service, we had a responsive reading, and I read it out of The Message. There was a line that said, "God throws garlands of hosannas around our neck." Every now and then, it's nice to just read a fresh new translation, to see some of the meanings that we skip over. God throws garlands of hosannas. That's how much He loves and cares for us.

Zephaniah 3:17 *He sings over you with great joy.*

Sometimes we think that God is really far away and He's not really concerned in my life. He looks at you and He just goes crazy over you. There's so much of delight when He sees you.

Hebrews 12:2 "For the joy set before Him, He endured the cross."

When we talk about prayer, we are not going to somebody who is saying, "Oh my goodness! Here he comes again." No! God is saying, "You're welcome! I delight in you. You're My precious one, and you're the one that I spin out of control over. That's how much love I have for you. Do you know that?"

So, when we think about that, we begin to understand John 3:16 where it says, "For God so loved the world..." All His love is captured in that two-lettered word – so. He so loved the world, so loved you and me. When we talk about prayer, when we talk about communion with Him, when we talk about having a conversation with Him, we go to the One who cares so very deeply for you and for me. So, I want us to see whether our understanding of who God is and what we mean to Him can change our concept of prayer.

We look at prayer in so many different ways:

The Lord's Prayer:

As I was looking at the Lord's Prayer, I found it interesting that in Luke 11:1, the disciples actually ask the question: "Lord, teach us how to pray." This was after they had spent some time observing Him pray. The Bible tells us that Jesus was praying and the disciples were there and they were watching Him. It says: *He was praying and the disciples were there. When He finished, they said, "Will You teach us how to pray?"* This comes out of ones who are just amazed at the way Jesus was praying. How did He pray that made the disciples say, "Will You teach us too, to pray like You do?" and so Jesus tells them. And we see the Lord's Prayer in various forms all through the gospels.

Jesus says to them:

- pray in a way that you afford God adoration;
- pray in a way that you invite His will into your life.
- pray in a way that He would ask Him to keep you from temptation.
- Pray in a way where you will confess your sins.
- Pray in a way where you will forgive others their sins.
- Pray in a way where He will give you provision. You can ask Him to provide.

All of this is captured in the Lord's Prayer. And He says, "This is how you pray. You can pray all of those separately; they do not have to form a pattern.

In the way we pray, over the years we have learnt about ACTS:

Adoration
Confession
Thanksgiving
Supplication

That's the kind of mantra we have for prayer:

Adore Him
Confess
Thank Him
Ask Him for things

But God doesn't wait for those things to happen. God hears. We can go to God with just adoration. We can go to God with just confession. As somebody said, God is not waiting for us to mosey up to Him and tell Him all the wonderful things that He is, and then finally say, "Oh, now, will you please do this for me?" We wouldn't do this to our earthly fathers. We don't go to our father and say, You're the best dad and, more than that, you're good-looking too. Yeah, really! I've seen other dads. And then dad, would you mind if I asked you for some money. I need to go out." We don't do that.

Ceaseless Prayer

There are different ways that the Bible says that we can go to God. Paul says "Pray without ceasing." Just be in a constant attitude of prayer, of conversation with God. We've looked at prayer before and we said that there are different types.

Authoritative Prayer

There is authoritative prayer, where we say "In the name of Jesus, we command," and we have that kind of authority that God has given us to use.

Persistent Prayer

We have a persistent kind of prayer where we persistently go to God and say, “Lord, we want You to do this, Lord, we want You, we are praying.” Jesus talks about that kind of prayer when he talks about the man who had visitors at night, and he went to his neighbor and pleaded for bread. The neighbor said, No. I have gone to sleep.” But he keeps on pleading and finally, the neighbors give him bread. Jesus says, “How much more will your Father in heaven give to those who ask Him.

There is a place in the Word for us to be persistent, to go back to God over and over again. It’s not that God doesn’t hear. God says, “I want you to trust Me because I have a particular timing, and I will give you what you are asking Me for.”

Tenacious Prayer

Then there is a tenacious kind of prayer – a prayer that says, ‘I will not give up’ like Jacob prayed. ‘I will not let You go unless You bless me.’ Elijah prayed that prayer when he was praying for the rain to come. The Bible says that he crouched down on his knees and prayed and prayed and prayed. Seven times he goes and sees whether the rain is coming. Scholars tell us that in the olden days, that was the position of a woman giving birth. He prayed with that kind of travail.

So, as we look at these models, I hope that one particular model settles on you. Maybe you will say, “I never really thought about that – sitting by myself and giving adoration to God.” The psalms are full of that. Psalm 27, 63, 84, 131, 146 to 150 are all ‘adoring communion with God’ psalms. “I gaze on the beauty of the Lord.”

Then psalms of supplication that say, “Lord, what is going on in my life?” Do you know that we can go to God and say, “Help me! What’s going on? I don’t understand You. Where are You? I don’t see You in my situation.” That’s a prayer that God accepts as well. The psalms are full of that as well – 10, 13, 39, 42, 43, 88. Where are You, God? You’re standing far away. I can’t see You. It’s a prayer of struggle. So, wherever you are in your life, whatever is going on, you can still go to the Lord and say: ‘Just as I am, I’m coming,’ because God knows exactly where you are.

But I wanted us to go back to Paul and the prayers that he prayed, because they are amazing prayers. He is praying for the churches at Ephesus, Philippi, Colossae, and in each one he has a prayer.

Philippians 1:9-11 And this I pray, that your love may abound still more and more in real knowledge and all discernment, so that you may approve the things that are excellent, in order to be sincere and blameless until the day of Christ; having been filled with the fruit of righteousness which comes through Jesus Christ, to the glory and praise of God.

When was the last time you prayed like this for somebody? We don’t even understand half those words!

Colossians 1:9-12 For this reason also, since the day we heard of it, we have not ceased to pray for you and to ask that you may be filled with the knowledge of His will in all spiritual wisdom and understanding, so that you will walk in a manner worthy of the Lord, to please Him in all respects, bearing fruit in every good work and increasing in the knowledge of God; strengthened with all power, according to His glorious might, for the attaining of all steadfastness and patience; joyously giving thanks to the Father, who has qualified us to share in the inheritance of the saints in Light.

After you read four or five of Paul's prayers, you are amazed. Our prayers are – Lord, would You please bless me. And while You are blessing me, bless my sister or my brother or my father or my mother. Help them to have a good day. Lord, would You provide a good lunch as well. That would be an added benefit.

Let us look at one of Paul's prayers to understand what he does. If you would do a little work at home on these passages of Scripture, it would be great. Just take these prayers and do what I am going to show you right now. If we look at Paul's prayer in Ephesians 1:17-19, he says that he is praying for two things. Basically, I am going to break this up. He says, "I'm praying for the spirit of wisdom and revelation." Then he says, "I am praying that the eyes of your heart may be enlightened." So, when you see that, you ought to ask the question: You're praying for the spirit of wisdom and revelation. Why? Why are you praying for wisdom and revelation, Paul? And Paul then answers: "So that you may know Him better." Let's unpack that a little.

Praying for the Spirit of Wisdom and Revelation

When Jesus asked the disciples, "Who do men say that I am?" Then Peter came up with the answer, and he said, "You are the Christ, the Son of the Living God." And what did Jesus say? Jesus said, "Blessed are you, Simon bar Jonah, or Simon, son of Jonah, for flesh and blood has not revealed this to you but My Father who is in heaven." You didn't get this revelation through your own thinking or any of your peers. You got this revelation because My Father chose to reveal it to you.

That's what Paul is saying. He said, "I, praying that you may have wisdom and revelation, that you may be able to hear the things that God is revealing to you." Then he says, "So that you may know Him better." As God reveals more and more of Himself to you, you begin to know Him better. It comes through revelation – revelation that comes through His Word that He has given to us, that we may get to know God better.

Now ask the question: Why is it good for us to know God better? Simply because if you know someone better, you can trust them. Think about a friend that you have – from the first day that you met this person to now. How much did you trust him on the first day, and how much do you trust him now? It's grown, isn't it? The amount of trust is directly proportionate to the length of time that you've gotten to know that person. It's the same with God. As we get to know God more, we trust Him more. We can depend on Him more. We can ask Him boldly for the things that hitherto we may have been so timid about. I wonder whether I can take this to God? Of course, you can.

The writer of Hebrews says, "Come boldly before the throne." How boldly have you come before His throne? How much do you know Him that tells you, that every situation that you're in, He can handle? Or are you in the habit of giving God some things and then holding back on some things, because you think you have a better understanding of it. Knowledge of God will help you trust Him more, to depend on Him more, to be bold with Him.

That the eyes of your Heart may be Enlightened

Question again: Why do you think that it's important for me, Paul, that you would pray something like that? And Paul answers,

1. "So that you may know the hope to which He has called you."

I love the song by Daniel Whittle, that we often sing in the first service.

I know whom I have believed,
And am persuaded that He is able
To keep that which I've committed
Unto Him against that day.

I've committed my life to Him and I have this hope that one day in eternity, we will be together. God, and you and I will be in heaven together. That's the hope! Another facet of hope is, because of that, every person that leaves us in death we will see again in life in heaven. Every lost one, every loved one who you have lost is not really lost; he will be found in heaven. We will meet again. What a glorious hope! Paul wants us to know the full extent of the hope that we have.

2. "That you may know the riches of His glorious inheritance in His holy people." And we looked at that. Just to be able to think that I am God's inheritance.
3. "That you may know the incomparably great power for us who believe." Here's a question for you and me. When was the last time you evidenced God's power in your life, when you said, "My goodness, this is God working because this wasn't me?" Do we even hope for that or pray for that, and say, "Lord, let me see Your power? I know that You can break these shackles. I know that You can do this, I know that You can restore a relationship? Can I see Your power, Lord, do these things in my life? when was the last time you saw supernatural power in your life – that God just came through and did something supernaturally for you?"

And Paul is saying, "That's something that I want you to see through enlightened eyes, this incomparably great power for us who believe." I don't think God wants insipid prayers. I think God is saying, "I'm God. Listen to Me. I'm God and you are My child, and you can come to Me with anything that's on your heart and mind and body. Come to Me. Don't stand afar."

When Jesus went to the Gadarenes and freed the man who was filled with demons, he went back to the village. And the villagers came out to Jesus. One of the saddest statements in the gospels, says, "and they begged Him to depart from them." Seeing the power, they asked Him to go away.

Are we guilty of that, beloved? Are we scared to see God's power work in our lives – this incomparably great power that is available to you and to me? We say, "I don't want it; it's too much. I don't want to operate at that level. That's high-risk level." Yet, it is at that place when we commune with Him, we talk to Him, we say, "Lord, we will operate with these wonderful things that Paul is just praying for us to have. Then the communion with Him gets closer and we are able to live on a different plane altogether. And that's where God wants us,

I shared this in the first service. I remember being in a room with Charles Kraft who is a prolific writer. He was a professor at Fuller Theological Seminary, and he has done a lot of work in the area of prayer. He was talking about prayer, and at the end of it he said, "You really don't understand what the Holy Spirit can do in you, the kind of power that He can manifest in revealing things about prayer as well. then he asked everyone to stand up and get into groups of threes. Then he asked us to pray for each other, without talking to one another. 1 prays for 2, 2 prays for 3 and 3 prays for 1. He said, "Just pray. Whatever God is placing on

your heart, just lean on the Holy Spirit to reveal.” At that point, I was thinking that I should have stayed home. And here I am standing with two people whom I have never met before.

So, after some amount of very uncomfortable silence, one person started praying, and he prayed for me. He prayed about the ministry that God was going to unveil as I went back to India. I almost fell through the floor. He knew nothing about me, but here he was praying for me. He finished that, and I felt the pressure building up. I asked the Lord to help me, and I felt the Lord saying ‘ulcer’. I said, “Lord, I’m not praying for an ulcer on somebody whom I haven’t met before.” I felt very constrained about it. But I went out on a limb and I said, “Lord, I’m praying for healing for this sister who has an ulcer, in Jesus’ name. Amen.” I opened my eyes and she was staring at me, and I thought – I’m done! I’m finished. Then she says, “How did you know?” I said, “You have an ulcer?” and she said, “I do.”

When you talk about incomparable power, it manifests itself in these ways as well, where God reveals to you and to me how to even pray intelligently for people we love, people we may not even know. But that comes with what He wants us to do – get close to Him, to have conversations with Him. That’s why Paul says, “Pray without ceasing.” It’s a constant communion with God, that we grow in this relationship so that you may know Him better, and that you may know the hope, the inheritance and the power that is available to you. That’s Paul’s prayer for you and me. Maybe, as we head into these beautiful days of self-introspection as we get into Lent, we need to up the ante on how we pray. Maybe we need to be a little bolder.

I like this quote by somebody: “Prayer is not merely a way to get things from God, but a way to get more of God Himself.” Isn’t that beautiful? It’s not to just go to Him and say, “This is what I want,” but to say, “Lord, invest in me. Give me more of you. Then I’ll be able to just think the thoughts that You think, pray like You want me to pray, do like You want me to do those things that You want me to do. Lord, come reside in my heart to the fullest extent possible. Be with me and change my prayer life.”

My challenge for you, my challenge for me during these days, is to really go after. That’s why I said: let’s do the homework. Read the verses where Paul prays in Philippians 1:9-11, Colossians 1:9-12, Ephesians 3:14-19. I did exactly what we did for the first one in Ephesians, and I am happy to send this to you if you want. But I would like you to do it first. Then take it and compare it and see how we can put things together. Just say: Lord, we’re pressing in, we are not going to be satisfied with the way we have been praying till now. We want a more dynamic prayer life, one where revelation and wisdom is involved. We are able to see and do the things that God wants us to do and have Him grow within us.

My prayer for us is this, that today we’ll draw a line in the sand and say: My prayer life till now is over. From now on, here’s the way I’m going to be praying. Here are the expectations I have of prayer and may God change us and fill us with His Spirit in such beautiful ways that we will just enjoy a triumphant, wonderful prayer life.

Our Father, we want to trust You more, depend on You more, come boldly before You, all of these things. But Lord, we’re inspired by Paul’s prayer. Master, we want those things for us and even as we bring it into our own lives, may our prayer for others be the same, the same kind of loftiness that lifts us above the average and the mediocre into something that is par excellence. In Jesus’ name we pray. Amen.