

Getting the Most From Prayer 01-19-20 AM

What is Prayer? In Genesis 20:3-17 we read about how King Abimelech was deceived by Abraham and nearly committed adultery. God came to him in a dream and told him to ask Abraham to pray for him. This is the first reference to prayer directly in the Bible. It teaches us that prayer is not simply a conversation with God, since Abimelech was speaking to God. God said that he needed Abraham to pray to God for him. If we look at this passage, we see that prayer is a process of “official” petition. It can be about praise and thanks, or request and pleading. These are terms similar to those found in legal court proceedings. At the end of a court pleading is a portion called the “prayer”, which is the petition to the court. A court will only receive the petition of someone in its jurisdiction; in a like manner God only hears the prayers of His people (although, as we see with Abimelech and Cornelius, He may listen/speak to others on occasion).

What is Required For Prayer? Let us consider the statement in James 5:16 (NKJV) that says *“The effective, fervent prayer of a righteous man avails much”*. Here there are three things listed that make for prayer: 1) Effectiveness, 2) Fervency and 3) Righteousness.

The Effectiveness of Prayer. We might consider that part of the effectiveness of prayer is how we pray. Jesus said that we are to pray in the name (authority) of Jesus (John 16:23). We also see that we are to pray to the Father in that same context. Finally, consider that we are permitted to pray for the will of God in places like Matthew 6 or 1 John 5:14.

The Fervency of Prayer. The second consideration is the intensity or consistency of our prayer. We are told that prayer ought to be continual, constant and ongoing. We are to “Pray without ceasing” (1 Thessalonians 5:17). Jesus told us in a parable in Luke 18 that we must continually plead our petition to God.

The Righteousness of Prayer. This refers not to the prayer, but to the character of the one who prays. God has said He does not hear the prayers of sinners (John 9:31). He says that *“the eyes of the LORD are on the righteous, and His ears are open to their cry”* (Psalm 34:15). Since Jesus is our authority in prayer, it makes sense that those who walk in the Way of Christ. Additionally, Jesus said in places like Luke 11:4 that our willingness to forgive others is also part of our prayer’s work.

What About Public Prayer? Some point to Jesus teaching in Matthew 6:5-9 and ask if there is permission to pray in a public way, or to lead a prayer for a group. We might consider that this very passage uses terms like “Give us this day....” and “Forgive us our debts....”, pointing to the group nature of this teaching. Additionally, places like Acts 4:24 and 31 show “they prayed” together. Thus public group prayer is appropriate. But these passages also demonstrate how those prayers ought to be conducted. They need to be brief and to the point (Matthew 23:14) with petition, praise and thanks. When public prayer is made it needs to be in consideration of helping others to get the most from this prayer. One way this can be done is by telling others what you will pray. This way everyone has the same mind in a public prayer.

Getting the Most from Prayer. First, we can get more if we make more effort in paying close attention to the words. By understanding the mechanism of prayer we know why things are being said a certain way. We need to be engaging ourselves in each statement. Too many Scripture says that we need to be declaring the truth of the prayer: “Otherwise, if you bless with the spirit, how will he who occupies the place of the

uninformed say "Amen" at your giving of thanks, since he does not understand what you say?" (1 Corinthians 14:16).

Prayer Matters. *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