

Wednesday Night BIBLE STUDY

Wednesday, October 16, 2013 – First Baptist Church Buda
Midweek Prayer Meeting & Bible Study

PRAYER THAT WORKS
Strengthening Your Grip on Prayer
Philippians 4:1-11, Matthew 6:5-34

GROUP EXERCISES/DISCUSSION: Take a few moments to fill out the provided card.

<p>When it comes to prayer, I _____</p> <hr/>
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“Tell God all that is in your heart, as one unloads one’s heart, its pleasures and its pains, to a dear friend. Tell Him your troubles, that He may comfort you; tell Him your joys, that He may sober them; tell Him your longings, that He may purify them; tell Him your dislikes that He may help you to conquer them; talk to Him of your temptations, that He may shield you from them; show Him the wounds of your heart, that He may heal them... If you thus pour out all your weaknesses, needs, troubles, there will be no lack of what to say.” – Fenelon

I. WHAT EACH OF US WANTS, AND FEW OF US HAVE (Philippians 4:1-9)

When we are not characterized by the following traits, our level of anxiety will be high. It will continue to grow until checked by the introduction of these things into our lives:

1. **Stability (v.1)** – *“stand firm in the Lord...” (NAS)*
2. **Harmony (v.2)** – *“... live in harmony in the Lord.” (NAS)*
3. **Sustained by joy (v.4)** – *“Rejoice in the Lord always...” (NAS)*

4. **Thoughts which are always beneficial (v.8)** – *“Whatever is true... honorable... right... pure... lovely... of good repute...” (NAS)*
5. **Consistency (v.9)** – *“The things you have learned and received and heard and seen in me, practice these things...” (NAS)*

II. COMMAND AND RESULT (Philippians 4:6-7)

Paul’s answer, under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, for dealing with the anxieties of life is interesting. It carries with it a command and the ensuing results of following that command... very interesting:

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

The Command and Result from Paul in Philippians 4:6-7:

1. **Command: Pray** - We are instructed to be anxious about nothing. Instead, the command is to pray (v.6). *“... By prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God.”* How foreign all this is to us. We are accustomed to trying to lift our own loads, to shoving around our own hardens... but we are commanded to do differently. Obedience to the command is accompanied by a special result
2. **Result: Peace** - The heart will be guarded by God’s peace... not only the heart, but the mind as well (v.7)

And remember that Paul is not the only Biblical writer that spoke of what to do with the anxieties and cares of this life. Listen to Peter in 1 Peter 5:6-7, *“Humble yourselves, therefore, under the mighty hand of God, that He may exalt you at the proper time, casting all your anxiety upon Him, because He cares for you.” (NAS)* The New King James states verse 7 this way, *“⁷ Cast all your care upon Him, for He cares for you.”* This idea of casting our care on the Lord is the idea of sending it to Him through prayer! In other words, talk to Him about it... give it to Him... discuss it with Him... ask His help with it... pray and give it to Him. **NOTE:** *“Casting” means “to throw something on something,” as to throw a blanket on a donkey, mule or horse.” To saddle up something with a load literally. Christian’s are to cast or to “saddle up” all of their discontent, discouragements, despair, suffering, anxiety, cares, complaints, burdens on the Lord, and trust Him to carry them knowing what He is doing with our lives.*

A good definition of prayer based on 1 Peter 5:7 is saddling up God with our burdens and cares.

III. PRAYER: THE ANSWER TO ANXIETY (Matthew 6:5-34)

History tells us that the practice of prayer degenerated in the first century because of formalism, ritual, verbiage, repetition, and pride. The world Jesus entered was held in the grip of religious activities which did not satisfy the longing of the heart. The Jews were not negligent in praying... they prayed at least three times a day at 9 a.m., noon, and 3 p.m. no

matter where they were. This was the devout Jews daily practice... ritualistically. They even assumed a prescribed posture in which the arms were extended outward, the palms were open toward heaven, and the eyes were directed heavenward or toward the ground. Their nation took prayer more seriously than perhaps any other nation to date. To these people, Jesus addressed His message on prayer contained in the Sermon on the Mount.

“When you pray...” – The Son of God, knowing the thoughts of His Father, brought His audience’s attention back to the basics of prayer and away from sterile expression and formality. Each comment took issue with their prayer habits, which had been shaped by centuries of tradition. Although to them the rituals seemed right and sacred, in reality they were unacceptable and empty.

What to watch out for in our prayer lives:

1. **Watch out for hypocrisy (vv.5-6)** – The idea is that we are not to be like one hiding behind a mask, flaunting a superficial spirituality. Note also Matthew 6:1a, *“Beware of practicing your righteousness before men to be noticed by them.”* Instead, Jesus instruction was to pray in secret, away from an audience... no more prayer for public display. Two side to this instruction: (1) We are to be honest before God... nothing hidden. Remember God see all and know all anyway. We are not hiding anything from Him. We can’t hide behind a mask with Him... He sees beyond our masks and what’s really going on inside. (2) This is not a call against public prayer, but against public pray as a spectacle or a show. There is nothing wrong with praying in public pray or corporate prayer. That is not the issue Jesus had with the prayers of the Jewish religious leaders of His day. The issue was a heart issued. They were praying flaunting and flowery prays before the public in order to receive praise and accolades as how spiritually superior they were. As we will see pride is a deterrent to effective prayer.
2. **Watch out for meaningless repetitions (v.7)** – The objective is to cut the verbiage, the clichés, and religious jargon which may not have meaning to the one praying. In that day, this was a trademark of the Gentiles and was not fitting for God’s people.
3. **Watch out for pride (vv.14-15)** – It is essential that we do not harbor anything against another. If there is a barrier between someone and his brother or sister in Christ, that same barrier will also exist between that person and God.

Unloading – There is significant therapy (healing) in telling God everything. How? Prayer transfers burdens, pressures, pain, and anxiety onto God’s shoulders and off of ours. By talking to God, we can become calm and quiet in regard to life... and some people need to become calm and quiet in regard to life.

Prayer: Health Benefits (*stason.org / article taken from Alternative Medicine Therapies Guide*)

Numerous scientific studies have evaluated the therapeutic effects of prayer. Generally, the research has shown that people who pray regularly are less likely to become ill and that when they do, they tend to recover faster. Interestingly, not only does prayer seem to have healing effects upon the people who pray, it also appears to benefit those who are prayed for by others.

Research reveals that people who pray have lower depression and suicide rates. Prayer even appears to lower blood pressure. In a study funded by the National Institutes of Health, investigators found that

individuals who attended religious services at least once a week and prayed at least once a day or studied the Bible frequently were 40% less likely to have high blood pressure than those who did so infrequently. In other research, elderly women recovering from hip-fracture surgery who had strong religious beliefs and practices were able to walk greater distances when they left the hospital than those who were not as religious.

Studies have also yielded findings in the area of distant healing (which includes intercessory prayer for someone who is ill), although many of these reports have appeared only in peer-reviewed parapsychology journals.

Perhaps the most famous study is one conducted by surgeon Randolph C. Byrd, which was published in 1988 in the *Southern Medical Journal*. In the study 393 coronary heart disease patients with similar symptoms of were admitted to a coronary care unit. The patients were divided into two groups, with neither group knowing whether they were being prayed-for or not. Distant healing was sent from born-again Christians to just under half of the patients. The remainder were not prayed-for and served as controls.

At the end of the study, all of the patients' charts were analyzed. Results showed that significantly fewer patients in the prayed-for group required ventilation/intubation; they also needed fewer drugs and contracted pneumonia less than those who were not prayed for. Prayer did not shorten the hospital stay of either group, however.

Another distant healing study, of nearly 1,000 patients in the coronary care unit at St. Luke's Hospital in Kansas City, was done in 1999. It found that those who were unwittingly prayed for fared better than those who got conventional care alone.

Kinds of Anxiety Diminished by Prayer (Mt. 6:25-34) – Communication with God helps us unwind... to relax. Three kinds of concerns are solved by prayer.

1. **Anxiety over life in general (v.25)** –
2. **Anxiety over basic needs (vv.28-31)** –
3. **Anxiety over the future (v.34)** –

IV. A FEW ENCOURAGING THOUGHTS ON PRAYER

5 Helpful Hints on Praying Effectively:

1. **Speak to God with this 1 thing especially in mind: (1) Speak in conversational tones as you would a very close, personal friend... a father - After all, that's what He is to us!**
2. **Remember 2 things that God is not looking for: (1) some religious prayer style, (2) or certain words or formulas - Instead, His ear is tuned to your attitudes and emotions. He cares much more about seeing your heart than any religious show.**
3. **While praying do 3 things: (1) be yourself, (2) keep it simple, (3) and maintain humility – Honesty, honesty, honesty! Be honest about yourself, your situation, your struggles. Be who you are with God... He already knows!**
4. **Evaluate your time with God (prayer time with God) as best as you know how by asking yourself 4 question: (1) Am I being spontaneous (unstructured, unplanned, extemporaneous, instinctive, unrehearsed, unconstrained) with God?, (2) Am I being thankful to God (expressing thanks to Him)?, (3) Am I being honest (completely) with God?, (4) and Am I baring (not holding anything back) all to God? -**

5. Learn the “5 Finger Prayer” as a simple and effective way to pray and remember what to pray for: **(1) Your thumb is nearest to you to remind you to pray for those nearest to you... your loved ones, (2) The pointing finger reminds us of those who instruct so pray for those who teach, instruct and heal. This includes teachers, doctors, and ministers - They need support and wisdom in pointing others in the right direction. Keep them in your prayers, (3) Our tallest finger reminds us of those who are in charge - Pray for the president and government leaders (national, state, county, city), leaders in business and industry. These people shape our nation and guide public opinion. They need God’s guidance, (4) The ring finger is our weakest finger (as any piano teacher will testify)... it should remind us to pray for those who are weak, in trouble or in pain, the sick and shut-in, etc. - They need your prayers day and night, and you cannot pray too much for them, (5) The smallest finger of all (which is where we should place ourselves in relation to God and others... as the Bible says, “The least shall be the greatest among you.”) is the pinkie finger and it should remind you to pray for yourself. - By the time you have prayed for the other four groups, your own needs will be put into proper perspective and you will be able to pray for yourself more effectively.**