

# Melva's Corner



## Perfected Prayer

June 18, 2007

(Rom. 8:26)

**Central Truth: "God grants the things we ask in Jesus' name, provided they are consistent with His will."**

In his book *The Prayer-Centered Life*, Dudley Delffs devises an interesting analogy to help us understand what it means to have direct access to God in prayer. He suggests that you imagine having a remote business relationship with the CEO of a conglomerate corporation worth billions of dollars. For our purposes, let's make it the CEO of the Honda Corporation in Japan. You're having a problem with the dome light of your six-year-old Civic that has 160,000 miles on it. When you open the door at night, the light doesn't come on like it's supposed to. So you write a letter addressed to "CEO / Honda Corporation" and post it to the company's office in Japan. You explain how frustrated you are with the problem, give an account of the trips you've made to a local dealer in Mississippi and explain that you just want to know what to do next. Can he suggest something you've overlooked in trying to get it fixed?

In response to your letter, the CEO shows up on your doorstep. He calls you by your name, introduces himself, and pulls your letter out of his pocket. "I'm here to set things right with the car you bought from my company," he says. "I've brought these two expert mechanics with me. So if you will just show us where your car is, they'll get to work immediately." While they work, the company's head man sits with you over coffee and learns about your family, your job, your hobbies. It isn't long until the smiling mechanics reappear and take the two of you to see their finished work. As they prepare to leave, their boss shakes your hand and says, "We have a personal relationship now. You're not just a nameless customer with a car my company manufactured. I know you now, and you have

direct access both to my office and home. I've written down my phone numbers for you on the back of this card. And my e-mail address is there too, just in case that's more convenient."

The problem is that the analogy is flawed. God is greater than a CEO. But maybe the analogy helps you — as it did me — to grasp how startling it must have been to Jesus' disciples to hear His words about immediate access to and favor with God on the basis of His name.

The commonest complaint I hear from my fellow-believers about their spiritual lives is that they pray so little, that they are so easily distracted from prayer, that prayer is such "hard work" for them. If we are as prayer-bereft as some believers say, I would have to agree with R.A. Torrey's comment: "When I stop to think how little time the average Christian today puts into prayer, the thing that astonishes me is not that we are so little like the Lord, but that we are as much like the Lord as we are."

### **The HOW of Prayer**

When some of us lament our lack of prayer, though, I suspect we are confessing a lack of formal, structured thanksgiving, confession, and intercession before the Lord of the Universe. And, true enough, Jesus gave us a model for prayer that we commonly call "The Lord's Prayer" in Matthew 6:9-13. It is a prayer that begins with praise and adoration, moves to a pledge of personal submission to His will and acknowledges dependence on Him for such routine necessities as daily bread. It both pleads for forgiveness and a forgiving spirit. And it further grants that, apart from God's sustaining grace against temptation, we would be hopeless before our enemy, Satan. So Jesus taught us to 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.

But there is another type of praying that God honors as well. It is one that I suspect most of us don't even acknowledge as prayer. Perhaps God accepts it as prayer for the simple reason that He knew how difficult and foreign so spiritual an exercise would be for us in our carnal existence. That He honors this alternative method of pleading with Him as legitimate prayer stands as another evidence that His grace is the basis for all His dealings with us.

Here is the verse I have in mind about what I've called "alternative" prayer: **"In the same way, the Spirit helps us in our weakness. We do not know what we ought to pray for, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us with groans that words cannot express" (Rom. 8:26).** I not only understand this verse as praying in tongues but I also believe Paul is referring to the groans, sighs, and stammerings that come from believers when we are confused and incoherent in our spiritual lives.

These are the angry complaints of teenagers and the disconcerted laments of their parents. They are the sobs of single mothers or betrayed and abandoned wives. They are the whimpers of a car wreck victim. They are the private anguish of a man who has just lost his job and doesn't know how he will support his family. They are the groans of someone dealing with cancer's pain or enduring the side effects of her chemotherapy. They are the sobs of a young widow and the wounded-animal cries of grieving parents. On the authority of Paul's apostolic interpretation of their meaning, I can assure you that the Holy Spirit transforms such inarticulate sounds into intercession on behalf of God's people. Isn't that comforting? Doesn't it reassure you? More than that, it affirms that most of us are not nearly so prayerless as we sometimes think.

### **The WHEN of Prayer**

As to planned and proper prayers of the first sort, we should all strive for more rather than less of them. Ralph Neighbour tells about meeting with well-known South Korean pastor David Yonggi Cho in Seoul several years ago. The two had an appointment and visited for some time. Then Dr. Cho's secretary entered the room to inform him it was time for his next appointment. The American visitor dismissed himself and sat in the waiting room outside his office to wait for a friend who was coming to pick him up. Fully a quarter hour later, he

had still seen no one go into the office he had just left. So he asked the secretary, "Has Dr. Cho's next appointment been delayed?" She smiled at Neighbour and said, "Oh, no. They are together now. You see, each day he uses this time to talk to the Lord." Perhaps that explains why Cho's church is the largest in the world — with over 730,000 members!

Whether you are a minister or a mother, a businessman or an electrician, in school or in real estate, you would do well to reserve a time on your calendar each day for prayer. Book an "appointment" for prayer! If you aren't in a situation where that is either practical or inviting to you, then realize that prayer isn't a prescribed posture or a ritualistic form. C.S. Lewis once wrote: "No one in his senses would reserve his chief prayers for bedtime — obviously the worst possible hour for any action which needs concentration. My own plan, when hard-pressed, is to seize any time and place, however unsuitable, in preference to the last waking moment. On a day of traveling . . . I'd rather pray sitting in a crowded train than put it off till midnight. On other and slightly less crowded days a bench in a park or a back street where one can pace up and down will do."

### **I Can Ask for Anything? *Anything?***

"But what are we to make of Jesus' words about getting 'whatever you ask in my name'?" someone asks. "Can we take that seriously? Can I just get anything I want from God — by asking in the name of Jesus?"

God grants the things we ask in Jesus' name, provided they are consistent with His *will*. That much is said explicitly in I John 5:14. And James pointed out that first-century believers sometimes asked for things but didn't receive them because they asked from "wrong motives" and for the sake of their selfish pleasure (Jas. 4:3). The same sort of requests today will get the same sort of answer.

God grants the things we ask in Jesus' name, but He does so out of His *wisdom* rather than according to our folly.

Paul's experience leads to a third observation. We must trust God to answer our prayers in His own *way* and not always by the method we expected. In the words of a contemporary Christian piece, God sometimes "stills the storm" and some-

times "stills His child" who is frightened by the storm's thunder and lightning.

### **Conclusion**

Mrs. Oswald Chambers gave an account of an event in her husband's life that serves well to end this message on prayer. At the close of a public meeting he had conducted, a woman came to him and said, "Oh, Mr. Chambers, I feel I must tell you about myself." So the preacher's wife resigned herself for a long wait. But he was back in a matter of only a few minutes.

As the two went home that night, she said something about the speed with which he was able to deal with the woman's request. So he told his wife, "I just asked her if she had ever told God all about herself. When she said she hadn't, I advised her to go home and pour out before Him as honestly as she could all her troubles, then see if she still needed or wanted to relate them to me."

Chambers knew the importance of encouraging people to take their troubles, heartaches, and doubts directly to the Lord Himself in prayer. Done in sincerity and faith, the result he would have expected would be either a change in the person's circumstances or a change in the person's ability to deal with a perplexing situation — and sometimes both. In either case, the Lord would fulfill His word to supply the needs of His people. He will give His answer out of wisdom that is infinite and resolve that is always redemptive. I claim that promise for myself today, and I encourage you to do the same in your situation.

### **Scriptural References:**

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