

Seven Laws of Prayer

by: Ronald L. Dart

Every day it seems I encounter questions about prayer that I really can't answer. There are so many things that I would like to know, so many things that I don't know, so many mysteries and paradoxes connected with prayer that people have written book after book about it. We study prayer, and we think about prayer and we pray and we hope for the prayer things that we ask for. Sometimes we ask in faith, sometimes we ask in hope, sometimes we ask in desperation, but it occurred to me that there are some things that we do know about prayer, and these things we know are actually a whole lot more important, than the things that we don't know. That is an important statement and I will tell it to you again. "The things we know about prayer are far more important than the things we don't know about prayer."

Today, my sermon is going to be about "Seven Immutable Laws Of Prayer."

Seven laws of prayer, not THE seven laws, just seven as I'm sure, we could go on and on with more than that, because we do know quite a lot about prayer, but I think these seven laws are extremely important to us and considerably more important in many cases than the things we would like to know but don't.

Law Number One: We All Must Die

This law cannot be revoked. Now you knew that, didn't you? But you see, you have to consider that when you pray. You cannot ask God, "Don't take my life," because sooner or later you're going to die. You can ask, please don't take it now, but you can't ask, don't take my life.

Ecclesiastes chapter 3, two short verses, {1} "To everything there is a season, a time to every purpose under the heaven, {2} A time to be born, and a time to die."

Men have speculated, down through time, about whether or not there is a time for each of us to die. You'll hear men in combat sometimes talk about, "Well it wasn't my time, I guess, the reason I survived that particular situation," or "I guess it was his time because he didn't make it." People talk about whether the bullet has your name written on it, which is just another way of saying, "He was fated to die or he was not fated to die." This is one of the terms we use about these things.

I don't know if we can answer that question. We do know there is a time to die. Is our time set? Is it out there? When we come to it, is that going to be the end of our life, no matter what we pray? No matter what we ask? No matter what we reach out for?

Hebrews chapter 9 verse 27 says this, "It is appointed unto men once to die, after this the judgment."

Jesus Was A Man And Had To Die

If you're human, you are going to die. This is something I haven't exactly thought about this way either, Christ was a man, therefore, He had to die, because it's appointed unto men once to die. The only questions for Jesus were, when, how and why?

We all know that a great righteous spirit filled man is still going to die. Elisha who had a double portion of the spirit of Elijah, eventually fell sick of a sickness and it was that sickness whereof he died. His time came (2 Kings 13:14).

King Hezekiah

Now there is an interesting example in the Bible. You can ask for an extension of time. One notable King did, his name was Hezekiah, really a fine man, a fine King, a great leader of Israel who did a lot of very good things in his life. But the time came for him to die. You will find this particular occasion in Isaiah chapter 38 and you'll also find it back in the historical records, but I chose this one.

Isaiah 38 verse 1, "In those days Hezekiah was sick unto death. And Isaiah the prophet, the son of Amos came to him and said, "Thus says the LORD. "Set your house in order for you shall die and not live.""

Many of us will never get the benefit of that kind of warning. You know, you are sick, you pray, you ask for God's mercy, and a prophet of God walks in and says, "It is time for you to put your papers in order, you're going to die." It would be a blessing, wouldn't it, in a way, to be able to know, to be able to tell your wife or your husband where the papers are, where the will is, and be sure that all the bank accounts were in order and that the bills had been paid, and the bills would be paid that were pending and just to know that all of your necessary affairs are in order before you actually kick the bucket.

So here Isaiah comes to Hezekiah, and he says "Set your house in order, you're going to die, you are not going to live."

Let's continue in verse 2, "Hezekiah turned his face toward the wall, and prayed to the LORD, {3} And said, "Remember now, O LORD, I beseech you, how I have walked before you in truth and with a perfect heart, and I've done that which was good in your eyes," and Hezekiah wept sore."

It's interesting, I don't know if he really asked for an extension of time, did he? He just simply cried, and said, "Look at me. I have tried to be a good man. I've done a lot of good things for Israel. I have walked with a perfect heart." God didn't rebuke him for vanity in this case at all. "I walked with a perfect heart and I've done what was good in your sight."

Isaiah was on his way walking out and {4} "The word of the LORD came to Isaiah saying, {5} "Go back and say to Hezekiah, "Thus says the LORD, the God of David your father. I have heard your prayer. I have seen your tears, behold, I will add to your days 15 years."

So Hezekiah got an extension of time, not only did he get an extension, he was told how long the extension would be.

Now this is, in a way, a sad story. You would not know it unless you had read the entire historical account, because the fact is that Hezekiah did not do so well in the years that followed this, and his final record before God was not very good. He actually went back on a lot of things he had done. His end was worse than his beginning. He would have been better off if he had died on schedule.

When You Go To God In Prayer

When you are sick and you go to God in prayer or you're going to God in prayer for someone else who is sick, you really ought to think about this, if you are asking God to "Let me not die now Father, I have some things I need to do. I want to see my grandchildren. I want to do this. I want to do that. Ask Him, but understand this, just because God may grant you an extension of time, He will not grant you eternal life because you still have to live out the remainder of your life well, after you have gotten that extension from God, if indeed you do. So that is an important thing to understand.

Corollary Number One: Death Is Not The End

Now a lot of laws have corollaries and this one does. Corollary number one, "Death is not the end." I think that's right when we are thinking in terms of prayer, because you're actually looking at some poor fellow lying in a bed in a hospital who has cancer and in a great deal of pain, and your question is, what do I ask God? Do I ask God to take his life now, or do I ask God to extend his life? What do I ask God to do? Because the end is not the end for this man. The next day after he dies, in his own consciousness, is going to be a day where he is free from pain, a day of joy and happiness, a day of seeing God, of seeing what God has done, it will be one of the most exciting days of this entire life, really of either of his two lives.

Ask God To 'Bless' Them

So what should you pray? I always find this difficult. One of the things that I pray is, that God would 'bless' this person. Some kids say, "God bless mommy, God bless daddy, God

bless aunt Sue." In a way, they have it right, they don't know they have it right yet, but they do.

In a sense, what you are asking God to do, is to look upon this person and do what is best for them. It's a simple prayer and from the heart, I believe God hears it, and I think God will look upon that person and answer it.

Ask God To 'Ease' His Way

I also pray, when it looks like a person is going to die, not because I have a lack of faith, but it just looks like it's the person's time. My prayer is that God would 'ease' his way. Which ever way it is going to be, that God would make it easier for him in these last days of his life.

Prepare For Death

You should prepare for death, but you should also look beyond death. If you're only looking to that one bitter end, you are among those people who all their life are in bondage to the fear of death.

An actual fact, death is only one stage of our life and we will pass through death and we will come back to life again in the resurrection of the dead and that life will be far greater and more glorious than anything we have now.

You should in fact, prepare for death in prayer. You should take it into consideration and you should prepare for death as you live. You should put your affairs in order. You don't have to wait for Isaiah to tell you that. You should put your affairs in order. You should be sure that the people you leave behind will take care of the things you left behind and follow out your instructions if you left assets behind. You should prepare for death, but at the same time, you should be looking beyond death.

Sometimes, as I have already said, in asking God to give a man more time, you're asking for more pain, more suffering, more risk and you forget that God said in Isaiah 57 verse 1, "The righteous perish, and these great men are taken away." Nobody stops to consider that God takes them away "from the evil to come."

God actually, in the taking of a person's life, spares them from terrible things that may lie ahead for them in this life.

So in prayer, never forget Law Number One: You and the person you are praying for, are both going to die.

Law Number Two: Prayer Without Works Is Vain

I knew a man once who refused to go the dentist. He prayed that God would heal his cavities. He took calcium and cod liver oil and he got the mirror out and looked at his teeth

every day and sometimes he would get hope that his cavities were starting to heal over. I think it was no more than plaque, but nevertheless, he was hopeful that the cavities were beginning to heal over and he prayed and he would not go to the dentist and God never did heal his cavities. I think he is still wandering around with holes in his teeth and probably some of them are missing by now.

Now I can understand why he didn't want to go the dentist. That makes a lot of sense to me. I don't like to go to the dentist either.

But I'm not so sure about the basis of his prayer. Why should God heal your teeth when all you have to do is go the dentist and the dentist can fix it. There might be a little bit of pain, sometimes not very much, and it doesn't last very long.

So here's the question. All you have to do is get in your little car, drive down to the dentist's office, sit there for a little while, go into his office and you get a little shot in the gums. Then he drills around in your tooth, puts in a filling and you go out without worrying about it anymore. If you can do that, why should God do it?

That's the question. Why should God heal your teeth simply because you're afraid to go to the dentist?

Here's another one. You can't pray that God will prosper you and then refuse to go look for a job. I have known people who pray that God would send them a job and didn't even get the newspaper and look at the want ads. I have known people who are out of work and praying to God and asking people to pray that God would get them a job who didn't even send resumes out to anybody.

Why in the world would you expect God to answer your prayer to find you a job when you won't even go to the trouble of getting your resume out to people. Now that's an interesting question.

You can't pray that God will bless your investments when you don't do your research. It is not going to do you a bit of good to pray and ask God to bless your investments and then go out and buy Enron. It just does not work that way. You're supposed to pay attention. I forget who it was that was talking about investments about not putting all your eggs in one basket. He said, "No, no, put all your eggs in one basket and watch the basket." You can't expect God to bless you in these type of things if you don't pay attention and if you don't do your homework.

If you are a student and don't work, you are not going to get A's in your class. If you don't do your homework, God is not going to do that for you.

Don't we know that! Of course we know that, and yet the strangest thing is, we sometimes act as though we don't know that.

This is why I'm giving a sermon on what we know about prayer, because it's a good idea to drive these thoughts home from time to time.

Faith Without Works Is Dead

You all know James 2 verse 20, and the following verses, "Will you know, O vain man, that faith without works is dead? {21} Was not Abraham our father justified by works, when he offered Isaac his son upon the altar, {22} Do you see how faith was working together with his works, and by works was faith made perfect."

Now can you think of any applications of this in prayer? Why sure. Pray. Send out your resumes, and continue to pray. Do your part. Call on some businesses. Look at the ads in the newspaper, continue to pursue earnestly as someone once said, "Make a job out of looking for a job".

Continuing in verse 23, "And the scripture was fulfilled that says, "Abraham believed God, and it was credited to him as righteousness," and he was called the friend of God. {24} "You see then how that by works a man is justified, and not by faith only. {25} Likewise also was not Rahab the harlot justified by works, when she had received the messengers, and had sent them out another way? {26} For as the body without the spirit is dead, so faith without works is dead also."

You can substitute the word 'prayer' for 'faith' and that would make just as much sense, as it does the way it is.

You can't pray that God will heal your broken arm and then refuse to get it set and expect God to do anything at all. God will not do for us what we can do for ourselves.

So when you pray, ask yourself, "What do you think I should be doing about this problem?" This is something that should go right along with it. Should you pray for the sick and then not visit them, nor send them a card, nor call them? Faith or prayer without works is dead, so I would take what we are reading here, when we say this, "that prayer without works is vain," that praying for the sick is a good thing, but when you do nothing beyond that, you have prayed without any works. You haven't gone to visit the sick, you haven't sent cards to the sick, you have not called on the phone to chat with them for a while to give them encouragement. Right? So prayer without works is vain.

Law Number Three: You Need Help To Pray

I don't think any of us are sufficient in ourselves as far as prayer is concerned.

It is really underlined, I think, so clearly by Paul, when he wrote to the Romans, chapter 8 verse 26 and he says this, "Likewise the Spirit also helps our infirmities, for we know not what we should pray for as we ought."

This is Paul speaking, this is not the weakest saint who is saying these words. This is a man that we look upon as a great pillar of strength and faith, a tower of leadership in the Church of God and he says, "We" and he includes himself in this, "know not what we should pray for as we ought, but the Spirit itself makes intercession for us with groanings which cannot be uttered."

I have no idea how that works. All I know is that it does. We need help from the Spirit of God in order to be able to pray like we should pray.

Verse 27, "He that searches the hearts knows what is the mind of the Spirit, because he makes intercession for the Saints according to the will of God, {28} And we know that all things work together for good to those who love God, and are called according to his purpose."

Now by the way, I shall remind you of what you already know, the Scripture does not say, "All things that happen to those who love God are called according to his purpose will be good." He said, "They will all work for the good."

So if you do something egregiously stupid and get hurt in the process, God is able to make it work out for your good in the long haul, but the long haul may be further than you think.

I think it was Alan King who said, "In the long haul we are all dead." That is true, but still dying is not the end, we must also remember that what we have to go through here and now may be an essential part of what God is going to be doing with us in the future.

Sometimes We Are Helpless in Prayer

There are times when we are helpless and distressingly this often happens to us at a time when we need prayer terribly and we simply cannot pray. You know, it is just one of those things, that at the time when you most need to be able to talk to God, to be able to pray, to be able to pour out your heart to Him, you can't! At times like this you have to ask for help, but by applying Law Number Two, you also have to ask, "What can you do? Here I am, I'm stuck. I try to pray, I don't think my prayers are going out of the room. I don't know what to say, I don't know what to ask."

Prayers Of Others

What can I do? Well, there is one thing you can do and I don't know if you think of this very often, you can borrow the prayers of others. Now apart from the fact that others will pray for you, you can actually borrow the prayers of other people. How do you do that? Why do you suppose all those Psalms are recorded in the Bible, if they are not there for us to use in prayer? Does it matter how David prayed when he was in trouble, if that prayer recorded there cannot be used by one of us when we are in trouble. So when you cannot pray for yourself, you can borrow the prayers of others.

By you, there on a chair, (if you are in church,) you probably have a red hymnal and in this red hymnal there is song after song after song, which are prayers. If you look at them carefully, you will see that these songs are prayers. They are prayers that were actually written and finally set to music by someone later, but oftentimes, they came out of this deep and profound sorrow or joy of the soul of a person who has been through something terrible in their lives and have come to know God better as a result of what they've been through.

One of the favorite songs, if you have a sing-along and you ask people, "What song do you want to sing?", inevitably one comes forward, "When peace like a River, attended by way, when sorrows like sea billows roll. Whatever my lot, you have taught me to say, It is well, it is well with my soul." Notice the way it is worded, "You have taught me to say." It's a prayer. You are speaking to God.

If you have trouble sometimes and can't pray, take a hymnal and open it up and read a long, or page through it until you find one that you can actually sing or at least you can read it aloud and make it your prayer to God, because there is nothing wrong with borrowing the prayers of others. I know it may seem strange to merely recite a prayer. That is not what I'm suggesting, I'm suggesting you make the prayer your own prayer. You can do that, you just have to take a few moments, spend some time with God, and read it and think about how you can apply it in your life.

Law Number Four: You Are God's Servant

You Are God's Servant, it is not the other way around.

Did you catch the importance of what I just said? You are God's servant, it is not the other way around. He is not there, at your beck and call, to take care of your little absences, your little stupidities, your mistakes, your faults. He will forgive you of your sins, but He is not there for you to take care of things that you can do. As I said earlier, God is there, not as our servant, we are His servants.

You should not be as one noted minister, who was a kind of a motivational, positive thinking preacher, used to say, "I walk out to the curb at the airport, and I say, "Lord, get me a taxi!" If I were the Lord at that moment of time, I would say, "Get it yourself! You should plan more carefully. One will be along in a moment. Just wait," would be my reply if I were God.

Presence Of God

You should not be asking God to wait on your table. Now it is a good thing to practice the 'presence of God,' as people say. In other words, to be aware that God is with you, to talk to God as you go on your way, as you fly across the country in an airplane, pray that God will look on you and the other passengers in this airplane with favor and take you safely to your destination. This is a very legitimate thing for you to pray about. You should be aware that God is with you. You should be aware that if you are standing out there on the curb, that you

can ask for a taxi, but you should also think about this, in asking God to give you a taxi, you may be depriving someone else of one. This is something that commonly crosses my mind when I'm praying about something for me, that might affect other people.

You know when you pray, and you are applying for a job and you really want that job, and you ask God to get you that job, the question may cross your mind, I wonder who else is applying for this job, and asking God to give them the same job? Do I really want God to give it to me when someone may need it more than I do? Do I really want God to send me the taxi, when there may be a crippled man with a wheelchair down the road, who needs that taxi worse than I?

Now saying things like this should somehow affect the way we pray, that we are not to pray in total selfishness. We are not to pray with ignorance of the world around us. We're not to pray in ways that would somehow adversely affect another person just to give us something. That's not what God wants us to be thinking about.

It is good to practice the presence of God but don't get presumptuous. Don't be presumptuous. Don't walk out to the curb and say, "Lord, get me a taxi!" You can pray about it. You can ask God, "Lord if this won't inconvenience somebody in a terrible way. I sure would appreciate it if you would get me a taxi because I'm out here in the cold, and I am freezing to death."

You really need at all times to remember, that God looks at a bigger picture, and He may be able to provide cabs for everybody, but at the same time, we need to take the big picture into consideration.

Abraham Was A Friend Of God

There was this time, when Abraham drew near to God, it was when God was on His way to Sodom and Gomorrah. It's a story that we are all very familiar with. I site it to you, because I think it helps us to understand and get a little better picture about a relationship of a man who is a friend of God.

But here is a man who was God's friend and he knew that God was going on to Sodom and Gomorrah. He already knew, probably, how bad things were down there, but he was worried about his nephew Lot and Lot's family.

In Genesis 18 verse 23, "Abraham drew near, and he said, "Would you destroy the righteous with the wicked? {24} What if there are 50 righteous within the city, will you also destroy and not spare the place for that 50 who are there? {25} That be far from you do after this manner, to slay the righteous with the wicked."

Now this is bold stuff. Abraham is very bold with God. That's not a problem.

Verse 26, "The LORD said, "If I find in Sodom fifty righteous within the city, then I will spare the city for the fifty people." {27} And Abraham answered and said, "Behold, I have taken upon myself to speak to the Lord, though I am but dust and ashes."

Notice the tenor of what Abraham is saying here. He is God's servant, it is not the other way around. He is dust and ashes, God is sovereign.

Abraham said, {28} "I've taken upon myself to speak to you, what if we lack five of the 50, will you destroy all the city for the lack of five? The LORD said, "If I find there 45, I will not destroy it." {29} Abraham spoke to Him again, "What if there are 40?" And the LORD said "I will not do it for 40." {30} Abraham said, "Oh let not the Lord be angry, and I will speak to you.""

Here is a man who is very much aware of who he was talking to. This is not "Lord, get me a taxi" type of conversation. This is a man who knows who God is and the way he phrases this shows that God could become angry and he could wind up himself no better off than Sodom and Gomorrah.

Continuing in verse 30, "Moses said, "Oh let not the Lord be angry, and I will speak: What if there are only thirty be found there. And LORD said, "I will not do it for thirty. {31} And Abraham said, "Behold now, I have taken upon me to speak to the Lord: What if there shall be twenty found there?" And the LORD said, "I will not destroy it for twenty." {32} Then Abraham said, "May the Lord not be angry, but let me speak just one more time. Ten?" The LORD said, "Ten."

I have no idea what God would have said if Abraham had gone to five.

Now I think this is really interesting to look at the way this prayer develops. In the light of what I said earlier, you have to keep in mind the relationship between us and God when we pray. You have to keep in mind a bigger picture of all of this.

We know this, but sometimes we don't think about what we know. We don't analyze these things or think through them. or spend enough time thinking on the things that we're going to ask God for.

Corollary to Law Number Four: God Is Sovereign

God does not have to explain himself to the likes of you or me. There is something else I think that we ought to be very very careful to remember, God is sovereign, and there is no reason for Him to explain Himself to us.

I think it was Job who said, that "The LORD giveth and the Lord taketh away. Blessed be the name of Lord (Job 1:21), and at times of the greatest tragedies in our lives, that is really about all we can say, because He has no obligation to explain Himself to us.

Remember what Job said in chapter 13 verse 15, "Though he slay me yet will I trust Him, I will maintain my ways before him. {16} "He also shall be my salvation, a hypocrite shall not come before him."

I have to come to God, I have to tell the truth. I can not stand before God, and call myself a sinner, when in actual fact I have led a pretty good life. I think this is a rather interesting approach on Job's part, because the truth is, God testified the same thing about Job himself.

Law Number Five: Absolute Honesty Is Required

This is another law of prayer, and you know this. Absolute honesty is required. You have to tell the truth. Don't sit there pretending that you love your enemy when you actually hate him in your heart. Not before God, it just won't work. God knows, so you might as well, own up to it.

Someone once was complaining about the Psalms, about how they are filled with revenge and violence, and people wanting to hurt other people. There's a psalm in this regard, Psalm 58, which I have found rather interesting. One day I was trying to make it my own prayer because there was a person who I thought was in a wrong spirit and a wrong attitude and had done things that I thought were hurtful and so I was working my way through the Psalms and I came to this.

Psalm 58 verse 3, "The wicked are estranged from the womb, they go astray as soon as they are born, speaking lies. {4} Their poison is like the poison of a serpent, they are like the death adder that stops her ear, {5} Which will not listen to the voice of charmers, charming never so wisely. {6} Break their teeth, O God, in her mouth, break out the great teeth of the young lions, O LORD."

Have you ever felt that way about somebody? "Break his teeth God, Break his kneecaps, put gravel in his mouth. Let's teach this fellow a lesson."

"Let them," {7} "melt away as waters. which run continually, when he bends his bow to shoot his arrows, let them be cut in pieces. {8} As a snail that melts. let everyone of them pass away like the untimely birth of a woman, but they may not see the sun."

The writer of this psalm was mad when he wrote this psalm. Why is this in the Bible? This is in the Bible because it is honest. This is a man who is speaking the truth to God, and there's no reason to do otherwise. As I said, God knows.

Whatever happened to love your enemies? Well it is still in the Bible and it is very much a part of what we are supposed to do. The truth is that sometimes, you have to learn to love your enemies and you don't start out feeling that way. Sometimes you have to get there by a route much like the writer of many of the psalms went through about people who were his

enemies, people who hated him, people who hurt him, people who tried to kill him, and so on it goes.

An Important Lesson To Learn

In the Psalms, the writer pours out his heart to God, telling the truth, about how he feels, about what he wants. I learned this the easy way once, as I said, I'd been praying, and I think I had been praying this psalm, about a man that I knew, and as I prayed, I tried to pray this psalm and I couldn't! I learned something very important about myself on that day.

I learned that what I felt toward this gentleman was not right. He wasn't right. Neither was I, but learning that particular lesson was one of the vital turning points in my life, of the realization that I can't afford to ask God to start breaking the knees of unrighteous people. I cannot afford to ask God to start breaking the teeth of unrighteous people when I have so much unrighteousness in my own life as I have had.

Because I was honest in my prayer, I found out what was in my own heart and I was able to begin making some changes.

What is so interesting about the Psalms is that as you make your way through them, you will also see that the men who wrote these Psalms also made changes and came to know and understand things better.

Law Number Six: Prayer Takes Time And Meditation

You can't toss it off. Prayer requires time, and I might add attention and meditation. If you're going to pray according to God's will, you're going to have to spend some time thinking about His will. You're going to have to spend some time getting to know God.

Thinking is something of a lost art, so many people can't stand to be alone with their thoughts. I mean we have to listen to something, we have to read something, have music on. Sometimes we turn the music up very loud so we can't think. We have to be saying something to someone but no, you really don't.

I'll never forget an assignment that Dr. Jim Stark gave to a group of us when we were taking a management class from him years ago. One week he had us keep a log of how we spent every 10 minute period of everyday. From the time we woke up in the morning to the time we went to bed at night. Every 10 minutes it had to be written down. We brought those into class and we talked about how our time was going and how things were getting a time.

The next week, he let us ease up to every 15 minutes, but he added another requirement. In that week we had to spend one hour doing absolutely nothing but thinking. One hour and it seemed like initially a very easy assignment. But it was tougher than you think. He said, "You can think about anything you want to, but what we really want you to do here is to think about your job. Think about your job for one hour. It was one of the revolutionary

things I have ever done in my life. What a difference that made to me doing absolutely nothing but think and stare into space.

Thinking is something people don't do much of anymore. We have sensory overload. We have so much stuff coming into us from all sides. We have more information coming to us than we could ever use in a lifetime. We have noise. We have distractions. We have so much stuff and it is not easy to find a moment of time, to find a solid hour somewhere. He even allowed us to break the hour up. But he preferred a solid hour. You were to find a solid hour when you're not going to do anything except think.

As Poirot would say, "To use the little grey cells." It was a revolutionary experience. I don't think I had ever done anything like it before.

In the Bible it is called meditation and it's an important value. I think many times we think that we are praying at great length when in fact if you spend a half an hour on your knees praying to God, you probably wind up spending maybe five or ten minutes actually praying. The rest of the time you will be wondering what that noise was, you will be wondering did you remember to turn off the burner on the stove? You'll be thinking about, I wonder if my husband is going to call me before he comes home from work? All kinds of thoughts come rolling back and forth in your mind.

I haven't had many occasions in my life where I have spent a full hour on my knees to pray and I have never, however, prayed for an hour, because my mind is just too active. I am all over the place. I will go and think about this and I will come back, then I will think about the other thing then I will come back. I used to feel really guilty about that but then I learned, no, that's a part of the process. It is a matter of being alone with God and one of the psalmist asked, "Let my meditation be pleasing in your sight" Psalms 19:14). The realization is I am with God, and I want what I am thinking about to be pleasant and pleasing to God. And that my friends also is something we have to work our way through.

Law Number Seven: When It Comes To Words, More Is Not Better

If you have read your Bible, and certainly if you read the Proverbs, you would know that to be true. You may not have thought about it in relation to God.

Ecclesiastes chapter 5, there is a Scripture and the first time I came across this, it just absolutely flattened me.

Ecclesiastes 5 verse 1, "Keep your foot when you go into the house of God, and be more ready to hear, than to give the sacrifice of fools."

What is the sacrifice of fools? It is the opposite of here. If you read your poetry and you understand how these things go.

"They consider not that they do evil. {2} Be not rash with your mouth, and let not your heart be hasty to utter anything before God."

What he's talking about is, when you start blabbing off at the mouth, this can be the sacrifice of fools, because Proverbs 10 verse 19 says: "In the multitude of words sin is not lacking, But he who restrains his lips is wise."

The more we talk, the more apt we are to get ourselves into trouble. It is the natural way of human beings. We feel like we have to talk. The implication of this Scripture here is that there are times when God would like for us to be alone with Him and just shut up, and listen, to the still small voice of God, to speak to our conscience, to reach us in the places where we are hard-to-reach because of our busy lives we lead, because we don't give ourselves and our time to Him.

Continuing to read in verse 2 of Ecclesiastes 5, God said, "God is in heaven and you are on earth, so let your words be few. {3} For a dream comes through much activity; and a fool's voice is recognized by a multitude of words."

You know that is true. From your own experience, you know that when you hear somebody blabber, blabber, blabber, blabber, blabber, you're listening to a fool, inevitably. Wise people spare their words. Do you think God doesn't know that?

Solomon who wrote Ecclesiastes in chapter 5 and verse 7 says, "In a multitude of many words there is vanity, but fear God."

Go to God in fear. Don't be in a hurry to open your mouth and say anything to Him. Take some time to think. And when you talk to God, get to the point. That's not difficult, is it? Here's a man, generations ago, who told us, when it comes to words, even in prayer, more is not necessarily better.

Some ministers used to talk a lot about spending an hour a day in prayer and that is a good thing. It was good for me, and I did it. I never did actually pray for a full hour.

But here's something to realize, to spend time alone with God is holy time! If you actually go to God in prayer, when you have nothing particular to say, other than perhaps to thank him for a few things, or unusual things that have happened, or a general thank you for all the things that have happened, there's nothing wrong with you spending time silent with God. Listening again for that still small voice and meditating on God, His greatness, His goodness and all the things that He has done. So meditate for a little while before you actually say the first word to God.

Be Companionable

I remember a friend once who told me, the reason he liked to travel with a certain gentleman, who was also his good friend of his, said, "We can be alone, side-by-side in the truck for a

solid hour, and neither one of us say a word and it doesn't hurt either one of our feelings." What he was trying to say is, that we are companionable together and we don't have to say anything, to be together and to be pleased to be together. I think I understand that, I can be companionable with God, when I say absolutely nothing.

Some people can not stand silence. You probably know some people like that. If there is any silence, then they have to fill it up with words.

There was an occasion, when Jesus spent all night in prayer. I doubt very seriously that He was talking the whole time. I doubt it very seriously, because you see, you don't actually have to be talking to be in prayer.

Remember that Scripture, "If we do not know what we should pray for as we ought: the Spirit itself makes intercession for us with groanings which cannot be uttered" (Romans 8:26).

Paul is talking about communicating at a nonverbal level. I think that's a fascinating idea, that you can actually communicate with God without saying a word. It's a nonverbal thing, but the communication is still there because God knows what's in your mind and in your heart.

Psalm 19 verse 14, one verse, "Let the words of my mouth, and the meditation of my heart, be acceptable in your sight, O LORD, my strength and my redeemer."

How Many Prayers Do You Need?

Being who I am, I get a lot of prayer requests. Most of them are from people I don't know and it was a lot of those prayer requests, that made me stop and think for a while and that led to this sermon. It made me think about what people don't understand and it's painfully obvious that people want prayer, when life is going sour. They asked for prayers reflexively. They make statements like, "I need all the prayers I can get." Actually you don't. You only really need one.

Fervent Prayer

James 5 verse 16, "Confess your faults one to another, and pray for one another, that you may be healed. The effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man avails much."

I think praying together is a good thing. I think requesting prayer from one another and reading prayer requests in church is a good thing. I think it's good for us to pray for one another this way, but what we are reading about here, is where a person comes to us and says, "You know, I have done something egregiously stupid. I have really messed up my life and I'm in a lot of trouble and I need for you to pray for me." The effectual fervent prayer of one brother can make all the difference in the world.

There is something about fervent prayer. There is something you know about fervent prayer if you thought about it. You can't work that up. You can't pretend it. It has to come from the heart, and the way it comes from the heart, is when your brother comes to you and says, "Can I talk to you for a minute?" You say, "Sure." He then begins to outline for you the trouble that he is in and he explains what is going wrong, and he explains why he needs for you to pray for him. You can actually come to the place to where the fervency is there, and the tears almost come when you pray. It comes out of love for the brother, knowledge about the situation, knowledge about what is eating him up.

This is why the Scripture says, "Confess your faults one to another." Talk to one another about what's wrong. Don't just say, "Pray for me, I can't tell you what it is, I just need your prayers." No you don't! All you need is one prayer. You need one prayer from a righteous man who really knows what your problem is. That's what this Scripture is talking about here.

I remember a little girl, she was eight years old, if my memory serves, she was hit by truck out in front of her house. I was called around midnight to come and pray for her. We were living in Memphis and she was in a hospital in Little Rock. She had severe head damage and they were going to do surgery on her and they couldn't find the father, so we jumped in the car, drove to Little Rock. We prayed on the way and prayed when we got there. The little girl died. I prayed very fervently for that little girl. She was a sweet little girl. I really was very affectionate toward the family.

I could say I don't know why she died, but I do know why she died, she was hit by truck. The damage that was done to her was irreparable and beyond anything anyone could do. That is not to say that God could not have healed her in this situation, but I don't think God has ever healed anyone whose body was so severely damaged. We could talk about it until the cows come home, about why He doesn't, but we do know that He doesn't do it. It doesn't mean that we can't ask, because I certainly did, and I was fervent.

Do you know where the fervency came from? It came from love for the family. It didn't come from the request, it didn't come from me being a righteous person. It came because of the love for the family and for the people concerned. It is only love that can really generate that kind of a fervent prayer that is being talked about here.

It occurred to me the time to pray for little girl was before she got hit by a truck, which is another important point for prayer.

Thus we see Seven Immutable Laws of Prayer.

- Law number one: We all must die.
- Law number two: Prayer without works is vain.
- Law number three: You need help to pray.
- Law number four: You are God's servant, it is not the other way around.
- Law number five: Absolute honesty is required.

- Law number six: Prayer takes time and meditation
- Law number seven: When it comes to words, more is not better.

Finally, Romans chapter 12 verse 10, "Be devoted to one another in brotherly love. Honor one another above yourselves. {11} Never be lacking in zeal, but keep your spiritual fervor, serving the Lord. {12} Be joyful in hope, patient in affliction, faithful in prayer. {13} Share with God's people who are in need. Practice hospitality."

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