

My Thoughts for Sunday, 26 July 2015

Plan Well? Work Hard? Get a Comfortable Life?

“If you remain in me and follow my teachings, you can ask anything you want, and it will be given to you” (John 15:7).

Were you, like me, taught these basic principles as you went from childhood to adulthood? As I grew up, the adults in my life stressed the importance that if I worked hard I could get everything I needed or wanted from life. Work hard! Get a good job! Make a lot of money! Save! Save! Save! They were right, to a degree. These principles are necessary for a comfortable life. But, is this enough? Is that all there is to being comfortable and happy? I went through many years working: planning my work and working my plan. However, something was always not quite right. Something was missing in my life. I was not content. I was always looking for more.

Somewhere along the line I was introduced to the Word of God and came to realize that those early instructions for contentment were lacking a very important ingredient. Nowhere in Scripture did I hear of Jesus teaching His apostles to **plan** and it will be given to you, or that you will receive anything and everything you **work** for. Maybe, just maybe, my mentors and leaders were not quite in line with the **comfortable life** they were trying to assure me of. I reread the many examples that were shown in Scripture of the things Jesus did while instructing His followers; how He calmed the winds and storms, how He raised people from the dead, and always prayed for His followers that they might find peace and the proper value lessons. Jesus did, however, give them some very sound advice on gaining what was necessary for acquiring comfort and to receive anything they needed. He told them that—*“If you remain in me and follow my teachings, you can ask anything you want, and it will be given to you” (John 15:7).*

The disciples, apostles and His many other followers never asked Him to show them how to walk on water, how to calm the storms or how to bring those sleeping in death back to life. One of His disciples did, however, ask for one thing he felt they needed. This request is written for us in Luke 11:1 where Jesus is being asked; *“It happened that while Jesus was praying in a certain place, after He had finished, one of His disciples said to Him, “Lord, teach us to pray just as John also taught his disciples.”* What better person could they have gone to for a lesson in prayer?

Here was the Word who had been with the Father throughout and active in the creation of the world along with the third person of the Trinity the Holy Spirit. *Jesus prayed. He prayed* for believers. *He prayed* for non-believers. *He prayed* before He ate. *He prayed* with tears. *He prayed* for children. *He prayed* for the sick. *He prayed* with thanksgiving. He was the creator of all things and yet *He prayed*. He is co-equal with God the Father, in charge of all the angels, in control of the governing forces of earth; yet *He prayed. He prayed* whenever He needed to and wherever He happened to be at the time; in the desert, in the cemetery, in the garden. *He prayed* in the crowds, in solitude, in the wilderness and on the cross for His enemies as they were calling for His death. I can hear His followers even now as someone is seeking Jesus: “Where is Jesus?”
“He’s where He is most of the time!”
“Praying again?”
“You know it; He’s been gone since early this morning.”

Who are we to feel that prayer is useless? How can we think that our loving Creator does not and will not hear us and answer us if we follow the example of His Son? Jesus pleaded with His Father for

us as he died on the cross. He pleads our case with His Father against the devil even today as we individually die and face that final judgment for our eternal life. Take a lesson from the Son. If He felt it was beneficial and worth the effort, who are we to doubt. 1 Thessalonians 5:16-18 (NKJV) *“Rejoice always, pray without ceasing, in everything give thanks; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you”*. Pray without ceasing implies that as we go through our normal lives, in all things we need to ask for His direction, help and power to do His will, always. Also we need to be giving Him the thanks for all the many blessings He constantly pours out on us. Pray for your friends in sickbeds, friends going through financial hard times and those suffering setbacks in their spiritual lives. We need to be always aware of the lives we have been blessed with knowing that no matter how bad things may appear for us, someone else may be in worse condition, unable to fulfill sometimes the most menial tasks and pleasures we so often take for granted. Look closely at the last portion of the verse in 1 Thessalonians, *“in everything give thanks; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you”*. Paul in this letter is telling us to always give thanks, thanks for the good and pleasing things we are blessed with and for those trials that God allows to come into our lives to strengthen us, because *“this is Gods will for us”* in our risen Savior.

Have you been, like I sometimes tend to be, lax in your prayer life? It is time to shake it up and begin giving thanks and asking for His direction. Stop doubting that He will answer you. Remember what John wrote to us in the opening text for this letter... *“If you remain in me and follow my teachings, you can ask anything you want, and it will be given to you”* (John 15:7). That’s right, He said ANYTHING! God does answer prayer. God will hear and answer your prayers. He said so and we must never doubt the love and promises of our God. As we are told by Matthew; *“Ask, and it will be given to you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you. For everyone who asks receives, and he who seeks finds, and to him who knocks it will be opened...”*

Friends, I pray that in your lives you will use more diligently the great means of communication that God has made available to us...prayer. Take to heart what the Psalmist wrote for our benefit, Psalm 34:4 *“I sought the LORD, and he answered me; he delivered me from all my fears.”* And again the Psalmist tells us to take delight in this line of communication, Psalm 37:4 *“Take delight in the LORD, and he will give you the desires of your heart.”* You don’t need to ask God to teach you how to pray, He already gave us a very special prayer that can be repeated as often as we like no matter where we are. We go back to when the disciples asked Jesus to teach them how to pray in Luke 11:1-4. One of His disciples said to Him, *“Lord, teach us to pray just as John also taught his disciples. And He said to them, “When you pray, say: ‘Father, hallowed be your name. Your kingdom come. Give us each day our daily bread. And forgive us our sins, for we ourselves also forgive everyone who is indebted to us. And lead us not into temptation.””*

This is a model prayer Jesus gave to His followers and it really says it all. Jesus didn’t give a lecture on prayer or the doctrine on prayer; He gave them an actual repeatable complete prayer covering the needs of us all. This prayer began with the glorification of God and request for His Kingdom to come and rule over us. Then Jesus proceeded with a request for all our daily needs followed with a request for forgiveness of our sins first then acknowledging our forgiveness of the sins enacted against us. Jesus closed this prayer with supplication to God to keep us from backsliding into sin that Jesus had already paid for in full, for all time.

What are we waiting for? Isn’t it time we took our God at His word and receive the ongoing fulfillment of the fondest desires of our hearts? Pray earnestly for your friends in need, for your enemies, that they might come to believe in their Savior. Pray for the sick, the mourning. Pray for God to guide us in our lives as we all strive for that eternal goal, endless life with our Father in heaven. Pray as Jesus did, unceasingly, wherever we find ourselves in need or thanksgiving. Never quit, we will win that glorious prize.