



***“Do not be anxious about anything, but in every situation, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God.”***

*Philippians 4:6*

I have been calling upon our Lord a lot lately, to be honest a bit more than the norm. Perhaps it has to do with the current situation in our world; my own sense of uncertainty and confusion; or maybe my need for comfort and strength right now. But whatever the reason, the reality of how often I am down on my knees, or sitting in silence listening, has prompted a lot of thought and reading about prayer this week.

So, with that in mind, let me ask you something: Have you ever noticed that the Bible is packed full of prayers? From Hannah’s pleading for a child, to Nehemiah’s petitions for a nation, to Jesus’ intercession for his people, to John’s prayers for the churches; scripture is crammed with prayers. But take note of the different places people pray: mountaintops, altars, roadways, prisons, thrones, pastures, deserts, stables, palaces, sickbeds, ships, and a whale’s belly. Isn’t it comforting to know that we can pray wherever we are, and God hears us?

Take Joseph and Paul, both were thrown unjustly into prison, yet emerged wiser. When you add injustice to the cruel conditions of incarceration, their situations would have been the perfect breeding ground for bitterness. I’m sure what kept Joseph and Paul’s faith life real was their prayer lives. Prayer softens hearts and makes the impossible possible, the harsh realities tolerable, the haughty humble, and the future hopeful.

However, you would think knowing this we would be on our knees from sunrise to sunset; or at least we would be like Daniel, who talked to God three times a day. But are we that involved in conversation when it comes to our Heavenly Father? How is it that we pray? Do we offer words freely or are they more scripted? Do we perhaps have a favorite prayer that we use over and over again?”

As I think about prayer it’s easy to recall that my Grandmother used the same grace at mealtime throughout my growing up years and probably her own (Bless us O Lord, and these thy gifts which we ....). Her prayer was predictably dear, even comforting. She also taught me “Now I lay me down to sleep,” when I was a little girl. A prayer that I will still recite from time to time.

But what about you? When you pray is there a certain set of words that are near and dear to your heart? Words that have been handed down? Words that perhaps you have penned together on your own? Words that you have learned in Sunday School or the church services you have attended? Do you pray the Lord’s Prayer with regularity and confidence?

It’s been my experience that many people prefer a kind of free-flowing speaking from the heart approach; while others are more disciplined. But if I am honest I believe that I probably fall somewhere in the middle. I appreciate well written prayers, especially when they help me process and give voice to my feelings, but I am also grateful for full-heart access to my God in which I can stumble and even give full voice to my struggles, as well as my joys. I find it healing to pour out my concerns to the only One who ultimately can do anything about our loud and sometimes painful world; while at the same time there is no one else who I enjoy sharing my joy and thankfulness with as much as my Heavenly Father.

But what about you? Exactly how often are you bending God's ear? Do you open your heart to him daily, several times a day; or is it more spread out than that?

This week I want to encourage you to think about the realities of your prayer life. Please no shame or guilt need be involved, just an honest look at the reality of how often you call upon His name. Are you opening your heart often enough? Are you perhaps shying away and holding back, perhaps even restraining yourself when it comes to that open and honest outpouring?

Whatever your structure, whatever your words, whatever your timing, may the open invitation to come into the presence of your Heavenly Father fill you with relief, awe, and gratitude. May this week and every week be filled with countless moments for you to speak, as well as listen to Him and His Holy Word.

**Prayer:**

**Gracious God,**

**Help us to bow our hearts before You that we might always give honor and praise to your holy name. We ask this day that you would strengthen our prayer lives. Help us to pray often, trusting you with our whole hearts. Lord, keep us mindful of the needs as well as the joys that surround us; guide us; empower us; but most importantly open our hearts, as well as our ears, that together we might hear your response, and be led by Your word.**

**Amen.**