
Heart and Soul ... A Weekly Meditation

October 26, 2014

The Puzzle of Prayer

“We always thank God for all of you when we mention you constantly in our prayers.”

1 Thessalonians 1:2 (Common English Bible)

It is not unusual for someone to ask me, “Please pray for me.” Often my response is an invitation to immediate prayer. My desire is to take the request for prayer seriously. By praying with the person immediately, I wish to say that I care deeply about them and that I appreciate their confidence in the power of prayer. Recently, however, I have begun to question, “Just what do they expect from this prayer?” “Do they really believe my prayer to do any good?”

Naturally, the Bible has much to say about prayer. What is often unrealized is just how frequently the mention of prayer in the Bible is one of complaint. The palmists, the prophets, Job and the apostle Paul often questioned the value of prayer, sometimes rather bluntly! Listen to a portion of Psalm 88, “But I cry out to you, Lord! My prayer meets you first thing in the morning! Why do you reject my very being, Lord? Why do you hide your face from me (verse 13, 14)?” It is clear that today’s church is not the first to question the usefulness of prayer.

It is important – and helpful – to note, however, that in each complaint that is uttered there is present a fervent belief that something can be expected from prayer. Prayer is never given up on in the Bible, never dismissed as not of any use. What makes each of those who wrestle with prayer people of amazing stature is their absolute confidence in the power of prayer – power to disrupt at any moment the ordinary with the extraordinary. Without reserve or embarrassment each character in the Bible shared in the same compulsion to pray.

I will freely share that I have no idea how prayer works. The question itself may be foolish simply because it strives to understand God. And someone once wisely declared that if we can ever grasp God then we must go looking for another God. Any God we can understand with our finite minds is simply too small to save us. What I am confident of is that God was very active in the drama recorded in the Bible and continues to be just as involved in the unfolding drama of life today. And God invites us, repeatedly, to seek the inflowing of God’s grace through regular prayer. Refusal to pray – even when prayer was questioned – simply was not an option for the people of faith in the Bible.

Prayer: *Heavenly Father, we pray today for one another. Grant your grace to each one as they have need, and strengthen our faith, particularly in moments when you seem silent. Amen.*

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