

A Proper Prayer Focus

Introduction

Several weeks ago... the Scriptures challenged us to examine the kinds of things that we pray for. My reflection on that challenge was prompted by the thought that our prayer can become self-centered. Prayers that focus on our desire to escape some trial, sorrow, disappointment, hurt, or difficult situation seem to become the basis for our prayer life. Ironically these types of prayers have been the challenge of my prayer life since that reflection.

I reflected on how this kind of prayer can never find the answers we are hoping for... an answer that brings us peace. I cautioned that this kind of prayer will eventually erode our relationship with God, as we ask God to grant to relieve our suffering and make our live easier. I concluded that the most effective prayer must always be rooted in seeking God's will

Today's Gospel

Today's Gospel presents us with another challenge... What we are doing to cultivate the reign of God? The focus of the parable of the vineyard is designed to get the audience to consider their role in furthering that kingdom. It is a story that would have been very familiar to all of the people who heard it. Each detail would have a particular significance for each member of the audience.

As I read this passage I was struck by the destructive power of envy and how the desire to take the easy way to obtain what we want, can lead us to do despicable things... like killing a man's son. It occurred to me that we can't ever possess something that God is freely and generously giving... such as the vineyard, and the winepress and the tower. Everything that was needed, was given as a gift by the owner. All that was asked was to work the vineyard and collect the harvest. The parable challenges us to cultivate the gift.

This parable speaks to a universal truth... If we don't cultivate the gifts that God has extended to us... the Kingdom of God will be given to someone who will produce and bear its fruit. Our giftedness is the means by which we will gain

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God's Kingdom. Those gifts need to be cultivated. So how are we to go about bearing fruit?

Paul's Insights

Paul talks about the peace of believing prayer or true prayer. Peace is an excellent antidote for envy. The docile person is not weak, and does lack courage, but merely desires to cooperate with God's will.

Believing (True) Prayer

So what is believing, or true prayer? True prayer has two elements... The first is gratitude and the second is submission to God's will. It is only when we are fully convinced that God is working in all things together for our good, that we can really feel perfect gratitude for him. Self-centered prayer, prayer that is rooted in our neediness, works against a feeling of gratitude and trust in God's will.

True Prayer has three focal points... The first focus is love of God, which desires what is best for us. The second focus is wisdom of God, which knows what is best for us. The final focus is the power of God, which can bring about what is best for us. Everyone who prays in perfect trust in love, wisdom, and the power of God will find peace. The result of this kind of prayer is that the peace of God will stand like a sentry over our hearts in good times and in bad.

The Human Mind

Paul knew that the human mind desires a goal or focus. He wanted to be sure that the Christian set his mind on the right things... the right goal. This is a critical first step to cultivating our gifts. Paul wanted the follower of Christ to focus on "Excellent" things. To be excellent as Paul saw it is to focus on things that are... True, Honest, Just, Pure, Lovely, and Gracious.

Truth reveals what is real, and grounds us in reality. Reality allows us to see things as they really are. Paul knew many things in the world were illusory and deceptive. Paul also knew that truth brings real happiness and peace.

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Things that are honest are things that accord a great deal of respect like age, wisdom, and character. They are those things, which add dignity and holiness to our lives. There is nothing more important than our dignity and holiness. We should never settle for the frivolous or the cheap in this regard.

Things that are just, give to others what is due to them. Simply it is duty faced and duty done. We must never make pleasure, comfort and the easy way our goal, ahead of what we owe to others.

Things that are pure help us to avoid falling into a way of thinking that defiles or spoils things. Our thoughts must be so clean that they can stand the scrutiny of God.

Things that are lovely are things that call forth the love of God. We need to let go of vengeance and bitterness as resentment destroys one from the inside. We are called to set our minds on kindness, sympathy, and patience just as Christ did.

Things that are gracious are things that have a goodness attached to them. These are things that are fit for God.

Conclusion

These are the things that contain every kind of excellence... Truth, Honesty, Justice, Purity, Loveliness, and Graciousness. These are the things that should be focus of our prayer life. And these are the things our God wills for us.

These are the things that are giftedness is rooted in because we are made in the image and likeness of a creator who is all of these things to a perfect degree. These are the things that prevent our vineyard from being overgrown and trampled down. These are the things that fill our hearts and minds with noble intentions and virtuous deeds. And ultimately these are the things that will bring us peace.