

“PRAYER”

An amalgamation of extracts of Dr E G Gibson’s (1915-1991) writings

Arranged and ordered by Mark Ingram

Prayer: The Possibility

God created man as his image and as both are personal each may communicate. All personal relationships involve communication. Prayer may thus be defined as: the mutual articulated communication between God and man. It is mutual, that is, it is a two way affair. It is articulated for it involves speech. It is a communication in that it is related to the purposes and processes of thought, feeling, and will of persons. It is to be seen not in the area of the magical but in the area of person-to-person communication. The possibility of communication lies in the fact that God is personal. It is not talk about nothing but a communication or sharing of oneself. It is a two-way conversation involving sharing at every level. Prayer is always self-communicating. Prayer is an essential part of worship by both individuals and groupings. The divine purpose in creating man had two sides : personal fellowship and divine programme. God was to rule the world through man (Gen 1.28, Heb 2.8).- men united to God finally through the Indwelling Spirit (Jn 14.23, 2 Cor 3.17). Worship is a person – centred experience and so involves the whole man - Deut 6.5, Mt 22. 37- physical strength, psyche, mind, heart. In worship man’s knowledge about God must become knowledge of God – intimate mutual sharing.

Types of Prayer

As man has been given dominion by God who has a programme, then prayer is of two fundamental types – fellowship prayer and dynamic prayer (or, creative prayer). Fellowship prayer is the enjoyment of fellowship between God and man, his creature. Dynamic prayer is related to the achievement of the divine programme in the affairs of men. Through the gospel, for those receiving Christ’s salvation, the Creator-creature relationship has become father-son relationship for the Father has sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, crying, “Abba! Father!” (Gal 4 :6). J Jeremias has indicated that neither the O.T. nor other Jewish literature used “Abba” as a form of address to God but that on the other hand Jesus regarded it as a sacred word. “Abba as a form of address to God expresses the ultimate mystery of the mission of Jesus”. And it is into this intimate relationship we have been taken by the Spirit. Or as Eph 2.18 presents it; we, Jew and gentile alike through Christ “have access in one Spirit to the Father”. We have been brought so near in that access that God now indwells. By his “residential possession” a new

intimate fellowship of prayer has resulted. This new relationship of Father – Son affects the place of the Spirit in creative praying. For it is through prayer that God’s will is done.

The boon of the New Covenant is to know God – Jer 31.34; Heb 8.11; Matt 11.27; Jn 17.3. This “knowing God” has two basic sharing elements :

1. Share life itself – existential element.
2. Share life’s program – dynamic element.

Fellowship Prayer : People who live together, share together.

1. Prayer begins by an awareness of God’s presence Heb 13.5
2. Prayer continues in mutual selfgiving and sharing. I speak. God speaks.
3. The prayer relationship moves in continual awareness of our contrasts :

His greatness / my littleness. His faithfulness / my weakness. His limitlessness / my finiteness. His adequacy / my inadequacy : All I am is of Him. Hence there is the sacrifice of praise. Heb 13.15; Acts 2.47.

4. Though prayer is a creator / creature relationship, it becomes operative on a new basis when the relationship becomes believer / Saviour.

Creative (Dynamic) Prayer: our co-operation with God in getting His will manifested in earthly situations.

God’s goal is that Christ might have all things headed up in Him, Eph 1.9. Five essentials of creative prayer are:

1. Identification with Christ’s programme – in love and obedience I accept His programme.
2. Acceptance of God’s commitment to us of the Great Commission, Mt 28.19. I accept the responsibility of the creative commitment given by God to men, hence to me personally. It is also a recognition that God is sovereign in every situation, Rom 8.29.

3. Availability. Psa.37.4/6, Jas.1 :7/8. There needs to be a recognition of the will of God in each situation coupled with my readiness to be available to God for any participation he may require of me in that situation.
4. Activation. Creative prayer requires action. The action must be God-revealed and for the benefit of God's stake in the situation. The fulfilment of one's prayer requires action in faith, hope, love.

Faith - commitment of myself to God for His fulfilment of His will

Hope - an expectation from God to the fulfilment of that purpose.

Love - a focus on the needs of others, not upon my own. Mt.6.14,33.

5. The undercurrent of creative prayer is "thanksgiving". This is not just saying 'thank you' but is given **in anticipation** of **answered** prayer. It is the response of the heart to God's sovereignty and certainty.

Laws of creative prayer

1. The Law of Dependence

Prayer to be effective must be in Christ's name (Jn. 14:13). Jesus says, "in my name," that is, "while sharing in my life and in all my plans, purposes, and programme." The initiative of planning is always to be Christ's. Prayer is thus the believer's response to God's need to have man as a cooperator to bring into actuality what God has already determined and made possible. The undercurrent in this dependence is "thanksgiving" resulting from (i) a sense of privilege in being a cooperator, and from (ii) an awareness that God has every situation completely under his control.

2. The Law of Obedience

“If ye continue in my Word,” if “my words abide in you” (Jn.8:31, 15:7). Knowing the will of God and the purposes of Christ does not come from human intuition, flash insights, promise boxes, sudden passionate calls upon God. It comes, on the ground of our obedience, from the revelation of the Spirit. It is the Spirit who searches the depths of God (1 Cor. 2:11) and reveals them to us. Eve had listened to the devil’s lie that man was able to determine of himself the right path. But, Rom. 8:26 indicates that there are areas of divine achievement that lie beyond the human comprehension. In the availability of our obedient hearts the Spirit, who resides within, also intercedes (huperentugchanei) with yearnings which cannot be verbalised. All is being achieved in the realm of “spirit” through the relationship “in Christ” established by the Spirit’s “residential possession.”

3. The Law of Faith

The word “faith” (pistis) is used in two main senses in the N.T.; as meaning (i) the basic theological details of Christian belief and normally then has the article (2 Tim. 4:7) and meaning (ii) the act of trust or commitment to God for some specifically detailed intention. In this second use it always involves “hearing,” that is, it is based on the declared will of God. The “prayer of faith” (Jas. 5:14) of the elders for healing was not a psychological intensity of belief in God’s goodness but a prayer based upon the revealed will of God in the specific case. This is not just a general belief in God but trust in God to fulfil His revealed will in the specific situation under consideration. The group praying needs to wait upon God till He shows His hand. Then the expectant faith becomes the prayer of faith. The Sword which the Spirit uses to overcome “the flaming darts of the evil one” is an “utterance of God” (rhema theou) – something specific for each occasion. This is why it is vital to be praying at all times “in the Spirit” (Eph. 6:17-

18), that is “directed by, and energized by the Spirit.” To ask in “faith” (Matt. 21:22) is only possible to him who “hears.”

4. The Law of Agreement (Matt. 18:19)

The basis of effective creative prayer is unity. “If two of you agree,” if two shall voice together, utter the same prayer unitedly, then the Father will grant the request. If husband and wife are not united their prayers are hindered (1 Pet. 3:7). It is the same Spirit who operates all the charismata (1 Cor. 12:4), so that they supplement each other. For dynamic prayer to accomplish its goal we need to be “eager to maintain the unity of the Spirit,” for “there is one body and one Spirit” (Eph. 4:3-4). It was in united prayer that the Spirit initiated the first great gentile missionary outreach. The Spirit said, “Set apart for me Barnabas and Saul” (Acts 13:2). In prayer and identification through the laying on of hands, the ecclesia at Antioch was associated in the Spirit’s sending out of that first missionary party (13:4). Paul writing to the Galatians stressed the necessity of unity of action. “If we live by the Spirit, let us also walk along together (stoicheo) under the control of the Spirit. The verb used means “walking in line together” (5:25).

5. The Law of Love

The law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus has made us free from the law of sin and death. This is freedom from self-centred living. It is freedom to love (Rom. 8:2). Paul appealed to the Roman Christians to wrestle with him in prayer to God on his behalf “through our Lord Jesus Christ and through the love of the Spirit” (15:30). Love (agape) is not a mere sentiment, not only an attitude, but is a force for good emanating from the believer’s heart. Who has plumbed the depths of the human psyche? Researchers in this area indicate powers of self-projection, the emitting from the psyche of force on a very high wave length. Love is self-giving, not merely to a cause, but to a person. By prayer agape-love, engendered by the Spirit, becomes that divinely infused human force utilized

by God to achieve Spirit-directed victories in the battles with evil. God chose to make Himself dependent upon this human availability impregnated with Spirit power. Jude urges his readers to keep themselves in the love of God, this is, enjoy God's self-giving to the full in three complementary ways "living in the realities of the christian faith, praying in and by the Holy Spirit, and anticipating the Lord's mercy, the goal of which is eternal life" (vs. 20-21). The love of God revealed in Christ coming and dying for man is exhibited also in a divine ministry of the Spirit in love directed towards winning the world. We need to recognize that the convicting work of the Spirit, outlined in John 16:8-11, is a work of love. The verb to convict (elegcho) implies refutation, the overcoming of error by truth and right, leading to a sense of shame. But this convicting (elegchos) of the Spirit is with view to persuading those convinced to put their faith and love in Christ. Dynamic praying involves the participation in the total agape-movement of God. He must love through us.

6. The Law of Constancy

Paul assured the Galatians that "he who sows to the Spirit shall from this Spirit reap eternal life," and, "in due time we shall reap if we do not lose heart" (6:8-9). There is the necessity of persistency. Prayer needs to be importunate, that is, it refuses to give in to evil (Lk. 18:1), but presses Christ's victory in every situation to the limits. It is the Spirit who produces this result. So Paul urged the Thessalonians to pray without giving in (5:17), and in Rom. 12:12, Eph. 3:18, Col. 4:2, he advises, keep on and on with praying, with all perseverance (proskateresis). As agape never falls (pipto) that is, never quits, so prayer in the Spirit never gives up (1 Cor. 13:8). These words of Jesus are made true by the Spirit, "he who is an asker receives, he who is a seeker finds, and to him who knocks it is always opened" (Lk. 11:10).

The goals of dynamic prayer

All aspects of the carrying out of the commission need to be saturated in prayer. The following are some of those specifically mentioned in the Scriptures: prayer for boldness in witnessing (Acts 4:31), asking the Lord of the harvest to thrust out reapers (Matt. 9:38, Lk. 10:2), knocking for the Lord to open doors for the extension of the programme of evangelization – Col. 4:3, 1 Thess. 5:25, 2 Thess. 3:1, 2 Cor. 1:11. Paul asked for prayer that the Spirit of the Lord would accomplish his deliverance from prison (Phil. 1:19, Phm 22). Extensive prayer to God for the release of Peter had been made successfully (Acts 12:5). Our Lord reminded his disciples that love always required prayer for one's persecutors (Matt. 5:44, Lk. 6:28). In the fulfilling of the divine programme it was not sufficient simply to bring souls to spiritual new birth. Paul loved his converts and always in his letters assured them of his constant prayer for their full maturity in Christ – Rom. 1:9, Eph. 1:16, Col. 1:3, Phil. 1:4, 1 Thess. 1:2, Phm. 22.

The function of prayer for outreach is to create a unity of the Spirit and the outreach, so that the Spirit may achieve His redeeming purposes. It is in prayer that the outreach makes his own spirit available for the Spirit's purposes. Prayer is the awareness of the Spirit's planning coupled with my ready availability to Him for its fulfilment.

The Holy Spirit and Prayer - Rom 8.25-29

1. Notice there is the Law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus v.2
 - (a) Spirit's presence **in** believer (v.9)
 - (b) Spirit brings sonship (v.15)
 - (c) Spirit produces control through the mind (phronema) – (v.6,13)
 - (d) Spirit leads the Sons (v.14)
 - (e) Spirit shares joint heirship (v. 23)
 - (f) Spirit empowers meaningfully through prayer (v.26-27) – (Eph 3.20)
2. The dynamic of prayer is submitting oneself to God and asking for the things promised Lk 11.9; Jam 4.2-3; Psa 37.4-5; Prov 3. 5-6.

3. Notice prayer associated with these events: Christ's inaugurating the basileia – Lk 3.21-22; Pentecost Acts 1.14; boldness of church, Acts 4.24-31; ministry of the Word, Acts 6.4; Spirit bestowed on Samaritans, Acts 8. 15-16; Spirit on Gentiles Acts 10.2-3, 9, 11.5; Gentile mission, Acts 13.2-4.
4. Prayer is prior to the work and is the medium by which the work is divinely accomplished. Eph 5.18; Rom 15.30

We give ourselves to prayer so that we are correctly related to the situation God is presently at in His global strategy. As we do not know just what that is, we depend upon the Spirit inwardly making intercession for us in an inaudible manner, by deep down yearnings.

Jesus at Prayer

In considering our Lord's Earthly prayer life, we need to recognize the basic relation of Jesus to God, His Father. Jesus was true man, hence His earthly life was completely dependent upon His Father (Heb 10.9) – a basic requirement of the creature. For Christ that dependence involved an uninterrupted awareness of the Father's presence, empowerment, and directives. There is a living "knowing relation" between the Father and the Son (Jn 10.15, Mt 11.27). This relationship involved conversation about the purposes and programme of the Father and the part the Son was to play. The constant awareness of the Father's presence meant for Jesus also special times for prayer. (Lk 5.15/16) indicates that Jesus repeatedly slipped away to pray in deserted places. No doubt many times Jesus prayed for individuals. But we are not permitted to know all the secrets of His prayer life. Only little glimpses are given us.

The Christian and Private Prayer

Practice of Prayer

It is natural to pray, but efficiency is learnt, and the learning takes time. Each person learns to develop his/her own skill according to one's own gifts and situation. We note the following:

1. Minute praying and fixed time praying are both vital.

2. For fixed place chose the time and place most convenient. Routine is necessary, but we are slave to God, not to ourselves. Spontaneousness is essential.
3. Discover how to overcome problems of body posture, wandering thoughts, sleepiness, staleness of routine.
4. To know the mind of God listen to His Word. Find the best way to read His Word devotionally. Don't mix scripture study with devotional meditation.
5. Practice laying aside business, tomorrow's programme, and be quiet before God. "Be still and know that I am God" – Psa 46.10

A selection of statements by Dr Gibson concerning prayer:

"While many private prayers, in the nature of things, must be short; while public prayers as a rule ought to be short and condensed, yet in our private communions with God, time is a feature essential to its value." (1953)

"Prayer is a vital necessity in the whole process of communicating with God."(1979)

"Prayer must be a mutual talk with God and therefore there must be a sense of the presence of God. A vital awareness of the presence of God is essential."(1979)

Rom 8:27 "For prayer to be effective it must be Spirit inspired. One evidence of reality in prayer is persistence." (1950's)

Rom 15:30-33 “Prayer is essential work for the Kingdom. Paul urges them to agonise unitedly...in praying for them. The basis of achieving prayer is that it is through (dia+G) Jesus Christ, and that it is love in action – a love imparted and maintained by the Holy Spirit, and the focus of the prayer is the extension of the Kingdom of our Lord.” (1970’s)

Prayer and Faith

Matt 21. 18-22. “Our Lord applied His act as an example of faith, vs 21,22. Believing prayer always brings an answer. It does not mean, however, that an answer will come simply because you are expecting it. The prayer of faith always involves a knowledge of God’s will. Faith is the foundation of prayer : prayer is the language of faith. It is not simply, because we believe in prayer we ask, that we have the answer. Whatsoever ye ask in prayer, believing (what?) – involves knowledge of the Word of God – sincerity of the prayer does not determine the final answer.”(Notes on Matthew p30, 1950’s)

Prayer and Faith

Matt 7.7 “Three present imperatives state the essentials of the prayers of Christians. Ask continually, seek continually, knock continually. These 3 represent a progression of faith. They indicate 3 different areas of life in which prayer is essential. Asking for those things specifically promised. Seeking to know the will of God in areas of life not clearly defined. Knocking on doors where we seem to be at a standstill and progress is impeded.” (Notes on Matthew p19, 1950’s)

Dr Gibson taught “Great saints are only great receivers.”

“We need to learn to appropriate and receive all the following by actively allowing the Spirit to achieve then in him/her. This is what Paul prayed for in Eph 3.16-17

Eph 3.11-21. “Paul deals with the process of effective prayer to achieve the eternal purposes of God revealed in His Son. The requests are in two couplets he paraphrases

3.16-17 “ I pray that the father will give you two complimentary things. Firstly to be strengthened by power through His Spirit moving within the inner man, and secondly, Christ to be “at home” in your hearts through the exercise of faith.”

3.18-19. “I further pray that you would be greatly enabled to do two essential things. Firstly to comprehend as with all the saints what is the inheritance bestowed by the father in all its totality of breadth, length, height, and depth and, secondly, and in particular, to know the love of Christ which is always greater than our knowing.”(1987)(Whose leaf does not wither)

Some of Dr Gibson’s personal discoveries and habits of prayer and modelling

Auto biographical note (Sermon - Praying Through to Victory in “ Whose Leaf does not Wither” 1987)

“As a Christian Endeavourer of the Haberfield Baptist Church c1931, I was in a group of young people who discussed the then public debate in the Sydney papers about the usefulness of praying for rain in a time of drought. A number of country ministers of various denominations wrote to the papers to say that it was foolish for anyone to pray for rain as God could not be manipulated by prayer. His purposes are fixed and christians had no power to change God’s activity. As Endeavourers we debated at length this question. Being teenagers and a little ‘beyond’, we believed that we were capable of understanding the function of prayer in the purposes of God. Our solution was : alter the motto “Prayer changes things” to “Prayer changes the pray-er”. In other words, through prayer and submission to God we come into the right relationship with God that made it right and proper for God to act and give the answer to our requests.”

“Some years later I was reading a book written by S.D.Gordon, who had a series of readable books for young Christians in a series called “Quiet Talks Series”. In the book that I was reading I came across the statement that when a person in the homeland prays for his missionary prayer partner the person praying actually visits the mission field. “We are in Christ not restricted to the location of our body” said Gordon. Speaking aloud I addressed the book, “S.D., you are romancing, I can’t believe that”. However further study about the human psyche convince me

that “S.D.” was right. A Christian, a person in Christ, through prayer provided God with “human stuff” which God used in the battles against the force of darkness. There is an essentialness in our praying that goes far beyond simply a change in the one praying. Said James in chapter 5 verse 16 – the supplication of a righteous person is powerful in its effectiveness.”

Learning the habit and discipline of a regular devotional life was a challenge for him as a young pastor.

In the last six months of 1939 at the age of 23 years, whilst in the NSW Home Mission appointed pastoral charge of Cessnock Baptist and a single man, he records in his diary a resolution after many days of not rising early and experiencing much frustration and bewilderment :-

“From now on by the sheer grace of God, I will get back to prayer. I’ve said so before but haven’t. It’s now 40 days since I rose early and had my prayer session. From tomorrow my plan shall be; Retire if possible at 10pm, set alarm for 5am. That is 7 hours rest. 5 to 8 . Two hours definite prayer and bible study. One hour preparation for sermons for the Lord’s day. If I retire later I shall rise later but never later than 6.30 and no matter at what time I retire.” He failed again the next morning and attributed the lack of general responsiveness to his ministry to his own perceived laziness and human weakness. In another diary entry he laments “Why do you not bless Oh Lord. Obviously sin is not forsaken” And in November 1939 he cried out “Prayer seems impossible – real study impossible. The forces of darkness are exceedingly strong – God is reducing me to nothing that he might be all. The church is not healthy, how can it be if I am so out of touch.” (p. 17 A Biography of Dr E G Gibson unpublished manuscript by Graheme Monteith ,1995 (Doc’s nephew)).

Auto biographical note (Sermon Praying Through to Victory)

“While I was living in Perth (1949-59) a number of ministers and layman used to meet for prayer on Monday mornings at 6.am. We waited upon God to send blessings upon our churches. On a certain occasion one of the ministers remarked: “I have had a bad week, and I just couldn’t get through to God. The heavens seemed as brass”. This brought on a discussion on the question of ‘getting through to God’. Finally we came to the conclusion that we were looking at things the wrong way.” We don’t have to get through to God, for He has already got through to us in Christ.” This understanding revolutionized the prayer life of many present (including myself).”

In his principalship years (1949-82), it was his custom to get up every day at 6am, make his wife and himself a hot honey and lemon drink then retire to his study for his private devotions before breakfast at 7am.

The student's devotions at Perth Bible Institute for the commencement of the academic year in February 1952 began with the words, "The devotional life is the life lived in conscious fellowship with God." Dr Gibson knew himself that the minister's life is the life of his ministry. That being true than surely the heartbeat of his life is the devotional life. So the New Year began with a conscious deliberate acknowledgement of the necessity of this truth to be incorporated into the very fabric of the lives of both students and Principal.

He punctuated every 15 minutes of his work and studies as a pastor with prayer - and so experienced something of the spirit of praying continually. I can personally recall him saying, "I can honestly say in all my life I have never let a day go past without praying for my children."

His daily pattern when he awoke in the morning was to say "Good morning Lord – what do you have in mind for me today?", and when he came to put his head on the pillow at night was to affirm, "Lord, I belong to you."

I recall a theological class in 1981 where Dr Gibson modelled the devotional reading of Psalm 34 before a class of forty-five students. You could have heard a pin drop as we were all transported into the presence of his God. Before commencing he said that he was conscious of the artificialness of such an exercise. Even so he was prepared to attempt to model before us how he lived in the Psalms. There was no showiness, just delight in the living God who has come into focus through Jesus Christ by the power of the Spirit.