

## WHY PRAYER DESERVES PRIORITY

1 Kings 8:22-24, 27-28, 38-39, 43

Can you think of someone who is a good friend? It could be a neighbor or someone you grew up with. What would be some events or things that might happen that an observer would notice about such a relationship? You might spend time together, have common interests, and you might call each other on the phone or share emails. If you happen to be in the neighborhood, you might stop by to see how things are going. If you were in close proximity, you would likely be talking with each other. You would probably help each other if one of you had a project you were working on. If you were going to take a walk for exercise you might walk together with your good friend.

How would you characterize a relationship in which the only time you talked with the other person was by appointment at a set time every day? The only time you did something together was at a planned event at a designated meeting place. I don't know what you might call such a relationship, but "being good friends" doesn't come to mind. This almost sounds like a business acquaintance or obligation rather than friendship.

Have you read any books on prayer and daily devotions? What kind of advice do you normally get about prayer? Get up early and make prayer the first thing you do. Or this advice might be combined with praying before you go to bed. You may also find encouragement to set apart some time during the day for Bible reading and thinking about the message. We see in the Psalms where David wrote that he would pray evening, morning, and at noon time. We know that the Muslims stop everything they are doing and pray five times a day.

It strikes me that the typical advice on prayer and devotions is closer to an obligatory acquaintance relationship rather than a friendship. In the New Testament, we find Paul saying things like "pray without ceasing" (1Th 5:17) and "praying always with all prayer and supplication in the spirit" (Eph 6:18). This sounds very much like an ongoing and continuing relationship that is somewhat of an everyday happening that influences and interacts with everything we do. It is sort of like having an ongoing conversation with a good friend. Having such an intimately close relationship does not preclude planning to get together with a friend for special occasions. For example your family and your best friend's family might celebrate Thanksgiving or Christmas together. You might even plan to go out for dinner each Sunday. The ongoing daily relationship makes such special times more meaningful and comfortable.

In the same way, a Christian's prayer life that is an ongoing conversation with God about the encounters and decisions of what we experience in living our lives makes the special times of prayer that might come from dedication ceremonies and celebrations more meaningful to us. Solomon had asked God to give him a hearing or listening heart so that he might have discernment to know the right path to take in his responsibilities as king. As a result he saw the fulfillment of many things he wanted to accomplish. In Psalm 37:4 David had written "delight thyself also in the LORD; and he shall give thee the desires of thine heart." One of those desires (of Solomon and his father David) was to build a place to house the Ark of the Covenant which represented the presence of God among His people. It took seven and a half years to complete and nearly a year of preparation to come to the point of a celebrative dedication of the Temple. Part of this dedication involved a public prayer. We can learn from what Solomon prayed that day and we can apply it to our lives and answer the question of why prayer should be a priority for us.

### Because God is Faithful 8:22-24

<sup>22</sup> Then Solomon stood before the altar of the LORD in the presence of all the assembly of Israel and spread out his hands toward heaven. <sup>23</sup> He said, “O LORD, the God of Israel, there is no God like You in heaven above or on earth beneath, keeping covenant and *showing* lovingkindness to Your servants who walk before You with all their heart, <sup>24</sup> who have kept with Your servant, my father David, that which You have promised him; indeed, You have spoken with Your mouth and have fulfilled it with Your hand as it is this day. 1 Kings 8:22-24 (NASB95)

In this formal setting, Solomon took a particular position for the prayer. This same account is recorded in Second Chronicles in chapter six starting in verse 12. We can find some additional details there. In verse 13 of the Chronicles account we see that Solomon knelt on the raised platform upon which he had positioned himself. Solomon positioned himself (took his stand) on a raised platform before the altar and knelt while spreading out his hand in the direction of heaven. What might be the spiritual significance of the various things in this picture?

**Bronze Platform:** The word used here is normally translated as “laver” or a wash basin. It is unlikely that Solomon was in the basin but may have been on the base on which the basin would rest. The symbolism associated with this (if any was intended) would be related to the references we see in the New Testament of being cleansed by “the washing with water as by the word” as we see in Ephesians 5:26. From this we could argue that the place where we take our stand and from which we pray is on the sure promises of the word of God.

**Before the Altar:** The altar was the place of sacrifice and the acceptable sacrifice on the altar opened up a way for the worshiper to enter into the place of worship. For us, the sacrificing altar has been replaced by the completed work of Christ on the Cross. So we would come to the Cross as the place of our petitions because that opened the way for us into the presence of God.

**Knelt to Pray:** Kneeling was an acceptable show of humility for people who would come before a king or ruler to make a request. Symbolically, this outward expression of humility needs to be the reality of the attitude of our heart as we come before God. We see this idea reinforced in James 4:6, “but he gives more grace. Therefore, he says: ‘God resists the proud, but gives grace to the humble.’”

**Spread Out his Hands:** This gesture was likely symbolic of offering up the prayer and praise to God and it could also show a readiness to receive any blessing, mercy or provision God might give to the one who was praying. Nowhere in scripture do we find those who are worshiping or praying lifted up their arms but simply their hands. The spiritual implication is that when we pray we do so in a mood of expectancy in that we offer to God praise and adoration and we are ready to receive from Him.

We see these “postured positions” that were very much a part of the worship process in the Old Testament and we might be tempted to adopt these under the New Covenant in an effort to enhance the worship experience, to give greater weight to our prayers, or to just draw closer to God as we worship. Does God care about the posture of your body? We know that God looks upon the heart. We can get caught up in doing these things religiously and we find that we are back under Old Testament legalism or rule keeping rather than operating from grace.

Solomon began the prayer with acknowledging that Jehovah is God alone. The chorus from the song *Days of Elijah* tells us “there’s no god like Jehovah.” One of the things that was characteristic of the pagan gods was that they were fickle and those who worshiped them were always uncertain about what would be pleasing or displeasing to them. Solomon saw a difference in that Jehovah was faithful in all things. He made covenants with His people and people knew what they could expect from Him. If they were faithful to the covenant provisions, then they would be blessed and prosper. If they ignored God’s covenant, then they would suffer

the consequences.

In addition to the general covenant keeping character of God, Solomon also pointed out specific promises that God had kept with David. The fact that the Temple had been completed was evidence of the promise God made to David regarding David's son carrying out what David so dearly wanted with regard to building a house for God.

If you were to think about the promises of God which He was already kept, which ones stand out as the most significant to you?

### Because God Listens 8:27-28

<sup>27</sup> "But will God indeed dwell on the earth? Behold, heaven and the highest heaven cannot contain You, how much less this house which I have built! <sup>28</sup> "Yet have regard to the prayer of Your servant and to his supplication, O LORD my God, to listen to the cry and to the prayer which Your servant prays before You today; 1 Kings 8:27-28 (NASB95)

Another difference in concept of those who worshiped pagan gods as compared to those who worship and follow Jehovah was that the pagan god was confined to the place where the idol was. Dagon was the god of the Philistines. Diana was the goddess of the Ephesians. There was some thought of this even among the Israelites that Jehovah was confined to Israel. We see the results of such thinking in the account of Jonah trying to run away from God. Solomon was familiar with the Psalms (many of which were written by his father David) and David had many references to the magnitude of God. In Psalm 139:7-8 we see: "whither shall I go from thy spirit? or whither shall I flee from thy presence? if I ascend up into heaven, thou art there: if I make my bed in hell, behold, thou art there." Solomon realized that the Temple he had built was not adequate to show the magnificence or the magnitude of the Creator.

Almost as amazing as the greatness of Jehovah is the concept that He would pay any attention to the creatures on this tiny speck in the vast universe that we call earth. David had an inkling of this dichotomy in Psalm 8:3 and 4 when he wrote "when I consider Your heavens, the work of Your fingers, the moon and the stars, which You have ordained; what is man, that You are mindful of him? and the son of man, that You visit him? We say that and yet when you realize that this little speck in all of the vast universe may be the only place where there is any intelligent life (or any life at all), then this even further boggles the mind regarding what God has done and is doing.

If we could comprehend the significance of the earth (uniquely create by God), life itself (the Source of which is God), humanity (made in the image of God), and Christians (born of the Spirit of God), then we would not need to be encouraged to be in constant communication with the One Who is the originator of it all.

### Because God Responds 8:38-39

<sup>38</sup> whatever prayer or supplication is made by any man *or* by all Your people Israel, each knowing the affliction of his own heart, and spreading his hands toward this house; <sup>39</sup> then hear in heaven Your dwelling place, and forgive and act and render to each according to all his ways, whose heart You know, for You alone know the hearts of all the sons of men, 1 Kings 8:38-39 (NASB95)

In the preceding nine verses (8:29-37) regarding the fact that God listens to the prayers of people, Solomon mentioned several specifics that people might pray about. These included such things as forgiveness of individual trespasses, condemnation of the wicked, justification of the righteous, forgiveness and restoration of the nation when they go away from God, help in times of famine, and pestilence. In verse 38 Solomon sums it up by requesting that God hear the prayers of the people (either individually or by the nation as a whole) for whatever their needs might be. The caveat was that Solomon added was for the people to be convicted in their hearts

(to know the affliction or plague of their own hearts) and then turn to God by looking to the Temple as they offered up their prayers to God for help. This is essentially what John wrote in 1 John 1:9-10: “If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us of our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.” A person is not likely to confess his sins unless there is “conviction” or “knowing the affliction of his own heart.”

This conviction or sense of a burden in our hearts is there from our conscience (in the case of unregenerate man) or (additionally) from the work of the Holy Spirit for those who have been born again. If we respond to this urging then we will find we can enjoy the benefits of God in that He will hear our prayer. (There are conditions of the heart that cause God to turn a deaf ear to our prayers. The most obvious ones are regarding iniquity in our heart and asking for something that is outside of His will.) Once God hears, then we should seek His forgiveness and that His will be done in the action He takes on our behalf. We can see in Solomon request that he trusted God to take the appropriate action in accordance with what God would see in the heart of the one who prayed.

### Because Everyone Can 8:43

<sup>43</sup>hear in heaven Your dwelling place, and do according to all for which the foreigner calls to You, in order that all the peoples of the earth may know Your name, to fear You, as *do* Your people Israel, and that they may know that this house which I have built is called by Your name. 1 Kings 8:43 (NASB95)

We talk about how wise Solomon was and we see evidence of the insight he had regarding the breadth of God’s plan for mankind. Most people of his day (and most of the Israelites before and after Solomon) were very nationalistic in the view of the man’s relationship to God. Even though God told Abraham that through him all the nations of the earth would be blessed, most of the Israelites had little or no concept of this outcome that God desired to accomplish. Solomon saw this and included the “foreigners” in his prayer for God to listen to their petitions as well as those of the nation of Israel. It was Solomon’s desire that the “house” that was being dedicated that day would be used in accomplishing that purpose.

The specific thing he requested was that they may know that “this house is called by Your name.” We know that the “name” is used as a reference to the character or essence of a person. Solomon wanted the Temple to be representative of the qualities and virtues of God. How does this apply to us today? In 1 Corinthians 6:19-20 we see “Do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit, Who is in you, Whom you have received from God? You are not your own. You were bought with a price. Therefore, honor God with your body.” If we are the Temple of the Holy Spirit then we should be concerned that “this house” represents the qualities and virtues of God to those with whom we encounter every day.