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THE PRAYER LIFE: OUR EXAMPLE

Luke 11:1

No man is a whole man who does not pray. Prayer is a vital part of God's plan for man. Jesus demonstrated this. He was not only a revelation of God, but He was also a revelation of man. As the Son of Man, He left us an example to follow. Those who walked with Him always sensed that He was what they ought to be.

Each of the records of His life leave us with the picture of a man of prayer. Dr. B. H. Carroll found clear references to twenty-two different prayers in His ministry. Another has found seventeen. Regardless of the number it is evident that He spent much time in prayer.

HE IS OUR EXAMPLE IN THE PLACES FOR PRAYER IN HIS LIFE

Jesus prayed everywhere. Definitely His prayer life was not confined to religious places and occasions. There is no clear reference to His prayers in the synagogues or the temple even though surely He prayed in both. The places are the common places of life.

Much of His prayer life was while alone in some secret place. Mark records of Him, "And in the morning, rising up a great while before day, he went out, and departed into a solitary place, and there prayed." (Mark 1:35) This time of secluded prayer came in the midst of what seemed to be much outward success.

Luke adds, "And it came to pass in those days, that he went out into a mountain to pray, and continued all night in prayer to God." (Luke 6:12) It was after this long night of prayer that He chose the twelve who were to share in His ministry. The place was a mountain - - the hour was the darkness of the entire night. Alone!

The unforgettable reference to His praying alone was the Garden experience. Evidently the Garden was a favorite place of prayer. Luke is detailed in his account of this visit. "And he came out, and went as he was wont, to the mount of Olives; and his disciples followed him. And when he was at the place, he said unto them, Pray that ye enter not into temptation. And he was withdrawn from them about a stone's cast, and kneeled down, and prayed, saying, "Father, if thou be willing, remove this cup from me: nevertheless, not my will, but thine be done. And there appeared an angel unto him from heaven, strengthening him. And being in agony he prayed more earnestly; and his sweat was as it were great drops of blood falling down to the ground. And when he rose up from prayer, and was come to his disciples, he found them sleeping for sorrow, And said unto them, 'Why sleep ye? rise and pray, lest ye enter into temptation.'" (Luke 22:39-46) Is that not beautiful? The place was familiar but alone. Our Lord liked secret places for prayer. Every follower who bears His name should have a secret place where he meets God.

Jesus spent time praying with a small group especially with the twelve. It was after praying with them that they asked the question about prayer. "And it came to pass, that, as he was praying in a certain place, when he ceased, one of his disciples said unto him,

Lord, teach us to pray, as John also taught his disciples." (Luke 11:1) This led to His great lessons on prayer. It was while Jesus was praying with an even smaller group, Peter, James, and John, that He was transfigured before them. "And it came to pass about eight days after these sayings, he took Peter and John and James, and went up into a mountain to pray. And as he prayed, the fashion of his countenance was altered, and his raiment was white and glistening." (Luke 9:28, 29) Is your life linked to a small prayer unit? It could be a supreme blessing to your life.

But Jesus also prayed publicly. The multitudes also heard Him pray. With more than five thousand looking on, He blessed the bread with a prayer of thanksgiving before breaking it. (Mark 6:41) The most public prayer of all was one of His last. Actually there were three prayers uttered from the cross. Each of them was heard by the crowd standing by. Jesus would not allow the presence of a multitude to intimidate Him. He could speak with His heavenly Father in the presence of others.

Reading the record of our Lord's prayer life leaves you with two impressions about the places He prayed. One is that He could pray anywhere. A mountain, a garden, a street, and even a cross could become a prayer room for Him. The other is that He prayed often. Jesus was much at prayer. In both of these things He is our example.

HE IS OUR EXANPLE IN THE PATTERNS FOR PRAYER IN HIS LIFE

No one word can describe the prayers of His life. His pattern of prayer is just as instructive for us as the words He spoke concerning prayer.

Prayer for Him was often an expression of thanksgiving. The multiplying of the loaves was marked by an expression of thanks. "And when he had taken the five loaves and the two fishes, he looked up to heaven, and blessed, and brake the loaves, and gave them to his disciples to set before them; and the two fishes divided he among them." (Mark 6:41) Lifting up the eyes was an expression describing prayer. It was God that was blessed, not the food. A similar occasion for prayer was at the last supper. "And he took bread, and gave thanks, and brake it, and gave unto them." (Luke 22:19) Food must be received with thanksgiving.

Matthew records one of His most beautiful prayers of thanksgiving. "At that time, Jesus answered and said, I thank thee, O Father, Lord of heaven and earth, because thou hast hid these things from the wise and prudent, and hast revealed them unto babes. Even so, Father: for so it seemed good in thy sight." (Matthew 11:35,36) This was the spirit of our Lord's life so it expressed itself in His prayer life. Our prayer closet must ever be the place of much praise unto God.

In the life of Jesus prayer was communion with the Father. About His baptism Luke records, "Now when all the people were baptized, it came to pass, that Jesus also being baptized, and praying, the heaven was opened." (Luke 3:21) We are not told of any matter of prayer in view here. It may have been just an expression of His communion

with the Father about His ministry. The prayer on the mount that resulted in the transfiguration may have been this kind of experience. (Luke 9:29) Prayer was not the only time our Lord had communion with the Father in heaven it was just an expression of the abiding experience of His life.

Jesus took counsel from the Father through prayer. Before all of the major events of His life He was found in prayer. At His baptism He prayed. Before He chose the twelve He spent the night in prayer. (Luke 6:21) Before He questioned them about the direction of His ministry, Luke records, "And it came to pass, as he was alone praying, his disciples were with him: and he asked them saying, "Whom say the people that I am?" (Luke 9:18) This was one of the turning points in His ministry. He will not turn it without much prayer.

Prayer was always commitment for Jesus. There was never a moment of His life when He was not utterly committed to doing the will of the Father, yet often in prayer He affirmed this. The experience of prayer in the shadows of the garden was an expression of commitment. When He prays, "Thy will be done", He is committing Himself afresh to the will of His Father in heaven.

One cannot adequately consider the prayer life of Jesus without noting the many references to prayer as intercession for Him. He prayed often for others. Many of the miracles of mercy were preceded by a prayer-sigh before the Father that brought the manifestation of power. He prayed for Lazarus before his resurrection. (John 11: 41,42).

He promised to pray for Peter before his trial of faith. (Luke 22:32). He prayed for His enemies from His cross. (Luke 23:34) He prayed for all of us in the famous priestly prayer that John records. (John 17) The flow of the prayers of Jesus was for others; none of His prayers were for any selfish interest.

What is your response to the great example of prayer given to us in the life of our Lord? Does your heart respond by acknowledging that this is the kind of life you want to live? Mine does! But is it possible for us to live that kind of life? It is! You and I can be a people of prayer. The same Holy Spirit that inspired the life of Jesus into a life of prayer abides in our hearts. He is a spirit of supplication. The secret of our becoming such a person of prayer is in yielding to His moment by moment influence. He will make us a people of prayer.

The place to begin is by a confession of your neglect of this privilege. Our neglect of prayer is sin. It is sin because it comes short of this pattern given to us by the Father. Confess your guilt and seek the fullness of the ministry of the Holy Spirit in your life. He is the spirit of supplication. He is your helper in prayer.