

DAY 1 - (week beginning Mon 6 May 2019)**Read - Philippians 4:4-9**

“Do not be anxious about anything, but in every situation, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God.” v 5-6

This week we continue our series on the ‘Care of the Soul’ where we will focus on those activities that we can do to care for our soul. We started with Scripture and this week we focus on Prayer.

This week my home group finished a study of a book on prayer by Bill Hybels “Too Busy not to Pray”, so most of this week’s notes will be based on insights from that book. The first point he makes is that our picture (understanding) of God needs to be correct, if we are to have a positive prayer life.

Paul wants the Philippians to know that God invites them into His presence to present their requests to Him in prayer. Our God wants us to pray to Him; to engage with Him; to know His presence; and to know that our God is willing and able to do anything.

It is sometimes difficult to come to God in prayer when we feel unworthy or feel that God will not be interested in what I want. But that is not a Biblical picture of God and is one that we have made up for ourselves.

Our loving, merciful, gracious, forgiving God encourages each of us to come to Him with our concerns and prayers.

This understanding of God is vital to our prayer life and so we have to start there.

Prayer: Father, please help me to know Your love and mercy and forgiveness at the very depth of my being.

DAY 2**Read - Matthew 6:5-15**

“But when you pray, go into your room, close the door and pray to your Father, who is unseen. Then your Father, who sees what is done in secret, will reward you.” v 6

Bill Hybels then discusses the need for us to develop ‘heart-building habits’. Habits that draw us in to a deeper relationship with our God.

He summarises these habits as follows:

- **Pray regularly:** Jesus said “When you pray”, not “If you pray”. We develop a deeper relationship with anyone if we engage with them in conversation regularly.
- **Pray privately:** While corporate prayer is a good thing, it is not private and personal. If we want to develop our relationship with God, we need to engage in one-to-one conversations with Him.
- **Pray sincerely:** We should move beyond formulas or structured, repetitive prayers and rather pray openly and honestly, telling God what is on our heart.
- **Pray specifically:** I often catch myself praying that God will bless someone. That is not nearly as effective as praying specifically for what is needed.

Most of these habits will come more naturally if we can see prayer as merely engaging in conversation with God, rather than trying to make our prayers sound right. God wants us to merely talk to Him and let Him talk to us.

Prayer: Father, please help me grow in prayer.

DAY 3**Read - Luke 11:1-13**

“When you pray, say: Our Father ...” v 2

Yesterday we said that prayer should be natural, like normal conversation with someone else. Nevertheless it is useful sometimes for us to put a bit of structure in our prayers. The reason for this is that we have a tendency to fall back into repetitive requests.

So Bill Hybels recommends that we try to put in some structure by using a pattern like ACTS.

A stands for adoration and means we focus on how great our God is, and this ‘sets the tone for our entire prayer’. It reminds us of who we are and Who we are speaking to. It is not that God needs us to affirm Him before He listens, but rather that we need to affirm God’s greatness to put us in the right place to engage further.

C stands for confession. Once we gain clarity on the greatness of our God, we then realise how unworthy we are to be in His presence – except that He makes us worthy through forgiveness of our sins. This cleanses us to proceed further.

T stands for thanksgiving, where we can thank God for what He has done; for all the good things in our life that come from being His child.

S stands for supplication, which means asking. We get the opportunity to make requests of God. We know that our God is capable of doing anything and so we take the opportunity to bring our requests to Him.

Think: Do you structure your prayers. If not do you think using one would make them deeper?

DAY 4**Read - Mark 10:35-40***"You don't know what you are asking". v 38*

Bill Hybels then moves on to discuss 'the hurt of unanswered prayer'. We are told in Matthew 21:21 that we can move mountains with prayer, but I think we all struggle to understand why prayers seemingly aren't always answered.

Bill says there 4 possible ways God answers prayer: No, Slow, Grow or Go!

"No" is the answer when our prayers are wrong. Jesus answered James and John's request this way. What they were asking was inappropriate. Jesus gave up all glory in order to come to earth to die for our sins, and here the disciples were asking for personal glory. This was not Jesus' way and so he said "no". Our requests could be wrong if our motives are wrong or if God would not be glorified. God is simply too loving to say yes to something that would produce harm (in us or others).

"Slow" is the answer when the timing is not right for whatever reason.

"Grow" is the answer when there is something in our lives that needs to be sorted out first. That is why we always need to do some inner searching if our prayers are not answered.

"Go" is the answer when we are aligned with God in our request.

Bill makes the point that as parents we have to answer 'No' or "Not now" or "When you are older" to our kids, so why do we feel it is a problem when God says the same to us?

Prayer: Lord help me understand Your replies.

DAY 5**Read - James 4:1-10***"You desire but do not have ... You do not have because you do not ask God." v 2*

We spoke yesterday of why God sometimes seems to not grant our requests. Ultimately we need to allow God to be God and to make decisions that are good for us, that we don't understand. If we don't think that He knows best then we need to go back to day 1 and start redefining our picture of God.

Bill Hybels then goes on to look at 'prayer-busters' – things that can get in the way of effective, answered prayer:

The first is 'prayerlessness' as James tells us. A regular, routine time of prayer plus a constant awareness of God's presence is the start.

Second is 'unconfessed sin' – "your iniquities have separated you from your God; your sins have hidden his face from you, so that he will not hear." Isa 59:2

Third is 'Unresolved relational conflict' – "First go and be reconciled to them; then come and offer your gift." Matt 5:24

Fourth is 'selfishness' – "When you ask, you do not receive, because you ask with wrong motives" Jam 4:3

Finally there is 'uncaring attitudes' – "on the day of your fasting, you do as you please and exploit all your workers ... You cannot fast as you do today and expect your voice to be heard on high. Isa 58:3

Some introspection is always good.

Prayer: Search me O God.

DAY 6**Read - John 14:20-27***"But the Advocate, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you all things and will remind you of everything I have said to you." v 26*

Bill Hybels concludes his book with two important final points.

Firstly, we need to slow down if we are to pray effectively. Yes, we can pray at any time and in any place, but if we don't have a quiet place that we go to regularly for prayer and can slow down, our prayers will be less effective.

His second point follows on from the first. One of the real joys of prayer is when it becomes a real dialogue – we talk to God and we 'hear' Him talking back to us: guiding, advising, leading, comforting, blessing.

Listening is an essential part of a good prayer life. In times of quiet prayer we will often find that 'leadings' come from God. Sometimes it a person who comes to mind, or an issue you are grappling with or something that you feel you need to do.

Bill makes the point that our eternal destiny, our assurance as a Christian, our spiritual growth and our life plans are determined by how we respond to these leadings. These leadings come from reading the Bible, through others or from the Holy Spirit.

However they come, we will miss them if we never have a quiet, still time of conversation with God on a regular basis. Prayer is a vital element of the care for our souls.

Prayer: Father, please help me hear You.