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Readers' Service

'To Help You To Pray'

by

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Number: 2

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'TO HELP YOU TO PRAY'

ORDER OF SERVICE

CALL TO WORSHIP:

There is no place where God is not, wherever I go, there God is. Now and always he upholds me with his power and keeps me safe in his love.

HYMN NO: 15 (H&P) - 'Praise the Lord! Ye heavens, adore him'.

(Explanation about the form the prayers will take)

We will use our hands to help us to pray in our worship. We can think of our hands as our personal prayer 'book'.

In our opening prayers we will use the left hand. You may like to hold each finger in turn as the theme associated with that finger is offered.

The thumb is for praise. Then comes the finger we sometimes use to point in accusation. It is for Confession. The middle finger stands above the rest. That is for Thanksgiving. The third finger is the weakest. We ask God for his Help. The little finger reminds us to listen as well as talk in prayer.

LET US PRAY:

The thumb is nearest to us. (PAUSE). We praise you, O God, we acknowledge you to be the Lord. You are holy, you are strong, you are great, you are the most high, you are Almighty. But you are not far away but very near to us in Jesus. We praise you that you are joy, you are life, you are peace, you are faith, you are love.

Yet the pointing finger reminds us, Lord, that we are not like you. Our conscience condemns us, we stand accused of committing sins of thought, word and deed. We have not loved you as we ought and we have hurt others. But when we are truly sorry, you freely forgive us in Jesus, our Saviour. (PAUSE).

So above all, as we hold the middle finger, we must thank you for your goodness to us. All your good gifts, in the world around us, through our families and friends and in the service of your church, refresh and renew our lives. Thank you Lord God for loving us each one so much, supremely in the gift of Jesus to us.

For the weakest finger reminds us of how much we need your help. We are weak and confused so often. The hurts of life can multiply. Gladness yes but sadness too. Without you, Lord, we would be lost. So come to us now, meet our deep needs, help us to believe again. Move swiftly to our aid as you always promise. (PAUSE).

And now as we think of the little finger, we spend a few moments in quietness, asking that we may know God in our time of worship, that he might speak to us individually and that we might receive his grace. (A BRIEF TIME OF SILENCE).

Hear our prayers, Heavenly Father, and answer them in the name of Jesus Christ, our Saviour, Lord and friend. Amen.

Old Testament Lesson: 2 Chronicles 6:18-21

King Solomon's prayer at the dedication of the temple includes a recognition that though God is far above us yet he is always ready to hear us when we pray.

HYMN NO: 549 (H&P) - 'Jesus, where'er thy people meet'.

Lesson from the Epistle: 1 Peter 4:7-11

(Whichever version you use, point out that the theme of the service and sermon 'TO HELP YOU TO PRAY', is the Revised English Bible translation of part of verse 7).

Peter reminds his readers that the Christian life is not an either/or but a both/and. It is both words of prayer and deeds of care.

The Gospel Reading: Matthew 6:5-13

Jesus teaches us about true prayer and gives us the timeless and precious truths of the Lord's Prayer.

**HYMN NO: 551 (H&P) - 'Lord, teach us how to pray aright' or
NO: 559 (H&P) - 'What a friend we have in Jesus'.**

SERMON (SEE ATTACHED SHEETS)

HYMN NO: 719 Part 2 (Verses 5-7) (H&P) - 'Pray, without ceasing pray'.

LET US PRAY:

We use the right hand to help us in our prayers of intercession. The thumb is nearest to us. So we pray to the Lord for our nearest and dearest, for our loved ones, members of our families and our close friends. We ask God to bless the family of his church, especially this congregation of which we are a part. (BRIEF PAUSE).

The pointing finger is also used to show the way. We pray for all who teach, in schools and all kinds of learning institutions. We pray for those who seek to guide others in the life of the church; for ministers, local preachers and leaders of worship; for those responsible for the organisations in our church and circuit, who guide through meetings for fellowship and in work amongst children and young people. Father, may they show clearly Jesus, who is the Way. (BRIEF PAUSE).

The middle finger stands tall. We pray for those who stand out in the life of our country and the world. We ask that leaders of the nations and those whose decisions affect the lives of many may be worthy of their responsibilities to others and have the humility to seek wisdom from God. Especially do we pray for true leadership in the situation in (mention current areas of concern).

The next finger is the weakest. We pray for those who are ill or sad, anxious or afraid. We pray for anyone known to us who has been recently bereaved or had a bad shock. We pray God's comfort for people troubled with worries about a family member or job or money or security. We pray in quietness for a moment, holding those in need in our minds before God. We make mention quietly of (SHORT TIME OF SILENCE).

Finally Jesus told us to pray for ourselves. As we hold on to the little finger, last but not least, we offer ourselves to God and pray that we may be trusting and obedient, faithful and loving in his service all the days of our lives. Lord teach us to pray. We gather up all our prayers in the prayer Jesus taught us.

THE LORD'S PRAYER

NOTICES AND OFFERTORY

PRAYER OF DEDICATION:

With our gifts, O God, we offer ourselves so that both gifts and givers may be used for the service of the church and blessing for others.

HYMN NO: 269 (H&P) - 'O Jesus, King most wonderful'.

BLESSING:

May the Lord lead us when we go, and keep us when we sleep and talk with us when we wake; and may the peace of God, which passes all understanding, keep our hearts and minds in Christ Jesus our Lord. Amen.

SERMON

Text: 1 Peter Chapter 4 Verse 7

‘..... TO HELP YOU TO PRAY’.

A nun in South Wales tells this story against herself. She had filled her shopping trolley at the local supermarket near to her convent in a hurry. Suddenly she panicked, wondering if she had enough money to pay for everything. In desperation, she emptied all the items on to the floor and, kneeling down, added up the prices as she checked them back into the trolley. Just then, a young supervisor strolled over, bent down and whispered, *‘You can pray as much as you like, Sister, but we are not reducing those prices’.*

Of course she wasn't praying. Had she been however, it is plain that her state of mind would have made her prayer much less effective. All of us want help to pray, as the text puts it. But Peter reminds us of essential preconditions. Our approach to life, and our frame of mind are very important in determining the way we pray.

The Revised English Bible spells it out clearly. *‘To help you to pray you must lead self-controlled and sober lives’.* There are a variety of meanings to this phrase. One is *‘keep your heads’.* This denotes the necessary attitude of a cool head and a balanced mind, these being the opposite of a panic-stricken, desperate plea for divine aid. Another way of putting it is William Barclay's paraphrase *‘preserve your prayer life by not being frivolous, selfish and irresponsible’.* Two more interpretations stress the importance of a positive approach to prayer. We see the things of this life in true proportion because we see them in the light of eternity. Or, we seek to achieve a disciplined life in order to promote our growth in fellowship with God.

So we must be serious in our commitment to prayer. But it still leaves in the air any practical response to the text's statement **‘TO HELP YOU TO PRAY’.** Just what is prayer? Here are three suggestions. Prayer is more a way of life than a way with words. Prayer is a sort of *‘sharing listening’* rather than a *‘shopping listing’.* Prayer is linking in love not labouring under loads.

(1) Prayer is more a way of life than a way with words

Many Christians can get overwhelmed by the thought of prayer. They give up attempts to pray because they assume that it is only the orators and the eloquent who can be effective. But most of us do not have a way with words. We may feel tongue-tied and stupid. We would run a mile if someone asked us to pray out loud. So we feel guilty and failures. We are not praying-type people.

Such feelings are misplaced. Prayer is really an expression of our relationship with God. That means that the living of our daily life in an awareness of the nearness of God is prayer. Of course we need to use words. But who would dream of talking to their family and friends as if they were addressing a public meeting? In conversation we use ordinary, simple, down-to-earth words. We

need to do the same in prayer and there are many helpful books of prayers to enable us to do it naturally.

Yet prayer is more importantly a way of life. As such it does not need words all the time. When our hearts are stirred by lovely scenery or beautiful music or breathtaking artistry; when we catch a glimpse of a child's smile, a brave deed or a gracious character; and when, aware of these things, we are also somehow aware of God providing and offering these blessings, that too is prayer. Whenever something moves you towards God in Jesus, whenever in the midst of daily life we feel grateful or forgiving or loving that is prayer. Brother Lawrence could feel as close to God at the kitchen sink as he could at communion. His book of meditations is called *'The Practice of the Presence of God'*. That is prayer. So prayer is more a way of life than a way with words. In that sense, all of us may be praying each day more than we may have realised.

(2) Prayer is a sort of 'sharing listening' rather than 'shopping listing'.

One of the secrets of successful supermarket shopping, according to a consumer organisation, is; make a list and stick to it. Some hope! Supermarkets are designed to promote impulse buying. Nonetheless, people do make an effort to prepare a shopping list of necessary requirements. But having ready our prepared *'shopping list'* of requests and demands for God is no way to understand the depth and richness of prayer. Prayer is not just asking for things that I want. Of course Jesus encouraged us to ask our heavenly Father for what we need but the Lord's Prayer sets that in the context of the much wider, comprehensive nature of prayer.

If we are to go further on in the life of prayer, it must therefore be a *'sharing listening'*. It must be a dialogue not a monologue of our complaints and wants. We must be prepared to listen to what God wants to say to us.

It is said that on the night of the tragedy of the Titanic's sinking, many passengers had apparently been jamming the wireless with unimportant messages. As a result, other ships broadcasting urgent iceberg warnings could not get through. In our praying, can God get through to us?

After all, it would be an insult to the loving relationship we have with our partner or a close friend if we monopolised the conversation and never let them get a word in edgeways. Or, as sometimes happens, you get two people talking to each other but on different tracks. Neither is really listening to what the other is saying. Neither is taking the conversation further by listening and responding. With the goal of the end of the story fixed firmly in their sights, they will get through telling it by hook or by crook. The other person is just an irrelevance.

In prayer, however, if you do not listen you are not praying, you are just talking. Whilst asking is, of course, an important element in prayer, more essential is a spirit of seeking to be in tune with God. We need to allow ourselves to come under the searchlight of God's love. We must open our hearts and minds to the promptings of his Spirit. We should seek to converse with God and express our relationship with him in terms of *'not my will but yours be done'*. Prayer is *'sharing listening'*, not *'shopping listing'*.

(3) Prayer is linking in love not labouring under loads

Someone once advised a young Christian *'don't make a trial of your religion'*. We make our Christianity into a burden if we get overwhelmed by the problems of prayer. How does prayer work? Does God listen? How will He answer? Does intercession do any good? The answer is to trust that God intends our prayers to be opportunities not problems and get on with praying. Labouring under such loads stifles our freedom as children of God and frustrates the liberty we should feel in being privileged to be used by him. He wants us to pray - the rest is up to him. Properly understood, that is such a relief. The welfare of the world and individuals is God's responsibility not ours. We trust that he knows what he is doing. He loves the people we are concerned about far more than the sum total of every human being's love. So trust him and make yourself available to be used by him. Instead of labouring under the loads of responsibility and worry, look on prayer as linking in love.

A helpful illustration of intercessory prayer is to think of it as reaching out with both hands. With one hand, we imagine holding the hand of God. With the other hand, we imagine holding on to the person we are praying for. The connection is made. Our prayer enables us to be a channel through whom God's blessing may touch the life of another. Such prayer does not need to be elaborate. We read newspapers, we watch television, we listen to radio, we meet people every day. A tragedy or crisis is mentioned. We learn of individuals caught up in suffering or anxiety. In our minds we offer them to God in a few seconds. That is prayer, linking in love.

On a number of occasions in his letters, Paul says *'I make mention of you in my prayers'*. (A V Romans 1:9, Ephesians 1:16, 1 Thessalonians 1:2). Make mention - not a long catalogue of what others need, for God knows that already. But just breathing their name before God; and the lockgates open and the flood of God's blessing flows. We make the link in love. We help to make the prayer *'make me a channel of your peace'* come true.

'TO HELP YOU TO PRAY'. By God's grace we can when prayer is seen as a way of life, a *'sharing listening'* and a linking in love.