

The Privilege of Prayer

Richard Foster wrote “Prayer is an invitation with my name on it”.

“It is an invitation to come home to where we belong.”

(Prayer – finding the heart’s true home. From the introduction)

It is also an invitation to ‘delighting ourselves in the Lord.’ (Psalm 37:4)

It is an invitation to ‘come boldly to the throne of grace.’ (Hebrews 4:14-16)

It is an invitation to ‘feasting in the presence of our enemies’. (Psalm 23:5)

It is an invitation to ‘partnership in the gospel.’ (John 15:15-16)

Prayer is an invitation with my name on it.

I have lately been grabbed by a sense of the *privilege* of prayer. I was watching a DVD that left me saying WOW, ohhh WOW! It is called ‘The Privileged Planet.’ (Ask at Christian book stores) Scientist and astronomers discuss and diagram the likelihood of there being other planets that can support life. They have devised criteria for life to exist – temperature, water, chemical components, distance from the sun, the size of our moon etc; and they demonstrate that if just one element was bigger or smaller by even a fraction then our planet would die. It is extraordinary to contemplate. They arrive at the view that we are a unique planet - a privileged planet and they infer we are designed for a special purpose. As I watched I kept thinking ‘how astonishing...how incredible... but there’s more... much more to this!’

We are privileged because we are human beings created in God’s image.

We are also privileged because we are a visited planet - our creator has come down to live among us and reveal the Father to us.

And that is only the beginning of the story.

I’ve been reading and chewing on a most helpful book called ‘The Rest of the Gospel – when the partial Gospel has worn you out’ (by Dan Stone and David Gregory – available on this web site) – where the writer describes in such an understandable way what it means to *rest* in the death and resurrection of Jesus for us – and how we live the life by resting in his life in us. It is the reality of ‘It is no longer I, but Christ who lives in me.’ And again a sense of the privilege of ‘Christ in us’ has brought tears to my eyes. Another holy WOW!

So how does this sense of incredible privilege affect prayer?

In recent years I have begun to believe that we do ourselves a disservice by thinking too often in terms of the *mechanics* of prayer. We *should* do this – we must avoid that. I am convinced a lot of people feel more guilt about prayer than joy in their prayer. ‘I know I don’t pray enough,’ is the most common response to a question about prayer. I usually respond – ‘What is ‘enough’? How will you know when you do pray enough?’

In Genesis we see the picture of working in partnership with God during the day – being his agents in the world, and then fellowshiping with him as they walked and talked ‘in the cool of the evening’. Looks very simple, doesn’t it - partnership and fellowship. I think we have somehow made it complicated – and that it is much simpler than we imagine.

Prayer is an invitation with my name on it; an invitation to fellowship and to partnership.

Prayer is a privilege – as we daily walk and talk and work with our God.

How we do that is hugely varied – *delightfully* varied. I think the key is to explore, to search, and find the ways that make him real for you. If things dry up, look at different ways to encounter God. I call them different doorways. For example if certain music lifts you to contemplate the Lord – use it as often as you need.

I have also found that prayer has a number of *motivations* – and when we attend to them – prayer flows much more naturally.

There is firstly the motivation of thankfulness.

After watching the DVD and reading the book mentioned above, I just kept saying ‘Wow- thank you Lord... how amazing – how wonderful.’ I didn’t need to wait for an appointment with God –

no liturgy or set prayers – there was just a *welling up of the heart* at any time of the day or night. Thankfulness awakens our hearts to the greater reality of the Kingdom and all the blessings that are ours in Christ Jesus. And it becomes an antidote to the ‘cares and worries of this world’ – to the confusions and disappointments of life. We are lifted up to see with new eyes. It is part of ‘feasting in the presence of our enemies’.

Whatever is against us – whatever stretches us or oppresses us or confuses us – what we are thankful for will reduce ‘the enemy’ or the trial to size and realign it to its place at the periphery of our vision. Dan Stone writes:

“In this seen and temporal realm we are privileged people. We are given the privilege of seeing life as God sees it. We see that he is moving all things and events for the redemption and the filling of our lives and others’ lives. There is not a single event in our life that God cannot use either to bring us to him or to cause his glory to shine through, causing someone else to see God in the way we handle a situation.
p.134 The Rest of the Gospel

Thankfulness is part of ‘keeping our eyes fixed on Jesus, on whom our faith depends from start to finish.’ (Hebrews 12:2) If prayer is dry for you, try a day, a *whole* day of simple thankfulness... for the people you meet, the things you see, the everyday things of life.

I think a second motivation to prayer is *helplessness*.

We have no problem crying ‘Help Lord!’ when danger threatens or we are stymied or stuck. The thing is we do not know just *how* helpless we are to live a life that pleases our Father and produces ‘fruit that lasts’. Of ourselves we cannot do it. But his life that resides in us, has already done it. The more we are aware of our helplessness, the more we will lean into Jesus within. It is a wonderfully, refreshing and restful way to live.

Helplessness leads to restfulness, (I can’t, you can) which leads to expectancy, (What will you do next, Lord?) which leads to joy – to an overflow of praise. For many years I felt I had to be ‘superwoman’ and not let anyone down; always be available, be strong for others. It was not until I experienced burnout that I accepted that helplessness is part of walking with God.

Prayers of dependency are prayers of faith and expectancy. This is throwing wide the door to inspired, joyful living. Oh that we would see our helplessness as a huge blessing - and surrender to his way of abiding in him and living out of his life. It is so restful.

I am enjoying listening to a woman in my small group who is a rather feisty character, direct and blunt, says what is on her mind freely. She has some testing situations in her extended family relating to her elderly mother. Week after week she comes and sighs and tells us the latest drama with her siblings... then says ‘I was getting so stressed, but I remembered to just lean back into Jesus and let his peace hold me... and I came through it without blowing up!’ We need him more than we think. Telling him what he is in us, reminding ourselves of his adequacy as ‘Christ in us’ is a great way to pray as our day unfolds.

There is a third motivation for prayer. It is *partnership*. We are partnering with God in the advancement of his Kingdom of love. What a privilege, what an incredible honour. One of the greatest hindrances to responding with joy to this honour is self-consciousness. We push this away with ‘I don’t have anything to offer’ ‘I am not a good speaker’ ‘I can’t...’ ‘I am not like her, or him...’ The Lord says ‘You are *exactly* the person I need for the job I had planned long, long ago – and I have all the tools and resources you will need – so let’s go!’ “Ah... but....”

What if we responded instead with a sense of privilege?

“What an honour – to work with the Creator of the universe, the redeemer of this world – in partnership with him.”

“I no longer call you servants, but friends, because I am sharing with you what is on the Father’s heart. I chose you to bear fruit, fruit that will last for eternity.” John 15:15

Doesn’t this incredible honour give us lots to talk about with him.

“Lord – what are you about today, in the lives of the people I meet? What can I do to make your love known to them? How can you and I partner together to affect eternity?”

So much to talk about!

We are watching with excitement the steady progression into the Kingdom of a once selfish, foolish 40 year old, typical 'bloke' with an obsession about money. It began when his wife came to me for some career coaching and shared as well her distress at how her husband was behaving. We had a number of sessions with them both – but he was very off-hand and seemed impervious to anything we said. We prayed for them often over that time. But they stopped coming, and she reported to me later that they were planning to divorce, and he was flouncing about with a younger woman.

Then out of the blue, a few weeks ago (after about 8 months) he rang my husband and said 'You were right David. I have seen it now. Can I come and talk with you.' He has come weekly to talk and pray, with tears. He is in a deep repentance over his life towards his wife and all the family. He has even been around them all to apologise and help them understand why they are back together. David is pointing him to the forgiveness of God and the work of the cross for him, and he is now praying and reading his Bible. What a joy, what a privilege! The privilege of partnership... we are provoked to pray for them day after day. This is exciting.

What is on the heart of God for the people in your life?

Joni Grace Powers wrote "*Our success or failure as his people depends on our openness to the movement of the Holy Spirit, who aligns our hearts with the heart of God.*" Aligns... it is so important that we are aligned and in touch with what the Father is doing, so we can partner with him.

Prayer is an invitation with our name on it.

Prayer is a conversation about the abundant goodness of God in our everyday lives.

Prayer is resting in him and joyfully expecting his life to flow through us.

Prayer is discussing what he is about in the world we live in and work in, and hearing his heart for redemption.

What an honour! What a privilege! Let us come boldly to the throne of grace. That place of authority and mercy. Boldly - anytime – anywhere. The door is wide open – it has been that way since Calvary. Our failures do not shut the door – just as our successes do not open it. Jesus opened it – and keeps it open. How glorious! There is no need to hesitate, or hang back, ever. Prayer is a privilege, an honour.

Let me give you one practical suggestion.

Pray the Scriptures. Don't just expect spontaneous prayer to always be happening. The pump often needs to be primed.

Here's a simple pattern when you have a Scripture passage:

Say it – aloud, strongly – with your heart and soul in it.

Savour it – take small pieces; a phrase, a word, and say them slowly a number of times.

Swallow it – give thanks for what you are savouring.

Then *stand in it* – as long as you need – all day, all week. Keep saying these phrases, keep thanking him.

This is prayer. This is our privilege.

Kath Wells

www.prayerchangeslives.org.nz