

The house wrapped around me, dark and gloomy. I tip-toed into the lounge room, ignoring Burt, our labrador retriever, and settled on the couch.

It was peculiar being alone with God. No church rituals. Just me, and God, for an hour. I glanced at my watch and cleared my throat. "Well, God, here I am. Now what?"

A Warm Presence

I would like to report that God replied immediately, but there was only quiet.

As I watched the first tinges of sunrise, I tried to pray, but thought instead of my son, Andy, and the fight we'd had the day before. I thought about a client whose business had hit a rough spot. I thought of inconsequential things.

Yet gradually my erratic thoughts slowed down. My breathing slowed, too. I began to sense a stillness within me. I grew aware of small sounds - the refrigerator hum, Burt's tail slapping the floor, a branch brushing a window.

Then I felt the warm presence of Love. I know no other way to describe it.

The air, the very place in which I sat, seemed to change, as the ambience of a house will change when someone you love comes home.

I had been sitting for 50 minutes but only then did I really begin to pray. And I discovered that I wasn't praying with my usual hurried words or my list of demands.

All my life I'd been told that God loved me. On that day I experienced His love, and the immensity of it was so overwhelming that I sat in quiet thanksgiving for nearly fifteen minutes.

Then Andy's alarm went off and Burt gave a small 'woof'. The ordinary day had begun. But all through the rest of the day I felt warmed by the memory of that love.

One More Day ...

The next morning the house seemed even darker and colder than before. But, shivering, I did get up. 'One more day', I thought. And the next day, one more day.

Day by single day, many years have now passed. There have been plenty of crises in those years: difficulty with one of our teenagers, marital turbulence, a big financial loss. Through every crisis, I have found a quietness of soul in that hour with God. It gives me time to put things into perspective, to find God in every circumstance.

Once I find Him, there seems to be no problem that cannot be resolved.

On some mornings I am quickly filled with the wonder and glory of God. But on other mornings I feel nothing. That's when I remember something else Don Campbell said.

God's Waiting Room

"There will be times when your mind just won't go into God's sanctuary. That's when you spend your hour in His waiting-room. Still, you're there, and God appreciates your struggle to stay there. *What's important is the commitment.*"

Because of that commitment, my life is better. Starting my day with an hour of prayer has filled the empty space - to overflowing!

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PRAYER – Powerful and Effective

Prayer is magnificent in its simplicity, but its effect is extraordinarily powerful. Nothing on this earth can touch the power of positive, faith-inspired prayer.

“And pray in the Spirit on all occasions with all kinds of prayers and requests. With this in mind, be alert and always keep on praying for all the Lord’s people” (Eph 6:18)

Nothing in this world, or the next, can stand against someone who bathes themselves in the anointing oil of God’s Holy Spirit, through prayer.

Prayer that touches God’s heart and releases His power on earth is arguably the most essential part of our Christian walk, yet we neglect it with easy abandon - then wonder why the power is missing from our lives!

To pray is to be intimate with God, one of the highest possible things a man or woman can aspire to. To be intimate means to be at one, to share deeply, to communicate in a fashion which indicates the relationship is one based upon love, honour and respect.

We enter and maintain this intimacy through prayer, and those who are serious about prayer usually wait around long enough to hear what God has to say in return. Our lives need to be steeped in prayer, our thoughts and decisions filtered through and covered in prayer.

“To be Christ-like is to be a person who spends time in prayer”

This is not always as easy to practise as it is to discuss. Everyday life does not naturally lend itself to prayer. Time is against us. Situations that shouldn’t have prominence overshadow our thinking and eat away at time we plan to spend with the Lord.

BIBLICAL EXAMPLES

The Bible is full of miraculous stories, such as barren women bearing children and parents having dead children raised back to life; God providing miraculously when everything looked lost and hopeless. Healing of the sick and casting out of demon spirits is largely a result of prayer, in the name of Jesus, and the exercising of God-ordained authority over the works of the enemy (Mark 16:17-18; Jude 1:20).

The Prophet Elijah

Elijah was a man like us, a prophet with similar passions (James 5:17-18). He prayed that it would not rain in Israel and for 3½ years, and it didn’t rain - except by his word (1 Kings 17:1). The course of nations can be affected by one man’s prayer.

King David

David was a man of prayer who meditated regularly on God’s law (Ps 1). The Bible says that he was a man after God’s own heart (1 Sam 13:14). There are constant references in the Psalms which highlight David’s heart attitude towards prayer and worship.

Paul and Silas Acts 16:25-34

These two apostles were in prison with their feet in stocks, praying and singing hymn and worshipping God, when a great earthquake shook the prison foundations and set them all free (Acts 16:25-34) with amazing results!

GIVE GOD ONE HOUR A DAY

I have had the following article in my files for several decades and have shared with countless people. I know the author is Barbara Bartocci, because I copied her name across when the original article disintegrated from overuse. The magazine probably came from Readers Digest, which I subscribed to for many years. It is not a new article, but a challenging and moving story, almost a parable of sorts, and highly recommended reading. I trust I have given the correct credit for it in this brochure and the posted article on prayer.

One Hour That Can Change Your Life

By BARBARA BARTOCCI

It was my birthday, that wintry morning in 1978, and I felt harried as I grabbed my briefcase and headed for a business breakfast. Life had been good to me overall. My small advertising agency was thriving. My husband and children were well. Yet something seemed to be missing - something that did not even have a name. I felt it only as a small emptiness inside me.

At the restaurant I joined Don Campbell, a tall, lantern-jawed man of 60-odd years. He was a successful marketing consultant with an unusual empathy for people. I was always struck by his calm, peaceful manner.

Over the poached eggs we discussed our advertising project and then, business behind us, I mentioned my birthday and confessed to my nagging feelings of emptiness.

An Hour of Prayer

“Want to fill it?” Don asked. “Sure.” I replied.

“Start your day with an hour of prayer.”

“I don’t have time for that!” I gasped.

“Exactly what I said twenty years ago. I was head of an advertising agency, running every which way just to keep up. I believed in daily prayer but couldn’t find the time for it. I had the distinct feeling that my life was getting out of control. Then a friend told me I was going about things backwards.”

“You’re trying to fit God into your life”, he said. “Five minutes here, ten minutes there. You need to fit your life around God, and you do that with a commitment. An hour a day - now that’s commitment! The idea is to take a chunk of time big enough to mean something to you - and then give that chunk to God.”

Don’s eyes twinkled. “I thought my friend was off his rocker. To find an extra hour for God, I’d have to get up an hour earlier. I’d lose valuable sleep and ruin my health.” The twinkle turned into a grin. “But I haven’t been sick in twenty years.”

Twenty years! I left the restaurant in turmoil. An hour of prayer? Preposterous! Yet I couldn’t get the idea out of my mind.

Saying nothing to our three teenagers or to my husband, I set my alarm for 5.00am. Where we live it’s cold and dark at five o’clock on a winter morning. I wanted to curl back under the blanket, but I forced myself to get up.

Praying in Tongues

We cannot close this section on praying in the Spirit without a brief mention of the Baptism in the Holy Spirit, and of the ability to pray in new tongues which flows from this experience. Praying in tongues often defies logical explanation because it is a gift which is spiritually discerned and cannot easily be explained naturally. Once we receive our new prayer language we must not neglect it, but use it each day to develop a closer relationship with the Lord.

The ability to pray in new tongues ("*glossolalia*" in Greek), is given to us as a sign and referred to frequently in the early church records of the book of Acts. Acts 1:8; Acts 2:1-4; Acts 10:1-48 and Acts 19:1-6 are all passages worth reading on this topic.

In 1 Corinthians (chs 12-14) there is good reading for the interested student on the various gifts of the Holy Spirit. Paul mentions in these passages that he wants everyone to speak in tongues (1 Cor 4:5), and that he (Paul) speaks in tongues more than all of the Corinthians (1 Cor 14:18). It is clear from these passages that speaking in tongues is for today and should be an integral part of every believer's prayer life.

The wonderful thing about the gift of tongues is that it doesn't make any sense to our minds. We can be occupied in other activities such as driving, working around the house or garden, walking or doing almost anything, and still pray in tongues either out loud or quietly. This has a direct effect on our spirit and will cause us to be renewed and refreshed as we persevere and discipline ourselves to honour God in this simple but profound way.

As human beings we are designed to operate spiritually, and as Christians we cannot be overcomers and walk in victory on a daily basis unless we avail ourselves of this power from on high.

"But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth" (Acts 1:8)

Praying in tongues allows us to access this power direct from the Holy Spirit, and as we pray regularly and consistently in this way God will reward us for our faithfulness.

In Acts 19:1-7 Paul inquired of the small band of new Christians at Ephesus (about twelve in all) as to whether or not they had "*received the Holy Spirit when they believed ...*" It's a question we should ask today as we watch some churches use organisation and tradition as a substitute for the lack of spiritual power in their experience. Paul then proceeded to lead the Ephesian Christians into a new and thrilling experience which we call the Baptism in the Holy Spirit. They prayed in tongues and prophesied, and we know they then started to move in the power of the Holy Spirit because history tells us that many people were subsequently saved and a very large church was established in what was a key provincial city of the Roman Empire, in Asia, at that time.

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Jesus - Our Example

Jesus' life, before He was baptised by John in the Jordan is largely a mystery. We do know that by the time He embarked on His chosen ministry of preaching the gospel to the poor, meeting needs, healing wounds and releasing captives (Luke 4:18-19) He was a person well-disciplined in prayer and well versed in Scripture. He had an intimate relationship with His Father God and would often stay out all evening just charging His spiritual batteries, staying in touch with His Father and tapping into the Holy Spirit, the source of His power during His earthly ministry. Sometimes He was even ministered to by angels (Mark 1:12-13). Frequently He arose before dawn and went to a lonely place to pray.

Jesus set an example that we are to follow as closely as possible. We are told that, "*Greater works shall we do than He did*" (John 14:12), but this won't happen unless we know how to use some of the Biblical keys that He used to obtain and maintain this anointing of power from on high (Acts 1:8).

Keeping Our Spiritual Batteries Charged

When a Christian comes into relationship with Jesus Christ, through the born-again experience, it is like having dead batteries powered up for the first time, fully charged to capacity. We are suddenly off and running; feeling good and knowing God is with us. Nothing can stop us - until the batteries run low and we start to feel that maybe God has deserted us!

An active and effective prayer life is the key. Prayer is not at all complicated. It is one of the simplest commands in the Bible and everyone, even a child, can do it.

KEYS TO EFFECTIVE PRAYER

Prayer is essentially communicating with God. It is more than having a shopping list or persuading God to do what we want. It's about building a relationship with our Saviour, and there are basic principles we need to understand in order to effectively communicate with Him.

1. Dealing with Unforgiveness

Forgiveness is critical to opening a pathway to communicating with God. Coming with unforgiveness in our heart will hinder our prayers and even contaminate our relationship with Him (Matt 6:14-15). Forgiveness is a choice we need to make in order to access the throne room in prayer. It is less about how we might feel and more about being obedient to clear biblical instruction.

"And when you pray, if you hold anything against anyone, forgive them, so that your Father in heaven may forgive you your sins" (Mark 11:25)

2. Faith Must Be Present

Without faith we cannot please God (Heb 11:6), so it is an important commodity of prayer. Faith is not believing that God **CAN** do something, because we all believe that He can do **ANYTHING**. Faith is believing that God **WILL** do something (specific), for you, according to His Word. Without faith we are largely wasting our time and energy because we pray in unbelief, hoping that God hears us and that, if He hears us, then hoping He will answer. Faith **KNOWS** that He hears us, and we are therefore **CONFIDENT** we will obtain our petition according to His Word.

"Whatever you ask in prayer, you will receive, if you have faith" (Matt 21:22)

3. Be Single-Minded

When we pray we must believe that God is there, and that He hears us. Do not doubt or fear, which is unbelief. These things have the opposite effect on God to the one we are seeking. Strive at all times to be a person of single vision and focus, and avoid double-mindedness (James 1:6; 4:8). Expect an answer and expect it to be good (Matt 7: 9-11). Mark these words carefully - ***you will get exactly what you expect and more besides***. This principle is spiritual and works equally well in the negative as it does in the positive (Job 3:25).

4. Pray According To His Word

Prayer must be subject to God's Word, and His revealed will for our lives. Faith is so powerful that it can have a tendency to twist the arm of God into granting us petitions that are not in our best interest. If we are unwise we will pray according to the flesh and not according to the Spirit. When we are not sure what to pray we should find out before we pray, or ask God to show us so that we can direct our prayers positively in the direction He wants us to go.

And this is the confidence that we have toward him, that if we ask anything according to his will he hears us. And if we know that He hears us in whatever we ask, we know that we have the requests that we have asked of him" (John 5:14-15)

5. Be Persistent

When we have done all we can to ensure that we are operating in faith, with a positive confession according to God's Word for our lives, then we must wait upon God for His answer expectantly. This is often the final test that we must go through before God releases His abundance into our lives. It is also a most difficult time because we must hold onto something intangible - a word, a vision, a desire, a goal. Yet hold onto it we must, until it comes to pass (Luke 8:1-8).

Sometimes God tests our perseverance, other times the enemy is resisting us (Dan 10:10-21). No matter what the reason for any delay, trust God to bring the answer to your prayer, according to His time scale, and not necessarily ours.

Ask, and it will be given to you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you. For everyone who asks receives, and the one who seeks finds, and to the one who knocks it will be opened" (Matt 7:7-8)

6. Praying In The Spirit

The Bible indicates strongly that "praying in the Spirit is an important part of any healthy and effective prayer life.

"Likewise the Spirit helps us in our weakness. For we do not know what to pray for as we ought, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us with groanings too deep for words" (Rom 8:26)

Praying in the Spirit is a term that can refer to spiritual warfare, and we will speak to that point shortly. Essentially it means being in harmony with the will of God. The Spirit knows God's will and can interpret this to us if we allow Him to do so. This requires us to develop a close and intimate prayer life.

"Praying at all times in the Spirit, with all prayer and supplication" (Eph 6:18a)

Learning to Listen to God

So the challenge for believers is to hook into what the Holy Spirit is wanting us to focus on. This means not just petitioning Him with our needs or requests for others, which are valid prayers at times, but also spending time listening to what He has to say. Real, effective prayer is about spending time building an intimate relationship with our Lord and Saviour, via the Holy Spirit.

Ps 46:10 asks us to ***"Be still and know that I am God"***. Spending time in His presence waiting on Him and be open to what he wants to share with us. This is often hard to do in our busy world with all its distractions, but it is very necessary. Our Christian walk requires us to be in relationship with God, and to be sensitive to what He might want to say or do through us at any given time.

Spiritual Warfare

Spiritual Warfare is a topic on its own, and it is an important aspect of a healthy prayer life. The Bible says that we do not war against flesh and blood, but against spiritual forces that are arrayed against us and will do everything in their power to frustrate both the will of God and His plan for our lives.

"For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the cosmic powers over this present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places" (Eph 6:12)

When we pray in the Spirit we access the authority Jesus has following His death and resurrection. All authority now rests in the head of the Church, who is Jesus our Lord.

"And Jesus came and said to them, 'All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me'" (Matt 28:18)

Although these spiritual forces are powerful, they are as nothing when we use the authority God has provided us with, as you will discover when you read further into Eph 6:10-18. There are three distinct pieces of artillery in our spiritual arsenal that will empower us to victory in spiritual warfare:

- ♦ **The Word of God:** Building a strong foundation in the Word of God is essential, praying according to His Word and always aligning ourselves with what it teaches.
- ♦ **The Blood of Jesus:** Understanding the power we have through the blood of Jesus, who didn't just die that we might live, but that we would walk in the victory He won at the cross through His shed blood.
- ♦ **The Name of Jesus:** He has a name that is above every name, and one day every knee will bow to it, and every tongue will confess He is Lord!

Therefore God has highly exalted him and bestowed on him the name that is above every name, so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father" (Phil 2:9-11)

Understanding the authority we have been given to wield in the name of Jesus is essential, as the seven sons of Sceva, a Jewish High Priest, learned the hard way in Acts 19:13-16. It is sobering reading. They clearly had no born-again relationship with Jesus, so their use of His name was not recognised by the demons who they were seeking to cast out!