

WHY PRAY?

“...that men ought always to pray...” Luke 18:1

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Summary: Why pray? This summer, how much have we been praying? This message is tailor made for anyone who has been letting solid prayer slide lately. If you need some motivation to pray more diligently, listen to this heart-felt message as Philip discusses seven reasons to pray. One or two of the reasons may be new concepts for many. Understanding why we pray helps one be more motivated to be praying regularly, effectively and frequently.

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Warm greetings, brothers and sisters in the Messiah. Last time we talked about the most awesome Father's Day of all time that is coming up, and how we can have a "Father's Day" every single day with our dear Abba above. My point last time is that our lives are ultimately to be about Him, and not about us. We need to start each day by asking what He wants us to do, to let us be part of what He is doing – rather than always telling Yahweh what *we* are doing and asking for His blessing on what we are doing.

Do you hear the difference?

Obviously we need to ask, and seek and knock – and ask God for His blessing. But as we ask, we need to be asking that we in synch with Him.

Anyway we're going to be talking about prayer today. It's summer time. And what happens in summer time? We tend to get so busy, to take advantage of the weather, kids are out of school, there are weddings and vacations to do, work projects, backyard projects, barbecues, one thing after another – and Yahweh gets left out of our lives. These are all distractions. Satan is a master at using "Weapons of Mass Distraction", as my brother says. If we have let up on prayer and fasting, we need to get back to this.

Before we get started, I wanted to bring up something quickly first on the last sermon. I hope in fact, you'll be sure to listen to that last message, for it has everything to do with what this website is all about: having an intimate relationship with God the Father and His Son. "That we may know Him", that we may come to know both the Father and the Son (John 17:3).

Last time we showed how our Father is Alpha and Omega, as is also the Son of God. Both are Alpha and Omega, the A and Z, the first and Last. Most of the time, it refers to the Son. In Hebrew, alpha and Omega is Alef Tov, the first and last letter of the Hebrew alphabet. And we showed how Alef and *Beit*, the first 2 Hebrew letters, give us the word for "dear Father" – Ab or Av, as in the Aramaic word "Abba".

But Alef and Tov, the Hebrew equivalent of Alpha and Omega, is also very interesting. Just let me digress for a minute. Now turn to Gen. 1:1-2. In the Hebrew, if you had an interlinear Bible, you'd find some letters that never got translated into the English. The Hebrew says, "In the beginning

created God..." or "in the beginning God created"... and then there are two untranslated letters: Alef and Tov, the first and last letters of the Hebrew alphabet. So in the Hebrew it is literally "in the beginning created God, Alef tov...the heavens and the earth." Alef Tov is the equivalent of our A and Z, or Alpha and Omega. So who was in the beginning? The Alpha and Omega, the Alef Tov, the Spoken Word of God. John 1:1 says "in the beginning was the [spoken] word, and the Word was with God and the Word was God." V. 2 – "The same was in the beginning with God". Very interesting, isn't it? I hope you'll be interested in hearing the last message.

So now let's talk about talking to the Word and to our dear Abba. Let's talk about praying, especially in these distracting and busy summer months—when it is so easy to have a thousand things going on taking up our time. Are we praying fervently in these summer months? *I trust you will find some new thoughts here today about praying that will spark new interest in your ability to pray with delight, conviction, with joy, and with an awareness of its power and more.*

Does your praying have any effect or do any good? In your heart, do you *really* think that when you pray, anything is really happening? In fact, do you even pray every single day? When *was* the last good solid praying you did, if you're honest with yourself? When was the last time you prayed, prostrated on the floor with your face on the floor, or kneeling deeply with your head on the ground, or with arms raised in praise?

One reason WHY we don't Pray, According to Scripture

We could toss out lots of reasons why we don't pray. We might blame it on being too busy, for example. But Almighty Father tells us how He sees it when we don't pray. This is shocking when you let it sink in.

Psalm 10:4 says something that identifies the real root of the reason why we don't pray: ***"The wicked, through the pride of his countenance, will not seek after God: God is not in all his thoughts."***

Oh my, isn't that corrective? The wicked, due to pride, will not seek after God; God is not even in his thoughts. Yahweh is telling us that pride is at the root of why we are not praying. We don't feel a need for God. No urgency.

Contrast that with Zephaniah 2:3 that says the Meek will seek after God and perhaps He will hide them in the day of His anger.

But we DO need God. We depend on God when our eyes are opened. In fact, the need for prayer is greater now than ever in human history. The need for God's children to be children of prayer is greater now than ever before.

When things are going well, we all can, at times, feel *no need* to pray, no urgency, if we're not careful. That's why I started with the last sermon: to start seeking what Father wants. Seeking to be in His will, His plans.

When we study *when* the Bible says people tend to forget God – it's when things are going fairly smoothly. "When you're well off, and lifted up, and forget your God" – that's the wording in **Deuteronomy 8:6-19**. When we're not praying, maybe we just don't feel the need for God. And in

these busy summer months, it gets all too easy to put Almighty God on the back burner of our thoughts and our lives. But Psalm 10:4 says its wickedness and pride that causes us not to seek after God or have Him in our thoughts.

Oh sure, once it becomes really urgent – that Mighty One (what El, translated “God”, means: Strong one) we hope is listening, then we pray. But otherwise, too many of us simply aren’t praying enough.

So I want to spend the time today talking about why we must be people of prayer. Why we pray. I hope you’ll find some things in here to rekindle your zeal to pray harder and more often and with your whole heart than ever before.

Remember that Abba and Yeshua are seeking not just awareness of who God is, but an intimacy. When Yeshua says, “Depart from me, you workers of iniquity for I never knew you” (Matt. 7:23), what He’s really saying is this: “Get out – for you and I never achieved any intimacy, any closeness.” *How are we going to achieve any intimacy without being a living, breathing House of Prayer, a person of prayer, known intimately by our Savior?*

“You will seek me and find me, *If you will search for me with all your heart*”, says Almighty God, creator of the heavens and earth, to His children (Jer. 29:13). Also check out Jer. 33:3. This should be a reminder for us in these busy summer months.

Seek Him with all our hearts. How many of us heed Him? How many of us really seek our Abba, our great Father, every single day, with all of our heart? We can truly search our hearts to see if our hearts are even *in* our praying when we *do* pray.

OK, I’m sure you pray. . . from time to time at least. We’re told to “pray without ceasing”. We’re told men and women of God prayed several times a day (Daniel 6:10-13; Psalm 55:17). In Psa. 86:3, David says “I cry to you all the day long”.

Hopefully we do take time to pray every day, some time on our knees and face on the floor, as well as the many connections we make with Elohim, our great God, during the day when we pray as we shave, or drive, or water the plants, or do dishes. I’m just saying-- I hope God’s children take time to follow the examples of Christ praying alone in the hilltops, or Daniel kneeling three times to pray in his room and so on.

But think of Prayer as the pathway to the intimate relationship we can have, must have, with Creator. Prayer is what takes us from the often feelings of emptiness we slip into, to be able to experience the fullness we can have in Yahweh. So I hope we will understand the need to pray and start getting back to being people of prayer.

SO, WHY WE PRAY

- 1. We pray to bring Joy, Praise and Honor to the Father and to our Savior Jesus Christ, as we seek closeness and intimacy with God.**

Perhaps you were not thinking of that as a primary reason to pray. We've thought of prayer as part of a "to-do" list. Here's what I mean: when my grandson in Orlando calls and says "Hi Poppy" – my face lights up. When my phone rings and it's one of my adult children calling just to chat, that brings such joy to me. I love it. Our father in heaven is the ultimate Father, from whom all "fathers" are named (Eph. 3:14-15). When you and I wake up in the morning, do we take the time and make the effort to say, "Good morning, dear Father"? Are we aware of how much joy *we* can bring to father just by saying "hi" to Him, talking to Him, letting Him know we enjoy His company?

We think of prayer as asking something God can do for us. But here I'm presenting prayer as something we can bring to God, something we can give the Almighty. Yes, we can bring Him joy. Prayer is enjoying His presence.

Yes, we can bless the Almighty. Psalm after Psalm speaks of "Bless the Lord eternal, O my soul". If you wish to read a few of the many, many verses which say we can bless Yahweh, here are a few: 1 Chron. 29:30; Deut. 8:7-10; Psalm 16:7; Psalm 104:1.

We sing about "blessing God" – but how often do we actually think about our ability to ... are you ready for this: to bless Yahweh! Now, the lesser is normally blessed by the greater (Hebrews 7:7). I know that. But we can't get away from the fact that verse after verse speaks of us blessing God. How can we do that? By being a blessing, a source of joy, for Him. *THAT'S how children are a blessing to their father!* I feel blessed when I experience my children wanting to be with me. If too much time goes by, my face doesn't shine as much.

We bless God the Father by being a blessing to Him. "Bless" means "joy". To "bless" means "to make happy". In that way, we have a LOT of power to bring joy – and therefore blessings – to Father, every time we pray.

I'm a grandpa of 4 wonderful children. Every now and again our phone rings and it's our 4 year old grandson from Florida. I hear his cheery little boy voice, "Hi Poppy. Can we talk on the computer? (Skype)" – and then he tells me about some bug he found, or his new bike, or someplace they went. My face just beams. If my wife picks up the phone, and if it's David, the 2 year old or Juliana our 2 year old granddaughter, her face just beams.

Remember the verses which speak of God's face "shining" on us? It's kinda like that. When God's face is shining on us, it is because He is happy. You can find several such verses in Psalm 80 alone! (See Ps. 80:1, 7, 19; Psalm 119:135). Call on your Father. Make His face to shine. *A father's face always beams and shines when He knows His children want to spend time with Him, want to be with Him, love Him and bring glory to the Family name.*

Psalm 80:1 "...shine forth";

v. 7—"Restore us, O God of hosts, cause your face to shine and we shall be saved...."

I want to cause my Father's face to shine. Don't you? Make Father's face shine, as any father's does when he senses his kids want to be spend time with him. I love it when my kids want to be with me. Our heavenly father is no different.

Prayer is a relationship being built – not just an act we cross off our to-do list. We too often saw prayers as a task, an obligation. That's surely an incomplete way of seeing prayer. Prayer is a

relationship. *Prayer is a way to bring joy to Father. Prayer is a way to bless Him. It's what we can do for Him, for once in our lives!* Do you wake up in the morning and think of prayer as a way we can give something back to God?

Everything we do should be to focus on bringing glory and joy to Father. The Son of God said that when we pray, we are to say, "Father in heaven, hallowed be thy name." We need to be praying to learn even HOW to hallow, to make sacred, his Holy name. *So when we pray, we need to focus on what we can bring to Father – and not just focus on what he can do for us.* Most prayers are an endless list of "gimmies" – give me this, give me that. There is a time and place to be asking Father for things. In fact He TELLS us to be sure to ask Him for His Spirit, for example. Or for wisdom. And we're told to pray for one another. So asking Abba for help with someone or something is fine... but I'm just saying let's let our prayers include all that, but then go beyond just asking for things. We're bringing Abba joy. We need to see how we can also make prayer a way of giving back to our Creator.

When you wake up in the morning, do you ever just say, "Good morning, Father. Good day, Beloved Jesus"? Do you ever laugh with God, or cry with God? Do you ever ask God how *He's* feeling? Does that seem strange to you? I'd bet that does seem strange to a few of you. But my point is, when we speak to our regular earthly fathers, do we not say or ask those things?

It's a mature child, usually an adult child, who can ask His Dad how he's doing. Why not with the ultimate Father? Why not be you, be real? Things are going on in the universe. I want Him to know that I'm thinking about HIM too, and how He's doing and how He's feeling. He has tremendous deep seated feelings. I want him to know I want to be in synch with Him and His feelings.

So be real, be yourself, when you speak to Abba. Forget the prayer books. Make it a conversation from your heart to His heart. And why pray in "thee" and "thou" language? Be real, be yourself, be genuine, be a real son or daughter of the Highest. When we do, our prayers come before His presence as a sweet perfume, sweet-smelling incense, according to **Ps. 141:2** and Revelation 5:8. Do you think of your call, your prayer, as an appealing perfume to the Creator?

Prayer reminds us that our primary relationship in spiritual matters is with Abba, our great father and with our Beloved, Jesus Christ, or Yeshua the Messiah. Our primary relationship is not with our pastor, or with our denomination. No, our primary love is with our eternal God, and Father, as well as with our Beloved, our Lord and Master, our Savior. Prayer is a primary way we build that relationship.

So we pray to bring our focus on Him. Our lives are not about us so much as it is about Him.

Psalm 115:1

Not unto us, O Lord, not unto us, But to Your name give glory,
Because of Your mercy, Because of Your truth.

Do we see what David is saying? We don't pray for God to make US have great glory or for everything to work out for our satisfaction – but we pray that HIS name is glorified.

Do you pray like that? That everything you do and get involved in will be to His glory? Do you praise, give thanks, honor and bless God? Do you consciously think of things you can do and say

when you pray which would be giving some joy, something back, to your Father in heaven? Focus on bringing honor to Him. Hallowed be your name. Bless the Lord eternal oh my soul. Exalt the Creator.

Bring joy and honor to Him as you seek Him – and at the same time we will be drawing close to dear Abba, our Father in heaven.

2. We pray to EXPRESS GRATITUDE and heartfelt thanksgiving.

Expressing gratitude is becoming a lost art. I'm finding that when I switch my focus from viewing a problem – and stewing over it- to finding something in that problem to be grateful for, that my whole demeanor changes.

King David speaks of giving thanks to the Eternal at least 35 or 40x in the psalms. When you add the word “thanksgiving” – there are many more. Ps 69:30 – “magnify Him with thanksgiving”. Ps. 95:2 – we are to come before Him with thanksgiving. King David even speaks of the “sacrifices of thanksgiving”. There were, of course, the peace offering and other sacrifices of thanksgiving literally.

But there are also times it's hard to be thankful in the circumstances we're in – but heed scripture and offer a sacrifice of thanksgiving. A sacrifice is not easy, is not cheap – but it is meaningful.

I know as a Father myself, that if a Father sees a child being grateful even in hard times, Dads everywhere will move heaven and earth if need be to reward that child. Do we not think heavenly father would do even more?

Our lives are now hidden in Messiah. We are parts of His body. When any part of my body is hurt, I'm totally aware of my back, or my toe, or my thumb. It's even more so with Messiah: when we hurt, He is totally aware of it and is working on it.

Remember, we are commanded to be thankful – listen – *for* all things, as well as “in” all things, or *for* all circumstances, as well as *in* all circumstances. How is that possible? Let's read it.

Ephesians 5:19-20 “for all things”

“speaking to one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and *making melody in your heart to the Lord*, 20 *giving thanks always FOR all things to God* the Father in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ...”

Philippians 4:6-7 “in everything...”

Be anxious for nothing, but IN everything by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known to God; 7 and the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus.

How is this possible? Because we understand we are children of the Creator and He knows everything we're going through and if our attitudes are right, will gladly work miracles in our behalf to improve our lot or change our situation – or not. If “or not”, that's because He knows what He's

doing, and we're grateful even for that. In the end, we're promised all things will work out for the good for those who love God and are the called, according to His purpose (Romans 8:28). (I tell the story of the peace we experienced even as we buried our first baby son 28 years ago).

Described my brother Loren's situation – wife now has early onset Alzheimer's. She's only 58. But I've never heard Him complain to God, or about God, in this situation.

The natural temptation and inclination for all of us – and I preach to myself, for I do it too – is to complain. ***Scripture tells us that when we complain Yahweh IS not pleased!***

Numbers 11:1

Now when the people complained, it displeased the Lord; for the Lord heard it, and His anger was aroused. So the fire of the Lord burned among them, and consumed some in the outskirts of the camp.

Numbers 14:26-29

And the Lord spoke to Moses and Aaron, saying, 27 "How long shall I bear with this evil congregation *who complain* against Me? *I have heard the complaints which the children of Israel make against Me.* 28 Say to them, 'As I live,' says the Lord, 'just as you have spoken in My hearing, so I will do to you: 29 The carcasses of you who have complained against Me shall fall in this wilderness, all of you who were numbered, according to your entire number, from twenty years old and above.

1 Corinthians 10:8-11

Nor let us commit sexual immorality, as some of them did, and in one day twenty-three thousand fell; 9 nor let us tempt Christ, as some of them also tempted, and were destroyed by serpents; 10 *nor complain, as some of them also complained, and were destroyed by the destroyer.* 11 Now all these things happened to them as examples, and they were written for our admonition, upon whom the ends of the ages have come.

A big antidote to complaining? Look for something to express gratitude to the Almighty. He is the one watching over us. He is the One who leads us His Red Sea, to His wilderness – often for our good, for HIS timing, though who wants to be in a wilderness?

You may be in your own type of wilderness in your life right now. Your wilderness may be a lack of opportunities for marriage, or maybe you can't find a group of people who will truly welcome you into a body that you want to be part of, or maybe there are emotional scars or financial woes. All of these can become your wilderness. But what is wilderness for one is opportunity for another. Try to find the opportunity in the wilderness. Try to look up and see His covering cloud by day and fire by night. Ask Him to help you and me become more grateful, and to quit complaining.

3. We pray to hear Him reveal His perfect will in our lives. We pray to LISTEN to what Abba has to tell us. Prayer is not just talking to God, but listening to God as well.

In my last message, I said this: "We need to start each day by asking Father what He wants us to do, *to let us be part of what HE is doing* – rather than telling Yahweh what *we* are doing and asking for His blessing on what *we* are doing.

Do you hear the difference?

Tying right on to the last point: what if you have had a massive stroke, can't talk or walk and need round the clock care? Can you thank God in that? For that? Or did God not really inspire Paul to write "for all things" and "IN everything with prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving..."?

Why would anyone thank God for such horrible things? Because it is in these trials where so much growth often takes place. Because we are in His perfect will and part of the refining process He is putting us through, though we for now go through pain and suffering.

My sister Charlotte is in that situation. After several strokes, she's been in 24/7 care for 8 years now. It's hard to see anything in it to be thankful for. So I'm not throwing out these concepts lightly as someone not close to anything tough going on.

I had bladder cancer last Fall. Our son died 28 years ago. I've lost all my parents, grandparents, most of my uncles and aunts, a cousin was killed on a motorcycle accident years ago, I have my own health issues that drive me crazy sometimes – but somehow we're to be thankful. We must be thankful. It reminds me of the story behind the song "It is well with my soul", which was written by Horatio Spafford in 1873, a man who had just had his daughters perish in a shipwreck. As he sailed over the same waters where it happened, he penned and sang those incredible words:

When peace, like a river, attendeth my way,
When sorrows like sea billows roll;
Whatever my lot, Thou has taught me to say,
'It is well, it is well, with my soul.'

And from there Spafford talks about his sins nailed to the cross, "not in part, but the whole" and that stanza ends with "praise the Lord, praise the Lord, Oh my soul." He ends the song with the greatest hope we all have –

"And Lord, haste the day when my faith shall be sight,
The clouds rolled back as a scroll;
The trump shall resound, and the Lord shall descend,
Even so, it is well with my soul."

So on to this point: IN all of these things, we also pray, "Master, what is it you want me to learn in and through all of this? What lessons am I to learn? What is your perfect will in my life? How can I hear your voice in all of this? Teach me, show me, be with me – and thank you for all you're doing in my life."

Brethren, after all, quite frankly most of us will have to admit that the greatest periods of maturing, of growth, of molding – happened in the hard times of our lives. Even the hard times we brought on ourselves. I've had a ton of those too.

So often, He is teaching us to be joyful in all things. Be turning to – and read – Acts 16:22-28. We have to mature to be able to accept what He is doing. To have peace in our soul even when we're in the chains of despair at times. One of the greatest manifestations of God's presence to Paul and Barnabas was when they had been beaten, chained in a dungeon – and began to pray and praise. This kind of Christianity does not happen without a deep closeness with our great God.

Acts 16:25-27

But at midnight Paul and Silas were praying and singing hymns to God, and the prisoners were listening to them. 26 Suddenly there was a great earthquake, so that the foundations of the prison were shaken; and immediately all the doors were opened and everyone's chains were loosed.

You and I will also have our midnight hour of chains. Will we be singing praises and praying – even in prison? At that midnight hour, bloody and beaten, they began to praise – and Abba in heaven heard it, and released them all.

We're not seeing those kinds of miracles today – but I'm convinced, if we become a people of this kind of praying, of this kind of seeking after Father, we *will* see miracles happening again. Is there such a thing as being *worthy* of seeing miracles? I think so!

How long has it been since you've asked Yahweh to speak to you and tell you what you are to learn from what you are going through? Are we listening? Are we still, and quiet, so we can hear His voice?

Prayer is not just a time we speak to God, but a time we listen to Yahweh.

I gave a couple sermons on hearing God's voice a while back. I recommend you hear those sermons as I felt especially inspired on those topics. Start having a notebook and pen with you when you pray. Why? So you can write down what Master wants you to hear from Him. Learn to stop talking sometimes when you pray – and remain quiet, still, listening. *Then be prepared to write down what the Holy Spirit will tell you. My point is: Praying is to also help us listen, not just speaking our own words to Him, but hearing His words to us.*

*Sometimes you'll hear Father say, "Hey, you're getting too far from me. Come back to me, son – and come back to your Savior. It's time for you to take time to put other things aside, seek me diligently while I may be found. You need to slow down and refresh. You need to seek different priorities and goals in your life. You have forgotten that you are to seek *first* my kingdom and my righteousness. You haven't really called me much lately. Come on, son, I want to walk with you."*

From time to time we have to refresh and "reboot" our lives, just like a computer has to be turned off and turned on again, sometimes defragmented, sometimes the entire system cleaned off and reloaded. Our lives are far more important and complex than any computer. Yes, sometimes we have to refresh, reboot, and reload.

I mean, when you realize that you're just floating through life, without real direction, without real service or purpose, just doing the treadmill of life – it's time to reboot. When you realize you haven't fasted since last Day of Atonement, it's time to reboot. When you realize it's been a few days since you really, really prayed like your life depends on it – it's time to reboot.

In your prayer, are you hearing Father say, "It's time to reboot your life"? Do you hear Father at all? He speaks to us through His Spirit, through circumstances, through people we interact with, through our spouse, through children, through thoughts he sends to us. But we have to be listening. Prayer should be interactive, 2-way streets. So we pray to listen, as much as to speak. Do we not have 2 ears – and one mouth? Maybe we're supposed to listen twice as long as we speak. Just a thought.

It's recommended when we reboot and refresh a computer that we have our computers connected to a strong power source. I recently got a message flash up on my screen, "your computer is not connected to a power source. Do you wish to continue?"

Do *you* ever get the message that you are not connected to *your* Power Source?

Prayer connects you and me to the most powerful mind and supernatural Being in the universe – and He *wants* to share His will and desires with you. He tells us to ask, to seek, to knock. Let's be doing it as we pray.

Is God's will always done on earth?

I said this point is about praying to hear Him, and praying to ask Him to show HIS will. "Thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven". Some ministers have said that God's will is always done, even here on earth. If that were so, then why are we told to pray that His will be done? His will IS always done in heaven. So we pray, "on earth, as it is in heaven". We are free moral agents. Can you reject God's will for you? Will God in heaven allow you to sometimes go even against His will?

The pat answer is "of course not" – but think again. Every time we sin, surely we are not doing God's will, God's way of life. And if we're not asking, surely there are times we are walking down a path not of His choosing. But let's allow Scripture to show people can go against God's will:

Luke 7:29-30

And when all the people heard Him, even the tax collectors justified God, having been baptized with the baptism of John. **30 But the Pharisees and lawyers rejected the will of God** for themselves, not having been baptized by him.

In Luke 13:34, the Christ cried out over Jerusalem, "how *often I would have* gathered you under my wings [that was my will, He's saying], as a hen gathers its brood—but you were not willing."

So it's quite easy actually to be on a path contrary to His will. That's why we pray to have Father show us what He wants us to do, to say, where we need to be, when, and every step of our lives.

All too often, if we're honest, we're praying that God will see things our way, that He will bend *His* will to *our* preferences and wishes. Isn't that true? But when we show we trust HIM, and are acknowledging Him in our lives, He will speak. He will direct us. He will do more than we could dream.

Proverbs 3:5-6

Trust in the Lord with all your heart, and lean not on your own understanding;
6 In all your ways acknowledge Him, And He shall direct your paths.

Psalms 37:4-6

Delight yourself also in the Lord, And He shall give you the desires of your heart.
5 Commit your way to the Lord, Trust also in Him, And He shall bring it to pass.
6 He shall bring forth your righteousness as the light, And your justice as the noonday.

4. We pray to Implore Him to forgive us our Failings and our sins.

Yeshua was called a “friend of tax collectors and sinners” several times. When we study most of these cases, our Savior was befriending and accepting *repentant* sinners. Zaccheus repented and refunded some of his stealing. The woman of a bad reputation who was anointing His feet also was washing His feet with her tears.

And yet we know a lifestyle of sin – if we’re into that – will separate us from God. Numerous scriptures indicate our sins, if they remain unrepented of, will cut us off from God (Isa 59:1-2). However, all of us have been sinners, and as we accept the grace of our Savior and Father in deep meaningful repentance, we are accepted by Father. Remember the prodigal son? There was great joy in his repentance and return home (Luke 15). But we *must* be repentant *proven* by a life of *changing* and overcoming, or there is no connection made. But we are promised: “If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and cleanse us from all unrighteousness” (1 John 1:9).

One of my favorites – 2 Chronicles 7:14-17, at the consecration of the first temple, Almighty appeared to Solomon in a dream and told him this. And remember, we are now His House, His House of Prayer. We are now “the Father’s House”.

“If My people who are called by My name will humble themselves, and pray and seek My face, and turn from their wicked ways, then I will hear from heaven, and will forgive their sin and heal their land. 15 Now My eyes will be open and My ears attentive to prayer made in this place. 16 For now I have chosen and sanctified this house, that My name may be there forever; and My eyes and My heart will be there perpetually.”

When was the last time we fasted and deeply, deeply repented of the many ways we have fallen short? When was the last time you fasted for unity, for God’s children to work together? I pray Elohim forgive those who have turned their backs on Him- - for now at least. This surely is partly what it means when it says the gates of death (Hades) will not prevail against the church! Why? Because we’re fighting FOR one another, and reclaiming some Satan, as a roaring lion, has in his awful grasp.

So Yeshua (Jesus) teaches us in His instructions on praying to include, “Forgive us our sins, for we also forgive everyone who is indebted to us” (Luke 11:4). This is something we must do, surely, every single day. And part of what we pray for is to be given a heart of being forgiving of others. Savior goes on to say we won’t be forgiven if we don’t completely forgive others of their sins or offenses against *us*.

Pray for your enemies. Pray “Father, forgive them”, just as Messiah did on the cross or tree. That is going on the offensive in a mighty way. Pray not that God “get them”, and punish them – no. Pray for their salvation. Pray they come to know their Savior. Pray they can be a brother. When you and I pray *for* our enemies and those who gossip about us, we are unleashing a mighty flood of salvation heading their way. Be prepared for those consequences. You may have to sit in church services beside them or wash their feet at Passover! Wouldn’t that be wonderful. That’s how I think now.

Lessons from Achan you may have missed before

Let’s look at it another way. There are many examples where Yahweh decides not to bless – and even to curse – His people when they are hiding sinful things in their lives. Achan’s story in Joshua 7 is a strong example. Jericho represented the world that was being destroyed by God’s human

kingdom on earth at that time – Israel. Elohim, Almighty God, wanted *nothing* to remain from Jericho or to be salvaged from it. Nothing. ALL of it was devoted to destruction – even precious gold, silver, expensive garments, the animals, all of it. But one man Achan sinned, when he thought this batch of gold and silver surely could be salvaged. Don't be too tough on Achan. Some hearing this message might have also done so. One man. But Elohim, the true God, says "ALL ISRAEL sinned". Let's read what happened and draw some lessons.

And as we read this, ask yourself, what "devoted thing" have you decided to hang on to from the world? What sin or sins can you and I hiding "in our tents", in our lives, as Achan was? And how could that possibly impact our immediate families, our churches, our fellowships, our city, our nation?

Joshua 7:1

But the *children of Israel committed a trespass* regarding the accursed things, for Achan the son of Carmi, the son of Zabdi, the son of Zerah, of the tribe of Judah, took of the accursed things; so the anger of the Lord burned against the children of Israel.

What "devoted thing" are you and I hiding in our tents? Could it be someone we won't forgive? Could it be over-eating or over-drinking? Could it be visits to the porn sites on the internet when we think no one is looking? Or are we tolerating profanity, and God's name dragged through the mud, in our homes by the movies we rent and watch on TV or pay money to watch in a theater? We'd never bring someone talking like that into our homes, so why do we let the TV bring something like that into our sanctuary? Don't kid yourselves. Yes, all these things and more are happening among children of God. These are no different than the type of thing Achan did. *And all Israel paid*. Thirty-six men died because of that. Six times six. The complete number of man doing thing man's way.

What's the point in praying if we have not been reconciled with father? But when we DO go to Him repentantly, Luke 15's parables are replete with examples of how much joy there is in heaven when one sinner repents. So repent, and bring joy in heaven!

Even a poor marital relationship, not honoring each other, can result in our prayers being hindered. We're supposed to love our wives as Christ loves the church, His Bride, with that kind of patience, with that kind of support, with that kind of love. Otherwise our prayers can be hindered.

1 Peter 3:7

Husbands, likewise, dwell with them with understanding, giving honor to the wife, as to the weaker vessel, and as being heirs together of the grace of life, that your prayers may not be hindered.

Why would prayers be hindered by a poor marriage? Because we're not obeying His instructions on how to treat a husband or wife. We're not at peace with the one we covenanted with in those situations. We see rampant divorce. There's divorce that is allowed for very unique reasons, and then there's rampant divorce. Too much of it by far. I'm not into hindered prayers. How about you?

5. We pray to Ask for His Divine power and divine help with our battles.

I mentioned the battle of Ai a minute ago. We all have our battles every day. Paul spoke often of our spiritual battles, the armor we have to have on, and behaving like seasoned soldiers (Eph 6:11-18)

But how will we be strong?

Ephesians 6:10-- Finally, my brethren, be strong *in the Lord* and in the power *of His might*.

We're constantly in spiritual battles: battles that wage on in our minds. Battles at the work place. Battles with our own attitudes. Battles with situations at home. Satan is constantly trying to keep us in either battle mode to weary us, or to fool us into thinking there is no battle going on so go in unprepared.

There's something else in that story: Joshua – whose name parallels Yeshua our Savior's name, did not go with those men into the battle. We can't win when we have forbidden devoted things in our tents (our lives) *or if we go into battle without Yeshua (Joshua) leading the way and being with us*.

Joshua learned his lesson well and never again allowed Israel to go into battle without him at the front with them. Did you realize that?

Have you and I learned that lesson? We don't start a single day without having Yeshua in the forefront of the battle with us. What does that mean?

Have you put on your spiritual armor today? We can read of the well-known spiritual armor in Eph. 6:11-18, and the final element that is mentioned is...? This one element is what puts all that armor into play. Let's read it.

Ephesians 6:17-18

And take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God; 18 *praying always with all prayer* and supplication in the Spirit,

Are we following the examples of the prophets and of Yeshua Himself, who rose early in the morning and prayed? It's not very useful to get your battle instructions when the day, and the battles for the day, are long over. We need to pray first thing, for sure, and then several times all through the day as the battle with our spiritual antagonists continue to be waged.

Mark 1:35

Now in the morning, *having risen a long while before daylight*, He went out and departed to a solitary place; and there He prayed.

(My story of praying in Rome, in 1973)

Are we giving Abba – the great Elohim, the great Adonai Yahweh, the El Shaddai Almighty God of the universe, our first time, and our best time? Do we do that consistently? Don't lie to yourself. I've had to reboot, to restart this habit I used to have when I was 20. You get into the real world, real jobs, real kids at home, and real bills – it's hard to put and keep God first in our lives. I'll say this: if you need to get up early to do this, that means we all – and I preach to myself too – have to get to bed much earlier going forward. I am now.

I personally try to get up now at 6:33 a.m. Why that time? To remind me of Matthew 6:33 as soon as I see the clock, 6:33 – ah-hah! – Seek first the kingdom of God and its righteousness. And first thing – is not coffee, is not turning on the TV for the news, is not anything but on my knees to say

“Hello, dear Abba, my dear father. Hello Savior, my Master – and go from there” as I beseech God’s help in my day, as I beg for the knowledge of His perfect will today.

6. We pray to ask His Intervention in the Lives of others; to INTERCEDE

Praying for others is “intercessory prayer” – which is worthy of an entire sermon by itself. It’s when you plead for someone else. ***Intercessory praying is such a selfless kind of praying.*** Hopefully a large percentage of our prayer time is devoted to praying for others. This is where ‘prayer lists’ come in so we don’t forget to pray for others.

How do we become intercessors? God’s word declares that believers are “a holy priesthood” (1 Peter 2:4, 8) and even calls us “a kingdom of priests”. A Levitical priest’s role was to intercede for the people; to stand before God in their behalf.

The sad thing is that God says in the end time He is looking for people who will “stand in the breach”, who will plead for others – and He found none. Let that sink in. If you and I think we are already intercessors, perhaps we need to be doing much more of it.

Ezekiel 22:30-31

So I sought for a man among them who would make a wall, and stand in the gap before Me on behalf of the land, that I should not destroy it; but I found no one. 31 Therefore I have poured out My indignation on them; I have consumed them with the fire of My wrath; and I have recompensed their deeds on their own heads," says the Lord God.

There have been some stand-out examples in Scripture on intercessory prayer:

- Abraham – for even the city of Sodom and Gomorrha if there be 10 righteous men in there
- Stephen’s last words in Acts 7
- Paul prayed constantly for the churches and the brethren as he often recounts
- Moses – for Aaron’s life after the gold calf incident; for Miriam’s life

Moses – for the entire nation of Israel after the gold calf incident and again in Num. 16 when he told Aaron to stand in the midst of the plague and pray with the censer in hand. Poor Moses – Deut 3 - he pleaded with Yahweh to let him into the promised Land, but Yahweh did not recant. *But my point is: where were the intercessors for Moses? He was a wonderful intercessor for others.*

Best of all, Christ Himself – Yeshua the Messiah – is the mediator between God and men (1 Tim. 2:5). As He died on the cross, He asked Abba above to remember all of us who killed the Messiah by our sins: “Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do.” Even Isa 53:12 states, “He bore the sins of many, and made intercession for transgressors”. Now, as the Risen Messiah at the right hand of God, He makes intercession for us (Rom. 8:34). That’s His job. Heb. 7:25 says He lives to make intercession for us!

Now how about us? How can we become effective intercessors? The ancient Aaronic priests stood before God, in the presence of God, before they could intercede. That hasn’t changed: ***we too, must have the relationship with God before our intercessory prayers go anywhere.*** Holiness, for example, is required to stand before the Almighty (Heb. 12:14). This holiness is not possible on our own righteousness, but on the righteousness of our Savior who is now our life. I am no longer my own. The life you and I live is not our own, but the life of the risen Christ (See Col. 3:3; Gal. 2:20 etc.). He makes us holy.

We must stand “before” God – in His presence, building on the relationship He has offered us – before we can stand “between” God and man, praying for someone.

As we intercede for others, be sure to FIRST – once again – ask Father to reveal to us HOW we should pray for that person. God may be using a trial or burden to create something very necessary in that person. Our intercession needs to include that God open our eyes to see things HIS way and to pray for them in a way pleasing to Him. Sometimes as a result of this intercessory praying, God’s Spirit will prod us to do something ourselves as well. It’s well and good to say “I’ll pray for you” – but do we leave them without some visible help? James 2:14-17 comes sharply to mind.

James 2:14-17 makes it clear that it’s not good enough to intercede but do nothing, if we have it in our means to do something.

In our praying for others, God is more likely willing to hear our own requests! James 5:16 includes the words, “...and pray for one another so that you may be healed....”

But my point here today in the short time I have – become a praying intercessor who also seeks action, seeks ways to pitch in. When was the last time you prayed your heart out for a little child suffering, for help with unemployed, for a young man who has yet to come to Messiah, for the many health problems so many have, and on and on? When was the last time you interceded for the president and our political leaders, as we’re told to do?

7. We pray because prayer does change things.

Sometimes those answered prayers come years and generations later. Don’t let that discourage you. God’s word can’t go out without accomplishing its purpose.

- Moses’ prayer changed the history of Israel
- 2 Chron 20 prayer of Jeshoshaphat and the people...

I’ve seen healings – even powerful ones – when people asked for prayer. I’m out of time here now, but just to say – the more we pray, the closer we come to being with God, the less we’ll worry and stew – and the more we’ll see that God IS in control and He does delight to hear us. Yes, prayer does change things.

Brethren, I hope you and I will find ways and make the time to come before God daily, several times a day. Make contact with Him throughout every day – not just quickie prayers as you shave or run out the door. We pray to build our intimate relationship with Father.

- Pray to bring our heavenly Father joy, to be a blessing to Him.
- Pray to express your gratefulness, your thankfulness for all He is, and for all He’s done.
- Pray to ask Father to reveal His will and how you can get involved in what He’s doing.
- Pray to plead for His gracious forgiveness for where we’ve fallen short.
- Pray to ask for His victory with battles we face – not just for ourselves, but pray for brethren you know are battling with issues.
- Pray to intercede for others.

There are so many reasons to pray. Remember, the wicked - in his pride – does not pray or seek God. We read that earlier.

But most of all, PRAY to build on your relationship with dear Abba. Bring Him joy. Make His face light up, as you call on Him. A loving father loves to hear from His Son or daughter. Pray to build on that relationship. Call on him often.

May Yahweh bless you mightily as we restore the House of God and make it a House of Prayer once again.

Until next time, this has been your brother in Christ, Philip Shields.