

Take With You Words (Hosea 14: 2)

Sometimes when we go to prayer, we find it difficult to begin. We don't know what to pray for. We don't know what words to use. The Lord has graciously granted us help in this regard. He has actually given us the words that He will give heed to when we come to Him in prayer. He has given us words for all occasions and all needs. One time Israel had fallen away from following the Lord. He called them to repentance. He wanted them to turn from their wicked ways and to turn to Him in repentance. He told them how to go about this in Hosea 14:1-2, "O Israel, return unto the LORD thy God; for thou hast fallen by thine iniquity. Take with you words, and turn to the LORD: say unto him, Take away all iniquity, and receive us graciously: so will we render the calves of our lips."

The Lord told them to take words and to turn to Him. He actually put the proper words in their mouths. The Lord has graciously given us a "prayer book." That book is the Bible. There are prayers in the Scriptures that will fit all our needs. It is a very good spiritual exercise to note these prayers in our Bible reading and to make use of them when we come to the throne of grace. It should go without saying that we cannot just utter words with no sincerity or feeling. We are not just uttering words or going through a routine as many people do in their liturgy. Our hearts must be in what we are doing. We must seek the assistance of the Holy Spirit as we pray. Our Lord condemned the mere uttering of words. He indicted unfeeling hypocrisy in Matthew 15:7-8, "Ye hypocrites, well did Esaias prophesy of you, saying, This people draweth nigh unto me with their mouth, and honoureth me with their lips; but their heart is far from me."

We have the assurance that the Holy Spirit will help us as we pray. Paul made this plain in Romans 8:26-27, "Likewise the Spirit also helpeth our infirmities: for we know not what we should pray for as we ought: but the Spirit itself maketh intercession for us with groanings which cannot be uttered. And he that searcheth the hearts knoweth what is the mind of the Spirit, because he maketh intercession for the saints according to the will of God." Jude exhorts us to be "praying in the Holy Ghost." (1: 20).

I am going to suggest some words we can take to the Lord when we pray. I hope this will encourage each of you to search the Scriptures to find words to take with you when you go to the Lord in prayer.

The Tongue

The tongue is one of the most important members of our bodies. There is much in Scripture about the proper use of the tongue. It is recorded in James 1:26, "If any man among you seem to be religious, and bridleth not his tongue, but deceiveth his own heart, this man's religion is vain." Certainly we need to take words with us when we go to the Lord in prayer to ask Him to help us to use our tongues aright. Some very appropriate Scriptures to use in this regard are:

Psalms 141:3, "Set a watch, O LORD, before my mouth; keep the door of my lips."

Psalms 19:14, "Let the words of my mouth, and the meditation of my heart, be acceptable in thy sight, O LORD, my strength, and my redeemer."

Confession and Repentance

There are many times in the life of a child of God when he needs to confess his sins and to turn to the Lord in repentance. There are many very suitable Scriptures to use at a time like this. There are several psalms which have been called "Penitential Psalms" because they are inspired examples of the proper way a child of God should react when he has been convicted of his sins. The most suitable of all is probably Psalm 51. Some others are Psalm 6, Psalm 32, Psalm 38, Psalm 39, Psalm 102, and Psalm 143.

A very good example of one who took words with him when he wanted to repent was the Prodigal Son. Before he went to his father, he rehearsed what he was going to say. This is a very good example for us. For a look at this rehearsal see Luke 15: 18, 19.

A very short, but extremely effective, prayer was uttered by the repentant publican in Luke 18:13, "And the publican, standing afar off, would not lift up so much as his eyes unto heaven, but smote upon his breast, saying, God be merciful to me a sinner." This prayer is rendered even more effective when we realize that the smiting of his breast is in the imperfect active tense, which indicates that he was repeatedly smiting himself on the breast. It is also significant that in the New Testament Greek the definite article is inserted in such a way that the publican is identifying himself as "the" sinner, implying that he is the greatest of sinners. It is also true that when it is said that he "would not lift up so much as his eyes to heaven" this is expressed in a double negative, placing great emphasis on his profound humility.

There are times when God's children realize that they are in sin and that they need to repent. However, their hearts are so hard they don't feel the godly

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sorrow that leads to true repentance. Our God has graciously given us words to take to Him in prayer even when we find ourselves in such a cold state. They are found in Jeremiah 31:18-19, "I have surely heard Ephraim bemoaning himself thus; Thou hast chastised me, and I was chastised, as a bullock unaccustomed to the yoke: turn thou me, and I shall be turned; for thou art the LORD my God. Surely after that I was turned, I repented..."

There are wonderful examples of saints who confessed their sins, the sins of their contemporaries, and even the sins of their forefathers. Two great examples of these prayers are found in Daniel 9 and in Nehemiah 1.

Keeping From Sin

Every true Christian realizes at least to some extent how weak he is, and how prone to sin. He desires to keep a guard over his heart and life. It is good for him to have words to take to the Lord in such a condition. The Lord Jesus Himself gave such a word in His Model Prayer. He has instructed us to pray in Matthew 6:13, "And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil..."

David prayed fervently that the Lord would keep him from sin. He prayed in Psalms 119:133, "Order my steps in thy word: and let not any iniquity have dominion over me." A very similar and more comprehensive prayer is found in Psalms 19:12-13, "Who can understand his errors? cleanse thou me from secret faults. Keep back thy servant also from presumptuous sins; let them not have dominion over me: then shall I be upright, and I shall be innocent from the great transgression."

Praise

In our need for help from God, we often forget that praise is the highest form of prayer. God more than deserves all our praise. In fact, He is the only One Who is truly worthy of praise. This is obviously pointed out in Isaiah 42:8, "I am the LORD: that is my name: and my glory will I not give to another, neither my praise to graven images." We need to be constantly engaged in praising our wonderful Lord. It is written in Hebrews 13:15, "By him therefore let us offer the sacrifice of praise to God continually, that is, the fruit of our lips giving thanks to his name." Our ambition should be that expressed in Psalms 71:8, "Let my mouth be filled with thy praise and with thy honour all the day." We should not be content with our present level of praising our God, but should have a holy ambition to grow in this activity all the days of our lives. This desire is beautifully expressed in Psalms 71:14, "But I will hope continually, and will yet praise thee more and more."

Thankfully, the Bible is replete with examples of exalted praise to God. The psalms are filled with praise. One of the best examples is Psalm 103. The first two verses set the tone for the entire psalm: "Bless the LORD, O my soul: and all that is within me, bless his holy name. Bless the LORD, O my soul, and forget not all his benefits..."

The book of Revelation is filled with scenes of praise. It would be so good to join the heavenly creatures as they offer constant praise to God. Most of us are familiar with the angelic praise offered to God for his work of creation recorded in Revelation 4:11, "Thou art worthy, O Lord, to receive glory and honour and power: for thou hast created all things, and for thy pleasure they are and were created."

There is a majestic scene in Revelation 5, where the Lord is being praised for His glorious work of redemption. In Chapter 19, He is being praised for His victorious providence.

The prophetic books are filled with His praises. One thinks of Isaiah 40, for example. What a truly awesome approach to God is written in Isaiah 57:15, "For thus saith the high and lofty One that inhabiteth eternity, whose name is Holy..."

Even the historical books of the Old Testament are filled with His praises. What could be more majestic than 1 Chronicles 29:11, "Thine, O LORD, is the greatness, and the power, and the glory, and the victory, and the majesty: for all that is in the heaven and in the earth is thine; thine is the kingdom, O LORD, and thou art exalted as head above all."

Likewise, the New Testament provides many examples of words of praise that we can take to the Lord in prayer. One example is found in Jude 1:24-25, "Now unto him that is able to keep you from falling, and to present you faultless before the presence of his glory with exceeding joy, To the only wise God our Saviour, be glory and majesty, dominion and power, both now and ever. Amen."

For Divine Guidance

There are many times in our lives that we just do not know what to do. We are perplexed, maybe even distressed, by circumstances. We are confused. We cannot see clearly what our course of action should be. At these times we have the privilege of going to our Lord in prayer and of taking words with us as we do so. One time God's Old Testament people found themselves in such a dilemma. They were beset by an overwhelming enemy and had no other recourse but to

turn to the Lord in prayer. We find their words in 2 Chronicles 20:12, "O our God, wilt thou not judge them? for we have no might against this great company that cometh against us; neither know we what to do: but our eyes are upon thee."

A similar prayer for guidance is found in Psalms 25:4, "Shew me thy ways, O LORD; teach me thy paths." Yet another one is recorded in Psalms 86:11, "Teach me thy way, O LORD; I will walk in thy truth: unite my heart to fear thy name."

Complete Prayers

There are many examples of complete prayers in the Bible which we would do well to emulate. Chief among these is the Lord's Model Prayer, which is recorded in Matt. 6: 9-13. If we put our heart into it, it is perfectly appropriate for us to pray this prayer, using the exact wording. We can also get the ideas from it and use our own words. Other examples of complete prayers which have been given for our learning and emulation are those of Paul. Two wonderful examples of his prayers are found in Ephesians 1: 15-23 and in Ephesians 3: 14-21.

Psalm 119

The psalms are a wonderful prayer book. There are many examples of prayers recorded there for all occasions. The longest chapter in the Bible, Psalm 119, furnishes many examples of prayers. In studying this psalm I have discovered at least 63 prayers! I will give just a few here:

Psalms 119:5, "O that my ways were directed to keep thy statutes!"

Psalms 119:10, "With my whole heart have I sought thee: O let me not wander from thy commandments."

Psalms 119:18 "Open thou mine eyes, that I may behold wondrous things out of thy law."

Psalms 119:25, "My soul cleaveth unto the dust: quicken thou me according to thy word."

Psalms 119:28, "My soul melteth for heaviness: strengthen thou me according unto thy word."

Psalms 119:107, "I am afflicted very much: quicken me, O LORD, according unto thy word."

Psalms 119:134, "Deliver me from the oppression of man: so will I keep thy precepts."

Psalms 119:135, "Make thy face to shine upon thy servant; and teach me thy statutes."

Psalms 119:153, "Consider mine affliction, and deliver me: for I do not forget thy law."

Psalms 119:170, "Let my supplication come before thee: deliver me according to thy word."

Psalms 119:176, "I have gone astray like a lost sheep; seek thy servant; for I do not forget thy commandments."

The Song Book

I realize that the song books we use in worship are not divinely inspired like the Scriptures are. However, most of the ideas in the songs are Scriptural. The saints of bygone days, who had some of the same struggles and experiences that we have had, have written songs that told of their experiences. Many of these songs are filled with fervent prayers. As we search the Scriptures for appropriate prayers, let us also consult our songbooks.

In Conclusion

I hope that this will be a preliminary study for each of you. I pray also that the readers will not be just hearers of the Word but will be doers also. May we give ourselves to God-honoring prayer. As we do so may we gain skill in praying. The best way to do this is to take the precious Words of our Lord to Him in prayer.