

Preparation in Prayer

I. The opening chapters of Proverbs are written from the perspective of a father passing down wisdom to his son. Among the many pieces of knowledge that this father wanted his son to know is the following from **Proverbs 4:23** “*Watch over your heart with all diligence, For from it flow the springs of life.*”

- A. The ESV translates it as “*keep your heart with all vigilance*”; The idea being that when it comes to keeping our hearts and minds pure, we are to act as a guard set at the post; We are alert and ready; we will repel anything impure that seeks entry;
- B. The father of Proverbs 4 is hardly alone in giving this admonition—it is one of the many recurring themes of scripture, especially in the New Testament.

I. We often find ourselves quoting from **1 Peter 5:8**, reminding one another to be sober and alert because we have an enemy who walks about like a lion looking for his next meal

- a) We encourage each other to be ready at a moments notice, always prepared for action:

(1) Therefore, prepare your minds for action, keep sober in spirit, fix your hope completely on the grace to be brought to you at the revelation of Jesus Christ (1 Peter 1:13)

- b) We speak about being ready and watchful for the Lord’s return

(1) Be dressed in readiness, and keep your lamps lit. “Be like men who are waiting for their master when he returns from the wedding feast, so that they may immediately open the door to him when he comes and knocks.” (Luke 12:35-36)

C. The Lord, His apostles, and numerous inspired writers wanted to make this point clear: ***Spiritual success comes to those who don’t get caught unprepared***

II. What I want for us to consider is how the concepts of vigilance and preparation relate to our prayers:

- A. When we look at **Eph. 6:10-17**, we often look at all the different pieces and comment on how we wouldn’t want to be “caught without them”. (Don’t forget your shield! How can you fight without a sword! etc)

B. Those same sorts of thoughts are not always extended to **v 18-20**... *Who thinks about getting caught without your prayer?*

1. *Can't I pray any time and anywhere?*

2. *Couldn't I simply pray in my head and heart?*

3. *illus. of best prayer...*

4. There isn't a ritual that needs to be performed, or any sort of special physical preparation; however, that when it comes to *effective prayers* there is *spiritual preparation involved*

C. In the rest of this study, I'd like to direct our attention toward two warnings about diligence as it relates to our prayer lives.

I. The First of these comes from James 5:13-18, where James is writing about prayer, largely in the context of using it to serve one another: (READ)

a. First I want us to observe the reasons James gives us to pray for for ourselves and others:

i. First on his list is **suffering**: The Christians of James' day frequently suffered physical and emotional affliction-- and prayers is where is first directs them to go.

ii. Next in **v 14**, he mentions **sickness**: I believe that in the context of **v 15** this is spiritual sickness-- but physical sickness would certainly included in **v 13**

iii. In **v 16** he encourages the confession of sins along with prayers for the sinner;

1. There is no aspect of our lives that has been excluded from this list: our physical needs, our spiritual needs, and communicating those to God are all affected by prayer.

a. Do these sound like needs that each of us have?

b. Are these ways in which you would like to serve others?

i. The only question is, "Am I preparing myself to help?"

b. I believe the warning comes in the middle of all that he has to say about prayer

i. He begins by giving a list of important needs all affected by prayer; He ends by giving an example about what great things prayer can accomplish; but *right in the middle of these is a **disclaimer**: The Prayer of a **righteous** man can accomplish much.*

- ii. I feel confident that one implication is that in order to be ready to serve others through the act of prayer, we must insure that we are living righteous lives.
- c. Righteous refers to one who is innocent or holy in character; One who has made God the center of their lives, and the pursuit of His will their purpose.
 - i. It is the prayer of this type of person that has the power to accomplish much;
- d. There are a couple of observations I'd like to make here:
 - i. **1 John 1:5** tells that “**God is light, and in Him there is no darkness**”. We are well aware that God cannot abide sin in His presence, and with the exception of a penitent sinner coming to him in prayer for forgiveness, someone who is failing to lead a life of righteousness would have their prayers hindered because of God's very nature; we cannot draw near to His throne with impure hearts and hands
 - i. And so this would be at least one way to take this warning to heart
 - ii. But a second observation is that those who are leading a God centered life, already have their hearts and mind inclined toward praying for their brethren; Someone who who is not living righteously will have to have their heart and mind turned toward prayer for others.
 - 1. I have known of brethren who have confided that they felt unable to pray for those who were dealing with sickness because they themselves didn't have a strong prayer life.
 - 2. I have known brethren who were unable to pray for others struggling with sin because they were too caught up in giving in to temptation themselves
 - 3. I've known others who because of poor relationships with other brothers or sisters refused to pray them;
 - a. These are generally exceptions and not the rule; but I'm using them to illustrate what a shame it is when someone is given a situation where they have the opportunity to serve another through prayer, and yet there is some sort of obstacle that prevents them from doing so.
- e. I don't want to leave the impression that only “super saints” have effective prayer. What we are encouraging is that we pursue righteousness in such a way that we are both inclined and ready to serve others through prayer.

2. The Second warning I'd like to look at comes from 1 Peter 4, and is given in the context of how prayer affects our ability to stay faithful/endure (Read 7, 12-14)

a. Peter's message to these brethren by and large is one of Endurance:

i. 1:6-7 speak of having their faith put to extreme tests going being distressed by trials

ii. 2:21-23 speak about looking to Jesus as an example of behavior during suffering

iii. 3:19-17 again speaks about the importance of Christ-like conduct in whatever trials we might face;

1. And in many of these as well as chapter 4 from which we read, there is instruction on preparation:

2. James encouraged righteousness, Peter makes mention of "Self-control, and a Sober Spirit"

b. In what ways do self-control and being of a sober mind affect our prayers?

i. Self control means for someone to be in their right mind- or to be sane, while sober is to be free from intoxicants:

1. Now, it very well could be that all Peter had in mind was; "Brethren, you've got an awful lot of praying coming up, so make sure you're not drunk with wine!"

a. While certainly true, I do believe there is a broader picture here: The idea that as disciples of Christ, there is a certain state of mind that we are to pursue, and it is brought about by choosing to meditate on the right things:

b. Paul describes it in in **Philippians 4:8** *"brethren, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is of good repute, if there is any excellence and if anything worthy of praise, dwell on these things."*

ii. We mentioned a moment ago about how we should already be inclined to pray, and not need turning in that direction: Dwelling on these things that Paul mentions is what will ensure that we are of a sober mind:

1. We will find it exceptionally difficult to pray:

a. After entertaining ourselves with books, movies, television where the opposite of these attributes is encouraged.

- b. Spending time with people who encourage us to behave like anything but a Christian
- c. Spending our time during the week pursuing trivial matters, but neglecting our spiritual growth.
 - i. The point is this: If we are filling our minds with something other than Paul's list, most likely, prayer isn't going to enter our minds period.
- c. As with James, Peter gives us a list of needs that Prayer fulfills:
 - i. Lusts that wage war on our souls (2:11)
 - ii. An enemy that wants to see us dead (5:8)
 - iii. Trials and persecution from those who reject the Lord
 - iv. Being prepared to pray through the "fiery ordeals" requires self-control and a sober spirit.

Conclusion:

- a.** the Devil would love nothing more than to find us unprepared, with our communication with God cut off
- b.** He delights in seeing those who aren't serving others through the powerful act of prayer:
- c.** Don't give him the satisfaction!