

## *Issachar Teaching Newsletter for June 2005*

### Praying the Word

For centuries there has been an approach to prayer, which involves "praying Scripture". It's known by the Latin phrase *Lectio Divina*. It's basically a way of allowing Scriptural texts to "speak back to you" as you meditate on them. This communing with the Author of the Word gradually brings about an intimacy opening the heart to a deep encounter with the Lord. Increased trust, love and obedience are some of the fruit of this deeper relationship with Him.

In *Lectio Divina* as we read and meditate on the Word we begin to converse with the Lord, treating the text as a topic of conversation with Him. Instead of just reflecting on what we're reading, we treat the Word as something personal between the Lord and ourselves. It's like actually speaking to Him as we read the Word, allowing the Word and its Author to speak back to us.

This has also been termed *Mental Prayer* and was a classic form of devotional life for a major part of Christian history. However because it was cradled within Roman Catholicism, most Evangelicals and Pentecostals have rejected it. Yet despite its origin there is something real and blessed in its approach. It can even be argued that *Lectio Divina* is similar in approach to a particular form of Jewish prayer known as *Kavvanat ha-lev*.

In this article we're going to be faced with a challenge to move out of our familiarity in prayer and consider something new.

The challenge is to be open to a fresh blowing of the Holy Spirit as He inspires us in the "art of prayer". While this phrase may sound strange to some, there is definitely an "art" in knowing what Biblically-orientated prayer is. So often what passes for prayer is like a shopping list of expectations and self-serving petitions.

Prayer that's founded firmly on Scripture (and here I don't simply mean adding Biblical texts) will re-address the woeful lack of balance in ignoring the grandeur and awesomeness of God Almighty. Much prayer still suffers from the want of realising He is transcendent, all sufficient, totally perfect in all His doings, glorious in His attributes, and magnificent in His un-surpassing glory!

Praying from the heart, with the Word firmly entrenched within, causes our minds to conform to Biblical patterns of thought which can help us discern the snares of a worldly mindset. It is from having a mind that's more persuaded by the world than Scripture, that causes so much unease in us. Some of the signs of this are; doubting prayer will actually work, giving up when we should persevere, and talking more about prayer than actually doing it!

We need rescuing from this mindset. To put it simply, having a Biblical prayer pattern can re-address many of our common ailments in the practice of prayer. The "art" of prayer is not so much a method, but an attitude, an understanding based on the character of God Himself. This will move us from self-centeredness in our prayer life to a unique view of the majesty of our God. It will be of great eternal worth to all who act on it!

As Spirit-filled believers we are used to "praying in the Spirit" and acknowledge that such prayer somehow by-passes our logic and thought patterns.

When I was baptised in the Holy Spirit I found this new form of prayer liberating and exhilarating. It displaced all my formal ways of praying and released me into greater dimensions of prayer and intimacy with the Lord. I really enjoyed it.

However, like some before me, I disregarded what I had learnt about "formalised" prayer, sometimes referred to as *Mental* or *Contemplative Prayer*. This was a mistake. The old adage is still true; we often throw out the baby with the bath water.

Just because something was used by traditional denominations or dressed up in a "religious" garment doesn't mean it's entirely invalid. We need to remember to look at the heart of the issue and not how it's presented.

Jesus warned us about wrong judgments. Isn't it amazing how quickly we can criticise the Pharisees for not seeing into the heart of a matter, but not apply that same test to ourselves?

**The Lord will *challenge* our thinking  
to *reveal* the condition of our spirit:  
He *offends* the mind to *expose* the heart.**

It's only now that I've arrived at a place where I can entertain once more some of the truths I once naïvely put aside. Of course I'm not talking about major doctrines here, but rather issues like prayer and Biblical meditation.

Recently I had a short but powerful dream. I was watching a man holding a large and important book. I realised the "man" was in fact an angel. He opened the book and flicked through the pages until he came to a chapter with the heading "*Revisited Truth*".

As I gazed upon the chapter I knew the Lord was saying to me there were things He had once tried to show me that I had either turned away from or neglected to finish. I needed to revisit these things again.

A few days later a prophetic sister in our Fellowship had a dream and word from the Lord for me. She saw me as a much younger man with longer hair, and said that God wanted me to know there were things I had not finished from my earlier years.

I immediately knew this was so; my own dream confirmed this. When I was in my late twenties (and my hair was longer!) I had a hunger for experiencing a deeper interior spiritual life. Before I was baptised in the Holy Spirit the only form of prayer I knew that could help this way was Contemplative Prayer, and it was to this that I had turned.

Despite some of the rigidity and religious baggage attached to such prayer, there was a reality in it that opened me up to a deeper intimacy with the Lord.

After my baptism in the Spirit I had shifted track dramatically and put away almost all other concepts of prayer, reacting against anything non-Charismatic.

Now I was at a place where I had to stop and reflect on what I had tasted before. Instinctively I knew the Lord wanted me to look again at my earlier spiritual practices. However, this time He wanted me to experience prayer as a relationship with Him rather than just 'doing' the prayer.

What this led to is outlined in chapter 7 titled *Pray Without Ceasing* in my new booklet due for release in October 2005.

However, as part of the revival of my prayer life I saw the need to use Scripture more directly as *Prayer*. This is when I began to recall such forms of prayer as *Lectio Divina*.

Having used this type of contemplative prayer once, then rejecting it totally in favour of speaking in Tongues, I was now back at the beginning again. But now the formalism of my earlier prayer life was gone. It had been purged from its religiosity by my experience of Tongues and I was free to see some liberating truths I had overlooked.

It's as if I had tasted some truth, discovered a purer truth in Tongues, then had to be taken back to re-capture what I had unthinkingly thrown away. Nevertheless, this time my new prayer language in Tongues had helped to mature me and develop my discernment.

I felt I could now safely review such practices as Lectio Divina without being trapped by religion and formalism.

As I began to study the Hebrew roots of the Christian faith, I saw how Jewish prayer used such methods as "conversation" in their style. We see this in the Psalms for example.

Even as Christians we use the Psalms this way. When we need encouragement or comfort, we readily turn to them. Most of us who use the Psalms in this way "personalise" them to suit our particular need at the time.

Well, that's nothing more than using the Word of God as a kind of prayer. In other words, it's very close to the centuries-old practice of Lectio Divina. The Book of Ecclesiastes says:

**That which has been, is what will be,  
that which is done, is what will be done,  
and there is nothing new under the sun.  
Is there anything of which it may be said,  
" See, this is new " ?  
It has already been in ancient times before us.**

*Eccles 1: 9-10*

So I've returned to revisit Truth, and especially to see what Scripture says about prayer. Along the way I saw that the prayers of Paul as found in his Epistles, are superbly appropriate for revival praying today. This is what my new book will partly be about. The prayers of the Apostles – powerful, impacting and practical!

Blessings and the Lord's favour upon you,

Peter McArthur

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