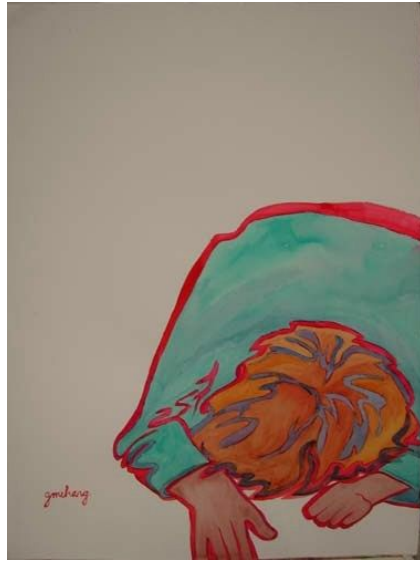


Maranatha Mirror Message

Recent Sermon 1/05/2020

GO INTO YOUR ROOM AND SHUT THE DOOR!



*"Intercession" courtesy of Gwen Meharg
drawneartogod.com*

In a church Jean and I were part of long ago there was a woman we all called Aunt Irene. Aunt Irene had been part of that church from the time she was a little girl, when her father was the neighborhood fire chief. Aunt Irene stuck with us through all the changes in our growing congregation. She was delighted to see black folks and Mexicans and Arabs becoming part of our church. But there was one thing that drove Aunt Irene around the bend. It was when Mary Foster began to pray. We had open prayer after the sermon, and once Mary Foster got rolling we were in for some heavy praying. Mary Foster had grown up in the black church tradition, where open prayer was as natural as breathing. Mary wasn't putting on a show. She was crying out to the Lord for help for herself, her family and for all of us.

After the service Aunt Irene would go up to Mary Foster and say, "Now Mary, it says in the Bible, 'Go into your room and shut the door, and pray to your Father in secret.'" Mary would smile warmly and thank Aunt Irene for the kind advice. Of course, Mary Foster had long since

been in the habit of going into her room every day and praying to her Father in secret. But Mary was convinced that if you prayed to God in secret, it was okay to pray to God in church. So if next Sunday she felt inspired to storm the gates of heaven nothing could stop her.

Aunt Irene and Mary Foster were both right. Our Lord tells us to go into our room and shut the door and pray to our Father in secret. But it's also clear that the Master has no problem with Mary Foster's kind of open prayer. We see it in Acts Chapter 4 when Peter and John were released from prison and the believers lifted up prayers so powerful that the place where they were gathered was shaken.

Of course, before we can pray like those believers prayed, or like Mary Foster prays, we need to learn how to go into our room and shut the door, and pray to our Father in secret.

And when you pray, you must not be like the hypocrites; for they love to stand and pray in the synagogues and at the street corners, that they may be seen by men. Truly, I say to you, they have received their reward.

But when you pray, go into your room and shut the door and pray to your Father who is in secret; and your Father who sees in secret will reward you.

Matthew 6:5-6



***"Prayer Warrior" courtesy of Gwen Meharg
drawneartogod.com***

“Go into your room and shut the door.” Private prayer is where God’s Spirit teaches us how to pray. Alone with God each day we move from this world into God’s world. That’s where God does things in us and through us that happen nowhere else.

In a gathering like this, we’re all at different stages in our prayer life. Some of us may be disciplined in spending time alone with God every day. Some of us may approach prayer in a more random way.

But for the next few minutes, let’s assume that we’re all just learning to pray. Actually we are all just learning to pray. Because when it comes to prayer, we’re always beginners, beginners to our dying day. After years as an apostle, Paul says,

“The Spirit helps us in our weakness, for we do not know how to pray as we ought.”

Romans 8:26

When it comes to prayer, we need help, not from some “prayer expert” or some “spiritual adviser,” but directly from God. As long as we are in these bodies we need help from the Spirit to enable us to connect with God in prayer. And help from the Spirit is the one thing we can absolutely count on.

“If you who are evil know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to those who ask him?”

Luke 11:13

The Holy Spirit is the one who helps us to pray, intercedes for us with sighs too deep for words. The Spirit prays inside us even as we struggle, helping us to actually connect with God.

We can expect help from the Spirit in specific ways.

The Spirit of God helps us find the time to pray.



*"There is a Time" courtesy of Mindi Oaten
mindioaten.com*

When we can't seem to find time to get alone with God each day, it's often because daily prayer looks like just another chore. Some kind of spiritual duty. Do we think of eating our pork chops as a duty? Drinking a cold glass of water when we're thirsty as a duty? And how long would we survive if we decided that breathing is just too much trouble? "Oh I'm so tired of breathing, I think I'll take a break from breathing for a day or two." We'd be dead in minutes!

Prayer is simply spiritual breathing. And yet the main reason we can't find time to get alone with God daily is because we see it as a chore. An obligation. A burden. "I'd really like to do this, but I just can't seem to find the time." "I did it for a week once, but couldn't seem to keep it up."

But now we're going to look to heaven to help us. We're going to let the Spirit of God transform that time alone with God each day from an "obligation" to a gift---a gift that refreshes our lives as nothing else in the world ever did.

Here's where we get recharged. We go into that room, weary and dull, we come out refreshed, ready to face the world.

The Spirit is going to come down into our confused lives and help us find the time to get alone with God each day and pray. Pretty soon we'll wonder how we ever got through our days without it.

The Spirit of God helps us find the words.



"Consuming Fire" courtesy of Gwen Meharg

So here we are, alone with God. What do we do now? How do we even start?

"And in praying do not heap up empty phrases as the Gentiles do; for they think that they will be heard for their many words.

Do not be like them, for your Father knows what you need before you ask him.

Pray then like this: Our Father who art in heaven,

Hallowed be thy name.

Thy kingdom come.

Thy will be done,

On earth as it is in heaven."

Matthew 6:7-10

Of course we can start our prayers any way we like. But many of us have found the Lord's Prayer a great way to begin. The Lord's Prayer helps us to keep it simple, because not one word is wasted.

It also reminds us that if we want to get through to God we have to get right with each other.

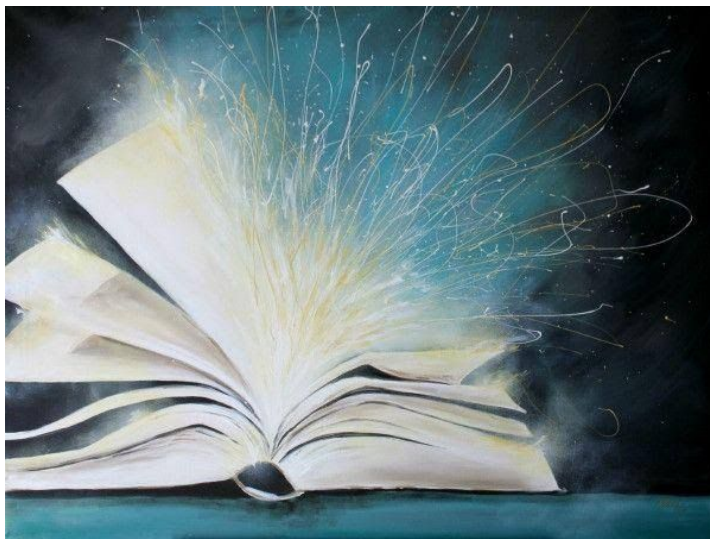
Forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive those who trespass against us.

Okay, so I prayed the Lord's Prayer, now what? If words come to us, we just start praying. Maybe we pray out loud, maybe we pray in a whisper. If no words seem to come, maybe it's time to just listen.

The Spirit helps us to hear the voice of God.

Somewhere in that time alone with God we begin to hear him speak to us through scripture. The Bible is the witness of flawed, stubborn, stiff-necked people like ourselves, who encountered God and found grace.

When we read the Bible we are entering their world. And the same God who spoke to them begins to speak to us.



The Living Word courtesy of Mindi Oaten

The Bible is like Mount Sinai. You go up there looking for God, and God comes to you like he came to Moses. Most of us find the psalms and the gospels of Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John, are great places to begin. In those gospels we meet a Jesus far different from the "Jesus" we find out there in the world, or even in many churches. We read slowly and let it sink in.

When we hit something that doesn't make sense we say, "Lord, this doesn't make sense. Help me to see what this means."

Often we come across a word that's just what we need. It could be a word of encouragement or a word of correction. It's always a word that puts power from heaven into our lives. If I'm being told to forgive, I'm given power to forgive. If I'm directed to right a wrong, heaven gives me the strength to do it.

The Spirit of God will show us how to intercede for others.



Intercession Fire Gwen Meharg

Without a doubt, the most powerful thing we do when we're alone with God, is intercede for other people.

We take time while we're in that room with the door shut, to lift people by name before the Father's throne. We lift up that name, and if the person we're praying for is a thousand miles away, something from God's world touches that person.

Sometimes we linger over a name and ask God to touch them with healing, or help them out of a financial jam, or guide them to a decent job. But often we just lift up their name before God, trusting that God will touch them where they need it.

Once we start doing this, God keeps adding names to our bundle. Our loved ones. Our neighbors. People in the church. Our friends. And especially people who give us a hard time. We don't pray, "Lord, straighten him out! Make him get off my back!" No, we pray, "*Flood this person I'm thinking of with your fulfilling mercy, meeting all their needs!*"

We ask the Father to bless them.

The beautiful thing about this work of interceding for others---and it is work---is that nobody sees it but God.

"Okay," you say, "that all sounds nice. But I've been praying for Jack for five years, and he's just as ornery as ever." Never mind. Just keep on asking God to bless Jack. No prayer is ever wasted.

If we make a habit of daily getting off alone with God, all the power of heaven comes to our aid. And if we do this right, two things will happen:

First, our life will begin to match our prayers. We'll pray for the needy, and God will show us how to help the needy. We'll pray for the sick, and the Spirit will guide us to visit the sick, to call them on the phone and connect with them. Everything we pray for, we will find ourselves doing.

The second thing that will happen is that we will find ourselves thanking God more than we ever did before. Our lives will begin to overflow with gratitude. We won't have to TRY to be thankful, we'll just BE thankful.

Aunt Irene has long-since gone to be with the Lord. As far as I know, Mary Foster is still storming heaven with her prayers----every day alone with God, and often in her church.

And if Mary Foster were here, I'm sure she'd tell us that the best time of her day is that time alone with God.

No matter what Kind of prayer life we have at the moment, we all need help from the Spirit. And that help comes with power as we get alone with God each day.

Only God knows what challenges we're each going to face in the year which has just begun. Only God knows what challenges our churches are going to face. There are so many things out there in the future which are beyond our control.

One thing we can control, one thing that will help us as nothing else will, is this simple practice of daily checking in with God---in that room with the world shut out, to get refocused and recharged.

The Spirit of God will help us find the time.

The Spirit will help us find the words.

The Spirit will enable us to hear God's voice.

The Spirit will put fire from heaven into those prayers we pray for each other and for all people.

Whatever challenges we face, the God who answers prayer will give us all the help we need if we'll but check in with him each day in that room with the door shut.

Prayer

Lord help us in our weakness when it comes to this most important part of our spiritual walk, prayer... Oh dear Master, that we would fervently look forward to shutting the door and being alone with you, opening our hearts, baring our souls. Dear sweet Father, connect us to you, moving us from our world to your world. May we know, to the depth of our beings, that this time with you is a precious gift, a gift we want to savor as much as possible, a time we need to survive and thrive. Give us the words to say to you, may your Spirit guide us in how to speak and listen to you as we pray. May we also hear your voice speaking through your living words in the scriptures. May we meet you there and find the answers and instructions we are seeking. Help us to lift up others to your throne of mercy. Lay many on our hearts to lift before you. May our list of names increase, those we love, those we criticize, those we despair over, those who irritate us, the broken, the sick, the lonely, the lost, the random strangers we meet. Heal them, guide them, bless them, touch them. Flood them with your mercy. In all this be with us as we face the challenges of each day, the things out of our control. May we find your help as we shut the door to all but you.



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