

Week 4 ~ Written Prayer

“Is any one of you in trouble? He should pray. Is anyone happy? Let him sing songs of praise. Is any one of you sick? He should call the elders of the church to pray over him and anoint him with oil in the name of the Lord.”

(James 5:13-14, NIV)

“Seek ye first the kingdom of God . . .”

(Matthew 6:33, KJV)

There is a great deal of material we could cover in just these two verses of James — praying for the sick, praise = prayer, anointing oil, the work of elders, and even how this passage, in itself, is the perfect example how God gives big blessings in small packages.

Instead, I ask this question: Where is prayer on your actions/ reactions list? You know, the list of actions you take in case of emergency? Or perhaps, asked another way, where is God on your speed-dial list?

Matthew tells us to seek God and his ways, his kingdom, first. This implies going to the Lord in *all* things and in *all* ways first. Before turning to anyone or anything else, we are to seek Him. That doesn't mean we can never ask for advice, go see a doctor, or share our good news with friends. In fact, those are good and wise things to. It simply means that God is our first stop, our first phone call, our first line of defense.

Are you quick to run to others before turning to God for advice? When you have a headache do you even consider God's power to heal outside the bottle of ibuprofen? When you receive an unexpected check in the mail do you turn and praise the Lord or do you phone a friend and squeal your delight?

Maybe you find yourself going to God when you need his help but are a little slower to approach Him when all is great and grand in your life, or vice versa. What might that say about your heart?

If you find yourself going elsewhere before turning to the Lord, what can you do today to turn that around?

How can you help others do the same?

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Written prayer is just what you might expect – writing your prayers instead of simply thinking or uttering them. There is no right or wrong way to write your prayers, your thoughts to God. Simply write in the way that most comes natural.

As we discovered in last week's mini devotional, creativity is king, and there's no better way to test the waters than to try your hand at it here. You can: write your thoughts to God as a letter – Dear God . . . ; ask God a list of questions that burden your heart or stump your intellect; prayer in poetry, much like the prayers we read in Psalms; or write in the same voice as you talk. Write it however you feel it.

A few suggestions (and these are only *suggestions*):

- Make sure to have a pen or two handy that you KNOW work. It can be rather frustrating to be in the middle of a thought and your writing utensil dies on you.
- It's a good idea to write in a notebook or writing pad that is relatively clear of other random notes or scribbles. This helps keep the heart and mind aligned in purpose rather than losing focus because you turned the page and there was your grocery list or ideas for your backyard renovation. As with any kind of prayer, the less clutter and reason for distraction the better.
- Write in a place that is comfortable and conducive to writing and praying. While lying on the couch may be relaxing for other forms of soul searching, you might find it difficult to write while stretched out on the sofa. Then again . . .
- If this is something you plan on doing going into the future, or have done for some time, you may want to invest in "special" items – nice pens or pencils, a special notebook or journal specifically for written prayer, and whatever else lends itself to practicing prayer in this way. Maybe you, like me, are more likely to avail yourself to keeping a journal of prayer if it seems more like an occasion. (If you are shaking your head yes at this last statement then this "suggestion" is almost assuredly a "must do." ☺)

Over the years, I have found prayer useful in tracking my own heart and my personal journey with Jesus. As a regular journaler, writing my prayers is cathartic, and I find that ending my journal entries with prayer keeps me from simply complaining or whining about the downs and reminds me to credit God for the ups. In essence, writing my prayers, for some reason, helps me to see better God's sovereignty in all things.

It's also fun to go back, from time to time, perusing the prayers I've written, and be reminded of how God has been present in my life. I have mile markers, written in black and white, of how far I've come, of how far God has led me.

I don't know what praying in this way will mean to you, but I pray that, in doing so, you will be blessed.



Reflection Questions

1. What did you most enjoy about prayer this week?
2. What was most challenging?
3. How did you notice about your prayers as you were forced to slow down and dictate them to paper?
4. Did you feel more expressive or less expressive in your heart toward God as a result of writing your thoughts and feelings to him? What do you think that says about you?
5. What revelations, if any, did you receive in prayer this week? Were any directly related to praying in this way?
6. What are you most likely to take away from this prayer exercise?