

Praying Through the Sanctuary

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In the first chapter we looked at the Biblical and practical necessity to make the Living Water an integral and ongoing part of our lives. The Living Water of God's Word must seep deep to nourish the very roots of our souls on a daily basis.

If we have heard God's voice in His Word then an intense longing will be awakened to converse with Him who has so graciously revealed Himself to us. Prayer is the second discipline of discipleship and calls us away from the busyness of life in order to abide under the shadow of the Almighty.

Since our Western culture has not usually understood or seen the need for a quiet time with God, the practice of prayer has often been neglected or misunderstood. When we make an attempt to pray, our minds often draw a blank and we sit there rather anxiously, waiting for an appropriate time to pass so we can get back to our busy lives with the assurance that we have fulfilled our duty to spend some time with the Lord.

One solution to this dilemma, is to have a mental picture which leads us in an appropriate way through the various stages of prayer. Some individuals have found a blessing in using the "Our Father" as a model for prayer. Many have found it most helpful to focus on each phrase of the Lord's prayer as they go about their prayer time.

Another mental picture some have put into practice is using the various parts of the sanctuary as a way to meditate and pray. In the following paragraphs is a short description of the sanctuary given to Moses in the wilderness—which was a type of the heavenly sanctuary above (Hebrews 8:5). Suggested devotional Scriptures and thoughts are then added to the description.

It is early in the morning and quiet before the dawn. Soon the sun will awaken every bird, flower and creature to the intense business of living. Freeways and Starbucks will fill with both the eager and the reluctant as the city stirs to rise as a cat from its slumber.

The Bible tells us that "At daybreak Jesus went out to a solitary place" (Luke 4:42) to spend time alone with God. Before the intense pressure of hurried time, Jesus spent quiet time with God. Communion with His Father filled the heart of Jesus with the heavenly manna so He could go forth and feed the starving multitudes with the Bread of Life.

When was the last time you visited the quiet sanctuary of the soul? Everyday the Lord is waiting for us to take off our shoes, softly tread upon holy ground and wondrously gaze on the Burning Bush of His presence.

“Be still, and know that I am God” (Psalms 46:10). “Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest” (Matthew 11:28).

God is not a slave driver but a rest provider. His sanctuary is now open for business. And don't worry. . . The rat race will still be there when you return. Have a soothing and quiet time with God.

Enter His Gates

“Enter his gates with thanksgiving and his courts with praise; give thanks to him and praise his name” (Psalms 100:4).

The sanctuary in the wilderness was surrounded by a seven foot high pure white linen curtain which enclosed a space of 150 by 75 feet. There was only one curtained gate on the eastern side of the courtyard. This provided the only way into God’s presence and symbolized Jesus who said that He Himself was the only Way (*John 14:6*) and the one true gate: “I am the gate; whoever enters through me will be saved. He will come in and go out, and find pasture” (*John 10:9*).

When the penitent sinner would bring his sacrifice to the sanctuary, he would have to enter through that gate. The gate served as a barrier between the sinner and the world. Whatever were the troubles that beset the person, they were left behind. In the fullest sense of the word, they were now entering the “sanctuary.”

Perhaps it was in appreciation of the protection this sacred space afforded along with the welcoming hug of God’s love that inspired the Psalmist to break out in song and exclaim: “Enter his gates with thanksgiving and his courts with praise; give thanks to him and praise his name” (*Psalms 100:4*).

Prayer Thought #1—As you leave for a time the troubles of this world and through Jesus enter the security and protection of the sanctuary, what can you truly thank God for?

Behold the Sacrifice

“Behold the Lamb of God which takes away the sin of the world” (John 1:29).

The first thing the worshipper would see as they entered the gates was the altar of sacrifice which was about seven and one-half feet square and four and a half-feet high (Exodus 27:1). It was made of bronze and upon it the priests would offer the daily sacrifices of the sanctuary service.

At the very front of this rather imposing and beautiful barbeque, the priests were instructed to throw the ashes along with the insides of the bird sacrifices (Leviticus 1:16). Thus as the worshipper looked downward they were forcibly reminded that the wages of every sin is death and that the day of judgment will result in rebellion being burned to ashes (Malachi 4:1-3).

The repentant sinner would be encouraged by the priest to kneel, place their hands on the animal and confess their sins. Then the innocent animal would be placed upon the altar to suffer and die in place of the guilty. Thus was taught the mystery of redemptive love who Himself provided the sacrifice in order that the gift of grace may flow freely to all who believe.

Prayer Thought #2— As you behold Jesus the innocent Lamb suffering and dying in your place, what thoughts, feelings and emotions about your own self-filled life arise?

Cleanse the Heart

“If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and cleanse us from all unrighteousness” (1John 1:29).

Between the altar of sacrifice and the Tabernacle stood a bronze laver or a place where the priest would wash and cleanse himself before entering the Holy Place. The inside of the water-filled basin was lined with mirrors which the women of the children of Israel had donated (Exodus 38:8). This basin therefore would wonderfully reflect the person’s image as they were washing.

James 1:23-25 tells us that just as a person looks into a mirror in order to see themselves, we can peer into the Law of God in order to observe our imperfections. As we gaze upon the perfect law of love, we begin to perceive our own self-centeredness and longed to be cleansed.

Praise God that He Himself has provided the Living Water that we might be cleansed from all of our sins! Not only that, but the cleansing water is right there, next to the mirror. The Lord never shows us the law without providing the water. It is always in the same basin. It is time to wash up. We are about to enter the Holy Place.

Prayer Thought #3— As you behold the reflection of His loving character, what smudges of self do you want to be cleansed from your own soul?

Feed the Soul

“When your words came, I ate them; they were my joy and my heart’s delight, for I bear your name, O LORD God Almighty” (Jeremiah 15:16).

The tabernacle itself was about fifteen feet high, fifteen feet long and forty-five feet wide. Its entrance was also on the east and was divided into two compartments: the Holy Place where the priests would minister daily and the Most Holy Place where only the High Priest would enter once a year on the Day of Atonement.

The Holy Place rightly represented the daily devotional life of feeding on the Word, prayer and service that every believer should practice in order to lead a holy life. As the priest would enter the Holy Place, the Table of Showbread or the Bread of the Presence was on the right hand side. There twelve loaves of bread would be placed every Sabbath. These loaves were made out of the manna and represented Jesus who was the Living Bread that came down from heaven (John 6:5).

As the last chapter emphasized, the daily feeding upon God’s Word, the moment by moment blessing of being planted by the Living Water is the primary means the Lord uses to nourish our souls in this famine-plagued world. Don’t gobble down the food that is offered here. Sit down. Take your time. There is no haste or no delay in the Sanctuary of life.

Prayer Thought #4— Besides the verse noted above, meditate on the following verses as you think about the blessing of God’s Word in your life: “Give us this day our daily bread” (Matthew 6:11). Thy Word is a lamp unto my feet and a light unto my path” (Psalm 119:105).

Commune with Jesus

“Let my prayer be set forth before thee as incense; and the lifting up of my hands as the evening sacrifice” (Psalms 141:2).

In the Ancient Near East, incense was widely regarded as a fitting symbol for prayer. Just as the perfumed smoke would ascend, the petitioner would be reminded that their prayers should ascend to the Lord above.

In the Tabernacle in the wilderness the golden altar of incense stood right in front of the curtain which separated the Holy from the Most Holy Place. This curtain was not as high as the ceiling so allowed a gap between the two compartments. Although the altar of incense was physically in the Holy Place, the writer to the Hebrews tells us that it actually was more connected to the ministry of the Most Holy Place (Hebrews 9:3-4).

As the priest would offer up the incense, the smoke would arise and curl up and over the curtain into the Most Holy Place. Although the incense was specifically attended to in the morning and evening (Exodus 30:7-8), its aroma filled the sanctuary continually and thus became a fit symbol for the daily and ongoing prayer life of the believer.

Prayer Thought #5— “Every sincere prayer is heard in heaven. It may not be fluently expressed; but if the heart is in it, it will ascend to the sanctuary where Jesus ministers, and He will present it to the Father without one awkward, stammering word, beautiful and fragrant with the incense of His own perfection” (DA 667.3).

Let Your Light Shine

“You are the light of the world. . . . let your light shine before men, that they may see your good deeds and praise your Father in heaven (Matthew 5:14-16).

The seven-branched lampstand was made out of one talent of pure gold (Exodus 37:24) and provided light for the service in the Tabernacle. It was on the left side, opposite the table of showbread and was a fitting symbol for the balanced life of devotion and service every believer is called to partake in.

The inner devotional life of Bible study and prayer should shine out to others as we go about our daily pilgrimage. The abiding in the presence of the Almighty should rightly lead us to abound in sharing in the love of God with others. Just as Jesus spent time between the mountain of prayer and the valley of need, we need both to feed upon the Word and exercise our spiritual muscles in active service to others.

Prayer Thought #6— How are you going to let the love and goodness of God shine out to others today? Who is especially in darkness and needs the warm light of God’s love?

Behold the Law

“Blessed is the man you discipline, O LORD, the man you teach from your law” (Psalms 94:12).

In the second compartment of the Tabernacle was the ark of the covenant which contained the ten commandments. Only the high priest could go into the Most Holy Place once a year on the Day of Atonement. It was here between the cherubim that the glory of God would rest. The ministering priests were constantly aware that God Himself was just beyond the veil and they went about their work with the utmost reverence.

The Law of God is a beautiful summation of His character of love and grace. It begins with the declaration that He had brought the children of Israel out of bondage. (Exodus 20:2). Grace then is the whole basis for keeping the law. We are honest and pure because of the gracious redemption God has provided for us in Christ.

At the end of every day it would be well for us to review our lives in light of this great law of love. The Lord has already opened the gates of salvation, provided the sacrifice and cleansing water, nourished us with the Bread of Life and communion with Him and entrusted us with His service. Fully assured of our standing with God, let us go to Him so He may sanctify us holy with His truth.

Prayer Thought #7—“Love worketh no ill to his neighbour: therefore love is the fulfilling of the law. Rom. 13:10. The question of deepest interest to each one should be, Am I meeting the requirements of the law of God? That law is holy, just, and good, and God would have us daily compare our actions with this, His great standard of righteousness. Only by a close examination of self in the light of God's Word can we discover our deviations from His holy rule of right” (That I May Know Him, 298).