

The Problem of Prayer

*For I know the plans I have for you," declares the Lord,
"plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future.
Then you will call on me and come and pray to me, and I will listen to you.
You will seek me and find me when you seek me with all your heart.
Jeremiah 29:11-13 (NIV)*

Prayer is the easiest spiritual exercise and at the same time it is the most difficult. A prayer can be as simple as a sentence uttered in a time of sorrow.

In Matthew 9:27 (NIV) we read, "As Jesus went on from there, two blind men followed him, calling out, 'Have mercy on us, Son of David!'" Here the blind men ask for mercy. Mercy is God compassionately addressing us as miserable while grace speaks of God meeting our need for redemption.

The men were in a pitiful situation. Certainly for Jesus to have compassion was what they desired. So a prayer may simply be a request for the Lord to look upon us and do good to us in our suffering.

A prayer may also be a statement of fact without any request attached to it as in John 11:3 (NIV) "So the sisters sent word to Jesus, 'Lord, the one you love is sick.'" Prayer may simply be telling the Lord about our difficult situation. Here the prayer is a simple statement of fact with no

request attached. It does not come easier than that.

The request of the repentant thief is exceptionally brief and without any fancy expressions. His statement is as basic as it can be. Luke 23:42 (NIV) "Then he said, 'Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom.'" Here the man only asks to be a part of Jesus' coming kingdom.

So we see some prayers that are easy. When we turn to difficult prayers we can find examples in Scripture as well. Matthew 27:46 (NIV) About three in the afternoon Jesus cried out in a loud voice, "Eli, Eli, lema sabachthani?" (which means "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?").

Here is a complex statement even if it is only a few words. Jesus is not expressing confusion about what is happening to Him. He had taught the apostles for at least a year about the cross. The horrors included the Father striking the Saviour and scattering his flock. Zechariah 13:7 (NIV)

"'Awake, sword, against my shepherd, against the man who is close to me!' declares the Lord Almighty. 'Strike the shepherd, and the sheep will be scattered, and I will turn my hand against the little ones.'"

Whatever you do, pray. Perhaps you do not know what to ask for. In that circumstance simply state the problem (John 11:3). Or just ask for mercy (Matthew 9:27). Ask for the lowest blessing as the repentant thief did and you will gain so much more!

Our verses today assure us that when we set ourselves to strong and specific prayer, God will hear and answer. Come today in an attitude of humble prayer and you will certainly be heard and the Lord will answer.

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