

July 24, 2016    “The Manual For Prayer”    Psalm 5

This past week I had an appointment with my eye specialist in Kingston. When we set out to one of these medical appointments in Kingston, the first thing Barbara does, regardless of whether she is driving, or I am driving, is this: she programmes the GPS to give us direction and show us the way. There are a lot of jokes made about the ability of these little gadgets to take one the wrong way, or the long way round, or even invite us to a right turn into the midst of the waters of a wilderness lake. I cannot say that has been my experience. Whether it was Kingston General Hospital for a cancer related appointment, or Dr. Urton's office on Wellington Street, she (her name is Gracie by the way) has been dependable in making the way plain and safe. And that is why we use her...uh...it, the GPS unit.

If we are looking for a manual for our prayer life, a GPS, to show us the way, Psalm 5 is a good place to start. I am not talking about what to say. I am extremely hesitant to put words in the mouths of others, I leave you to figure that one out for yourself. But there are hints in Psalm 5 about getting it done. About doing our prayer life.

Verse 3... “In the morning, O Lord you hear my voice.” The writer of the Psalm, (and by the way, while I use that phrase, be assured my assumption is that the writer of the Psalm is David the King of Israel. David who was a shepherd as a boy and a young man. David who served in a lowly task, a humble responsibility in his father's household, before God called him to greater things.) The writer of Psalm 5 clearly had a time set aside to pray daily, to pray regularly. He was both organized and disciplined when it came to talking with the Lord his God. Good place to start. Setting a time, an

appointment with the Lord is a great idea.

Having a set time (whatever works for you) is a great idea. Among other things it means it is going to happen. Quiet time. Set aside. Scheduled. Means more than it is going to unfold. It also makes the point both to self and to God, that this is a priority. As I said, not just a good idea...a great idea. And it may be that it is going to be a bit of hunt to find a time to which you can regularly dedicate attention to this matter of “speaking oft with your Lord”. That is the goal. And I am not surprised that David's time was morning. And I suspect, it was early morning, before the routine of the day began to take charge of his time. Before the hustle and bustle of activity had invaded his time and dictated so much of what had to be next.

Find a time. And I also see here, the need to find a place. Quiet time. Quiet location. Verse 5... “But I, by your great mercy will come into your house; in reverence I will bow down.” Location, location, location. A time and a place that are calculated to avoid interruption. A place where you will not hear the telephone ring if it does. A place devoid of computers and other electronic devices that so easily demand our attention, no matter what else we are attempting to do. I had a friend in the very first church I served in a formal capacity...as a student pastor...who took me to his barn, not so much a barn as a machine shed. He climbed up onto an old rusting tractor, that had belonged to the former land owner, it no longer ran, it didn't serve as a tractor anymore. Sitting there, looking down at me, he said, “This is where I spend time with God. I hear His voice on the morning breeze.” It worked for him. Quiet time. Quiet place. In its own way a prayer closet.

The second principle in this brief manual for prayer is also

look for, be expecting that there will be other opportunities to pray, and don't hesitate to seize them. I have been saying over and over in this series, that prayer is a relationship. That means it is not a ritual. You do not have to be at that one quiet time of the day, or in that special place where you pray in order to do so. Having had that base time in you special place expect there to be other opportunities and do not hesitate to seize them.

One of the mistakes we make, and I include myself in that statement for a reason, one of the mistakes we make, is this: we find ourselves in a situation where there is opportunity to pray, usually with someone else or for someone else, and we let it slip by. If we stop to think about it we tell ourselves it would have been an intrusion on our part. We would have been forcing our ways on someone else. I have been there. On the other hand, when I have been bold, having perceived this as an opportunity, and making the offer... "would you mind if I prayed for you," I must tell you I have never had someone say, "I'll pass." Or "I'd rather you wouldn't." I have had people say, "Would you really?" And I have had people say, "Please." And I have had men suddenly find their eyes filled with tears, unable to speak, but nodding in affirmation. Be sensitive. You never go wrong by asking permission. But look for the opportunity in the midst of the run of daily life to pray, and to pray for others.

My old standby in terms of expanding the time I spend in prayer is making use of standing in line. Clearly we are in line because we need to be there. At the bank waiting for the service of a teller, at the post office, waiting to buy stamps, at the grocery store, waiting to pay. Seize the moments as they are given. You are not going anywhere else in the next few minutes. And if you cannot think of anything else to say, pray for those around you who are also

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waiting in line. Pray for the one who will serve you, who is coping with pressure and trying to get the job done quickly and efficiently. You don't have to speak out loud. You don't have to move your lips. You don't have to close your eyes.

Point 3 in this manual for prayer...review what has happened and what is happening in your life. Review it with God. It makes a difference. Any casual reading of Psalm 5 reminds us and reveals to us that being King of Israel was more than a little challenging for David. He continually had to confront evil. Not everyone around him was committed to the service of the Lord his God. We need to be realistic. There is a huge difference between being religious, and striving to be faithful. David struggled with that in his own life too. But it is apparent from the words of this Psalm which reads like a prayer, that David had to deal with those who were arrogant, who thought they knew more about his job than he did. He is working in the real world. There are people who are not truthful when they report to him, because they are afraid, because they have an agenda of their own, because power is corrosive and corruptive. He deals with some even in his own household, his own family, who would clearly not be displeased if he were to suddenly die, creating the opportunity for “succession”.

Reviewing what is happening, with God, and before God can be very revealing. What was it that aging farmer said to me, “I hear HIS voice on the morning breeze.” Prayer is not just about laying our requests before God. There is also that time we spend “waiting in expectation.” For God to speak to us, to show us the way, to let us see what we missed in the first run by, for revelation. Prayer is a relationship. And if we pay attention, we discover God is always actively involved.

Point 4 in this working paper on prayer (that's what a manual is) it's about getting the thing to work in the very real world in which we are involved. Point 4...Discover what God wants you to pray about. When I read verses 1-3, of Psalm 5 I find myself asking, "how did David ever get to verse 4?" The pleasure David takes in his prayer relationship with God turns to some potentially poisonous things...dealing with evil, with liars, with people who are bloodthirsty and deceitful. How did David get there from where he started. 2 possibilities come to mind. David needs a psychological bath...if he is to go on with the day and serve the people to whom God has called him to be King. This may be what is going on here. The Lord giving ear as David dumps the accumulated garbage of dealing with people whose values are different from his own, so that he can do a reboot to his day. The second possibility is equally exciting. The Lord showing David, what is going on around him so that he can continue as it were with one hand on his heart and the other on his sword hilt. Sometimes we need to survive to live another day, to fight another battle. And the Lord knows more about that dimension of our lives than we do! It could be that the Lord is affirming David's suspicions. Helping him to see clearly what is going on in some of those politically charged meetings in which not everyone is agreeing. Dealing with the real world.

Finally, as David seeks God's help and He does, the Lord teaches David more about himself. The same offer is held out to us when we pray. If David is learning things about those who are around him, he is also learning things about himself. He is striving to serve God as a faithful King of the realm committed into his care and keeping. Prayer is for David a teachable moment. He is on his knees for a reason. He does wait. He is expectant. He is looking for the straight way in coping with what lies before him. Because the

day is not over...until it is over.

Surely it is as we are praying we are affirmed in our relationship with the Lord. It is in prayer that we start to really count our blessings, surprised by some of the things that have happened, that have kept us safe and sound. An awareness that we are not doing what we are doing simply in our own strength or by means of our own resources. In prayer we discover there is a shield that surrounds us with safety, and we are not holding it or controlling it. God saves. God protects. God sustains. And we find ourselves praising His name, in spite of everything else that has dribbled from our lips.

Let us pray...

Lord Jesus, be with us in quiet moments and quiet places. Give us hearts and minds that seize the opportunities to run to you in prayer amidst the baggage and the baffling moments of the day. When we try to analyze the things we have been through, grant us the light of your Spirit, and the truth of Your Gospel. Teach us to bring our work and our troubles before you, and show us not only your love for us, but also who and whose we are. We ask this as your children needing guidance, needing light in the midst of darkness.  
Amen