

PSALM 106:13-15 WHEN WE FORGET GOD

“[Israel] soon forgot his works;
they did not wait for his counsel.
But they had a wanton craving in the wilderness,
and put God to the test in the desert;
he gave them what they asked,
but sent a wasting disease among them.”¹

“**W**e want what we want; and we want it when we want it.” This seems to be the mantra of modernity. Tragically, such attitudes permeate modern church life. We imagine that we know what we want, never pausing to think that He who gives us our being knows what we need and provides richly. Focused on our immediate desires, few of us can actually say what we need. This is one great reason why we need God. “Your will be done” has become a talisman in too many instances; we say the words, but we don’t mean it.

I believe it is accurate to say that few of us have all we want, though all of us likely have all that we need. It is distressingly easy to confuse “need” and “want;” the appetite is insatiable. Perhaps you will remember the words Solomon penned so many years ago:

“Sheol and Abaddon are never satisfied,
and never satisfied are the eyes of man.”

[PROVERBS 27:20]

When we recall God’s goodness, we will almost always be satisfied. When we consider the fact that God is ever with those who love Him, we will rejoice. When we think of the blessings showered on us each day, we will praise the Lord our God. When we begin to compare ourselves to others, we will inevitably begin to feel cheated. When we focus on what we don’t have, we will shortly begin to grumble about how unfair life can be. The message this day is a call to focus on God’s goodness so that we will not forget God.

GOD’S RICH BLESSINGS IN A DIFFICULT SITUATION — The first twelve verses of this Psalm speak of God’s rich blessings to Israel during the wilderness journey. The first several verses speak in general of God’s goodness, encouraging those who know God to reflect His character.

“Praise the LORD!
Oh, give thanks to the LORD, for he is good,
for his steadfast love endures forever!
Who can utter the mighty deeds of the LORD,
or declare all his praise?
Blessed are they who observe justice,
who do righteousness at all times!”

[PSALM 106:1-3]

¹ Unless otherwise indicated, all Scripture quotations are from **The Holy Bible: English Standard Version**. Wheaton: Standard Bible Society, 2016. Used by permission. All rights reserved.

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The next strophe is a petition addressed to the LORD, pleading with Him to again show goodness as He has in the past.

“Remember me, O LORD, when you show favor to your people;
help me when you save them,
that I may look upon the prosperity of your chosen ones,
that I may rejoice in the gladness of your nation,
that I may glory with your inheritance.”

[PSALM 106:4, 5]

Two points I ask you to keep in mind. First, remember that the Psalms are prayers. I am not saying that all that is written in the Psalms is a prayer, but much of the Psalms consist of prayers. Then, notice that the Psalmist makes his request in full confidence that God will hear what he asks. He is not simply tossing out a plea in some vague hope that God might do something; he asks, confident that God does hear and that God will act in order to glorify His Name.

Then, on behalf of his people, the Psalmist confesses their awful sin of forgetting God’s goodness to the nation.

“Both we and our fathers have sinned;
we have committed iniquity; we have done wickedness.
Our fathers, when they were in Egypt,
did not consider your wondrous works;
they did not remember the abundance of your steadfast love,
but rebelled by the sea, at the Red Sea.
Yet he saved them for his name’s sake,
that he might make known his mighty power.
He rebuked the Red Sea, and it became dry,
and he led them through the deep as through a desert.
So, he saved them from the hand of the foe
and redeemed them from the power of the enemy.
And the waters covered their adversaries;
not one of them was left.
Then they believed his words;
they sang his praise.”

[PSALM 106:6-12]

Let’s think through what the Psalmist has written. God’s people did not think about God’s wondrous works when they were enslaved. They didn’t give thought to God’s power and might. In effect, they differed little from the Egyptians. Perhaps the sole difference was that the Egyptians worshipped various gods that had no real power; but what difference does it make whether people worship false gods or worship no gods? Israel was virtually indistinguishable from the Egyptians in that they had no god to whom they looked. Many supposed Christians are indistinguishable from the pagans about them with the sole exception that the professed Christians perform religious rites that they identify as “Christian.” In too many instances, those rites are a mere performance without any real impact.

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Twice the Psalmist states, “[God] saved them.” God saved them “for His Name’s sake” [PSALM 106:8]; God saved them “from the hand of the foe” [PSALM 106:10]. In the next Psalm, we see the same grace extended to His people, though the people were quick to forget His mercy. We read,

“They cried out to the LORD in their trouble;
he saved them from their distress.”

[PSALM 107:13 and 19 CSB]

Repeatedly, the LORD God revealed His mercy toward His people; He was not willing to surrender them to the ravages of their enemies. For His Own Name’s sake, God saved them, just as He graciously saves His people to this day, even when we act foolishly. If we turn from our wicked way and cry out for mercy, we will discover that God is merciful. That is the promise we have received when John writes, “If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness” [1 JOHN 1:9].

THEY SOON FORGOT — The Psalm gives a litany of sins committed against God both in the Promised Land and during the wilderness wanderings. In the Promised Land, Israel accommodated the ways of the Canaanites. They had been warned not to adopt their ways when they at last entered into their inheritance [see Exodus 34:11-14]. God had specifically warned, “Take care, lest you make a covenant with the inhabitants of the land to which you go, lest it become a snare in your midst” [EXODUS 34:12]. Instead of obeying God, we learn,

“They mixed with the nations
and learned to do as they did.”

[PSALM 106:35]

Israel went so far as “serv[ing] their idols” [verse 36] and “sacrific[ing] their sons and their daughters to the demons” [verse 37].

I’m certain that each Christian among us would say, “We would never do such a thing!” I’m certain that any of us present this day would say that we are horrified at the thought that God’s people would ever do such things. However, I wonder if we don’t act just as Israel acted. How many professed Christians sacrifice their children by pushing them into a pagan environment so that they can gain a better place in the world? We fail to equip our children to face the evil of this world by neglecting to instruct them in the Word of God, through failure to invest time in prayer with them. If we do not have times of regular Bible reading with memorisation, we are failing in our responsibility to our own children. If we do not spend time in prayer with each child, teaching them that God both hears and answers prayer, we are failing in our responsibility to our children. We cannot anticipate that the world will teach them to honour the Lord; we cannot anticipate that the world will teach them that God hears prayer.

How many Christian parents accommodate the morality of the world, just so they can get ahead? Then, when their children make the same choices, these same parents justify what is done because it is, after all, their child whom they know so well! Let me caution you that if you worship any of the gods of this dying world—power, prosperity, possessions, position—they will become a snare to you. If you are not careful, you will sacrifice your own standing with the Master, just as you will sacrifice your own children—and you will justify doing so.

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The Psalmist lists six dreadful sins that Israel committed during the wilderness wanderings. The first of these dreadful sins that I will mention is *rebellion* against the LORD God is identified in **PSALM 106:32, 33**. This is in reference to the insurrection at Kadesh when the people had no water [see **NUMBERS 20:2-13**]. This terrible sin even led Moses to disobey the LORD as result of his frustration with the people.

The Psalm speaks of Israel's *apostasy* in **PSALM 106:28-31**. This sin was recounted in **NUMBERS 25:1-18**, when the people of Israel entered into cultic immorality, attracted by the promise of sex without guilt. In this respect, it was not unlike the ubiquitous sexuality that contaminates modern life, drawing church members and even pastors into the morass through what we justify as innocuous entertainment.

The Psalmist identified the sin of *unbelief* in **PSALM 106:24-27**. Despite God's mercies, despite God's provision, the people did not believe. We see the impact of their unbelief when we read of their refusal to enter into the Promised Land after the spies had gone throughout the land [see **NUMBERS 13:1-14:45**]. You will recall that when it became apparent that God would not accommodate their unbelief, they acted presumptuously. It is a sad reminder that unbelief almost always leads to presumption.

In **PSALM 106:19-23**, the Psalmist focused attention on the sin of *idolatry*. The grave sin is described in **EXODUS 32:1-35**, describing how the people made a calf of gold. Had you asked any of the people whether the calf was their god, they would have no doubt been horrified that such a suggestion could even be made. They would be insulted that anyone would even think such a thing. They would have argued that the calf only represented the Living God. They would have insisted that they knew it wasn't a god. However, they began to think as idolaters always think. "God doesn't see me. He's somewhere else. I can do what I want. I made him; I can ignore him." Their disobedience quickly led them into gross immorality. There is always a correlation between idolatry and immorality. Immoral people are idolaters—they have begun to worship their own pleasure! They fall into the ghastly trap described in the opening verses of Romans.

"What can be known about God is plain to [wicked mankind], because God has shown it to them. For his invisible attributes, namely, his eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly perceived, ever since the creation of the world, in the things that have been made. So, they are without excuse. For although they knew God, they did not honor him as God or give thanks to him, but they became futile in their thinking, and their foolish hearts were darkened. Claiming to be wise, they became fools, and exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images resembling mortal man and birds and animals and creeping things.

"Therefore, God gave them up in the lusts of their hearts to impurity, to the dishonoring of their bodies among themselves, because they exchanged the truth about God for a lie and worshiped and served the creature rather than the Creator, who is blessed forever! Amen."

People who pursued gratification of their own fallen desires at the expense of righteousness, were given over to fulfilling their own passions. Therefore, Apostle observes, "For this reason God gave them up to dishonorable passions. For their women exchanged natural relations for those that are contrary to nature; and the men likewise gave up natural relations with women and were consumed with passion for one another, men committing shameless acts with men and receiving in themselves the due penalty for their error." Understand what the Apostle has just stated, idolatry led to immorality. The Apostle is teaching those who are willing to receive the truth to recognise the correlation between idolatry and immorality. Just as idolatry leads to immorality, immorality leads to idolatry. This is the natural progression of giving free rein to unnatural passion!

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Then, Paul concludes by exposing the downward progression once a society, or an individual for that matter, surrenders to idolatry/immorality. “And since they did not see fit to acknowledge God, God gave them up to a debased mind to do what ought not to be done. They were filled with all manner of unrighteousness, evil, covetousness, malice. They are full of envy, murder, strife, deceit, maliciousness. They are gossips, slanderers, haters of God, insolent, haughty, boastful, inventors of evil, disobedient to parents, foolish, faithless, heartless, ruthless. Though they know God’s righteous decree that those who practice such things deserve to die, they not only do them but give approval to those who practice them” [ROMANS 1:18-32].

In **PSALM 106:16-18**, the Psalmist exposes the sin of *jealousy* resident within Israel. The reference is to the incident recorded in **NUMBERS 16:1-50**, which detailed Korah’s rebellion. Though Moses did not specifically state that Korah was motivated by jealousy, the Psalmist is certain that jealousy was the reason for this rebellion. The Psalm reads,

“Men in the camp were jealous of Moses
and Aaron, the holy one of the LORD.”

[**PSALM 106:16**]

The account in Numbers speaks of how widespread the action was when it informs us, “Korah the son of Izhar, son of Kohath, son of Levi, and Dathan and Abiram the sons of Eliab, and On the son of Peleth, sons of Reuben, took men. And they rose up before Moses, with a number of the people of Israel, 250 chiefs of the congregation, chosen from the assembly, well-known men. They assembled themselves together against Moses and against Aaron and said to them, ‘You have gone too far! For all in the congregation are holy, every one of them, and the LORD is among them. Why then do you exalt yourselves above the assembly of the LORD?’” [NUMBERS 16:1-3]?

This is an awful list of sins—accommodation of the pagans, sacrificing their children, insurrection, apostasy, unbelief, idolatry and jealousy. The text for this day speaks of one other awful sin—discontent! I believe it is significant that *discontent* is the sin listed first. When we review the sin as presented in Exodus and in Numbers, it is referred to as *grumbling*. It is significant that this sin is listed first, significant because we do not consider it to be a serious sin. Perhaps we have heard people say at one time, “A complaining church is a happy church.” Nothing could be farther from the truth! Complaining, grumbling, murmuring is a heinous sin inviting God’s swift judgement.

The divine account in Exodus tells us the precise complaint of the people, a complaint that spread like wildfire. “The whole congregation of the people of Israel grumbled against Moses and Aaron in the wilderness, and the people of Israel said to them, ‘Would that we had died by the hand of the LORD in the land of Egypt, when we sat by the meat pots and ate bread to the full, for you have brought us out into this wilderness to kill this whole assembly with hunger!’” [EXODUS 16:2, 3]. The people whined, whinged, pouted because they had nothing to eat. So, God gave them manna. Asaph speaks of this as “the bread of the angels” [PSALM 78:25].

Have you ever wondered what the manna tasted like? That is difficult to answer since no one has tasted manna since Israel crossed the Jordan into the Promised Land. We do have this description, however. “The manna was like coriander seed, and its appearance like that of bdellium. The people went about and gathered it and ground it in hand mills or beat it in mortars and boiled it in pots and made cakes of it. And the taste of it was like the taste of cakes baked with oil” [NUMBERS 11:7, 8]. Think of rich, aromatic cakes flavoured with honey.

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In the Apocrypha, we read that that manna tasted like whatever the one eating it wished it to be.² Now think of that! “Honey! How about chicken tonight?” “Oh, I really, really wanted a nice sirloin.” “Okay, you get sirloin and I get chicken. Children, what do you want for dinner?” In unison, “Pizza!” “Okay, pizza it is.” On the plate, it all looks the same. However, father gets his sirloin; mother gets her chicken; and the children get pizza.” Now, I don’t know that this is what they actually received; but you have to admit that would be great for meal planning. What is important for the purpose of our study is to note that this food was provided by God. It would teach Israel to depend on Him. One great lesson would be that Israel would be taught to avoid becoming greedy. They would have to have enough faith not to take more than was needed.

Fed by God, the people were nevertheless dissatisfied, discontented, unhappy. We read, “The rabble that was among them had a strong craving. And the people of Israel also wept again and said, ‘Oh that we had meat to eat! We remember the fish we ate in Egypt that cost nothing, the cucumbers, the melons, the leeks, the onions, and the garlic. But now our strength is dried up, and there is nothing at all but this manna to look at’” [NUMBERS 11:4-6].

The statement of God’s anger should give anyone pause who thinks of complaining. “The anger of the Lord blazed hotly” [NUMBERS 11:10] is the divine assessment. God’s answer was delicious irony. This is the account recorded at the end of the chapter. “A wind from the LORD sprang up, and it brought quail from the sea and let them fall beside the camp, about a day’s journey on this side and a day’s journey on the other side, around the camp, and about two cubits above the ground. And the people rose all that day and all night and all the next day, and gathered the quail. Those who gathered least gathered ten homers. And they spread them out for themselves all around the camp. While the meat was yet between their teeth, before it was consumed, the anger of the LORD was kindled against the people, and the LORD struck down the people with a very great plague. Therefore, the name of that place was called Kibroth-hattaavah, because there they buried the people who had the craving” [NUMBERS 11:31-34].

Israel was denoted for grumbling, much as contemporary churches are known for their complaining. Throughout the wanderings in the wilderness, they were chronic complainers. The Egyptian army had just been destroyed after God had brought Israel through the Red Sea. Israel grumbled because an early rest spot had “bitter water” [see EXODUS 15:22-25]. God had delivered them, but they couldn’t trust Him to now give them water.

Saved by His grace—and yet they grumbled. Two weeks into the wilderness journey and again they grumbled, grumbling on this occasion because they once had *so much* back in Egypt [see EXODUS 16:1-12]! Look at the complaint: “Would that we had died by the hand of the LORD in the land of Egypt, when we sat by the meat pots and ate bread to the full, for you have brought us out into this wilderness to kill this whole assembly with hunger” [EXODUS 16:3].

Massah and Meribah was a repeat of an earlier complaint—there was not enough water [see EXODUS 17:1-7]! It was as though God had never intervened on their behalf before! They couldn’t trust Him. They sounded like so many Christians. Saved from sin, blessed with rich blessings and provided with more than they need, the cry of this crowd accuses the Master, “What have You done for us recently?” They can’t look back to what He has done in the past because they can only focus on the immediate. No wonder Moses was stressed out with attempting to lead this crowd!

² W. O. E. Oesterley, **The Wisdom of Solomon, Translations of Early Documents: Series II: Hellenistic Jewish Texts** (Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge; The Macmillan Company, London; New York 1917) Wis 16:25–26; see, also, Roger A. Bullard and Howard A. Hatton, **A Handbook on the Wisdom of Solomon, United Bible Societies’ Handbooks** (United Bible Societies, New York 2004), 277–278

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The nation had arrived at the boundary of the land which God had promised. Moses dispatched spies to search out the land and bring back a report. For forty days these spies explored the land God had promised. At last, the spies returned. Ten of the spies presented a majority report. “We came to the land to which you sent us. It flows with milk and honey, and this is its fruit. However, the people who dwell in the land are strong, and the cities are fortified and very large. And besides, we saw the descendants of Anak there. The Amalekites dwell in the land of the Negeb. The Hittites, the Jebusites, and the Amorites dwell in the hill country. And the Canaanites dwell by the sea, and along the Jordan” [NUMBERS 13:27-29]. All these men could see were the problems—their eyes were fixed on the opposition.

However, Caleb presented the minority report: “Let us go up at once and occupy it, for we are well able to overcome it.” His focus, together with Joshua, was different—they had fixed their gaze on God who had delivered them from Egypt and brought them through the wilderness.

Yet, the majority persisted in their negative report. “We are not able to go up against the people, for they are stronger than we are... The land, through which we have gone to spy it out, is a land that devours its inhabitants, and all the people that we saw in it are of great height. And there we saw the Nephilim (the sons of Anak, who come from the Nephilim), and we seemed to ourselves like grasshoppers, and so we seemed to them” [NUMBERS 13:31-33].

Listen, people, grasshopper theology will drive you away from God. In this instance, it disheartened the people, and thus, we read, “Then all the congregation raised a loud cry, and the people wept that night. And all the people of Israel grumbled against Moses and Aaron. The whole congregation said to them, ‘Would that we had died in the land of Egypt! Or would that we had died in this wilderness! Why is the LORD bringing us into this land, to fall by the sword? Our wives and our little ones will become a prey. Would it not be better for us to go back to Egypt?’ And they said to one another, ‘Let us choose a leader and go back to Egypt’” [NUMBERS 14:1-4].

After God had judged all who participated in Korah’s rebellion, that divine judgement resulted in the people grumbling! “On the next day all the congregation of the people of Israel grumbled against Moses and against Aaron, saying, ‘You have killed the people of the LORD’” [NUMBERS 16:41]. Korah led a rebellion and God judged the rebels together with their families. The response of the people is to charge Moses and Aaron with killing “the people of the LORD!”

Moses had warned Korah. He said, “Hear now, you sons of Levi: is it too small a thing for you that the God of Israel has separated you from the congregation of Israel, to bring you near to himself, to do service in the tabernacle of the LORD and to stand before the congregation to minister to them, and that he has brought you near him, and all your brothers the sons of Levi with you? And would you seek the priesthood also? Therefore, it is against the LORD that you and all your company have gathered together. What is Aaron that you grumble against him” [NUMBERS 16:8-11]? Yet, despite the warning, Korah, Dathan, Abiram and those who joined them in this rebellion against the Lord’s leadership, blindly dared God to act. And God did act.

I recall an incident something like that. A deacon’s board was insisting on seizing power in a congregation. It was my unhappy lot to confront them, reminding them that they were setting themselves in opposition to the Lord. I called out the leader of that group before them all. He fell to his knees and cried out that I was killing him, beginning to sob uncontrollably. I was astonished at his response with his rebellion against the Lord’s leadership. Rather than being humbled, the eldest of the deacons present that night looked at me, and said, “Look what you’ve done, Pastor. You’ve hurt old Frank. He’s hurt because of you.” I could only shake my head at the spectacle I was witnessing that night.

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Within a matter of weeks, I left that assembly, commending the congregation to their own devices. Old Frank died, following a series of disastrous incidents within his own family. In retrospect, the problems all appeared to be a series of divine judgements. The church disbanded after trying for a while to “turn things around.” I learned from that episode to leave judgement in the hands of Him who rules over the churches and who overrules the wicked designs of men. Dear people, we dare not dishonour God, and we especially dare not grumble against Him and those whom He appoints to service.

Years ago, during a tenure with a congregation in a major city in the western United States, the children of the church often presented some of the songs they were learning during Sunday School. One song in particular always got a chuckle, though the song hit home more effectively than those sweet little children could have imagined.

In country town or city Some people can be found
Who spend their lives in grumbling At everything around
Oh, Yes, they always grumble No matter what we say
For these are chronic grumblers And they grumble night and day

Oh They...
Grumble on Monday Tuesday Wednesday Grumble on Thursday too
Grumble on Friday Saturday Sunday Grumble the whole week through

Grumble on Monday Tuesday Wednesday Grumble on Thursday too
Grumble on Friday Saturday Sunday Grumble the whole week through

They grumble in the city They grumble on the farm
They grumble at their neighbours They think it is no harm
They grumble when it's raining They grumble when it's dry
They grumble all the year round Yes they grumble 'till they die!

They grumble at their husbands They grumble at their wives
They grumble at their children It is their way of life
They grumble at their parents They grumble in the schools
They grumble at their teachers And they grumble at all rules.

If you don't stop your grumbling Stop all your grumbling here
You'll never go to Heaven For grumblers don't go there
Repent and be converted Be saved from the grumbling sin
You'll find that grumbling people, They never will get in.³

The English poet, Matthew Arnold, is known for his sagacity. He is quoted as saying, “One thing only has been lent to youth and age in common – discontent.”⁴ He was correct; and when discontent is revealed, it is almost always in the form of grumbling.

³ Thoro Harris, “Grumblers,” n.d.

⁴ Matthew Arnold, knowyourquotes.com, www.knowyourquotes.com/One-Thing-Only-Has-Been-Lent-To-Youth-And-Age-In-Common--Discontent-Matthew-Arnold.html, accessed 1 March 2018

HE GAVE THEM WHAT THEY ASKED — The Psalmist writes:

“They had a wanton craving in the wilderness,
and put God to the test in the desert;
he gave them what they asked,
but sent a wasting disease among them.”

[**PSALM 106:14, 15**]

The Word cautions that not every answer to prayer is a blessing. In fact, God’s answer could be a test, as stated in this Psalm. It wasn’t that Israel simply asked God for food—they had a wanton craving! He had fed them, and they didn’t like what He gave in answer. It was as if they said, “Is that it? Is that all You are going to do for us? We were better off in slavery!”

Before you condemn Israel, how often do we witness Christians praying for something, and when God answers, these saints are disappointed in what the LORD has done? We approach God with a definite answer in mind, as if we know precisely what is best. We will do well to remember some of the lessons in praying which were first taught by our Saviour. For instance, you may recall one particular instruction Jesus provided in Matthew’s Gospel.

Jesus had instructed disciples, “I tell you, do not be anxious about your life, what you will eat or what you will drink, nor about your body, what you will put on. Is not life more than food, and the body more than clothing? Look at the birds of the air: they neither sow nor reap nor gather into barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not of more value than they? And which of you by being anxious can add a single hour to his span of life? And why are you anxious about clothing? Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow: they neither toil nor spin, yet I tell you, even Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these. But if God so clothes the grass of the field, which today is alive and tomorrow is thrown into the oven, will he not much more clothe you, O you of little faith? Therefore, do not be anxious, saying, ‘What shall we eat?’ or ‘What shall we drink?’ or ‘What shall we wear?’ For the Gentiles seek after all these things, and your heavenly Father knows that you need them all. But seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be added to you.

“Therefore, do not be anxious about tomorrow, for tomorrow will be anxious for itself. Sufficient for the day is its own trouble” [**MATTHEW 6:25-34**].

The instruction is summed up in the thought that we need to rest in God’s goodness. Instead of focusing exclusively on the necessities of daily life, we need to focus on those matters of eternal worth. It is not that we are to neglect daily needs—food, rest, strength; but, we are not to be consumed with these things, necessary though they are. It is far more important that we focus on eternal issues—salvation, maturation in the Faith, communicating the Gospel! Our prayer life should always seek God glory, the advance of His Kingdom and the benefit of others.

The Apostle Paul reminds us that “We do not know what to pray for as we ought.” Therefore, it is necessary that “the Spirit himself intercede[] for us with groanings too deep for words” [**ROMANS 8:26**].

The words which Paul wrote are exemplified in an incident in the life of the Apostles. The mother of James and John asked Jesus to promote her boys to Number One and Number Two in the Kingdom. Jesus’ answer was pointed; He said, “You do not know what you are asking” [**MATTHEW 20:22**]. The two men asserted that they did, in fact, know what they were asking, though in reality, they were woefully ignorant of what that answer would entail. Jesus graciously refused to give them an answer, no doubt disappointing their mother.

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These two men, and their mother as well, fell under the condemnation of James, the brother of our Lord. You may recall the warning James delivered to those earliest Christians, “You ask and do not receive, because you ask wrongly, to spend it on your passions” [JAMES 4:3]. The sons of Zebedee were thinking like the world thinks. Had the Master granted their request, they would have never accomplished the great things within the Kingdom of God for which they would become known. They still had to learn to pray as Jesus would pray.

In the shadow of the cross, “Jesus offered up prayers and supplications, with loud cries and tears, to him who was able to save him from death, and he was heard because of his reverence” [HEBREWS 5:7]. We know the prayer He offered, for Jesus is recorded as praying, “Abba, Father, all things are possible for you. Remove this cup from me. Yet not what I will, but what you will” [MARK 14:36]. He was heard! And yet He did go to the cross. How can that be? The answer lies in the submission to the Father’s will when Jesus prayed, “Yet not what I will, but what you will.” This is an example of the conduct of His service while in the flesh. Remember how Jesus said, “I can do nothing on my own. As I hear, I judge, and my judgment is just, because *I seek not my own will but the will of him who sent me*” [JOHN 5:30]. This was the Master’s consistent position throughout the days of His service while in the flesh. Again, we read, “I have come down from heaven, not to do my own will but the will of him who sent me” [JOHN 6:38].

We must learn to be thankful for what God gives, rejoicing that He does not give us what we ask! We must learn to trust Him, knowing that we serve a God too good to ever hurt us and too wise to ever make a mistake. Permit me to address one further issue concerning prayer. Recall that Jesus has taught His disciples, “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 others. 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.

“And when you pray, 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 [MATTHEW 6:5-8].

Don’t fall into the trap of repeating phrases or attempting to pray horizontally, that is praying for the benefit of being heard. Such prayer is not heard by Him who hears and answers prayer. Rather, pray succinctly, always remaining focused on God’s glory. We are taught to “seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness” [MATTHEW 6:33a]. Then, having put God’s Kingdom first, “all these things will be added to you” [MATTHEW 6:33b]. The necessities of life are provided to those who pursue God’s glory first. Determine that He will have first place. Amen.