

St. Paul's Dorking Small Groups. Nov 6th 2005

Whose life is it anyway? Called to pray

Acts 12.1-19

Luke 18.1-8

Word: Key points from Sunday's sermon

THREE aspects of radical prayer: 3 sets of P's.

Firstly, Perseverance in prayer, even through Pain or when God seems far away,

Secondly, The Possibilities, and Power of prayer

And *thirdly*, Practising the Presence of God in prayer.

Perseverance: Jesus told the parable of the persistent widow "to show us we should always pray and not give up." The widow in the story persisted, even though this was a radical thing to do; good Jews prayed a maximum of X3 per day lest they weary God. But Jesus wanted to show that God is never wearied by our prayer, in fact He welcomes it. And the widow's Perseverance worked, she got justice. Peter's friends' persistence also paid off, he was released.

St Augustine's mother prayed for him for many years: he was an immoral waster and a drunkard. Aged 27, he turned back to God and became one of the greatest spiritual giants of all times, a person whose writings have influenced the church ever since. Perseverance worked.

When God seems silent, He is still near to us. Remember the story of Job and all he went through: he lost everything, yet *at the beginning* he praised God. But then doubts set in and he wanted to argue it out with God. And that's OK, there are plenty of examples in the bible of people questioning, arguing or being angry with God. Look at Psalms e.g. Ps 6 v.2-3 and Ps 10 v.1. God understands: He was with Jesus as He suffered on the cross; the agony of Jesus' was followed by his resurrection. And sometimes we can see in retrospect that we've grown and learnt through times of seeming silence from God, that He's taught us things about ourselves and forced us to depend more deeply on Him.

The **Power and Possibilities** of prayer was understood by the widow, who believed she would get the seemingly impossible. Peter's home-group prayed for his release yet didn't recognise the radical answer God sent. Do we believe in miracles nowadays? People we know have been healed! Let's be bold and expect God to work powerfully when we pray. What has God laid on our hearts that might seem impossible? E.g. healed relationships with God for those who are outside the church, financing for our new church room.

Practising the presence of God: a phrase from Brother Lawrence, a 17th century Carmelite lay brother: knowing God's peace in our heart, communing with him whatever we're doing, or, as the bible puts it elsewhere, praying without ceasing. Peter must have been doing that as he was at peace and asleep when the angel came. Spending time being with God is *the most important part* of our ministry, because we need to let Him bless us before we can bless others, otherwise what do we have to give? We need to spend time just being with and receiving from God, letting go of our worries to rest in Him. See Philippians 4:4-7. Look at the painting "The Creation of Adam," by Michelangelo, how close God's finger is to that of humankind. God is reaching out to us, He is closer than we think, we just need to stretch out; He's already stretching out to us.



Ice breaker/Welcome: **Share a time when you have had to persevere with something and it has paid off, maybe in a way you didn't expect.**

- **What's the longest you have ever set aside to pray– be honest! What is it that distracts/stops you? What different ways can you think of to encourage each other to persevere in prayer?**
- **Can you think of any reasons in ourselves that might make God seem distant or hard to find?**
- **What is your honest reaction when you are invited to a church prayer meeting? Why?**
- **Look at the painting: does God feel that close to you? If God is closer than we think, what practical steps can we take to practise the presence of God?**
- **What radical prayers do you think we should be praying as individuals and as a church? What personal issues do each of us need to persevere about? E.g. our children, unbelieving spouses, chronic illnesses, wars & famine: whatever God lays on your heart, don't give up, persevere. TAKE TIME to pray now.**

