



Zechariah 8:20-23

HICKSON

Last weekend we were privileged to have Rachel Hickson with us. Those who were here I'm sure will agree with me that it was a time of encouragement and challenge.

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If you missed it then tapes, CDs and DVDs are available. If you don't have the facilities and would like to see the videos, then please sign the sheet and we'll arrange something soon. If you want to know more, then copies of Rachel's book *Supernatural Communication* are available and Small Groups will be looking at the material soon. If you are not part of any of those groups, you are welcome to join one. Seize the moment! You've been challenged: do something about it!

Above all things, Rachel was practical – in the end that's what praying is about. If you thought last weekend was good, then what part of your life has changed? What are you doing about it? Rachel didn't just fill our heads with knowledge but she was very practical on how we could deepen our own prayer lives as well as deepen the prayer life of the church. For me personally there were four specific challenges that I'd like to remind you of today.

ENRICH OUR PRAYER LIVES

Rachel also underlined a point I've been making over the last few months. Many Christians have inherited a very narrow view of prayer. We have one or two ways of praying, a specific prayer language, a specific prayer position, one attitude. Rachel pointed out that for many Christians, prayer is crisis prayer. We do it when we need to. But prayer is talking to God as we would to our closest friends and family.

Any time, any place, any way. We forget that God is available 24:7. We can, and should pray into all situations of life as we meet them. We keep the natural and spiritual apart when we should be keeping them together. We found that speaking to God is wide-ranging, not narrow. Here are some of Rachel's visuals to remind you. If you want more details on any of these, watch the video, read the book, do the study.

POSITIONS OF PRAYER

Kneeling
Sitting
Standing
Walking
Prostrating
Inside/Outside
Driving
In the shower
Sleeping.
Near Water
Near the sea
On the Mountains

Allow God to release you into praying anywhere, any time. When I was younger we were encouraged to pray in quiet places. It was normal to bow in humble reverence. Even to pray using thee and thou. There's nothing wrong with any of that if prayer is meaningful. But we're missing something if prayer isn't in every facet of our lives. Think of all the opportunities we miss daily because we don't speak to God straight away. If I don't respond immediately, I've usually forgotten within the hour!

TYPES OF PRAYER

1. Supplication

2. Asking/Petitioning
3. Intercession
4. Thanksgiving
5. Confession
6. Forgiveness
7. Prayer of Proclamation
8. Silence/Waiting

One of the biggest misconceptions I came across when I first came to MRBC was that many people thought prayer was asking God for stuff. It's "spoilt teenagers" syndrome. Actually there's nothing wrong in asking God for something. What's wrong is when it is the sum total of our prayer life! It's narrow and God wants us to have a mature relationship with Him.

As you can see, there's a range of ways to pray and the broader our prayer life, the greater the maturity. I've also known some who see intercession as most important. Much prayer in a church context is intercessory, but that in itself can be narrow and God wants us to be mature in our corporate prayer life too.

We have a Father who wants to release us into the pleasure of being able to speak to Him at any time and in any place and feel the whole breadth of a relationship with Him. It's releasing also to be able to pray in any position and out loud. Sometimes what we have to say warrants loud proclamation, not respectful silence. Think about it - it's the same when we speak to people. What we say and how we say it reflects our situation. It depends where we are and what we're doing and what's happening round about us.

HAVE "TABLE FOR TWO" TIME WITH GOD

So we can speak to God at any time and in any place but I, as Rachel encourage a personal relationship with God. Rachel calls it a "table for two" time with God. It's important to speak to Father wherever and whenever but it's actually just as important to spend quality time with God, looking at His word and speaking to Him. We have to lay time aside to do that daily.

PRAY FOR OUR CHILDREN

One of the things that came out of the evening session was an encouragement to pray for our children. It hadn't been scheduled into Rachel's notes but she talked about it and encouraged us to pray for it. I know that many of you have been praying for your children and grandchildren for years. Sometimes we see fruit, sometimes we are discouraged. It was an encouragement to persevere. Don't give up. God is faithful to those who pray and don't give up. What can we do? Support and encourage one another. A Prayer covenant.

PRAY FOR OUR COMMUNITY AND THE NATIONS

One of the bits most of you missed from the Leaders' Session was Rachel's encouragement for us to pray for the nations and to also pray for our communities. I'll give some more details next week. For this week I'll ask the question – why? Sometimes praying for the nations seems vague. Many of us pray for missions abroad. It's important that we should and the good thing about that is that it is specific and often very personal and I like to encourage people to pray in that way because when we do, we so often see answers to those prayers.

But to pray for nations seems rather more vague. Can we really change our community by prayer? What influence can we have on this town of Felixstowe? What about our nation? What about all the world's hot spots. We often don't feel we should bother. How can I or we make a difference. But we are the people of a God who can change nations. Here are a few verses from Zechariah 8:

20 The LORD Almighty says, "The time is coming when people from many cities will come to Jerusalem. 21 Those from one city will say to those from another, "We are going to worship the LORD Almighty and pray for his blessing. Come with us!" 22 Many peoples and powerful nations will come to Jerusalem to worship the LORD Almighty and to pray for his blessing. 23 In those days ten foreigners will come to one Jew and say, "We want to share in your destiny, because we have heard that God is with you."

We have a God who has a heart for the nations and we see this picture of the nations desiring to worship and people desiring to share the destiny of the people of God. There is a sense in which this prophecy and similar ones in prophecy like Ezekiel and Isaiah is not yet fulfilled as far as Jerusalem today is concerned. Yet we see it being fulfilled in Christ. We don't need to go to Jerusalem to worship at the temple, but by the Holy Spirit God has brought the temple to us: we are the Temple of the Holy Spirit – each one of us. We as God's people seek and pray for the blessing of God.

EDWARDS

You'll remember last time that I mentioned Jonathan Edwards. He used this passage to encourage God's people to pray for the nations, that they might worship the Lord almighty and seek His blessing. *In Zechariah 8:20-22 we have an account of how this future advancement of the Church should occur. It would come to fruition as multitudes from different towns resolve to unite in extraordinary prayer, seeking God until He manifests Himself and grants the fruits of his presence.*

It's quite topical really in a week where so much has been said about public prayers. But as the purposes of God are that the nations will seek to worship and pray, then it's something we should desire should be done and when God's people come to do that, things should happen in a positive sense. Therefore we as people of God should be looking at our community, our nations and the nations generally and see the trends and pray into them.

Does that really work? And if it does, what should we pray for?

All I'll say is that there is a track record of amazing things when God's people – corporate- come together as churches in an area or in a land to seek His face and pray for the land. It is a missing facet in prayer in churches, and in church groupings in towns, cities and regions. But when it happens, things happen.

I leave that as an advert for next week and close with this. I firmly believe that when we engage with God as His people, when we use the privilege of prayer God has given us to it's full extent, then we mature as believers, the church grows, our community is transformed and the nations changed.

TITLE

We have been given encouragement, we have had the practical advice, we have the tools. Seize the moment!

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