

How We Grow: Implementing the Spiritual Disciplines

Week 1 - Prayer

March 17, 2024

Additional Teaching Notes

What are some obstacles to prayer?

Sins you knowingly have not confessed

- a. Ps. 66:18 "If I had cherished sin in my heart, the Lord would not have listened"
- b. Isa. 59:1-2 "Surely the arm of the Lord is not too short to save nor His ear too dull to hear. But your iniquities have separated you from your God; your sins have hidden His face from you so that He will not hear"

Idolatry (Ezek.14:3 "Son of man these men have set up idols in their hearts and put wicked stumbling blocks before their faces. Should I let them enquire of Me at all?")

Stingy and Covetous Spirit

- a. Prov. 21:13 "If a man shuts his ears to the cry of the poor, he too will cry out and not be answered"
- b. 1 Timothy 6:10 "For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil. Some people, eager for money, have wandered from the faith and pierced themselves with many griefs"

Unbelief, Doubt

- a. (James 1:6-8 "But when he asks, he must believe and not doubt, because he who doubts is like a wave of the sea, blown and tossed by the wind. That man should not think he will receive anything from the Lord; he is a double-minded man, unstable in all he does")

Unforgiveness/bitterness

- a. (Matt.6:14-15 "For if you forgive men when they sin against you, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. But if you do not forgive men their sins, your Father will not forgive your sins.")

Family/Marital problems

- a. (1 Pet.3:7 "Husbands, in the same way be considerate as you live with your wives, and treat them with respect as the weaker partner and as heirs with you of the gracious gift of life, so that nothing will hinder your prayers.")

Pride

- a. (James 4:6 "God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble.")

Selfishness/Wrong motives

- a. (James 4:3 "When you ask, you do not receive, because you ask with wrong motives, that you may spend what you get on your pleasures.")

Judgmental attitude

- a. Matthew 7:1 "Do not judge, or you too will be judged"
- b. Romans 14:10 "You, then, why do you judge your brother? Or why do you look down on your brother? For we will all stand before God's judgement seat".

Thanklessness, Ingratitude

- a. (1 Thess.5:18 "Give thanks in all circumstances, for this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus.")

Worldly spirit

- a. (1 John 2:15 "Do not love the world or anything in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him.")

Not praying through Jesus

- a. (John 14:14 "You may ask me for anything in my Name, and I will do it.")

Not praying in God's Will

- a. (1 John 5:14 "This is the assurance we have in approaching God; that if we ask anything according to His will, He hears us.")

LEARNING TO PRAY:

"Lord, teach us to pray" Luke 11:1

1. Prayer is something you learn -- "No matter how weak or strong your prayer life is right now, you can learn to grow even stronger."

2. Prayer is something you learn by doing it -- "Reading a book about prayer, listening to lectures and talking about it is very good, but it won't teach you to pray. You get nothing without exercise, without practice. I might listen for a year to a professor of music playing the most beautiful music, but that won't teach me to play an instrument."

3. Prayer is something you learn by meditating on

Scripture -- There should be a smooth, almost unnoticeable transition between Scripture input and Prayer output so that we move even closer to God in those moments. This happens when there is the link of meditation in between. Psalm 19:14. Meditation allows us to take what God has said to us and think deeply on it, digest it, and then speak to God about it in meaningful prayer. Matthew Henry said about Psalm 19:14, "David's prayers were not his words only, but his meditations; as meditation is the best

preparation for prayer, so prayer is the best issue of meditation. Meditation and prayer go together.”

4. Prayer is something you learn by praying with others -- Most of the great movements of God can be traced to a small group of people He called together to begin praying.

5. Prayer is something you learn by reading and studying it. -- We would not want this to take the place of prayer, but it is a valuable way to learn.

PHYSICAL ASPECT OF PRAYER:

Stand – standing is a way of honoring the presence of another and giving him or her your full attention. Stand before the majesty of God. (1 Kings 19:11; Mark 11:25; Gen. 18:22)

Outstretched Arms – Lifting up our arms or hands pulls our awareness toward heaven. It is a posture that opens the core of our body toward God. (Psalm 141:2; Psalm 63:4; Psalm 77:2; 1 Timothy 2:8)

Uplifted Eyes – looking up to heaven with open eyes draws our attention above earthly realities to eternal things. We are not alone. God is watching us. (Psalm 123:1-2; Mark 7:34; Mark 6:41; John 17:1)

Kneeling – Kneeling is a way we express humility and reverence. (1 Kings 8:54; Acts 9:40; Daniel 6:10; Mark 1:40)

Prostrate – lying face down or bowing low to the earth reminds us that we were created from dust and to dust we will return. It is a posture of submission and obedient worship. (Genesis 17:3; Exodus 4:31; Neh 8:6; 2 Chron 20:18; Luke 5:12; Luke 8:47; Psalm 72:11; Psalm 66:4)

Benefits of a devoted prayer life:

Colossians 4:2-6 “Devote yourselves to prayer, being watchful and thankful. And pray for us, too, that God may open a door for our message, so that we may proclaim the mystery of Christ, for which I am in chains. Pray that I may proclaim it clearly, as I should. Be wise in the way you act toward outsiders;

make the most of every opportunity. Let your conversation be always full of grace, seasoned with salt, so that you may know how to answer everyone.

A person devoted to prayer becomes more of what God calls him to be. Likewise, a church full of people devoted to prayer will bring about massive regime change from self to Lord. Right after Paul tells us to devote ourselves to prayer...to be watchful and thankful, he begins to turn us inside out.

Prayer leads us outward. Why? It leads us Godward. Whenever we grow toward God we grow toward the lost. "...Pray...that God may open a door for our message..." We cannot ascend in godliness without also ascending in awareness of those around us who need Jesus – and our ardent desire to see them saved. "Pray that I may proclaim it clearly..." The Spirit-filled Apostle Paul asking for prayer like this? His heart is evident. Whatever opportunity is before him, he would like to clearly tell them about Jesus. It is never far from his mind.

Prayer changes the way we view people, and also the way we talk to them. Watch for opportunities to speak grace into the lives of sinners. Get some grace on your lips! How? By devoting yourself to prayer. You cannot pray without realizing that you are talking to someone who should have squashed you like a bothersome gnat – and could have – but chose instead to love you. Grace. Prayer will turn us inside out because...

- *It shifts focus from ourselves to our God.
- *It bends our hearts toward His Will, above our own.
- *It begins to adopt the ways and thoughts of God.
- *It drives us to look for ways to share the Good News with those who need it.
- *It washes our mouth out with gospel soap and gives us words of grace to bless and encourage.

Take it home:

This week, begin writing some prayers in your spiritual journaling.
Some ideas to start with:

- a. Confession - share something with God that perhaps you have not shared yet.
- b. List things that you regularly put before God and pray for strength to put Him first instead
- c. Share some things that perhaps you are selfish with - and ask God to help you.

Try out some new physical aspects of prayer this week - if you usually pray sitting, try some of the above suggestions.

What are the different formats for prayer?

Petitionary Prayer. This is a formal request. It is a solemn supplication or request to a superior authority; in the case of prayer, that superior authority is God. James 4:2.

Intercessory Prayer. An earnest request in favor of another, especially a prayer or petition to God in behalf of another. John 17:15-21.

Thanksgiving Prayer. This is giving thanks to God for (1) who He is and (2) for what he has done on our behalf. Two examples.

- a. First, Exodus 15:1-13, 18 – the song of Moses and the Israelites who rejoiced after crossing the Red Sea on dry land.
- b. Second, Luke 1:46-55 – the prayer of Mary who expresses thanks for God's favor in choosing her to bear the Messiah.

Warfare Prayer. Warfare prayer is the kind of prayer in which we wage war against an enemy. It is prayer that is undertaken to destroy and undermine the strength of the devil. We engage in warfare prayer every time we pray for the souls of others. 2 Corinthians 10:3-5; Ephesians 6:11-18

Breath Prayer - God is the oxygen of our soul, and we need to breathe him in all day long" Breath prayer has been practiced in the church for millennia. The eastern Orthodox Church in particular has seen breath prayer as a way of living out Paul's instruction to "pray without ceasing." The "Jesus Prayer" is a breath prayer described in The Way of the Pilgrim:

- a. Take a seat in solitude and silence. Bend your head, close your eyes and breathe softly, in your imagination, look into your own heart. Let your mind, or rather, your thoughts flow from your head down to your heart and say, while breathing: "Lord Jesus Christ, have mercy on me." Whisper these words gently or say them in your mind. Discard all other thoughts. Be serene, persevering and repeat them over and over again.
- b. Breath prayer is to be a living breathing rhythm of surrender. It is a constant reminder of the one in whose presence you stand. Often the rhythm involves breathing in with a name of God, and out with the desire of your heart. The breath prayer can be any phrase that expresses a deep desire of your heart ... brief enough to be repeated over and over throughout the day. Examples:
 - Abba... I belong to you.
 - Healer... speak the word and I shall be healed.
 - Holy One Keep me true.
 - Lord ... here I am. Jesus ... have mercy on me.

Centering Prayer

Centering prayer is a form of contemplative prayer where the pray-er seeks to quiet scattered thoughts and desires in the still center of Christ's presence. Centering prayer is an ancient form of prayer that joins meditation on a word of Scripture with prayer. Centering prayer leads us to sit in the presence of God and give him our undivided love and attention. Generally the only words that are spoken in centering prayer are the prayer words that continually bring our drifting attention back to God. The prayer word is simple, such as Jesus, love, peace,

father, or a phrase from Scripture. In a centering prayer the goal is to dwell in Christ so much that the fruit of this dwelling begins to show up in your life. Centering prayer may 'do' nothing at the moment. You sense physical or spiritual "high" or feeling. But later as you move out into the busyness of life, you begin to notice that something has shifted. Your quiet center in Christ holds.

- A short method for Centering Prayer:
- Set aside a minimum of 15 minutes. Set a timer if that helps you be less concerned about when to stop.
- Settle into a comfortable position.
- Intentionally place yourself in the presence of God, in the center of his love.
- Choose a simple word, phrase or verse from Scripture that expresses your desire for God (e.g. love, peace, grace, Jesus, great Shepherd). Let this word guard your attention.
- Take time to become quiet. It is not unusual for the first minutes to be filled with many noisy thoughts. Don't worry about them or pay attention to them. Let them go. Gently return your attention to the Center of God's presence and love by repeating your word.
- Use your imagination – God gave you the ability!
- Imagine God's river of life running through you. Deep down, the river is calm and slow. But on the surface there is rushing and debris. Imagine your distracting thoughts are a part of the debris floating in the current. Don't try to capture these thoughts; release them and let the river of God's life carry them away.
- As you are resting in God's love, trust the Holy Spirit to connect you with God.
- Take several minutes to come out of prayer. Don't hurry. Offer yourself to God for the tasks awaiting you (e.g., "I am yours," or "Remain with me")

Take A Prayer Walk - One of the most common struggles in the practice of spirituality is maintaining mental focus in prayer. Walking as we pray – either in a large place indoors or outdoors – keeps the mind from wandering as easily. Bring a small Bible to prompt prayer periodically during the walk. Abraham's son Isaac is an example from Scripture of walking while thinking on the things of God. Genesis 24:63 reports, "And Isaac went out to meditate in the field."

Use Prayer Prompts - Use something that you see on a regular basis to prompt you to prayer.

- Christians have always used commonplace things as ways to turn their thoughts heavenward. When dressing in the morning, many Puritans made a habit of praying briefly for a different matter with each article of clothing they pulled on. I know several believers who pray whenever they hear a siren. Philippians 1:3-4.
- Why not transform something from your routine into a prayer prompt? A sight, a smell, sound, thought, event, or experience. You might also use common objects ... or even religious objects – crosses, prayer beads, etc. as aids ... but they should never be considered as having power other than as a reminder. Praying with beads is an ancient practice that can be individualized.

Take it home:

During the week set aside specific time to spend in prayer. You may only feel ready to spend 10 mins, 4 times during the week., or you may want to spend 30 mins, 3 times a day, every day, it's up to you. Remember don't try to run a marathon unless you are fit enough, and have been training for a long time. Allow the Holy Spirit to lead and guide you.

Think about using these Bible readings and pray in response to what they evoke in you. Again, you may use them in any order you want, and spend as long as you need on each one:

<u>READING</u>	<u>FOCUS</u>
Matthew 6: 5-15	The pattern of prayer.
Psalms 103	The prayer of worship.
Psalms 51	The prayer of repentance.
Psalms 150	The prayer of thanksgiving.
Matthew 26: 36-46	The prayer of guidance.
James 5: 13-18	The prayer of faith.
Mark 9: 14-29	The prayer of command.