

Prayer

Introduction to Prayer

Every Christian knows how important it is to pray. In fact, most of us who consider ourselves to be followers of Jesus, believe that we should be praying more than we are. We understand that prayer is not only our best defense against Satan, but also our greatest weapon in the war against principalities and powers. And yet, we do not pray as we should. We get distracted by something that is going on around us. Or we find that we cannot avoid a pressing obligation that keeps us from prayer. We remember that there was something that needed to be done before we could pray at all. There are dozens of excuses. But the bottom line is that we should be praying more than we are.

There are really only two problems with praying for most of us. First of all, we have a view of prayer that is much too limited. That is, we are unable to see the full spectrum of prayer. Our impression of prayer is that we collect the problems and burdens of everyone we know, think about all our personal needs and desires. Then we compile a 'prayer-list' and present that to God. This is a pathetic approach to prayer. It turns God, the Almighty Creator of the universe into an eternal, heavenly Santa Claus.

Our second problem with prayer is that for too many of us we have never had the training or experience that is needed to have a truly full and fulfilling prayer life. We have always been taught to pray, but not necessarily how to do it. Consequently we can become frustrated and filled with guilt. There is the necessity to pray, but unfortunately we do not have the tools with which to do it. It is only a matter of time until the passionate believer becomes the passive attender who does not understand all the uproar about prayer.

This chapter will address both of these concerns. In these few pages you will be informed and inspired to do what God has called you to do, and as a result you will be tremendously blessed. Consider making the following commitments as you continue in this journey toward God through prayer.

Prayer Commitments

- Commit yourself to different varieties of prayer. Each Christian should participate in as many types of prayer as possible. God speaks in many ways and we should be willing to listen at any time- and in any way. Examples: verbal, silent, writing, memorized, praying verses, corporate, intercessory, song
- Commit yourself to spending extended amounts of time in prayer. It may seem intimidating- or even impossible- at first, but there is nothing more enriching than praying for long periods of time. In fact, we should get over the idea that we have accomplished prayer. There are no limits. You should keep praying at all times.

- Learn to worship God with your prayer. Our prayers should not be only about what we want God to give us, or do for us. It is important that we invest our prayers with worship, exalting God, thanking him and loving him.
- Commit to pray in different settings. Private prayer is only one venue in which we can spend time with the Lord. We also need to be sure that we have 'prayer partners,' or a small group with which we can covenant to pray and lift one another up in prayer. Additionally, we need to be sure that we are involved in corporate prayer. When you are gathered with your congregation be sure to join in at prayer times. Do not be a spectator. Add your heart- and maybe your voice- to the words being spoken on behalf of the whole church.
- Commit to prayer as a discipline. There will be times when it is easy to let prayer slip off your list of priorities. Make it a discipline in your life to avoid missing out on the connection with God through prayer.

Beginning a Life of Prayer

It is God's will that his followers be devoted and dynamic Christian disciples. The best way to accomplish this is to pray.

Here is a word of caution, however. It is easy for humans to get consumed with gathering information and studying an issue thoroughly before we are willing to tackle it. You may be tempted to read about prayer, listen to sermons about prayer, have conversations about prayer and to think about prayer. But make sure that all of your preparation and planning for prayer does not keep you from praying. Do not wait to begin your prayer life until you are more prepared. Begin to pray right away. Right now.

Lord God, you have called me to know you. The way that I know is best to accomplish that is to pray. Help me to pray, O God. Give me the commitment that I need to not be distracted, tempted or lazy. Help me to be consistent in my prayers. Make it a daily discipline for me. Help me to keep going even when it seems that my prayers are not being answered. Show me the best ways to pray. Fill me with your Spirit so that I can know you fully, receive your blessings in my life, and share your goodness and grace with those around me. In the name of Jesus Christ, my Savior and your Son I pray. Amen.

The Need for Prayer

Most of us will quickly agree that we need to be praying more than we are. There is something inside us that longs for more time and intimacy with Jesus. But perhaps we have never evaluated that desire, where it comes from, why we have it and what to do about it.

Let's begin by agreeing that we need to pray and we need to pray more than we currently do. For the rest of this chapter we are not so much interested in the excuses that people have for not praying, but in getting the tools and experience to make prayer a significant and vital part of the believer's life.

Benefits of Prayer

There are several benefits to devoting your life to prayer. The ways that the individual believer receives blessing from prayer varies. What may be most important to you may not exist in my prayer life at all. But there are some benefits to prayer that seem to be nearly universal.

- Prayer leads to a closer relationship with God. Just as any human relationship grows as the participants talk to one another, spend time together and care for the needs of the other, our relationship with God grows as we pray. We get to know more about God, even as we become more familiar with him.
- Prayer develops a sensitivity to the things of the Spirit in us. In the Lord's Prayer (Matthew 6) Jesus teaches that we should pray for God's will to be done. The more time we spend in prayer the easier it is for us to understand him and his desires for the world.
- Prayer helps us to grow in dependence on God's will. Just as time spent with God will help us to know his will, it will also help us to rely upon it. My wishes will become secondary to the will of God.
- Prayer opens us to the power from God himself. I am helpless and hopeless on my own. But by the grace of God and through prayer I am given the power to do the work of God.
- Prayer leads to healings, signs, wonders and miracles. If we never ask for miracles we should not be surprised if they do not come. God is able to do anything. Through our prayers we can help bring about the miraculous.
- Prayer will give you a sense of peace and calm. The world is full of activity and busy-ness. There are distractions and temptations all around us. Prayer helps us to find a place of peace and strength, hope and calm in the presence of God.
- Prayer provides stability in relationships, priorities and actions. Making prayer a part of your daily life helps to build in you the tools you need to live a life of consistency, integrity and love.
- Prayer opens us to the grace of God. There are many things in the life of every follower of God that give us guilt. The Bible teaches that everyone has sinned (Romans 3.10, 32). Prayer is the way to receive the forgiveness and grace of God.

Jesus and Prayer

*Now in the morning, having risen a long while before daylight, He went out and departed to a solitary place; and there He prayed. And Simon and those who were with Him searched for Him. When they found Him, they said to Him, "Everyone is looking for You." But He said to them, "Let us go into the next towns, that I may preach there also, because for this purpose I have come forth." **Mark 1.35-38***

1. Jesus prayed early in the morning.

There was a designated time to pray.

2. Jesus prayed in the dark.

He wasn't concerned about the elements or his environment.

3. He went away.

There was importance to making an extra effort to pray.

He had to 'go' somewhere.

4. He was by himself.

It is important for us to have time alone with God.

5. Then he prayed.

There was preparation involved in his prayer time.

The Prayers of the Desperate

Mark 2.1-12

Sometimes we pray when we are desperate.

Prayer becomes our last resort when we are in need.

Sometimes we lose all faith and give up on prayer.

Sometimes we have friends who lift us up in prayer.

They pray for us.

We should be those who pray for the downtrodden, desperate and discouraged.

Hearing from God in Prayer

1 Kings 19.1-14

“I have been very zealous for the Lord God of hosts; because the children of Israel have forsaken Your covenant, torn down Your altars, and killed Your prophets with the sword. I alone am left; and they seek to take my life.” **1 Kings 19.14**

There are times when we are weak.

There are threats, even when you are godly. (v. 2)

Then Jezebel sent a messenger to Elijah, saying, “So let the gods do to me, and more also, if I do not make your life as the life of one of them by tomorrow about this time.”

You may be discouraged, or even terrified. (v. 3)

...when he saw that, he arose and ran for his life...

But, God takes care of his people. (vv. 5-8)

...suddenly an angel touched him, and said to him, “Arise and eat.” Then he looked, and there by his head was a cake baked on coals, and a jar of water. So he ate and drank... (vv. 5-6)

There are many distractions.

- Wind
- Earthquake
- Fire

Then a gentle whisper.

This is God's voice.

Prayer is often listening to God

Like communicating in a marriage

The Pastor and Prayer

- Public or ceremonial prayers.

Sometimes the pastor will be called upon to pray in a public, civic setting. When this occurs, he/she should be careful to be prepared and sincere. Do not be judgmental or controversial. Plant seeds so that the unchurched will hear the gospel, but not be offended by it.

- Prayers in worship.

These are our most important prayers, in that they set the example of how to pray for the rest of the congregation. If you write your prayers be sure that they seem natural. Pray on behalf of the congregation, but also with them.

- Praying for the sick.

See the notes to “Recipe for Prayer.” Do not make promises of healing for people, but encourage faith in the power of Christ to heal. God chooses who, how and when he will heal. We need to make ourselves available as instruments, however.

- Ministering to hurting, imprisoned, etc.

Never make a visit with a person (at home, hospital, nursing facility, prison, etc.) without offering to pray with them. Pray that God will minister peace, patience and joy in the midst of difficulty.

- Prayer for the church.

Remember that one of your responsibilities as a leader is to pray for your church. Pray for the members of the congregation and pray that you will all be united in support of God's vision for your lives and church.

- Personal Prayer Life of the pastor.

Never neglect your personal prayer life. Spend time every day with the Lord in prayer, meditation and Bible reading and study. This is how you will grow your relationship with God.

A Recipe for Prayer

James 5.13-18

Is anyone among you suffering? Let him pray. Is anyone cheerful? Let him sing psalms. Is anyone among you sick? Let him call for the elders of the church, and let them pray over him, anointing him with oil in the name of the Lord. And the prayer of faith will save the sick, and the Lord will raise him up. And if he has committed sins, he will be forgiven. Confess your trespasses to one another, and pray for one another, that you may be healed. The effective, fervent prayer of a righteous man avails much. Elijah was a man with a nature like ours, and he prayed earnestly that it would not rain; and it did not rain on the land for three years and six months. And he prayed again, and the heaven gave rain, and the earth produced its fruit.

1. Pray for needs.

2. Sing in times of blessing.

3. Call the elders of the church.

Pastors, leaders, faithful disciples, the mature in faith, those with great faith.

4. Elders should pray.

5. Anoint one another with oil.

6. Lay hands on one another.

7. Pray with faith, believing in God for healing.

8. Confess your sins to each other.