

THE PRIORITY AND PURPOSE OF PRAYER

“The condition of the church may be accurately gauged by its prayer meetings. So I s the prayer meeting a graceometer, and from it we may judge the amount of divine working among a people. If God be near a church, it must pray. And if he be not there, one of the first tokens of his absence will be a slothfulness in prayer.”-

Charles Spurgeon

Nothing reveals our spiritual condition so accurately as our private prayers. Most Christians, however, know that (their) prayer life is one of their weakest points.”

-John Munro

“The one concern of the devil is to keep Christians from praying. He fears nothing from prayerless studies, prayerless work and prayerless religion. He laughs at our toil, mocks at our wisdom, but trembles when we pray.”

-Samuel Chadwick

I. Scripture Illustrates It

A. Old Testament Examples

- ✓ Gideon prayed to the Lord, and He gave him a great victory over the Midianites (Judg. 6-7)
- ✓ Hannah, who was unable to have children, prayed fervently (I Sam. 1:10, 27; 2:20), and God gave her a son, Samuel, who became a great prophet.
- ✓ David, who id described in ‘scripture as a man after God’s own heart (I Sam. 13:14; Acts 13:22), lived a life of prayer, evidenced by his many psalms of deep devotion to God. God honored him and used him as a great king of Israel.
- ✓ Nehemiah wept, fasted, prayed-and God used him to lead the difficult task of rebuilding the walls of Jerusalem, resulting in a great spiritual revival among the people of Israel. In fact, the Book of Nehemiah records twelve times Nehemiah prayed!
- ✓ Threatened with death by lions, Daniel continued, as before, to pray three times a day (Dan. 6:10-13). And amazingly, God saved his life in the den of lions. Daniel was a man of prayer. And so were Elijah, Hezekiah, Ezra, Isaiah, Habakkuk, and Jeremiah-and many other men and women, young people, and children.

Each of these individuals faced “impossible situations”-but they believed in the potential of prayer. They did not merely speak about prayer or discuss its possibilities. They did it!

- B. Jesus modeled the priority of prayer in His life.
- C. Jesus prayed because He wanted to be:
 - obedient to
 - united with
 - empowered by
- D. Every major event and every minor decision in Jesus' life was shrouded with prayer.

II. Prayer Builds Our Relationship with God

- A. Intimacy is built as Christ's bride.
- B. Moses-Exodus 33:11-23: Moses knew God!
- C. God is Spirit (John 4:24) and to know and understand the things of God, spiritual eyes must be opened. Keeness in the spirit realm comes as you discipline yourself in prayer, praise, fasting, and renewing your mind through God's Word.
- D. Prayer will allow the Lord to reveal spiritual reality, our spiritual eyes will be opened. (2 Kings 6: 16, 17), (Luke 8:45, 46) The more our spiritual eyes are opened, the more understanding we will have about our physical circumstances.

III. Prayer is Ministry

Ministry to God must come before ministry to people. I Peter 2:9 tells us that we are a kingdom of priests. The way we minister to God is by praising, worshiping and communing with Him in prayer and meditation. The way we minister to people is by allowing the overflow of what we have received in our time along with Him to pour out into the lives of others.

IV. Prayer is Sacrifice

Prayer is a love response to the burdens of others. As we follow Christ's example of going to the cross for our sin, we too must freely give ourselves to prayer. Prayer is an unselfish work that is often unseen and unappreciated by others; they only experience the results. When we pray, we are not seeking to be seen by men, but rather to stand in the presence and pleasure of the Lord (Matt. 6:5; Heb. 7:25) Our times of oneness with the Father bring us into oneness of heart with Him. We are then able to experience His

heartache over the lost, His compassion for the hurting and His love for others-even our enemies.

Note the prayer of the apostle Paul in Phil. 2:3,4.

V. Prayer is Kingdom Partnership

Prayer makes a way for God to act sovereignly on earth. Jesus said to pray, “Thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven.” (Matt. 6:10) God has chosen to work through people, not around them. He also says, “Truly I say to you, whatever you shall bind on earth shall be bound in heaven; and whatever you loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven” (Matt. 18:18) The obvious inference is that God has limited some of His activities on the earth and will respond only to the prayers of His children. Heaven waits for those of us on earth to pray for things to open. E. Stanley Jones once said, “We align ourselves with the purpose and power of God, and He is able to do things with us that He could not do otherwise.” God seeks a person, an intercessor, to plead for His perfect will to be done on earth as it is in heaven (see Isa. 43:26; Jer. 1:12)

VI. Prayer Has Power

Prayer can cause God to relent. Many times the fate of the world is not in the hands of governors or kings, but in the hands of mighty intercessors! You, too, can influence society as did Abraham and Daniel and other in the Old Testament! Your prayers not only affect those you are praying for, but can also help to mold national or international events. Note how God changed His mind in Exod. 32:11-14.

Not only does the Lord change His mind when His people pray, but He also gives revelation knowledge and the mind of God through His Holy Spirit. As you pray, He will pinpoint a problem area in someone’s life or in a situation, allowing you to see as He sees. Luke tells us that “all things have been handed over to Me by My Father, and no one knows who the Son is except the Father, and who the Father is except the Son, and anyone to whom the Son wills to reveal Him” (10:22) The intercessor must carefully guard the secrets God reveals during prayer and be obedient to share only when the Lord directs. Seek His clear guidance on the proper follow-up of His revelation (Matt. 11:25, 26; Phil. 3:15)

As you continue to pray, you will see the miraculous! The kingdom of God will become real through the miracles of God operating in your life. (Mark 16:17,18)

DVD: Raised from the Dead-story of Pastor Daniel Ekechukwu

VII. Prayer is Warfare

Illustration: Ft. Lauderdale-in hotel room, blood clot, couldn’t breathe, felt like something was in the room with me-smothering me; called a friend to intercede for me-breakthrough in the service-didn’t quit; didn’t pack and go home; stayed on the God-given agenda

Ephesians 6:12-our struggle is not with flesh and blood. You are called to do warfare spiritually through prayer over Satan's strongholds until you win! Satan will usually attack in our greatest area of strength. In our weak areas, we are more apt to call on the Lord for help, but in our strong areas, we tend to rely on self and fighting the battles on our own.

Jesus Himself had to fight, battle Satan through prayer for His ministry and in other situations. Note the wilderness temptation! He experienced spiritual warfare and won before He ever went out into public ministry. You, too, must win before you can fully function in what God has called you to do. The success of your Christian life is dependent on winning....winning in prayer (Josh. 1:3, 11, 15; Matt. 4:11; Mark 3:27)

Note Daniel's example in Dan. 10:12, 13-Don't give up! You are in a win-win situation. God is for you, and the battle is the Lord's!

VII. Prayer is Rest

Prayer is not just a call to war; it is also an invitation to rest. Jesus said, "Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your request be made known to God. And the peace of God which surpasses all comprehension, shall guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus." (Phil. 4:6,7)

Knowing that God is on your side will help you to enter into the rest He offers. Cast your burden upon Him and He will sustain you; He will never allow the righteous to be shaken (Ps. 55:22) As you come away with Him in prayer, you can rest!

VII. Prayer Has Potential

The power of prayer is so immense it is almost indescribable! Prayer spells the difference between doing things for God in our own strength or carry on His ministry by the power of the Holy Spirit. Prayer made the difference between Peter denying the Lord and the same Peter preaching with great power and incredible results on the Day of Pentecost. Prayer was a factor in changing the fragmented, timid disciples, who fled for their lives when Jesus was arrested, into men of great spiritual boldness and unity on the streets of Jerusalem as Peter proclaimed the gospel on the Day of Pentecost.

Yet many are missing out on the power of prayer! James wrote in 4:2-"You want something but don't get it. You kill and covet, but you cannot have what you want. You quarrel and fight. You do not have, because you do not ask God." Jesus gave the invitation to us in Matt. 7:7-"Ask and it will be given to you."

Remember the hymn?

*O what peace we often forfeit,
O what needless pain we bear,
All because we do not carry
Everything to God in prayer.*

Many times I have attempted to do things for God in my own strength rather than reaching out to Him in prayer, asking for His wisdom, power, and provision.

Learning to pray requires a radical change for most of us. It translates us from focusing on ourselves and our own abilities to focusing on God and His unlimited resources.

Most of us have come to recognize our limitations. As a result, many find it more and more difficult to take risks-to venture out in faith. Many of us have adopted the 'play it safe' life style and walk by sight rather than by faith.

Prayer moves us from the safe and comfortable to the impossible and even miraculous areas of life and ministry. A life of prayer is a life of great adventure and unlimited potential.

Cultivating a life of prayer is not optional for those who are committed to loving and obeying Jesus Christ and who desire deeply to be used by Him to the maximum!

Our Lord is ready to make Himself and all His resources available to us. He is waiting for us to pray. To potential of prayer is virtually unlimited!

VIII. Prayer Has Purpose

“Prayer honors God; it dishonors self. It is man’s plea of weakness, ignorance, want; a plea which heaven cannot disregard. God delights to have us pray.”-E.M. Bounds

“The purpose of prayer is not to get man’s will done in heaven, but to get God’s will done on earth.” -Phillips Brooks

“When a person is born from above, the life of the Son of God is born in him, and he can either starve that life or nourish it. Prayer is the way the life of God is nourished.”

So, why pray?

1. To obey God!-Obedience is at the very heart of authentic Christian discipleship. I Samuel 15:22-23-“Does the Lord delight in burnt offerings and sacrifices as much as in obeying the voice of the Lord? To obey is better than sacrifice, and to heed is better than the fat of rams. For rebellion is like the sin of divination, and arrogance like the evil of idolatry.”

In one sense failing to spend time in prayer with the Lord is a form of rebellion. It communications that we do not need Him very much, that we can carry on our ministries and leadership responsibilities in our own strength.

Psalm 32:6-Therefore let everyone who is godly pray to you while you may be found.

Isa. 55:6-Seek the Lord while he may be found; call on hi while he is near.

Matt. 7:7-Ask and it will be given to you.

Luke 18:1-Then Jesus told his disciples a parable to show them that they should always pray.

John 16:24-Ask and you will receive.

Eph. 6:18-Pray in the Spirit on all occasions with all kinds of payers and requests.

Phil. 4:6-Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your request to God.

I Thess. 5:17-Pray continually.

James 5:13-Is anyone of you in trouble? He should pray.

James 5:16-Pray for each other.

Jude 20-Pray in the Holy Spirit.

It is virtually impossible to be effective disciples of Jesus Christ without cultivating and practicing the life of prayer. However, prayer is more than obligation! Martin Luther-“To be a Christian without prayer is not more possible than to be alive without breathing.” It is no mere religious duty Through prayer, all God’s resources become available to us, including the unspeakable resource of Himself!

2. To commune with God

The greatest privilege of prayer is that of coming into th eacutal presence of God to enjoy loving conversation and communion with Him. To pray is to invite Jesus into our hearts! At any time, if we pray continuously and openly, we can share in intimate, joyous fellowship and communion with Him in prayer!

3. To move with God’s agenda

Intimate fellowship will help us focus more on Him and less on ourselves. Communing with God in prayer encourages us to see situations as our Lord sees them, to become more concerned about God’s will than our own, to pray earnestly and authentically for His will to be done rather than our own. Remember Jesus’ prayer in the Garden of Gethsemane, at one of His greatest times of need. He was about to be betrayed by one of His most trusted disciples. He was about to be denied by one of His most devoted followers. He was about to be deserted by most of the Twelve. The cross lay before Him. And soon, in a mysterious way no one can fully understand, even His Father would ‘forsake’ Him. The reason for which He had been born was about to come to pass. And

at His great time of need, His disciples fell asleep instead of praying with Him. There was only One to whom He could go, One with whom He could communicate openly and freely and intimately. He opened His heart to His Father.

He prayed, My Father, if it is possible, may this cup be taken from me. (Matt. 26:39)

We can identify with that human kind of praying. “Father, if there is any way to get me out of this situation, please do it.” That’s a natural prayer for most of us. It is common. How many of us could testify to praying that prayer and hearing God answer?!

But the further example of Jesus’ prayer is an entirely different kind of praying...uncommon, infrequent, unnatural. It is the way God wants us always to pray-“Yet not as I will, but as you will...May your will be done.” (Matt. 26:39-42)

I John 5:14-we are exhorted in approaching God we are to ask according to His will-here is the clincher-we are to submit to His will, His wanting what He wants even if it conflicts with our wishes. Praying in the will of God means our prayers are in harmony with God’s character and with what He has revealed in His Word. When we pray this way, then He answers us. “This is the confidence we have in approaching God: that if we ask anything according to His will, he hears us. And if we know that he hears us- whatever we ask-we know that we have what we asked of him” (5:14-15)

Remember, prayer is what Bill Hybels calls an unnatural activity. He says, “From birth we have been learning the rules of self-reliance as we strain and struggle to achieve self-sufficiency. Prayer flies in the face of those deep-seated values. It is an assault on human autonomy, an indictment of independent living. To people in the fast lane, determined to make it on their own, prayer is an embarrassing interruption.”

Without a doubt one of the great contributions of prayer is to help us move to our Lord’s agenda from our own agenda, to move to God-dependence from self-reliance, to understand that the purpose of prayer is for us to surrender to His lordship and to submit to His sovereign will-not to convince God to bless our self-initiated goals and plans.