

Prayer

Central Truth:

Psalm 127:1 says this: “Unless the Lord builds the house, the workers labor in vain.” This verse reflects the absolute necessity of prayer in the life of a disciple of Jesus. Unless we see God as essential to our lives, we will avoid prayer because interaction with God is a unique form of communication in our lives. Prayer, however, is also extremely powerful! In one moment God can answer a request that we could never accomplish on our own. Who else has the power, love, and authority of God? And He is eager to hear our heart!

Scripture for Devotional Time

Read Matthew 6:5-15

When Jesus speaks of “hypocrites” he is speaking about the theater. The term in his day was akin to putting on a mask and performing before others. Obviously, actors who take their craft into everyday life are deceiving others to believe they are someone they are not. Jesus speaks to this issue regarding prayer.

Questions:

1. What are the two situations that Jesus says will ruin the purpose of prayer?
2. How do those situations cut out the heart of prayer?
3. Why is a person who does these things considered a hypocrite?
4. What is God looking for when we pray?
5. Put the Lord’s prayer (vs 9-13) in your own words. How can you make it a model for your everyday interactions with Jesus?

Supplemental Reading

By Matt Herman

“Prayer is an unnatural activity. From birth, we learn the rules of self-reliance as we strain and struggle toward independence, and frankly, prayer flies in the face of all that. It is an assault on human autonomy, an indictment of self-sufficient living. To people like me, who are fond of racing down the fast lane, determined to make it on their own, prayer can seem a really annoying interruption. Although prayer is alien to our proud human nature, somehow, at some point along life’s journey, most of us fall to our knees, bow our heads, fix our attention on God and just plain pray. We may look both ways to be sure no one is watching; our knees may crack at the foreignness of the activity; but still, we pray. It’s as if something within us is hard-wired with the knowledge that in so doing we weave stronger threads of intimacy with the One who alone can provide peace to endure and power to overcome whatever challenge we face.”

—Bill Hybels, *Too Busy Not to Pray*

Prayer is universal and yet foreign. It has the power to lift us up and sustain us, but it is rarely used to its fullest intent. Part of the problem is that our relationship to God is unique among all our relationships. Although we are cast in His image, we are still different. His nature is so unlike our own that when Moses asked of His name, the response was descriptive: “I will be who I will be,” God answered. He carries no all-encompassing name, for all names do an injustice to Him if they stand alone. He is more than a provider, healer, father, friend, etc. When He came as the Son He took the name Jesus, which means “God saves” or “One who saves,” for that is what Jesus’s life was uniquely about. If there are a multitude of books written about how men and women can communicate, then it should not surprise us that when we communicate to God in prayer it may seem a bit nuanced or unique.

And yet the uniqueness of our relationship to God also contains our greatest joy! For who else can do the things He can do. When a child goes to their parent for something they have not worked for and cannot obtain, and that parent gladly gives it to them, a powerful transaction occurs. What took that parent time, energy, and resources to provide has been freely given in a matter of seconds.

When we open the pages of Scripture and see the nature and love of God, we are witnessing a more loving, resourced, energized, authoritative, and all-powerful being than anyone we could ever meet otherwise. With God we have access, through the forgiveness of Christ, to anything and everything we need. Prayer may be foreign in one regard, but in another, it is the greatest opportunity and blessing we are offered in our lives. Who else can do for you what God can uniquely do?

Prayer, however, is learned just like all communication is. It is a sad reality of the fall of mankind that we must re-learn how to relate properly to God and one another. So in Luke 11:1-4, the disciples come to Jesus to ask Him how to pray. Something was

unique in the way Jesus interacted with the Father. The frequency and fervency of Jesus's prayer life was inspiring. The disciples wanted to know how they could have that kind of connection. It is out of this longing that we receive what is known as the Lord's Prayer.

The Lord's Prayer is a model. Recite it word for word if you like, but when we notice the other recorded prayers of Jesus we can see that He approached the Father within this framework. What, then, is that framework? Here's a brief breakdown.

Position ("Our Father"): We begin our prayer with affirming our relationship to God. When we repent and believe in Jesus God becomes our adopted Father. God loves and cares for His children. This is great news!

Praise ("Hallowed by Your name"): When we affirm God's worth we begin to place our felt needs and desires into their proper place. Life is ultimately about Him, not us.

Provision ("Give us this day our daily bread"): God cares about our needs. If we give Him our concerns He can give us peace. When we hold on to them we often experience worry.

Pardon ("Forgive us our debts as we forgive our debtors"): We need forgiveness; it's why Jesus came. As we admit our need of His grace and mercy, we can begin extend forgiveness to those who harm or hurt us.

Protection ("Lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from the evil one"): In the final line the petition is not to keep us from anything bad, but a vote of no confidence in our abilities. It is a statement that we are not heroic enough to keep ourselves from falling into serious sin.

If you begin to find your prayer flowing through these qualities that Jesus gives to us, you're moving in the right direction. They are affirmations of who God is and who we are in His sight. When we see God for who He really is, and place ourselves in our rightful place before Him, humility increases and our needs set in place. But it is a process, just like any other relationship.

Later on in his book on prayer, Bill Hybels says this:

"Authentic Christianity is not learning a set of doctrines and then stepping in cadence with people all marching the same way. It is also not simply humanitarian service to the less fortunate. It is a walk—a supernatural walk with a living, dynamic, communicating God. The heart and soul of the Christian life is learning to hear God's voice and then developing the courage to do what he asks us to do.

Authentic Christians are persons who stand apart from others, even other Christians, as though listening to a different drummer. Their character seems deeper, their ideas fresher, their spirit softer, their courage greater, their leadership stronger, their concerns wider, their compassion more genuine and

their convictions more concrete. They are joyful in spite of difficult circumstances and show wisdom beyond their years.

That's because authentic Christians have strong relationships with the Lord—relationships that are renewed every day. As the psalmist said of godly people, 'Their delight is in the law of the Lord, and on his law they meditate day and night. They are like trees planted by streams of water, which yield their fruit in its season, and their leaves do not wither.'

Embarrassingly few Christians ever reach this level of authenticity because most Christians allow busyness to rule the day. Which, if you ask me, is the unrivaled archenemy of spiritual authenticity. Busyness is akin to something the Bible calls worldliness—getting caught up with society's agenda, objectives and activities to the neglect of walking with God. And any way you slice it, a key ingredient in authentic Christianity is time. Not leftover time, not throwaway time, but quality time. Time for contemplation, meditation, and reflection. Unhurried, uninterrupted time."

Prayer is a doorway into a relationship that will anchor your entire life. Scripture unveils the nature and character of God, but prayer is when your personal world collides with His. Honesty is vital. Conviction is expected. Joy is the outcome.

Here are some practical ways to pray:

1. Journal your prayers
2. Prayer walk
3. Pray through your calendar
4. Pray Scripture
5. Pray with the news
6. Prayer partner
7. Listen in silence

Final Questions:

1. How can you begin to incorporate God into your daily activities?
2. What does a vibrant prayer life look like to you?
3. If you knew God was listening, how would you come to Him every day?