

CULTIVATING A LIFE OF PRAYER

2 Chronicles 7:14

If My people who are called by My name will humble themselves, and pray and seek My face, and turn from their wicked ways, then I will hear from heaven, and will forgive their sin and heal their land.

Luke 18:1-8

1 Then He spoke a parable to them, that men always ought to pray and not lose heart, 2 saying: "There was in a certain city a judge who did not fear God nor regard man. 3 Now there was a widow in that city; and she came to him, saying, 'Get justice for me from my adversary.' 4 And he would not for a while; but afterward he said within himself, 'Though I do not fear God nor regard man, 5 yet because this widow troubles me I will avenge her, lest by her continual coming she weary me.' "

6 Then the Lord said, "Hear what the unjust judge said. 7 And shall God not avenge His own elect who cry out day and night to Him, though He bears long with them? 8 I tell you that He will avenge them speedily. Nevertheless, when the Son of Man comes, will He really find faith on the earth?"

3 DRIVING FORCES OF PRAYER

When people pray, they are often motivated by three driving forces. Though each has its causes and effects, only one leads a person to a truly prevailing prayer life.

- **Needs and Necessities**
- **Duty and Discipline**
- **Communion and Relationship**

The most common driving force of prayer in the life of people today is what we will identify as "Needs and Necessities."

- When a person's necessities are the things that drive them to pray, they pray because *they need to*.

They have bills to pay, there is trouble in their relationships, they are trying to overcome a habit, they have pressing problems that must be addressed, etc.

In this way, the driving force of their prayer life is desperation. Some may even refer to this as “foxhole praying,” meaning that when the bullets start to fly and they begin to feel the threat of danger, they suddenly turn religious.

Though this manner of praying is not inherently bad, it should not be the primary driving force of a person’s prayer life.

- **If it is, a person will view God as an “emergency hotline” only to be used in times of great crisis.**

Another common driving force of prayer among men is what we refer to as “Duty and Discipline.”

When a person’s sense of duty and religious discipline drive them to pray, they pray because they *have to*.

They do it because it is what Christians are supposed to do; they have seen it practiced in others and want to live up to their standard; they feel obligated to pray because it’s the “spiritual” thing to do, etc.

- In this way, the driving force of their prayer life is **responsibility**.

Though a measure of discipline is necessary to develop any devotional practice, it should not be the primary driving force. If it is, it turns prayer into an object on a long list of religious duties to complete.

- **When a person gets it done and checks the box, they gain a certain level of satisfaction. However, when the box is not checked, it leads to condemnation.**

If a person’s prayer life is driven only by their obligation to religious discipline, they will be driven to use prayer as a measuring stick for their own self-righteousness.

- Living in this way, they forget that prayer is, *first and foremost*, the avenue through which they commune and connect with God on a personal level.

The only motive that leads a person to a prevailing life of prayer is that which is driven by a desire for communion and a relationship with God.

- In this way, a person’s prayer life is driven by a deep sense of personal meaning. They pray (not because they *need* to or *have* to) because they **want** to.

They have a hunger that cannot be quenched and long to live a life that is pleasing in the sight of God.

Jeremiah 9:23-24

Let not the wise man glory in his wisdom, let not the mighty man glory in his might, nor let the rich man glory in his riches; But let him who glories glory in this, that he understands and knows Me, that I am the Lord, exercising lovingkindness, judgment, and righteousness in the earth. For in these I delight," says the Lord.

- If people only pray when they are in need, they look more to God's **hand** than anything else.
- When people pray out of a sense of religious obligation, they do so to reinforce their reputation.
- But when people pray out of a desire for a **relationship** with God, they intently listen to God speak. Furthermore, they anticipate that God has something to say to them.

The Psalmist wrote, "To Him who rides on the heaven of heavens... He sends out His voice, a mighty voice!" (Psalm 68:33).

- **That voice can and should be the primary driving force in a man's life.**

GETTING PRACTICAL

To develop a prevailing prayer life, a person must consider how they can develop a routine of prayer. There must be a plan and rhythm to their praying. If they wait to find time to pray, they will find that their calendar is always full.

- **Therefore, they must establish prayer as an anchor point in their schedule.**
- **They should establish a day of focused prayer during the week and a time of focused prayer during each day.**

Rather than leaving prayer as an afterthought, they should write it into their workweek and build everything around it.

To cultivate a meaningful prayer life... A person should consider keeping a journal or notebook and writing down what the Lord may say to them.

These prayer journals can be great conversation starters with those family members, friends, and followers that are in their circle of influence.

- **Is there a series of Bible verses that he can incorporate into his prayer time?**
- **What are his prayer goals and objectives?**
- **How can he pray for the specific needs of others?**

Ultimately, for a person's prayer life to be meaningful, they must give it meaning. They must assign a high value to their prayer time.

- **If they wait until the end of the day to pray after they have worked and given the best of themselves to other pursuits, the quality of their time with God will be minimal.**

Therefore, they must consider how they can pray earlier in their day.

- **Though everyone is different, most people are better suited to think more clearly in the morning.**

By praying during this time, whether at home or in the car on the way to work, they begin the day with a greater awareness of what God is doing with them and through them.

- As David prayed, *"My voice You shall hear in the morning, O Lord; In the morning I will direct it to You, and I will look up"* (Psalm 5:3).

E.M. Bounds was a Methodist minister, devotional writer, and pastor of several American churches in the late 1800s. Many of his devotionals are still in use today and are recognized as Christian classics.

It is well documented that before Bounds started his day and worked on his many sermons and writing projects, he spent up to three hours in prayer. Of his passion for prayer, he wrote:

The men who have done the most for God in this world have been early on their knees. He who fritters away the early morning, its opportunity and freshness, in other pursuits than seeking God will make poor headway seeking him the rest of his day. If God is not first in our thoughts and efforts in the morning, he will be in the last place the remainder of the day.

Behind this early rising and early praying is the ardent desire which presses us into this pursuit after God. Morning listlessness is the index to a listless heart. The heart which is behindhand in seeking God in the morning has lost its relish for God. David's heart was ardent after God. He hungered and thirsted after God, and so he sought God early, before daylight. The bed and sleep could not chain his soul in its eagerness after God. Christ longed for communion with God; and so, rising a great while before day, he would go out into the mountain to pray. The disciples, when fully awake and ashamed of their indulgence, would know where to find him. We might go through the list of men who have mightily impressed the world for God, and we would find them early after God.

I also love the way pastor and author Ken Gurley put it when he said,

“The Roman Emperor Nero, as the story goes, played his fiddle as flames consumed the great city of Rome. He fiddled while Rome burned... May we not look back and say we piddled as the world burned. We must arise and seize this moment *in prayer*.”

LEARNING TO PRAY¹

Prayer must be:

TAUGHT

In Luke 11:1, after hearing Jesus pray, his disciples requested, “Lord, teach us to pray...”

It is helpful to hear about prayer, to learn about prayer, and to hear how prayer has transformed the life of a person... to see what prayer has done for them – will build your own faith *in* and practice *of* prayer.

CAUGHT

A great way to learn how to pray is to be in the presence of someone that really knows how to pray. Not someone that just utters empty words, but someone that really knows how to get ahold of God.

...Someone who, when they open their mouth and begin to talk to God, the moment *suddenly* turns sacred and holy.

Someone that, as Romans 4:17 describes, is able to “*speak the things that are not as though they were.*”

¹ This thought of “taught, caught, sought” was first written about by Ken Gurley in *The Book of Prayer* (2020).

As we look to flesh and blood examples of others that really make a difference in the Spirit, we find deep paths paved in prayer that shows us how to really live lives of great faith. Paul told the believers in Corinth, “Imitate me as I imitate Christ.”

So if you really want to learn how to pray, spend time with those who already do.

SOUGHT

If you really want to learn how to pray and get better at connecting with the Spirit and mind of God... you must begin to pursue God in prayer.

You must begin to pray for yourself.

No one’s prayers should be used as a substitute for your own.

At some point, you must begin to seek God for yourself... and take personal responsibility for your own spiritual growth.

You must begin to believe that God does, indeed, hear you when you pray.

Psalm 6:9

The Lord has heard my supplication; the Lord will receive my prayer.

Hebrews 11:6

But without faith it is impossible to please Him, for he who comes to God must believe that He is, and that He is a rewarder of those who diligently seek Him.

In the Apostle John’s revelation of heaven and the last days in the Book of Revelation, he makes a note of something he observes in heaven...

In **Revelation 5:8**, he witnesses golden bowls full of incense – great, big heavenly containers and vessels with sweet-smelling incense.

And this incense in the bowls of gold is described as “the prayers of the saints.”

- I am *not* convinced that this represents a physical or literal bowl in heaven containing the prayers of the saints...
- I *am* convinced, however, that this is the Apostle John’s way of describing with his words what God allowed him to see in heaven.

He is reassured that God knows – he has heard and received – every prayer that has ever been prayed.

In His infinite and all-consuming power and knowledge – he has never forgotten the prayers of his people. **They are as sweet-smelling incense in the heavenly realm.**

- Despite what you may sometimes FEEL or THINK – God does, *indeed*, hear you when you pray.

THE FIRST MENTION OF PRAYER IN THE BIBLE²

Genesis 4:26

And as for Seth, to him also a son was born; and he named him Enosh. Then men began to call on the name of the Lord.

You see, Seth was a son of Adam & Eve.

Prior to his birth, they had two other boys named Cain & Abel.

And the generation of Cain & Abel was marked by jealousy, rage, hate, and murder. The Bible conveys that Cain rose and slew his brother... he then left and walked out into the wilderness, and his lineage and family line was forever marked by **worldliness** and **wickedness**.

- In time, Adam and Eve had a 3rd son named Seth... And from the beginning, Seth seemed to have a desire for God, and he looked for God.

And his lineage was **much different** from that of Cain.

His descendants were not defined by the heathen culture of the world... but by a heart that looked unto the Lord.

- As his son Enosh was born, the Bible says, *“then men began to call on the name of the Lord.”*

And as we follow the generations through Biblical history, we discover that the patriarchs and matriarchs of faith came not from the descendants of Cain – *but of Seth.*

² This thought first written by Ken Gurley in *The Book of Prayer* (2020).

- PRAYER has the potential and the power to write into your story a different lineage and legacy.
- Regardless of our past, we can begin a new **posterity**.
- Through prayer, we can hit the reset button and start a Godly lineage.
- Our lives, and the lives of our children, do not have to be defined by jealousy, rage, hate, murder, and wickedness... through prayer, we can change the script of our past and birth a new path in God to follow!