

Why We Don't Pray
Matt 6:1-8; Eph 6:18

THIS IS A TOPIC THAT IS EASY TO PRODUCE GUILT AND TO MAKE PEOPLE FEEL LIKE BAD Christians. THAT IS NOT MY DESIRE. Most Christians could state as a New Year's Resolution that they want to pray more.

Wouldn't you like to have a life characterized by prayer, of living as one who is 'connected' with God in a way that brings His joy, peace, love, kindness, goodness....self control into the core of your being?

THE CHALLENGE this week isn't related to the question of whether one is or isn't a Christian, but rather the issue really boils down to whether one has a growing personal relationship with God or simply a public relationship that is just for show.

Right before Christmas I did a series on the Lord's Prayer, so we're all experts, right? We're all prayed up; we're on a roll when it comes to prayer.

My guess is that private prayer is something we all struggle with in different ways.

I've read many sermons on prayer from some great saints of the past who have developed the biblical argument that private prayer is perhaps the best way to discover whether one is born of the Spirit or not. But don't settle for the arguments of mere men, listen to the teaching of Christ in Matthew 6:1-8, the other passage that introduces the Lord's Prayer.

“And when you pray, you must not be like the hypocrites. For they love to stand and pray in the synagogues and at the street corners, that they may be seen by others. Truly, I say to you, they have received their reward. 6 But when you pray, go into your room and shut the door and pray to your Father who is in secret. And your Father who sees in secret will reward you. 7 “And when you pray, do not heap up empty phrases as the Gentiles do, for they think that they will be heard for their many words. 8 Do not be like them, for your Father knows what you need before you ask him. Matt 6:1-8

6:1 introduces the theme of the “public righteousness” of those who have no reward in heaven. Jesus indicates two areas of concern – giving and private prayer. Under prayer he examines two false forms of prayer that show that one is a hypocrite who has no reward – those who only pray in public and those who pray with an abundance of words.

Keep this in mind as we consider the question of prayer.

Today's message will be focusing on Christian prayer. If you don't know where you stand with Christ it is my hope that you'll learn something about what it means to be a Christian, but the truths relate specifically to those who know Christ by faith.

ONE IMPORTANT THING FOR YOU TO REMEMBER IS THAT PRAYER IS NOT SOMETHING ONE DOES TO BECOME A CHRISTIAN; IT IS SOMETHING A CHRISTIAN DOES NATURALLY TO FELLOWSHIP WITH HIS OR HER FATHER.

<< If I just pray a lot, then God will accept me>> VS <<I know that God has accepted me, in and because of, Christ and he has given me a new heart and I can't keep from praying to him. The Holy Spirit who indwells me is drawn to fellowship with the Father.>>

Eph 6:18

praying at all times in the Spirit, with all prayer and supplication. To that end, keep alert with all perseverance, making supplication for all the saints,

I. We don't pray because we don't FUNCTIONALLY believe the gospel (EVEN AS CHRISTIANS). we don't function out of the gospel.

WE DON'T BELIEVE WE'RE REALLY HELPLESS AND SINFUL – John 15:5 “Apart from me you can do nothing.” Martin Luther 1500's said “nothing is not a little something.” We don't believe that. We think we can do a lot on our own apart from God. We're competent capable people, so certainly we can get it done on our own.

PRINCIPLE #1: We pray to the EXTENT that we're in touch with our humanity and have a realistic view of who we are. Psalm 100:3 “It is he who has made us, and not we ourselves; we are His people and the sheep of His pasture.”

In our success oriented, get all you can, grab for the gusto culture, we don't want to believe that we are sheep. Sheep don't finish #1 or come out on top. How many sports teams have sheep as a mascot? Rams yes, lambs, no. Sheep are dumb helpless animals that lose their way easily. They need a shepherd.

EDWARDS: *“Hypocrites never had the spirit of prayer given them. They may have been stirred up to the external performance of this duty, and that with a great zeal and affection, and yet always have been lacking the true spirit of prayer.*

But it is far otherwise with the true convert.. He sees himself still to be a poor, empty, helpless creature, and that he still stands in great and continual need of God's help. He is sensible that without God he can do nothing.

II. WE DON'T BELIEVE THAT WE'RE REALLY FORGIVEN AND ADOPTED BY THE KING

LUKE 11:2; ROMANS 8:1, 15

- that we have throne privileges
- that there is no condemnation in Christ.
- that God loves us apart from and despite what we do
- that God really cares

The great strategy of Satan is to get you to believe that you're an orphan who is cut off from forgiveness and grace; that you don't have a “daddy” who will always listen and who is always working for your good.

We don't pray because we don't pray – Matt Chandler

i.e. we get in a prayer slump, then we feel and think that we can't pray now, because God is upset with me. He's disappointed, He's angry. We're living in shame so we don't want to go to God – WE'RE NOT BELIEVING THE GOSPEL.

PRINCIPLE #2: Remember that prayer is not overcoming God's reluctance to love you, it is laying hold of his highest willingness to love you.

The primary goal of prayer is fellowship with the Father, not checking off some to do list SO that God will accept you.

GAL 4 & Romans 8:15 teach us THAT PRAYER IS EXPERIENCING GOD'S FAVOR AND LORDSHIP OUT OF A REALIZATION OF SONSHIP.

The goal of prayer is to have a sense of meeting with the Father, not getting God to do what we want.

The Lord's Prayer teaches "Don't ask for things until you seek fellowship with the FATHER and know the experience of it on your heart." This is very different from the religious prayer that Christ calls the hypocrisy.

How does it happen?

Religious persons don't have friendship with God, while moderns don't have lordship. Moderns don't have a God who can contradict them- they are condemned to being in the place of God for the rest of their lives- WE under qualified for the job.

The modern individualistic person asks, "How can you trust him as Lord? Don't we have to determine truth for ourselves?"

Religious people have trouble with intimacy. How can you say "father"? << I'm trying to be good, I hope he accepts me. I think I'll get to heaven. I mean, God should let me into heaven because I believe in him and I'm trying to live for him and obey him. "

THAT IS RELIGION – self salvation. It isn't biblical faith alone in Christ alone.

You get both intimacy and trust through the cross

The answer is in adoption – Father. The gospel is you become a Christian when I say, 'accept me because of what Jesus Christ has done, not because of what I've done.'" When that happens we get the Sonship

How can you know you have it?

You find your heart crying out to ABBA even when you don't have needs. Your prayer life is characterized by praise and worship as much as by asking for things.

III. We don't pray because we don't know how --

<< It doesn't work for me>>

Have you tried prayer as the bible describes it?

We get bored & distracted because our minds and hearts aren't focused on God's Word and His glory

We ask for the wrong things for the wrong reasons – James 4:3

In Matthew 6 Jesus gives warnings about false ways of praying and he isn't talking about IRRELIGIOUS people, but those for whom prayer is cultural. It reflects the culture of your people. It makes you feel stable and good.. But prayer is to connect to God, not culture, not environment, not nostalgia, not sense of being part of tradition.

The sign of religious/cultural prayer is that when you go to private prayer, there is nothing to say.

There is no passion to know HIM, no desire to worship Him, to meet HIM. You pray in crisis, but when there is no social family reason, no internal pressure, then you don't go to Him. This is religious person prayer, not Christian prayer. No continual, growing, secret, private prayer life.

You're bored alone with God.

RELIGIOUS PEOPLE CAN PRAY IN PUBLIC, BUT ARE BORED ALONE WITH God. They can pray in a group, when asked, but they seldom pray in private.

PRINCIPLE #3 What has glory to you will shape your behavior.

If money, then you'll lie, cheat, steal to get it. If power, you'll walk over people to get it. If approval, you'll lie, avoid conflict, brown nose etc to get it. If security you'll be worried, anxious, angry at any threat. If winning or being the best, then you'll cheat, yell, get angry at those who are less skilled and cry, pout or get angry when you lose.

Your feet, hands, and mouth will follow your heart. If your heart is captivated by the glory of God – delighting in and obeying him- then your behavior will reflect it –OUR HEARTS WILL BE TURNED TO PRAYER because the Holy Spirit within loves to fellowship with the Father.

IV. WE CAN ENRICH OUR PRAYER LIFE BY PRAYING SCRIPTURE BACK TO God

You'll never run out of ways to pray and you'll pray with confidence that God hears because you'll be praying according to His Will. NOTHING HAS ENRICHED MY PRAYER LIFE MORE THAN THIS!! It is simple, engaging, and free!!

SCRIPTURE BASED 'GENERAL' REQUESTS: Col. 1:9-12; Proverbs 1-31

We pray for God to work Biblical character into our lives, but we don't know the specific details. This kind of praying is good for all seasons and all believers.

We pray for the work of the Holy Spirit to bring people to Christ – convicting of sin, opening and changing hearts.

NEED BASED SPECIFIC REQUESTS – Phil 4:6-7

We make our need known to God and we pray **WITH THANKSGIVING**.

Phil 4:4-7 / 1 Thess 5 In both passages see themes of rejoicing always, and thanksgiving in prayer.

BECOMING MORE OF A PRAYER WARRIOR

How?

–**Consider** the benefits of God centered, gospel motivated, private prayer- it promotes life of faith and growth in grace.

–**Order** your life so that private prayer is not neglected. This will mean that some changes must be made – TV turned off, phone unplugged, hobbies pursued with less zeal, alarm clock set earlier.

Dr. Koistra – “If you don't do it, you won't do it.” BUILD IT INTO YOUR LIFE - somewhere

Practice Deeply

For his book The Talent Code, Dan Coyle researched why certain parts of the world were talent “hot spots” for certain skills.

Brazil: soccer. Moscow: women's tennis. New York: music (think the Julliard School).

One key factor in each hot spot was knowing how to practice well—Coyle calls it “Deep Practice.”

The three components of Deep Practice are:

Practicing small chunks of the bigger action (for instance, rather than practice the whole tennis serve, you practice just tossing the ball up).

Prayer application – focus on one section or chapter for reading, memorization, meditation and prayer. Focus on one theme per day: Family needs, church, work, relationships, those who are sick or in need, a day for just thanksgiving, etc

Repetition, repetition and repetition... and repetition. Do it fast, do it slow, do it differently. But keep repeating the action. Prayer application – “In everything give thanks; pray without ceasing; be anxious for nothing, but in everything let your request be made known to God.”

And finally, **being mindful and noticing when it goes well**. When it does, celebrate success

Prayer application: make a journal note – “Today was a meaningful time of prayer. I really had a sense of meeting with God. He showed me..... I feel more empowered to.....”

Take a L.E.A.P.

The *Law of Diminishing Intent* says, the longer you wait to take action, the less likely you will be to take it. Jim Rohn originally noticed this phenomenon and coined the term.

ADAPTED FROM MICHAEL HYATT (“common grace” insights about life)

1. **Lean into the change with expectancy.** When you notice that a change is desirable or necessary, that’s the trigger. Determine to follow through. That inkling is all you need to get going. WHEN YOU SENSE THE SPIRIT WITHIN MOVING YOU, THEN LEAN INTO IT. EX: “maybe I ought to pray about that” –THAT THOUGHT CAME FROM God- go with it.
2. **Engage IN PRAYER PERSISTENTLY** –Rom 11:12; Eph 6:18; Phil 4:4-6; Col 3:17; 4:2; 1 Thess 5:16-18; 1 Tim 2:1-2; 1 Pet 4:7 don’t give up because you have some off days
3. **Act and do something—anything.** Don’t wait until you learn how to say “perfect lofty” prayers. We learn to pray by praying. Use the Bible, use a hymnal, use VoV, etc
4. **Pounce and do it now.** Once you’ve determined your next step, take it. Don’t wait. Waiting feels safe, but waiting kills the momentum

When is the best day to begin praying regularly, praying with your spouse, family???

Don’t be like the hobo character on Andy Griffith (Buddy Ebsen). He was lazy and lived by doing as little as possible. When a project needed to be done his approach was “The best time to do that job is tomorrow.”

Opie started imitating him at home and Andy wasn’t pleased

How many of us are like that when it comes to prayer, or our spiritual life?

“I’ll really focus on that tomorrow, or next week, month, year, when I move to the next level in school, or job or family; when the kids are older, when the kids are gone, when I retire, etc”

Friends, a deeper relationship with God is available to us TODAY.

The ABC’s of coming to faith –

A - Admit that you’re weak and need grace and strength – That means there is GOOD NEWS FOR YOU

B- Believe that Jesus is the only savior who can heal your heart.

C- confess to God that you want to trust Jesus as your savior and Lord.

COMMUNION

This table represents that which makes our access to God possible?

CLOSE IN LORD’S PRAYER

