

Spiritual Discipline: Prayer

May 2015

Of all the Spiritual Disciplines, prayer is second only to the intake of God's Word in importance. However, surveys and experience seem to agree that a large percentage of professing Christians spend little time in sustained prayer. While they may offer a sentence of prayer here and there throughout the day, they rarely spend more than a very few minutes- if that – alone in conversation with God. It is very easy to make people feel guilty about failure in prayer, but that is not my intent here. We must come to grips with the fact that if we desire to be like Jesus we must pray.

Prayer is expected – Colossians 4:2, "Continue steadfastly in prayer." I Thessalonians 5:17, "Pray without ceasing." Prayer is a divine summons and a royal invitation. Hebrews 4:16, "Let us then with confidence draw near to the throne of grace, that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need." We can see the expectation to pray merely as an obligation, or we can see it as an opportunity to receive the mercy and grace of God. Prayer is not so much a duty as a privilege, and not so much a privilege as it is an expression of life. Parents expect their children to communicate – even if all they do is cry – because they are alive. So God expects His children to communicate because they have been given eternal life and "have received the Spirit of adoption as sons, by whom we cry, 'Abba! Father!'" (Romans 8:15). In order for prayer to become a priority in your life it must be planned, allotted a specific time, and carefully guarded. It always seems that time dedicated to prayer is too easily crowded out by things that appear to be more urgent.

Prayer is learned – One would think that if prayer is simply communicating with the Father, then it should come naturally. After all, no one needs to teach a baby how to cry in order to make its needs known. But crying for basic needs is minimal communication. We must grow out of infancy and learn to pray in the same way a growing child learns to talk. Even the disciples asked Jesus, "Lord, teach us to pray" (Luke 11:1). So, how do we learn to pray?

- ***We learn to pray by praying***, just as you learn a foreign language best when you actually have to speak it.
- ***We learn to pray by meditating on Scripture***. By taking a passage of Scripture, thinking on it deeply, digesting it, and then speaking to God about it in meaningful prayer, we better realize that we are in conversation with God, as He speaks to us in His Word, and we speak to Him in response to what He has said.
- ***We also learn to pray by praying with others***. The disciples learned to pray, not only by hearing Jesus teach about prayer, but also by being with Him when He prayed.
- ***We learn to pray by reading about prayer***. We can read what others have learned about prayer from their study of Scripture. We can read about historical figures who were giants in prayer (like George Müller, David Brainerd, or Brother Lawrence).

Prayer is answered – Matthew 7:7-8 says, "Ask, and it will be given to you; seek and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you. For everyone who asks receives, and the one who seeks finds, and to the one who knocks it will be opened." God desires to give good gifts to His children. It is through prayer that we align our hearts, dreams and desires with His, and more clearly recognize His answers when they come.

Throughout the month of May, live out the spiritual discipline of Prayer by working through the items below and discussing them with your 222 Group.

- Commit to finding a time and place to pray daily throughout the month of May.
- Identify and read a book or article on prayer, or a biography of a prayer warrior.
- Go to ***ministrygrid.com*** and in the "Have a Membership Code?" field type in the following code: **9KB8NW**. If you do not already have a profile, you will be asked to create a free profile. View the online video on Prayer and Spiritual Warfare and discuss with your 222 Group.
- Respond to this quote about prayer: "One of the main reasons so many of God's children don't have a significant prayer life is not so much that we don't want to, but that we don't plan to....the opposite of planning is not a wonderful flow of deep, spontaneous experiences in prayer. The opposite of planning is the rut."