

The Importance of Prayer

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Luke 11:1 (NKJV) “Now it came to pass, as He was praying in a certain place, when He ceased, that one of His disciples said to Him, ‘Lord, teach us to pray, as John also taught his disciples.’”

E. M. Bounds once said, “*The most important lesson we can learn is how to pray.*” Yet it seems that one of the most neglected areas of the Christian life is prayer. It is easy to talk about the need to pray, but it is an entirely different thing to actually pray. Prayer is one of the greatest privileges we could ever have—to commune with the God of the universe—and yet we often find it so difficult to pursue. Bill Hybels once said of this tension, “Prayer is an unnatural activity. 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.” Why is prayer such a struggle in the beginning? I believe it is due to our faulty perception of prayer. In his book, *Deeping Your Conversation with God*, Ben Patterson shares a key personal insight that moved prayer from a duty to a passion: “I’m not ‘into’ prayer. I seem to have missed the religious gene or whatever it is that makes people enjoy the act of praying. It’s not my nature to pray. I’m not into prayer, I am into God! I thirst and hunger for God, I ache for God. Without his everlasting arms holding me up, I will fall. So I must pray.”

What is prayer? In simple terms, prayer is communion with God. Jesus emphasized the importance of private prayer: “*But you, when you pray, go into your room, and when you have shut your door, pray to your Father who is in the secret place; and your Father who sees in secret will reward you openly.*” (Matthew 16:6) God wants to spend time with each of His children in private. Just think of how awesome it is to be invited into the very presence of Almighty God, the Creator of the entire universe!

Prayer often is placed at the end of our priority list getting our left over time and energy, that is, if there is any left. However, prayer should be our first and greatest priority each day. Jesus, the Son of God, made prayer a priority seizing the rare moments He had to pray: “*Now in the morning, having risen a long while before daylight, He went out and departed to a solitary place; and there He prayed.*” (Mark 1:35 NKJV) So it is with anyone who is serious about the Father’s business. When once asked what his plans for the following day were, Martin Luther answered, “Work, work, from early until late. In fact, I have so much to do that I shall spend the first three hours in prayer.” John Wesley said, “I have so much to do that I must spend several hours in prayer before I am able to do it.” The late revivalist Leonard Ravenhill once said, “No man is greater than his prayer life. The pastor who is not praying is straying...poverty stricken as the church is today in many things, she is most stricken here, in the place of prayer. We have many organizers, but few agonizers; many players and payers, few pray-ers; many singers, few clingers; lots of pastors, few wrestlers; many fears, few tears; much fashion, little passion; many interferers, few intercessors; many writers, but few fighters. Failing here, we fail everywhere.”

An important reason prayer should be a priority in our life is because it is essential for personal victory. Jesus said to His disciples, Matthew 26:41 (NKJV) “*Watch and pray, lest you enter into temptation. The spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak.*” (Matthew 26:41). I wonder how many of our lost battles with sin and the flesh are directly related to our failure to pray? E. M. Bounds records Philip Henry as saying, “Be sure you look to your secret duty; keep that up whatever you do. The soul cannot prosper in the neglect of it. Apostasy generally begins at the closet door. Be much in secret fellowship with God. It is secret trading that enriches the Christian. Let prayer be the key of the morning and the bolt at night. The best way to fight against sin is to fight it on our knees.”

Not only is prayer communion with God, but it is also partnership with God. Jesus taught His disciples: “*In this manner, therefore, pray: Our Father in heaven, hallowed be Your name. Your kingdom come, Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven.*” (Matthew 6:9-10 NKJV) The great preacher Charles

Spurgeon said, "Whether we like it or not, asking is the rule of the kingdom. 'Ask, and ye shall receive' (John 16:24). It is a rule that never will be altered in anybody's case. Our Lord Jesus Christ is the elder brother of the family, but God has not relaxed the rule even for Him. Remember this text: Jehovah says to His own Son, 'Ask of me, and I shall give thee the heathen for thine inheritance, and the uttermost parts of the earth for thy possession' (Psalm 2:8). If the royal and divine Son of God cannot be exempted from the rule of asking that He may have, you and I cannot expect the rule to be relaxed in our favor. Why should it be?" E. M. Bounds said, "The prayers of God's saints are the capital stock in heaven by which Christ carries on His great work upon the earth." God accomplishes His work in the earth through our partnership with Him in prayer.

Prayer is to be the primary work of the church. Jesus said, "*It is written, 'My house shall be called a house of prayer,' but you have made it a den of thieves.*" (Matthew 21:13 NKJV) Is that true today that God's house is known as a house of prayer? If not, then we are guilty of making it something else? Prayer should be the place where every endeavor begins. We are not to plan and then pray. We are to pray and then plan. We are not to work and then pray. We are to pray and then work. E. M. Bounds said, "The life of the church is the highest life, and its office is to pray. Its prayer life is the highest life, the most fragrant, the most conspicuous. When God's house on the earth is a house of prayer, then God's house in heaven is busy and powerful in its plans and movements. "For mine house shall be called an house of prayer for all people" (Isaiah 56:7), says our God. Then, His earthly armies are clothed with the triumphs and spoils of victory, and His enemies are defeated on every hand."

Prayer is the key to success with God. Jesus said, "*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 he who seeks finds, and to him who knocks, it will be opened.*" (Matthew 7:7-8 NKJV) John Wesley once said, "It seems God is limited by our prayer life—that He can do nothing for humanity unless someone asks Him." Someone has said that when we work, we work; but when we pray, God works. This is so true! In reality, whatever is accomplished for the glory of God is initiated and completed through prayer. E. M. Bounds says again, "The mightiest successes that come to God's cause are created and carried on by prayer in God's day of power. When God's church comes into its mightiest inheritance of the mightiest faith and mightiest prayer, the angelic days of powerful activity occur. God's conquering days are when the saints have given themselves to mightiest prayer."

Prayer is the key to revival. 2 Chronicles 7:14 (NKJV) declares, "*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.*" Dr. J. Wilbur Chapman said, "Revivals are born in prayer. When Wesley prayed, England was revived; when Knox prayed, Scotland was refreshed; when the Sunday school teachers of Tannybrook prayed, eleven thousand young people were added to the church in a year. Whole nights of prayer have always been succeeded by whole days of soulwinning." E. M. Bounds says, "All revivals are dependent upon God; but, in revivals, as in other things, He invites and requires the assistance of man, and the full result is obtained when there is cooperation between the divine and the human. In other words, to employ a familiar phrase, 'God alone can save the world, but God cannot save the world alone.' God and man unite for the task; the response of the Divine Being is invariably in proportion to human effort and desire."

So how is your prayer life? Is God stirring your heart to pray? Are you ready to move beyond the duty of prayer to the passion of prayer? Are you hungry for God? Are you ready to see results through prayer that can never be accomplished otherwise? Then it is time to pray!

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