The Life You’ve Always Wanted

(But Need Spiritual Disciplines to Obtain)

#6 Prayer

**Introduction**

Our goal is genuine TRANSFORMATION. Our tools are PURPOSEFUL ACTIVITIES (spiritual disciplines) that help us become more and more like Christ (II Cor. 3:18).

Transformation requires TRAINING and DISCIPLINE. So, we are learning how to arrange our lives around those purposeful activities that will enable us to live out the FRUIT OF THE SPIRIT (Gal.5)

**The Spiritual Discipline of Prayer**

 “It is a learned behavior. Nobody is born an expert at it. No one ever masters prayer. As Thomas Merton put it in his book *Common Prayer:* ‘We do not want to be beginners. But let us be convinced of the fact that we will never be anything else but beginners all our life!’” (Max Lucado)

**Definition of Prayer:**

Prayer is not a wish or hope. It is not just a quiet meditation or passive reflection. It is a conversation with God. And it is much more than merely asking for things. It should include:

1. Adoration (worship, giving God the glory He so richly deserves: Luke 2:36-38)
2. Confession (saying the same thing about or sin that God says: I John 1:9)
3. Thanksgiving (developing a grateful heart: Phil 4:6)
4. Supplication/ Asking (looking to the Lord for our needs: Matt. 7:7)

“Godliness born of obedience to Christ. Obedience unlocks the riches of the Christian experience. Prayer is what prompts and nurtures obedience, putting the heart into the proper ‘frame of mind’ to desire obedience.” (R. C. Sproul)

**Our Prayers are Important to God**

Consider the picture in the throne room of God (Rev. 8:3-4). And remember that prayer is commanded (not just a suggestion). See Matt. 6:9. This is an ongoing command, a present imperative that should be translated, “Be praying.” Keep on praying!

**Note the Example of Christ**

Jesus prayed at His baptism (Luke 3:21), during his regular quiet time (Matt. 14:23, Mark 1:35, Luke 5:16), as an example for His followers (Luke 11:1) and the night before He died (Matt. 26:36-43).

In John 17, Jesus prayed specific things on behalf of His disciples:

That we would gain eternal life (vs. 1-3), that we would be unified (vs. 10-11, 20-23), that we would be protected from the evil one (vs. 14-15), that we would be sanctified in truth (vs. 16-19), that we would see His glory (vs. 24) and that we would make His name known (vs. 26).

Jesus continues to intercede for us. (See Romans 8:34 and Heb. 7:25)

**Jesus Taught us How to Pray**

See Matt. 6: 9-13 and note that there are 7 petitions: 3 are focused on the glory of God and 4 are focused on our “good” (our needs).

**What you need in order to learn how to pray**

1. Time

Start small, maybe commit to 5 minutes a day

At a regular time, an appointment to keep

Pray when you are at your best

1. Place

Somewhere that will support your efforts (a quiet place)

Somewhere that will help you maintain your focus (no interruptions)

Somewhere that will remind you of God’s presence (pull up another chair, envision a fireplace with coffee prepared, use candles or soft music…)

Anywhere! (see I Tim. 2:8)

Keep in mind, it is not about a physical position. In the scriptures, people prayed while kneeling (II Chron. 6, Dan. 6, Luke 22, and Acts 7), while laying prostrate (Num. 16, Josh. 5, Dan. 8, Matt. 26 and Rev. 11), while sitting (II Sam. 7) and standing (John 11:41).

**The Substance of our Prayers**

Simple Prayer- Bring to the Lord those things that are really on your heart, not just the stuff you wish was on your heart. C.S. Lewis once remarked, “We must lay before Him what is in us, not what ought to be in us.”

Intercessory Prayer-Bring to the Lord your requests, concerns and desires. Some of these are for others, some for yourself.

Persistent Prayer-We are told to be “devoted to prayer” (Rom. 12:12), to seek His face continually (I Chron. 16:11) and to pray without ceasing (I Thess. 5:17). Consider the parable of the persistent widow in Luke 18:1-8.

**Preparation for Prayer**

Focus and be fully present. Recognize that your mind may wander. Keep a pad of paper nearby, so you can jot down your “things to do.” Acknowledge them and move on.

Deal with the monkeys: “Henri Nouwen once said that when we go to pray, thoughts jump around in our minds like monkeys jumping on banana trees.” (Max Lucado)

Help your mind focus. Softly repeat/whisper a word or phrase that will draw you towards Him.

Consider using a visual like a candle burning.

Slow your breathing down. Sit still. Wait on the Lord.

**So What?**

**Remember, Prayer is a Relationship (not a series of words)**

Prayer allows the Lord to sing over us.

Zeph. 3:17 “The Lord your God is with you, the mighty warrior who saves. He will take great delight in you, in His love He will no longer rebuke you, but will rejoice over you with singing.”

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Discussion Questions:

1. What is one word that you might use to describe your current prayer life? Why did you choose that word?
2. What is the biggest obstacle or hinderance that impacts your prayer? Is there unconfessed sin (see Isa. 59:2)
3. Do you compare your prayer life to someone else? Is that a good idea?
4. What specific steps (training) can you do this week to improve your prayer life?

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