

A Prayer Closer

by Susan Forde

Subject: Prayer

Theme: The necessity of prayer

Proposition: Prayer is vital in seeking an authentic, intimate relationship with God

Transitional Sentence: Because of the following reasons/benefits all Christians who desiring a deeper relationship with God should consider prayer is a vital part of the relationship.

Introduction

Last week we talked about drawing near to God in a regular and intimate relationship through the practice of Christian Disciplines. Of course, this was a call to action of spending time, holy luxury, with God in response to who He is and what He has done, motivated by love not obligation. God carries on the good work He began in us and works in us as we partner with Him for the kingdom and He continues to transform us in ever increasing glory for His will and grows each of us in maturity, providing all we need to be all that He wants us to be, not for our own indulgence, but for His purpose and His glory.

So, what are these Christian Disciplines exactly? The most common are prayer (fasting, confession, worship, praise, thanksgiving, listening, resting or soaking, solitude and silence), Scripture reading (study, meditation, listening, journaling and application), and service or stewardship of your gifts for God.

Definition of Prayer

Many think that prayer is petition or asking for something. An earnest wish or request, but prayer is more than that. It is communion with God on whom we are dependent and an expression of gratitude for God's blessings. Communion is coming into union with or becoming one with. Communion is an act of sharing. It is a dialogue, a two way communication. It is a response of love for who God is and what He has done for us through Jesus' work of redemption.

God's love is realized through Jesus' life, suffering, death, and resurrection and God's love is realized through the presence of the gift of the Holy Spirit that is with us, helping and guiding us. Prayer involves a variety of aspects like faith, worship, confession, adoration, praise, thanksgiving, in addition to supplications or asking for something.

On a practical note, I have found it helpful to use the acronym "ACTS" to pray. Adore, Confess, Thanksgiving, and Supplication. When we begin with adoration and begin to think about the wonders and glory of God, His greatness, the natural reaction is to realize how very short we fall from His glory. Confession follows so naturally and then what follows is thanksgiving for all that He has provided to help us, to restore us and to make us whole. The needs of others and ourselves grows seems to naturally grow out of this. It's simple, but it really isn't meant to be complicated.

Another helpful tool we have with us everywhere we go. Our fingers.

1. Your thumb is nearest you. Pray for those closest to you. Friends, family...
2. The next finger is the pointing finger. Pray for those who point others in the right direction. Doctors, teachers, ministers.
3. The next finger is the tallest finger. Pray for our leaders. The president, leaders in business and industry, and administrators. These people shape our nation and guide public opinion.
4. The fourth finger is our ring finger, our weakest finger. Pray for those who are weak, in trouble or in pain.
5. Finally, our little finger - the smallest finger of all which is where we should place ourselves in relation to God and others. As the Bible says, "The least shall be the greatest among you." Your pinkie should remind you to pray for yourself. By the time you have prayed for the other four groups, your own needs will be put into proper perspective and you will be able to pray for yourself more effectively.

Why should I?

These are helpful tools because they help us to be able to pray anywhere, at anytime.

- Some of us may have a dedicated time of study and prayer, a discipline that we already practice. For those, these tools can be used to press in to practicing the presence of God Who is with us all day long. We can pray anytime. We can whisper prayers throughout the day.
- And for those who are wanting to start the discipline of prayer, these are tools that can be used to make the time more profitable and less awkward in wondering how or what do I pray?
- *But there may be some of you here today, who are still not quite convinced of the reasons why? These tools do not answer the question "why should I pray"? Today, we will explore the answers to "why should I pray"?

First of all....

To glorify God

I think it's safe to say that the ultimate purpose of our salvation is to glorify God, right? and to enjoy Him forever, or to bring us into an authentic relationship with Him. So, failure to seek God in prayer, or in others words, to ignore God, is to deny that purpose. ¹

Imagine spending an entire day with your best friend at your side. Throughout the day, you would acknowledge his or her presence. You would introduce your friend to your other friends or work associates. You would talk to him or her about the various activities of the day. But how

¹MacArthur, J. (1995). *Alone with God*. Includes indexes. Wheaton, Ill.: Victor Books.

would your friend feel if you never talked to him or acknowledged his presence? Yet quite often that's how we treat the Lord by failing to pray.

1 Jn 1:3 says, "*We proclaim to you what we have seen and heard, so that you also may have fellowship **with** us. And our fellowship is with the Father and with his Son, Jesus Christ.*"

In other words, they are proclaiming Jesus, that whoever believes will have eternal life and a relationship with the Father and Son along with them.

Prayer is the most central characteristic (trait) of fellowship with God because it potentially ushers in unending unity with the Father.

It's like breathing. A person doesn't have to think about breathing. The combination of the diaphragm's tension and the atmosphere exerts pressure on the lungs and forces breathing. That is why it takes effort to hold your breath. When we're born into the family of God, we enter a spiritual atmosphere in which God's presence and grace exert pressure (or influence) on our lives. Prayer is the normal response to that pressure. Unfortunately, many times we hold spiritual breath for long periods of time and think that a quick gulp of prayer here and there is sufficient for our spiritual survival, when in fact we must breathe to survive.

And again, the physical aspects of life can be compared with the spiritual in that we are satisfied with the physical blessings and may have little interest in spiritual blessings. We become dependent upon our physical resources and may have little need for spiritual resources. Success may make us think we are divinely blessed and without need, and the result is that we are living by our own strength and resources and not truly experiencing the abundance of God's blessings spiritually.²

To change

To pray is **to** change into the likeness of God in ever-creasing glory. To pray is to know the heart of God, to put ourselves in the position to know God better, and that is to know His heart, His will, His best for us.

Prayer is the central avenue God uses to transform us. As we draw closer to God by the discipline of prayer, He fills us up with spiritual abundance so much that we cannot help but pour out and share what He has given us to others.

To know God

God draws near to the praying soul as we draw near to seek Him.

Jer 29:13 says, "*You will seek me and find me when you seek me with all your heart.*" This in context is from a letter from Jeremiah to his exiled brothers. In it comes in a promise that God will free His people from captivity, but the principle of seeking and finding God when you seek Him with your all is still true for today, as true as God's desire for you to love Him with your all and love your neighbor as yourself.

²MacArthur, J. (1995). *Alone with God*. Includes indexes. Wheaton, Ill.: Victor Books.

Ps 73:28 says, “*But as for me, it is good to be near God. I have made the Sovereign LORD my refuge; I will tell of all your deeds.*”

It is good to be near God. To seek God, to know God, and to live for God — these are the aim/goal of all true praying. Therefore praying is being inspired to seek after God. He stirs in us a hunger and thirst and we long to be with God, to see Him, be near to Him, know Him better, and to have an intimate encounter with God. We begin to know God’s heart. So to those who pray with this kind of aim, things become new, the Bible becomes a *new* Bible, and Christ a new Saviour, because of what God will provide spiritually to the praying soul.³

So far, we should pray because we will glorify God, we will be changed, we will know Him better and know His heart.

Some others reasons are:

To obtain temporal blessings

Gen 28:20 Jacob made a vow to God and asked God to watch over him on his journey (travel mercies) and provide for him food and clothes.

Proverbs 30:8 The author asks that he be protected from falsehood and lies, that he is given neither poverty or riches but that he receive his daily bread.

Mt 6:11 Jesus is teaching his disciples the model prayer. In the Lord’s prayer, he teaches them to ask for daily bread.

To obtain spiritual blessings

Mt 6:33 talks about seeking God’s kingdom and righteousness (or spiritual blessings) and the material things will be given as well. Sure God provides and as we pray for spiritual things, we gain confidence in the faithfulness of God that He will provide for our needs. I have often wondered about this verse. It stirred my thoughts that if we ask for spiritual things, how might our hearts and our prayers be changed in what we think we need. Sometimes the things we think we need, we find we don’t really need after all.

To obtain mercy and grace to help in time of need

Heb 4:16 “*Let us then approach the throne of grace with confidence, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help us in our time of need.*”⁴ This passage is talking about Jesus who knows about our weaknesses and temptation. We can find mercy for our sins, grace to help us in times of temptation, but not only that. When we pray, we can find strength and in our walk through the shadowy valley, we can find peace and comfort, in the storms, calm, in the earthquakes of life, a firm foundation, in darkness, we find His light. We will not be shaken. These also are times of need in which God is there to help us.

³Bounds, E. M. (1999). *The necessity of prayer*. Oak Harbor, WA: Logos Research Systems, Inc.

⁴Torrey, R. (1995, c1897). *The new topical text book : A scriptural text book for the use of ministers, teachers, and all Christian workers*. Oak Harbor, WA: Logos research Systems, Inc.

It is a great privilege to talk to God; it is indeed good to be near Him.

But best of all...and in keeping with the theme of the past weeks...

To obtain closeness with God or in other words, to have a deeper, more intimate relationship with God.

*Let's look at a prayer in the Psalm 16.

¹ *Keep me safe, O God, for in you I take refuge.*
² *I said to the LORD, "You are my Lord; apart from you I have no good thing."*
³ *As for the saints who are in the land, they are the glorious ones in whom is all my delight.*
⁴ *The sorrows of those will increase who run after other gods. I will not pour out their libations of blood or take up their names on my lips. (In other words I won't run after other gods or participate in their sacrifices.)*
⁵ *LORD, you have assigned me my portion and my cup; you have made my lot secure.*
⁶ *The boundary lines have fallen for me in pleasant places; surely I have a delightful inheritance.*
⁷ *I will praise the LORD, who counsels me; even at night my heart instructs me.*
⁸ *I have set the LORD always before me. Because he is at my right hand, I will not be shaken.*
⁹ *Therefore my heart is glad and my tongue rejoices; my body also will rest secure,*
¹⁰ *because you will not abandon me to the grave, nor will you let your Holy One see decay.*
¹¹ *You have made known to me the path of life; you will fill me with joy in your presence, with eternal pleasures at your right hand.*

This prayer show that...

- Closeness with God grows out of our choice to make Him #1 in our lives

God is our #1 "*You are my Lord; apart from you I have no good thing.*" (v1-4)

I like to use and personalize the Psalms as prayers. Do you do that? We can take the Psalms and personalize them, to write or journal such heartfelt prayers, prayers that we cannot express easily at times and this is a great tool to express our love for and respond to God.

David here is expressing his understanding that without God, there is nothing good. In v 8 He says *I have set the LORD always before me*. It was always the same with David, God was always first in David's life, no matter what happened.

God's people are the best. "*As for the saints who are in the land, they are the glorious ones in whom is all my delight.*" The saints were those people who worshiped the Lord God with David. It's not talking about canonized saints. David delighted in God's people. We too can delight in our Christian brothers and sisters, the family God gave us when He adopted us into this body of Christ.

Do you see by any chance in these verses an image of, "*Love the Lord your God with all your heart, soul, mind and strength and love your neighbor as yourself*"? (Mk 12:30-31) I do.

v4 David is saying that people who don't make God their # 1 are in for sorrow. And David will not have anything to do with participating in sacrifices to other gods or worshipping them. David was bound and determined to keep God, the one and only God, his #1.

This prayer also shows that...

- Closeness with God blesses us in life (v5-7)

⁵ *LORD, you have assigned me my portion and my cup; you have made my lot secure.*

⁶ *The boundary lines have fallen for me in pleasant places; surely I have a delightful inheritance.*

⁷ *I will praise the LORD, who counsels me; even at night my heart instructs me.*

In other words, “you alone are my inheritance, my cup of blessing. You guard all that is mine.” (NLT) A cup often spoke of a lot in life. David was rejoicing in his good life and in his prayer, he doesn't hesitate to praise God for his good life and recognize that it is God who gave it, who blessed him.

Closeness with God gives us eyes to see God's blessings. We are able even in the midst of trials to find God's faithful hand when we are close to Him in prayer. He gives us a different perspective. One that shows that what is apparent isn't always the true reality. If for example, we are apparently in financial difficulties, the reality is that God loves and He knows what He is doing and wants what is best for us. At that point, it is good and wise to draw nearer so that we can be sensitive to hear God's direction for us. When we are close to God, we are more able to have His perspective.

Finally, this prayer shows that...

- Closeness with God will secure real life

⁸ *I have set the LORD always before me. Because he is at my right hand, I will not be shaken.*

⁹ *Therefore my heart is glad and my tongue rejoices; my body also will rest secure,*

¹⁰ *because you will not abandon me to the grave, nor will you let your Holy One see decay.*

¹¹ *You have made known to me the path of life; you will fill me with joy in your presence, with eternal pleasures at your right hand.*

Life has joys and sorrows. Life has ups and downs. Life has pleasures and pains. Happiness and hurts. Contentment and concerns. But real life is life that is close to God. Real life is knowing God's faithfulness in whatever we are dealt in life. David wouldn't have said “I will not be shaken” if he was not experiencing something that would shake him. He is saying that through his closeness with God in prayer, he knows God is there for him and as a result, he will not be shaken. He generally is joyful and praising God, because he has found real life in his closeness to God through prayer. It's about being in an intimate relationship with God, in holy luxury, enjoying His presence forever through prayer.

We too experience closeness with God through prayer and as a result, we know that we will rest in safety. No matter what happens in life, we will know God well enough through prayer to be

confident that God is our security.

The last two verses are written by David and are applicable to David's life, but are also consider prophetic verses about Jesus. Acts 2:29-32 is where the apostle Peter refers this passage to Jesus.

Jesus Who always had the Father as #1, Who was blessed by the Father in His life, and Who secured real life, eternal life for all of us. Jesus was the One, the Holy One whose body didn't decay, because He conquered sin and death as He victoriously rose from death. The same promise that assures David of life, assures us of life. Spiritual life, not only in the future, but now. Through prayer, we develop closeness with God.

Conclusion

So, I don't think that I even have to tell you the call this morning. I don't have to say that God is calling you to a closer relationship with Him through prayer. But I do want to encourage you that we do not have to be spiritual giants to obtain this closeness with God through prayer. We just have to be willing people of simple prayer. God meets us where we are at. Our words do not have to flowery or our prayers long or extravagant. We just need to respond to God, to Who He is and all that He has done for us. We can honest with Him, He cares about what we have to say to Him. He already knows our needs but He wants us to share with Him our concerns, our gratitude, our lives. We can cry or sigh, we can laugh, we can share honestly. He is our closest friend.

So, of all the reasons today that I outlined as reasons or benefits to prayer, what it comes down to is relationship. Obtaining a closer, deeper more intimate relationship with God. Yes, we will glorify God, yes, we will be change into His likeness in ever increasing glory and know Him better, getting to know His very heart, yes, we will obtain temporal blessings, spiritual blessings, mercy and grace to help us in our time of need, but of all these reasons, we will develop a closeness to God, a deeper more intimate relationship with God through the discipline of prayer, taking time, holy luxury, spending time with God on a regular basis.

In that God becomes our #1 and God's people become our delight. We come to love the Lord with all our heart, soul, mind and strength and love our neighbor as ourselves. We develop a closeness to God as we choose to make Him our #1, a closeness to God as we recognize and acknowledge His blessings in our lives even in the midst of the trials and sufferings that life contains, and a closeness that will establish such trust that we will know beyond a doubt that God has made our lives secure.