

The Power of Prayer

Welcome back to Walking with Purpose. We're on a mission to become more faithful disciples of Christ! We've talked about what being a "disciple" means, basically ***following the teachings of*** and ***chasing*** after God. We've talked about the cost of discipleship...giving up *our* desires and making them subservient to Christ. But how do we go about this discipline of discipleship? Today we'll create a roadmap and discover how to spend time with our Master in prayer. After all, it was a foundational part of *His* day and we want to follow His example!

Early African converts to Christianity were earnest and regular in private devotions. Each one reportedly had a separate spot in the thicket where he would pour out his heart to God.

Over time, the paths to these places became well-worn.

As a result, if one of these believers began to neglect prayer, it was soon apparent to the others.

They would kindly remind the negligent one, "***Brother, the grass grows on your path.***"



Fellowship

1. Does having a consistent prayer time come naturally to you or do you struggle for consistency?
2. What time of the day do you find it easiest to meet with God?



Discipleship

No matter what type of church a person belongs to, (and if fact, if you asked people who don't even go to church, you'd find that) one thing is largely held in common: prayer is powerful! Someone has said, "Without time for prayer, nothing can be accomplished." John Bunyan said, "He who runs from God in the morning will scarcely find Him the rest of the day."

When asked how much time *he* spent in prayer, George Mueller's reply was, "Hours every day. But I live in the spirit of prayer. I pray as I walk and when I lie down and when I arise. And the answers are always coming." Martin Luther valued his prayer life so much that he said, "If I should neglect prayer but a *single day*, I should lose a great deal of the fire of faith."

But if we know prayer is powerful, and we know prayer is important...why is it so hard to do? It's our way of communing with an all-powerful God, expressing our thanks and unloading onto Him all of our concerns...yet most Christians struggle with this discipline and the guilt that comes from failure.

Comedian Smirnoff said that when he first came from Russia, he wasn't prepared for the incredible variety of instant products available in the grocery stores. He says, "On my first shopping trip, I saw powdered milk--you just add water, and you get milk. Then I saw powdered orange juice--you just add water, and you get orange juice. And then I saw baby powder, and I thought to my self, what a country!" (*chuckle*)

You know, we do live in an "instant" age; we want *instant* results. Waiting 5 minutes seems like too long! Yet *waiting* on God is exactly what He wants from us. To take ourselves away from the business of life, quiet ourselves, listen to His voice, and spend daily time developing our relationship with Him. In fact, that's just what Jesus did!

Turn with me to Mark 1:35-39 as we read it together. "Very early in the morning, while it was still dark, Jesus got up, left the house and went off to a solitary place, where he prayed. Simon and his companions went to look for him, and when they found him, they exclaimed, 'Everyone is looking for you!' Jesus replied, 'Let us go somewhere else – to the nearby villages – so I can preach there also. That is why I have come.' So he traveled throughout Galilee, preaching in their synagogues and driving out demons."

Here we have a roadmap for a successful prayer life in just four verses! First of all, notice that Jesus rose early in the morning, while it was still dark. Now, I'm not saying that we all need to get up before the sun comes up. But Jesus knew what His day was going to be like, and He prioritized His time with the Father *enough* that if getting up early was what it would take for Him to spend that quality time...He was going to do it! Next, He went off to a solitary place. How many times have your best intentions for some time with the Lord been thwarted by an unexpected phone call, a request from your child for some juice, or the thought that you'll get to it..."after one more quick chore"? Sometimes just leaving the house and going to a solitary place, even if it means sitting in your car with no distractions, is exactly what you need. Notice that Simon and the others went looking for Him! Maybe you can relate: "Mom, where have you been?" "Dad,

phone call for you!” or maybe you’ve even been criticized for spending time doing “nothing” when there are “important *things* to be done!” I find it interesting that Jesus doesn’t even address Simon’s comment that “everyone” was looking for Him...He just gets on to the business at hand...which *perhaps* He had just received as instructions from His heavenly Father! Having spent time discussing the upcoming day and His ministry with His Father, He knows what must be done, is set in His purpose, and is filled with power.

Jesus had more responsibility on Him than we ever will. He was constantly surrounded with people wanting healing, teaching and to take what He had to give. Have you ever felt “sucked dry” with all the demands placed on you? If *Jesus* knew that He needed to be re-charged in prayer and *made* the time...so can we!

The rewards are nothing short of miraculous! David states in Psalm 38:15, “I wait for you, O Lord; **you will answer**, O Lord my God.” And again in Psalm 17:6 – “I call on you, O God, for **you will** answer me.”

Pastor Tony Campolo tells about the time he was asked to speak at a college. Before the service, eight men had him kneel so they could place their hands on his head and pray. Tony was glad to have the prayer, but each of them prayed a long time, and the longer they prayed the more they pushed on Tony’s head. And then they even seemed to *wander* in their prayers. One of the men didn’t even pray for Tony, he prayed for some guy he was concerned about. He said, “Dear Lord, you know Charlie Stoltzfus. He lives in that silver trailer down the road a mile. You know the trailer, Lord, just down the road on the right-hand side.” Tony wanted to interrupt and tell him that God *already knew* where they guy lived and didn’t need directions, but he just knelt there trying to keep his head upright. The prayer went on: “Lord, Charlie told me this morning he’s going to leave his wife and three kids. Step in and do something, God. Bring that family back together.” With that, the prayer time ended and Tony went on to preach at the college chapel. Things went well and he got in his car and began to drive home. As he drove onto the highway, he saw a hitchhiker and felt compelled to pick him up. After driving a few minutes, he said: ‘Hi, my name’s Tony Campolo. What’s yours?’ The young man replied, ‘My name is Charlie Stoltzfus.’ He couldn’t believe it! He got off the road at the next exit and headed back the other direction. Well, Charlie got a bit uneasy with that and after a few minutes he said, ‘Hey mister, where are you taking me?’ Campolo said, ‘I’m taking you home.’ Charlie narrowed his eyes and asked, ‘Why?’ To which Tony said, ‘Because you just left your wife and three kids, right?’ Charlie was getting a bit scared about now. ‘Yeah Yeah, that’s right.’ With shock written all over his face, he plastered himself against the car door and never took his eyes off Tony...who drove right to his silver trailer. You know the one...the silver trailer, right down the road a mile. (*smile*) When

Tony pulled up, Charlie's eyes bulged as he asked, 'How did you know that I lived here?' Tony was able to talk with Charlie and his amazed wife about the power and love of God, and led that young couple to Christ.

It all started with prayer that believed in God. Faith is what moves the hand of God. The Bible says in Hebrews 11:6 that without faith it is *impossible* to please God, because anyone who comes to him must believe that He exists and that He rewards those who *earnestly* seek Him.

A hospital chaplain visited a delightful old lady in the hospital. As he approached her bed he noticed that with the index finger of one hand she was touching, one by one, the fingers of the other, with her eyes closed. When the chaplain spoke to her she opened her eyes and said, "Ah, minister, I was just saying my prayers--- the prayers my grandmother taught me many years ago."

The chaplain looked puzzled, so she went on to explain, (*demonstrate with fingers*) "I hold my hand like this, my thumb towards me. That reminds me to pray for those nearest to me. Then, there is my pointing finger, so I pray for those who point the way to others--teacher, leaders, and parents. The next finger is the biggest, so I pray for those in the government and positions of authority. After that comes the weakest finger. Look--it won't stand up by itself, so I pray for the sick, the lonely and the afraid. And this little one? Well, last of all I pray for myself." What a great model for prayer.

For bicycle-riding enthusiasts, there is a small book called "250 Best Cycling Tips." In the section dealing with training for races they say, "The biggest problem that many cyclists face is finding enough time for training amidst life's many responsibilities. Here are 10 ways to do it:

Train before work.

Ride at lunch.

Commute by bike.

Train at night.

Schedule your ride like any other daily appointment.

Train intensely to maximize limited time

Adjust your goals to reflect limited time.

Enlist your family's support so you can ride without guilt.

Combine your cycling with family activities.

Ride indoors when bad weather or interruptions occur."

What a correlation for the disciple of Christ regarding prayer! Let's look at the tips reworked:

Pray before work

Pray at lunch.

Pray on your commute.

Pray at night.

Schedule your quiet time like any other daily appointment.

Pray intensely to maximize limited time

Adjust your goals to reflect limited time.

Enlist your family's support so you can pray without guilt.

Have family worship times.

Be flexible when interruptions occur.

We make time for what we value, and prayer is no exception. Isaac Singer once confessed, "I only pray when I'm in trouble...but I'm in trouble all the time, and so I pray all the time."

Well, we've talked about the need to pray, the command to pray, the power of prayer and the importance of prayer. But the important thing is to not just *study* prayer...but to pray! Enjoy the following time of prayer in your small group and alone with your God this week!



Ministry

3. Read Galatians 6:9, 10. How is prayer the greatest gift we can give another?



Evangelism



Worship

4. Like the African converts, we all need someone to nudge us if “the grass grows on our path.” Team up with an accountability partner for the week. Pray for each other and check in mid-week to encourage your partner in a consistent prayer life.

5. Take 5 minutes to pray for each of the following:
 - Leaders in government
 - Persecuted Christians around the world
 - Missionaries
 - Unsaved people you’d like to see join this group
 - Your personal commitment to prayer
 - Praise for His forthcoming answers and perfect plans