

Devoted to Prayer

Part #2

Introduction: Today we move to the second and last message of this brief prayer series—*Devoted to Prayer*

Review of Last week:

1. The struggle of prayer is real (Romans 15:20... “Strive together in prayer” implies it is a struggle (2 issues)
 - a. If I had enough faith, I would prevail!
 - b. Why pray at all if God is sovereign?
2. The value of prayer is priceless (untapped resource, like an unexplored continent)
3. The definition of prayer—“*The offering up of our desires unto God, in the name of Christ, by the help of the Spirit, with confession of sins and thankful acknowledgement of His mercies.*” Westminster Catechism)
4. The misconception about prayer—it bothers or pesters God (on the contrary... “*the prayer of the upright is His delight*”—Proverbs 15:8).
5. The appropriateness of prayer (morning, evening, afternoon, without ceasing)
6. Four main lessons:
 - a. We must be both focused and persistent in our prayer (continue steadfastly)
 - b. We must possess a passion in our prayer (Jesus was passionate and modeled that passion in the Lord’s Prayer)
 - c. We must have hearts of gratitude when we pray (reveals our dependence, relationship with God, and humility)
 - d. We must intercede for others when we pray

Ended last week with the Sin of Prayerlessness

- A reproach to a God who created and redeemed us and invites us to draw near
- The cause of a deficient spiritual life
- The Church suffers loss
- The Gospel fails to reach the world when we fail to tarry until we are endured with power from on High (Acts 1:6)

F.F. Meyer—“*The great tragedy of life is not unanswered prayer but un-offered prayer.*”

Today we return to the text:

“Continue earnestly in prayer, being vigilant in it with thanksgiving;” Colossians 4:2 NKJV

- Some translations say, “be watchful.”
- No one floats toward godliness (read Hebrews) pursue holiness (godliness)
- Likewise no one stumbles into a life of prayer or accidentally becomes godly
- There is a discipline element to growing in godliness—it never just occurs
- No one wakes up one day and knows the Scriptures and prays constantly
- When you see someone who knows the Word or who excels in prayer they have spent years, decades, developing these disciplines, steadily studying and praying and submitting their lives to God, learning how to pray and praying with others and by themselves
- Those who have excelled in prayer have figured out how they are wired and what obstacles and distractions and hindrances are in their way

So why don't we excel in the discipline of prayer?

I. We don't excel in the discipline of prayer because we don't really believe that we are in a spiritual battle.

A. We know that the angels rejoiced in the act of creation and gave God glory

1. Except Lucifer who wanted the glory himself
2. He led a mass rebellion that caused 1/3 of the angels to fall
3. God gave John a revelation of what happened when this transpired—war broke out in heaven

“And war broke out in heaven: Michael and his angels fought with the dragon; and the dragon and his angels fought, but they did not prevail, nor was a place found for them in heaven any longer. So the great dragon was cast out, that serpent of old, called the Devil and Satan, who deceives the whole world; he was cast to the earth, and his angels were cast out with him. Then I heard a loud voice saying in heaven, “Now salvation, and strength, and the kingdom of our God, and the power of His Christ have come, for the accuser of our brethren, who accused them before our God day and night, has been cast down. And they overcame him by the blood of the Lamb and by the word of their testimony, and they did not love their lives to the death. Therefore rejoice, O heavens, and you who dwell in them! Woe to the inhabitants of the earth and the sea! For the devil has come down to you, having great wrath, because he knows that he has a short time.” Now when the dragon saw that he had been cast to the earth, he persecuted the woman who gave birth to the male Child.” Revelation 12:7-13 NKJV

- a. We are in that time when Satan is persecuting the people of God
- b. Knowing his time is short he wages war against the enemy
- c. His goal, to steal, kill, and destroy
- d. This is the reality that we face today

Paul describes:

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“For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this age, against spiritual hosts of wickedness in the heavenly places.” Ephesians 6:12 NKJV

B. We don't pray because we don't really believe there are demonic forces after our children and our grandchildren

1. Satan wants to destroy them
2. Our marriages
3. Our churches
4. Our young people with lies...deceiving them from the truth
5. It is what happened to Eve—deceived by Satan
6. Satan wanted to deceive Peter

“Simon, Simon, Satan has asked to sift all of you as wheat. But I have prayed for you, Simon, that your faith may not fail. And when you have turned back, strengthen your brothers.” Luke 22:31-32 NIV

- a. Wonder why Peter didn't just say “couldn't you just say ‘no?’”
- b. Why don't you call him back and say you have changed your mind
- c. Satan wants to destroy but Jesus is praying

John Piper—“We think it's peace time.”

Note: When we think our kid is on the front line we pray, or when our kid is under attack, or our marriage then we pray. But we think it is peace time when it is really war time.

Lacking Full Armor, British Warships Sunk—Ray Stedman, Spiritual Warfare

British admiral Lord David Beatty commanded a flotilla at the Battle of Jutland during World War I. As the battle began, British and German ships engaged each other long-range. A heavy cruiser, the Lion, was hit by an artillery barrage and quickly sunk. Next the Indefatigable was hit in its powder magazine and blown to pieces. Then the Queen Mary was sunk, taking a crew of 1,200 sailors straight to the bottom.

A flaw in the design of the British ships was soon recognized. Though their hulls were heavily armored, their wooden decks offered almost no protection against enemy artillery shells dropped from above. Only after the British began to armor their ships on top as well as on the sides did they stop losing ships to German long-range artillery.

Effective armor is a crucial element in spiritual warfare too. If you leave anything unprotected, the enemy will find a way to exploit that chink in your armor.

II. We don't excel in the discipline of prayer because we are deluded into thinking that we are in control.

A. Most Americans buy into the lie that we control our circumstances and we control our environment.

(ILL) Self-help books (Do this and your marriage will succeed, and you will lose weight, you will prosper)

Obsession with Time

We can't stop talking about time. It seeps its way into nearly every conversation. According to the editors of the Concise Oxford Dictionary, time is the most frequently used noun in the English language. The titles of self-help books mirror our obsession with time: One Year to a College Degree, Thirty Days to a Better Life, Seven Days to a Brand New Me, even Sixty-Minute Marriage Builder. Still not quick enough to address your crisis? How about One-Minute Father, Sixty-Second Stress Management, The One-Minute Healing Experience, One-Minute Therapist, or Sixty Seconds to Serenity?

More than one hundred titles in print use the word instant. You'll find everything from Instant Yiddish to Instant Emotional Healing. Running out of time? Read Instant Time Management. The Christian publishing world is not immune to the band of time. Among examples are Sixty Seconds with God, Daily Prayers Sixty Seconds Long, and Instant Sermons for Busy Pastors.

Prayer takes time: patience, waiting, listening

B. The truth is that our time is in God's hands

"But I trust in you, Lord; I say, "You are my God." My times are in your hands; deliver me from the hands of my enemies, from those who pursue me. Let your face shine on your servant; save me in your unfailing love." Psalm 31:14-16 NIV

We get in trouble when we think we are in control

1. Job understood his times were in God's hands (wanted to through the suffering but understood God had a plan)

"A person's days are determined; you have decreed the number of his months and have set limits he cannot exceed." Job 14:5 NIV

(ILL) You remember the story of the little boy who was playing outdoors and found a fascinating caterpillar. He carefully picked it up and took it home to show his mother. He asked his mother if he could keep it, and she said he could if he would take good care of it.

The little boy got a large jar from his mother and put plants to eat, and a stick to climb on, in the jar. Every day he watched the caterpillar and brought it new plants to eat. One day the caterpillar climbed up the stick and started acting strangely. The boy worriedly called his mother who came and understood that the caterpillar was creating a cocoon. The mother explained to the boy how the caterpillar was going to go through a metamorphosis and become a butterfly.

The little boy was thrilled to hear about the changes his caterpillar would go through. He watched every day, waiting for the butterfly to emerge. One day it happened, a small hole appeared in the cocoon and the butterfly started to struggle to come out. At first the boy was excited, but soon he became concerned. The butterfly was struggling so hard to get out! It looked like it couldn't break free! It looked desperate! It looked like it was making no progress! The boy was so concerned he decided to help. He ran to get scissors, and then walked back (because he had learned not to run with scissors...). He snipped the cocoon to make the hole bigger and the butterfly quickly emerged! As the butterfly came out the boy was surprised. It had a swollen body and small, shriveled wings. He continued to watch the butterfly expecting that, at any moment, the wings would dry out, enlarge and expand to support the swollen body. He knew that in time the body would shrink and the butterfly's wings would expand.

But nothing happened. The butterfly spent the rest of its life crawling around with a swollen body and shriveled wings. It never had the chance to be what it was designed to be. It never was able to fly. As the boy tried to figure out what had gone wrong he learned later on that the butterfly was SUPPOSED to struggle. In fact, the butterfly's

struggle to push its way through the tiny opening of the cocoon pushes the fluid out of its body and into its wings. Without the struggle, the butterfly would never, ever fly. The boy's good intentions hurt the butterfly—our good intentions can do the very same thing to us, when we decide to work on our time instead of God's time.

2. Moses understood that time was in God's hands (40, 80, 120)
3. Most of us believe we have this and don't need Him...we find out differently when crisis comes and we pray!
4. Tell tale sign that we think we control circumstances
 - a. When all is well no praise
 - b. When things go bad...we pray

(ILL) Cody Parkey

III. We don't excel in the discipline of praying because we feel unworthy to pray.

A. Pervasive misunderstanding of the American church is the notion that morality and moral behavior provide us right-standing before God and earn us our acceptance by God

1. Jesus came to destroy that kind of thinking
2. Pharisees...because we did this we could be accepted
3. He called them brood of vipers
4. Pharisee...I praise you that I am not like that guy, that I don't screw up like he screws up
5. The one who says woe is me goes home justified.

"These are the ones I look on with favor: those who are humble and contrite in spirit, and who tremble at my word." Isaiah 66:2 NIV

B. The Gospel teaches that right standing with God is purchased through the blood of Jesus Christ alone. It is no act of your own.

1. If sin in your life keeps you from praying you have believed a lie
2. You somehow think your goodness gives you favor and access

Unbelievably Good Gospel—Ken Taylor

A friend of mine serves as a missionary in a restricted access country. For many years the government of this country has taught the people that there is no God. My friend had the opportunity to interact on a regular basis with a nonbeliever of that country who is a highly educated professional.

After developing a friendship with the professional, my friend had the opportunity to share the gospel story with him. My friend was taken aback by the man's response: "What you have told me cannot be true. If it were true, it is such good news that someone would have told this to me before."

IV. We don't excel in the discipline of praying because we fail to practically plan to pray.

A. We don't decide WHEN we are going to pray

1. End up praying quickly before bed or over a meal
2. Never gets done—just a quick one to ease our conscience
3. Or, we read easier than we pray
4. Settle the time of WHEN (Daniel had a plan)
5. Maybe morning, lunch, evening not legalism but settle the question of time

B. We don't decide WHERE we are going to pray

1. May not have an office or work at a church
2. Mom—with little kids
3. Find a place for you're your prayer and stick to it

C. We don't decide HOW we are going to pray

1. Worship—praise Him for who He is
2. Confession
3. Gratitude and thanks
4. Pray for family, friends, church
5. Other needs on a list
6. Read scripture and listen to Holy Spirit what yo pray for
7. Worship

V. We don't excel in the discipline of prayer because we are weak of faith.

- A. I'm afraid we don't believe and expect that God can do amazing things
- B. I think we are weak in believing that He can save our prodigals, heal the sick, deliver the addict, and provide for the hurting.
- C. I think we lack the resolve to "continue earnestly in prayer, being vigilant in it."
- D. We must become better at praying in 2019!

Conclusion: But I feel like I pray the same things over and over again.

(ILL)

The Beauty of a Broken Record—Brian Lowery, associate editor, PreachingToday

I was born in the waning days of vinyl records. I would watch as my father pulled them from their sleeves and placed them on the turntable. When the needle dropped into the record's grooves, the speakers popped to life with a tide of white noise that was chased away by music. Some records were so worn that they hiccupped along or—even worse—repeated a section, over and over again.

The sound of a broken record—such are my prayers at times. The yellowed pages of my journals betray my stubborn consistency about this request or that concern. I rap on God's door, morning, noon, and night, half wishing I could blow the great house down and see some results!

I often reflect on the spirited persistence of my prayers; there is a fine line between bold and bullheaded. But in my pondering, I think back on the great texts on prayer and the great prayers themselves. Alongside honesty and deep worship, you will most often find the quality of persistence. It seems the hiccupped, repetitious sounds from another room are music to the ears of God. He listens along with us. At times, he even sets the needle right.