

UNDERSTANDING PRAYER

Lesson One

INTRODUCTION:

It is interesting to note that the Apostles said to the church in Acts 6:4, "We will give our attention to prayer and the ministry of the Word." Note the order: first prayer, then the ministry of the Word. If those men, who had spent 3 intensive years of training with our Lord Jesus, saw prayer as the #1 priority, what about us.

Why did they do that?

They saw that prayer was the #1 priority in the Lord Jesus.

Look at what is said in Mark 1:35. This was after an intensive ministry that ran into the late evening the night before. Mark 1:32-34. Before He chose His 12 apostles and sent them out to minister, He spent the night in prayer. Luke 6:12-16

Prayer under-girded and went before everything that our Lord Jesus did in His earthly ministry, as we see from above. As we read through the book of Acts, we see that is true also of the Apostles.

Having said the above, look at John 15:5. Jesus says, "...Without Me you can do nothing." We say that we believe those words of Jesus. Are we putting that truth into practice?

That's where prayer comes into the picture for us as Christians. We need to know what Jesus wants us to do, and we need His Holy Spirit's empowering to do what Jesus wants. That happens through intimacy with the Lord in prayer.

We know we need to pray. There are at least three motivations for prayer.

1. We know that we need to pray. We realize that we and others have needs that only the Lord can meet. However, if that's the primary reason we pray, it will soon deteriorate into simply using the Lord.
2. The Lord wants us to pray. That's not because He is not all-powerful; in His sovereignty, He has chosen to limit Himself to work through us in response to our prayers. (More will be said about that later) But, if that is the primary reason for our prayers, it quickly deteriorates into legalism and a form of bondage. The result is that we don't look forward to prayer, nor do we enjoy it. It simply becomes a sterile discipline. :
 - Jim Cymbala in Fresh Wind, Fresh Fire, says, "Prayer cannot truly be taught by principles and seminars and symposiums. It has to be born out of a whole environment of felt need. If I say, I *ought* to pray, I will soon run out of motivation and quit; the flesh is too strong. I have to be *driven* to pray"
 - Most of us, myself included, finally begin praying and having time of prayer because we realize our desperate need, that we are helpless without the Lord.

In fact, prayer begins out of a deep sense of need. Look at what Jesus says in Luke 18:1-8 and Luke 11:5-10. Why motivated these people to continue their requests?

3. We need a personal, intimate, love relationship with the Lord. And, that's what He wants with each of us. How would you describe your current prayer life? What do you do during that time? How do you feel during and after your prayer time?
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After this initial realization of helplessness and requests for help from Lord, I decided to enjoy my prayer life—just being with Him. Sometimes saying nothing, just enjoying the companionship. Sometimes, reading His Word and praying the thoughts back to Him. Sometimes, praying for others and myself. I encourage you to start with QUALITY time, not quantity time. I made the mistake about 18 years ago to have an hour of devotion time each day. It quickly deteriorated into a drudgery that I did not like at all. I had placed myself under the law. So, I quit for a while. Then, I began with a few minutes and asked the Lord to enlarge it because I wanted to, not because I have to. Now, my desire is to have the time, because I realize I am loved. With this approach, our prayer life will increase, not decrease.

I quote Mike Bickle, director of the International House of Prayer of Kansas City, who says:

“Most of us accept that God loves us...because the Bible tells us so! But, it's harder for some of us to accept that God enjoys and likes us, that He wants to be with us, weaknesses and all!”

4. On the very night that Jesus' disciples all deserted and betrayed and denied Him (and, He said they would), Jesus told them how much He loved them—that He loved them even to the degree His Father loved Him (John 15:9; 17:23). Their weakness and betrayal did not stop Him from giving up His life for them out of love.... What are some descriptive words for intense love?
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Do you realize that you are loved by Jesus with exactly the same intensity that the Father loves His perfect and righteous Son?

5. We all need to have confidence that God loves and enjoys us the same way He loves and enjoys Jesus...Think of how it feels to be accepted and liked for who you are. What is your natural response to that feeling?
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God sees us through the lens of the passion of His own heart and the gift of righteousness. As we grow in the understanding of how God sees us, and we grasp the reality that He even *likes* us, we find a firm foundation to enjoy life in the grace of God. Prayer becomes our delight rather than our duty.

- Love enlarges our heart. Once we realize how much the Lord enjoys the very thought of us, once we see that *we make God smile*, our prayer life will take on a whole new dimension. Our delight in Him, not our sense of duty, will move us into His presence.

6. Look at St. Paul's prayer in Ephesians 3:17-19 for the Christians in Ephesus. It's a powerful prayer that you can pray for yourself as well. Describe how this prayer reflects God's relationship with us.

Is this a new thought for you? If so, how do you think it may change your relationship with God and your prayer life?

St. Paul wanted the Christians to have God's love ingrained in them that way; so, he prayed that they would be saturated in His love.

Knowing that the Lord deeply loves you right now, this very moment, will change the way you look at and live life. You can take a deep breath and rest thankfully in the fact that God sees you in His passion for you and your longing to love His Son. He sees you as He designed you to be—a love of Jesus. His beloved.

Trisha Rhodes, The Soul at Rest, says, "God wants to meet your deepest needs. He wants you to see, know, taste and experience Him in ways that shake you to your core. He longs for you far more than you long for Him. He stands ready to reveal Himself, enfold you in His love, speak to you with power, and touch you with His grace. He has waited for you—for this moment.

Are you ready?" What's your desire and answer to that question?

How is God revealing Himself to you right now? How do you think this will change your prayer life?

