

# Hope City House of Prayer: Celebration of Discipline

## Chapter 3: The Discipline of Prayer

As I travel, I find several common misconceptions that defeat the work of prayer. The first misconception is the notion that prayer mainly involves asking things from God. Answers to prayer are wonderful, but they are secondary to the main function of prayer, which is a growing, perpetual communion. To sink down into the light of Christ and become comfortable in that posture, to sing, “He walks with me and He talks with me” and know it as a radiant reality, to discover God in all of the moments of our days, and to be pleased rather than perturbed at the discovery— this is the stuff of prayer. It is out of this refreshing life of communion that answered prayer comes as a happy by-product. The second misconception is the view that prayer must always be a struggle, “getting under the burden of prayer,” as we say. I certainly would not want to deny those times of intensity and difficulty, but I have not found that such times are the most common experience. Nor would I want to minimize the sense of awe, and even terror, which we feel in the presence of the Sovereign of the universe. And yet, the most frequent experience during prayer is one of lightness, joy, comfort, serenity. Even laughter comes at times, though it is richer and less pretentious (should I say, more holy) than ordinary laughing. There is a feeling of companionship, though again it is of a different quality from the ordinary human variety. Perhaps it is that we are becoming friends with God. A third misconception is the idea that we live in a closed universe, that everything is fixed. We think, “Since everything is set and God knows the end from the beginning, why pray?” The question is a good one. Perhaps you have had the frustrating experience of talking with an employer about some company policy being considered for adoption. Your employer may invite you to share your concerns and may seem to listen intently. Then later you discover that the decision had already been made long before you ever entered the room. Many folk feel that prayer is a similar situation. But if the Apostle Paul is right that “we are fellow workers with God” (1 Cor. 3: 9), then ours is indeed an open universe. We are working with God to determine the outcome of things. It needs to be said reverently, but it does need to be said: we are co-creators with God in advancing His kingdom upon the earth. A fourth misconception is the fear that our faith will crumble if our prayers are not answered the first time every time. As one person put it to me, “If God doesn’t answer this prayer, it is all over; I will never be able to believe in prayer again.” It is this fear that causes us to gravitate toward vague prayers— then if nothing happens, no one is the wiser. But suppose I walk into my office and turn on the light and nothing happens. Would I say, “I never believed in electricity anyway”? No, I would assume something is wrong, and I would set out to find out what it is: perhaps the

bulb is burned out or the wiring connections are faulty. The same is true with prayer, and very often I have found the problem is indeed a faulty connection on our end. A fifth misconception about prayer is the common teaching, “Pray once! Any more than that shows a lack of faith.” Now I understand the good intentions of people who teach this way, but, very frankly, it flies in the face of a great deal of biblical experience and teaching, especially Jesus’ parables on importunity. We are to keep at this work, mainly, I think, because we are the channel through which God’s life and light flows into individuals or situations. And, incidentally, I have found prayer to be the most helpful of the Disciplines in freeing us from the monsters of the past because of the inner healing that comes through the hands of those who pray for us. May I call you to the adventure of prayer? Nothing draws us closer to the heart of God.

### **Daily Scripture Readings:**

Sunday: The pattern of prayer / Matthew 6: 5– 15.  
Monday: The prayer of worship / Psalm 103.  
Tuesday: The prayer of repentance / Psalm 51.  
Wednesday: The prayer of thanksgiving / Psalm 150.  
Thursday: The prayer of guidance / Matthew 26: 36– 46.  
Friday: The prayer of faith / James 5: 13– 18.  
Saturday: The prayer of command / Mark 9: 14– 29.

### **Study Questions:**

1. Why do I say, “To pray is to change”? Have you ever experienced that in your own life?
2. How can we keep from being discouraged by the example of the “giants of the faith”?
3. What difference does it make in our praying if we believe that we live in an “open universe”? A “closed universe”?
4. Why is it important to view prayer as a learning process?
5. Distinguish between the prayer of faith and the prayer of guidance.
6. Frank Laubach said, “I want to learn how to live so that to see someone is to pray for them.” Experiment with that approach to life for one whole day and record what you learn from the experience.
7. What is your response to the idea of using the imagination in the work of prayer?
8. Look at someone today and imagine what they could be if they received a double portion of the light of Christ. By faith, give that portion to them and record what you learn from the experience.
9. What should we do when we don’t feel like praying?
10. What experience have you had of the Thomas Kelly statement on page 40 of Celebration?