

# Spiritual Disciplines- Prayer

## Intro

- The last time we had a lesson we started a series on spiritual disciplines.
- We established that spiritual disciplines are those personal and corporate disciplines that promote spiritual growth. They are the baits of experiential Christianity that have been practiced by the people of God since Biblical times—essentially they are habits that promote spiritual growth.
- The first discipline we discussed was Scripture intake. We talked about how important it is to make sure you are taking in the Bible in some way. We learned that you need to hear scripture, read it, and study it. Today we're going to look at another very important discipline.
- We're going to study Prayer.
- But before we get too deep, I want you run a scenario by you and ask you a question. We're all out to dinner somewhere, IDK maybe buffalo wild wings. The food comes out and I ask for someone to pray for our food. All of you begin to hold your thumbs up and the last one of you who puts their thumbs up, or even the one who doesn't put it up is the one to pray. Essentially, it's a game, and the loser has to pray.
- My question is, why do we do that? Why do we make it essentially a punishment to pray? Why don't we like to pray?
- Praying in front of people can be very nerve wrecking. We worry about what people will think about us. Maybe we won't say the right words, or we'll say something stupid and people will make fun of us. Maybe they'll think we don't have a good relationship with God...I could go on and on about why it makes us nervous to pray in front of others.
- I know, because I get that way too. If I need to pray in groups or with other pastors a lot of times I'm listening to what they're saying so that when it's my turn to pray I can say something really impressive to God and show them how smart or deep I am. I don't want them judging me and thinking I'm not a good pastor or Christian. Sometimes when I'm with other pastors praying I try not to pray so that I don't have to worry about it.
- But in doing all this, in trying to impress others, or trying to avoid prayer are we honoring God?
- I have another question for you. Do you pray privately? Or do you let your fears of praying in front of others pour over into your private prayer life?
- I ask these questions because yes, we're talking about prayer today. Prayer is a very important spiritual discipline. When we started our theme for the year I asked you to write on a card what you thought we could teach you or what we could do to help you go deeper in your relationship with God. Many of you wanted us to talk about prayer, how to pray and why we pray.
- But, I'm not going to talk about how to pray. I have been here for almost 4 years as your youth pastor, and for many of you, you have already heard me teach several lessons on how to pray. We have taught you how to pray, and I think most of you have a good understanding of what prayer is.
- But, I wonder if we as a group really understand the importance of prayer. I wonder if we understand its importance because I believe if we did a lot of us might not be so apprehensive about praying on our own or in front of others. So, today we're going to talk about why prayer is so important, both when we pray with others and when we pray by ourselves.

## **What Is Prayer?**

- To understand prayer's importance let's first understand what it is. So, to do that, let's watch a short video.
- Did you catch what she said in the video...Prayer is simply talking to God. At its basest definition that's all it is. And so, I think sometimes we, myself included, over complicate what prayer is. And when we do that prayer becomes this scary thing that we may not want to do.
- There is no right combination of words, or specific direction you should pray. Some religions believe that, they believe if you don't pray in the right direction or say the right words God won't hear you. But this isn't the case. To put it in a way we understand prayer is as simple as picking up the phone and calling someone. You're calling God when you pray. Prayer is the way we talk to God.

## **Why Is Prayer Important**

- So, prayer is the way we talk to God, but why is that important?
- It's important because it's expected of us. Jesus expects us to pray. Let's look at some scripture that supports that.
  - o Matthew 6:5
  - o Matthew 6:6
  - o Matthew 6:7
  - o Matthew 6:9
  - o Luke 11:9
  - o Luke 18:1
- What do all of these verses have in common? Jesus' words indicate that he expects us to pray.
- Let me ask you, if Jesus Himself appeared before you and said to you that He expected you to pray, would you be faithful to pray? I know I would.
- Here's the thing. Even though He hasn't appeared physically in front of you or me, He has told us He expects us to pray. We just read His words from the Bible. These words that we just read are as much His will for us, as if He had spoken them to our face.
- Jesus followers who wrote the New Testament understood that prayer was an expectation. For instance Paul writes in Colossians 4: 2 that we should devote ourselves to prayer, and then again in 1 Thessalonians 5:17 we're told that we should pray continually. I could go on with other verses, but these are just a few examples.
- Martin Luther wrote that, "As it is the business of tailors to make clothes and of cobblers to mend shoes, so it is the business of Christians to pray." The point is prayer is an expectation.

## **Why Is Prayer Expected?**

- So why is prayer an expectation?

- Perhaps it will help us to think of prayer in a different way.
- Instead of an expectation let's think of it as a royal summons.
- What is a royal summons? It's when a king would call you to come before him.
- In many cases when a king calls you to come before them it's an honor, it's something to be excited about. But, when you are summoned you are expected to appear before the king.
- So, even though it's an expectation we shouldn't think of it as a chore, but rather as something we get to do. For instance, I don't think of going to a baseball game as something I have to do, but something I get to do. This is because I enjoy baseball, I have a connection to the game that gives me some pleasure.
- God does not want us to approach prayer as a chore but rather something we get to do, because ultimately, He desires a relationship with us. And here in lies the heart of why prayer is expected.
- We get to talk to God, we have that royal summons, that expectation to pray, because God wants us to have a relationship with Him.
- So much of our interaction with God comes back to the fact that He desires you and me.
- This goes all the way back to the garden of Eden when God created mankind. He created us to have a relationship with Him.
- Think about this. When you have a friend do you feel obligated to spend time with them or talk to them? You probably don't think of it as an obligation, as something you have to do, but rather as something you get to do. But the reality is, to maintain that friendship you are obligated to spend time with them and talk with them. If you don't talk to them, or spend time with them can you really call them your friend?
- So, let me ask you this, can you honestly say you have a relationship with God if you don't talk to Him or spend time with Him?
- This may sting a little to hear, but let's get real. If you can't have a friend without spending time with them or talking to them, how then can you have a relationship with God if you don't spend time with Him or talk with Him? It isn't possible.
- This is why it is expected for us to pray. We're expected to pray and it's important to pray because that is how we continue to maintain and grow our relationship with God.
- If you don't pray and you claim to have a relationship with God, I'm going to straight up tell you that you're just simply playing games with God. I'm going to tell you that you may not have a relationship at all.
- I know I know there are a lot of distractions out there that can keep you from praying. But here's a reality check, if something is important to you, you will make time for it.
- Give examples of making time for something (even personal ones)
- All of these examples were of things that are important to us, but yet in our busy schedules we still find time for them.
- How then, can we not find time for God. If you can't find time to pray, to talk with God and spend time with Him, then I would say your relationship with Him isn't very important to you. And honestly, we need to put the creator of the universe at the top of our priority list.

## Conclusion

- As we conclude prayer is vitally important to our relationship with God. It's how we talk to Him, it's part of how we spend time with Him. It's how we deepen our relationship with Him.
- Prayer isn't about what we can ask of God, it isn't about saying the right words or bowing your head, it's about spending time with Him, making time for Him and talking with Him.
- Prayers can be simple, they can be short, they can be long...it's all about approaching God with the heart of wanting to spend time with Him. It's about wanting to deepen that relationship with Him.
- There is so much more we could talk about regarding prayer, and honestly, we will probably have more lessons in the future about prayer. What's important today though, is that I want you to understand how important prayer actually is.
- If you had a direct line to the president and you could talk to him about whatever would you use it? We have a direct line to God, the creator and ruler of everything, and what's more He actually wants to hear from us, the president probably wouldn't want to hear from you all the time. But God does. So why don't we use it? Why do we argue in groups over who has to pray? It's because we don't value prayer and see how important it is.
- Prayer and scripture intake are part of what feeds our relationship with God, because they are both centered on spending time with Him.
- We shouldn't let our fear of what others think prevent us from praying in front of people. I know it's scary for some of you to speak in front of others in general.
- But, if prayer is simply talking to God why does it matter what others think? All that matters is what God thinks, and truthfully if you're praying with a heart to glorify and honor God you've said a great prayer regardless of what others think.
- My life verse 1 Corinthians 10:31 is therefore whether you eat or drink, whatever you do, do all to the Glory of God. This includes prayer. My prayers, whether privately or in front of others should always be about bringing Glory to God. Nothing else matters.
- So, as we close today I want to challenge you on your prayer life. We can never pray enough. Be praying on your own, it's expected because God wants that relationship with you. But also, be ready to pray in front of others.

If you don't pray I want to challenge you to evaluate your relationship with God.