

CHAPTER 1

PRAYER & WORSHIP

Rejoice always, pray continually, give thanks in all circumstances; for this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus.
—1 Thessalonians 5:16-18

The Christian life is not just about knowing and doing; it's about *being with Jesus*. Before we focus on any specific practices, habits, or spiritual routines, we must realize following Jesus begins simply by spending *time* with Jesus.

How much time? The answer cannot be reduced down to rules needing to be followed. For example, what if I tell a husband that the best way to get to know his wife is to spend time with her, and he asks, "How much time do I have to spend with her?" That response would be considered rude and too mechanical for a relationship.

Not only do we need to spend time with God to grow our relationship, but incredibly, that is what he desires as well! God wants to spend time with us.

Not only is spending time with Jesus the way we develop our relationship with him, but at our very core we are designed for relationship with our Father and Creator. Without him, we live a subpar life and will be constantly chasing other things for fulfillment.

We are designed to know, love, walk with, and worship God. While Jesus was on the earth, someone asked him, "What is the greatest commandment?" We read about this and his response in Matthew:

“Teacher, which is the greatest commandment in the Law?”
Jesus replied: “Love the Lord your God with all your heart and
with all your soul and with all your mind.”
—Matthew 22:36-37

The greatest priority is to love God with all that we have. If God isn't the center of our life, our worship, and our work, nothing will make sense. Everything flows more effectively once we put Jesus as the primary focus of our lives. There's another story from the Bible that shows this primary importance of spending time with Jesus in Luke 10:

As Jesus and his disciples were on their way, he came to a village where a woman named Martha opened her home to him. She had a sister called Mary, who sat at the Lord's feet listening to what he said. But Martha was distracted by all the preparations that had to be made. She came to him and asked, “Lord, don't you care that my sister has left me to do the work by myself? Tell her to help me!” “Martha, Martha,” the Lord answered, “you are worried and upset about many things, but few things are needed—or indeed only one. Mary has chosen what is better, and it will not be taken away from her.”
—Luke 10:38-42

It's important to notice that Jesus says only one thing is needed; he elevates spending time with him as our highest pursuit. This should be the priority and focus of our lives. Often, like Martha, we find ourselves distracted and pulled away, but the most important thing is to spend time with Jesus.

With that being said, how do we do this? What does it mean to “spend time with Jesus,” since he is no longer physically walking the earth? We spend time with God through prayer, worship, Bible reading, and the Holy Spirit. In this chapter we will focus on prayer and worship.

PRAYER

One of the best ways to view prayer is to see it as talking with

God. It's a conversation that goes both ways; you talk to God and God talks to you. Through prayer we have access to his presence and power. So many Christians settle for less than what God wants for them, because they don't take time to pray.

HEARING THE VOICE OF GOD

One of the most important questions—and often the most common—is, “How do I hear God when he talks?” One of my favorite Scriptures that give us a clue how to do this is found in 1 Samuel:

The boy Samuel ministered before the LORD under Eli. In those days the word of the LORD was rare; there were not many visions. One night Eli, whose eyes were becoming so weak that he could barely see, was lying down in his usual place. The lamp of God had not yet gone out, and Samuel was lying down in the house of the LORD, where the ark of God was. Then the LORD called Samuel.

—1 Samuel 3:1-4

You see in these few verses that Samuel positioned himself in a place where God could speak to him. Often we find ourselves like Eli in this story—distracted, busy, and away from God's presence. Can God shout over the noise of our lives? Yes, but he usually asks us to quiet our lives and lean in to hear his voice.

I've found that the more time I spend talking and listening to God, the more I am able to discern if God is speaking to me or not. It's similar to how we have the ability to pick out the voice of our parent or child from a distance. Because we've spent enough time with them, we recognize their voice over the other voices.

My sheep listen to my voice; I know them, and they follow me.

—John 10:27

When you spend time with God, pray; talk to God, then take time to listen and write down what you feel like you hear him saying. God may choose to talk to you in an audible voice, but usually he speaks to us in our spirit. So, you don't hear him with

your ears, you hear him with your spirit. Sometimes he'll want to give you specific instructions about something or he may just want to reaffirm his love for you!

Knowing what the Bible says is a huge clue to learning how to recognize when God is speaking to you. God will never say anything to you that contradicts his Word. In the beginning stages of following Jesus, if you feel God is telling you to do something extreme, I highly recommend that you share it with a more mature Christian. They will be able to help you process it, so you don't make a wrong move out of immaturity. But, if God is speaking to you, act on it quickly and fully!

“PRAYER IS THE GREATEST
PRIVILEGE OF HUMANITY.”

God also calls us to pray on behalf of his will on earth. The first purpose of prayer is to grow our relationship with God, but that isn't all. God calls us to devote ourselves to prayer. The Bible says that the prayer of the righteous person is powerful and effective. God chooses to work through his Spirit and our prayers.

In Ezekiel 22, God was looking for someone to stand in the gap on behalf of a city so that it could be saved, but sadly, it says he found no one.

I looked for someone among them who would build up the wall
and stand before me in the gap on behalf of the land so I would
not have to destroy it, but I found no one.

—Ezekiel 22:30

God is looking for you and me to stand in the gap and pray for individuals, cities, and countries. The kingdom of God advances on the prayers of his people. Don't assume that our prayers don't matter or that they won't do much. Actually, it's the opposite; our prayers are powerful and essential for the work of God to move forward. When Jesus walked the earth, he first called twelve disciples to follow him. They once asked Jesus to teach them how to pray; here is what he said:

And when you pray, do not be like the hypocrites, for they love to pray standing in the synagogues and on the street corners to

be seen by others. Truly I tell you, they have received their reward in full. But when you pray, go into your room, close the door and pray to your Father, who is unseen. Then your Father, who sees what is done in secret, will reward you. And when you pray, do not keep on babbling like pagans, for they think they will be heard because of their many words. Do not be like them, for your Father knows what you need before you ask him. This, then, is how you should pray: “Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name, your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven. Give us today our daily bread. And forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors. And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from the evil one.”

—Matthew 6:5-13

There are many great studies on these few verses that Jesus gives us on prayer, but let me give a few thoughts to help us quickly take away what Jesus wants us to see.

Approach Is Important: (Our Father, You Are Holy)

When you pray, come to God in awe and reverence of his greatness and the fact that he is a loving Father. It is important to give him the honor that he deserves, because how you see God will determine your ability to have faith for him to respond. If you see God as small, you’ll pray small; if you see him as the Almighty and All-Sufficient One, you’ll pray bigger and expect more!

Put His Purpose First: (Your Will Be Done)

Many people come to God begging and only asking for what they want, rather than partnering with God in prayer for his will to be done on earth. If you pray for the advancement of God’s will, you’ll also find that God takes care of your needs and wants.

Make a Request: (Give Us Our Daily Bread)

Never be shy about asking God for what you need. He loves to provide and respond to our requests. Jesus says we don’t have because we don’t ask.

Forgive Us: (Forgive as We Forgive)

It is so important that we realize how much we’ve been forgiven, so that we continue to release forgiveness to others. Confess your

own sins quickly and be quick to offer forgiveness to others when they wrong you.

Protect and Lead Us: (Lead Us, Deliver Us)

God wants to lead our lives, but he doesn't force his way in. He looks for us to lean in and ask. He wants us to pursue him and walk with him.

Your Father and Savior cannot wait for the next time you stop and spend time with him. Don't limit prayer to mealtimes and church buildings. God wants to hear from you every day and your world desperately needs you to stand in the gap and pray for God's will to be done on earth!

WORSHIP

One of my favorite ways to spend time with God is through worship. If you want to experience the presence of God, begin to worship. A key part of my prayer times usually includes listening to worship music, singing, and lifting up the name of Jesus! One of the greatest warriors and worshipers in the Bible was King David. I love his heart for worship:

Shout for joy to the LORD, all the earth. Worship the LORD with gladness; come before him with joyful songs. Know that the LORD is God. It is he who made us, and we are his; we are his people, the sheep of his pasture. Enter his gates with thanksgiving and his courts with praise; give thanks to him and praise his name. For the LORD is good and his love endures forever; his faithfulness continues through all generations.

—Psalm 100:1-5

Worship aligns our heart to his. It creates a landing pad for the presence of God in our life. Like a helicopter that looks for the H to land on, worship puts a neon target on our life that invites the presence and power of God to land.

In times of worship, we'll often have a heightened sense of the presence of God, but worship is not just a response to good feelings or only something we do when we feel like it. Worship

is what we do regardless of circumstances or feelings. Often, taking a few moments in worship to lift up your hands and sing will greatly impact your life and the climate of your heart.

LEAD WITH WORSHIP

Just like prayer, worship has a powerful dual nature to it. On one hand it creates the perfect atmosphere to connect with God, and on the other, it is also used as a way to fight against the work of the enemy.

After consulting the people, Jehoshaphat appointed men to sing to the LORD and to praise him for the splendor of his holiness as they went out at the head of the army, saying: “Give thanks to the LORD, for his love endures forever.” As they began to sing and praise, the LORD set ambushes against the men of Ammon and Moab and Mount Seir who were invading Judah, and they were defeated.

—2 Chronicles 20:21-22

No matter what you’re facing, lead with worship! As the men in this passage worshipped, God began to work. In your life, when you’re facing a difficult situation, stop, take time to worship God, and watch him begin to move in your situation. Worship is potent; it releases the power of God and it calms and quiets your heart so that you can hear God speak to you.

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CHAPTER CHALLENGE

STUDY IT THROUGH:

What does the Bible say about prayer and thankfulness?

1 Thessalonians 5:16-18

What does God ask us to pray for? Matthew 6:9-13

How does Jesus want us to pray? Luke 18:1-8

What does Jesus say about fasting? Matthew 6:16-18

Who are we to worship? Luke 4:8

What does Psalm 96:1-10 say that the Lord is worthy of?

WALK IT OUT:

- Set time aside daily to pray. Pray for 15 minutes at a time and slowly increase the length.
- Create a worship playlist and worship God outside of a church service.
- Pray with bold faith for others and for God's will to be done in your city.