

PRAYER

Lesson 7: Regular and Systematic Prayer

1. Examples from Fellow-Believers

2. The Greatest Example of All

INTRODUCTION

There are two excellent ways to destroy our prayer lives:

- One way is to create an elaborate system of rules for which prayers should be said and when. Prayer then becomes a matter of keeping the rules instead of a joyful, heart-to-heart talk with God. The result is a ritualistic going through the motions. Most people become irritated with the rules and abandon prayer altogether.
- The other way is to insist that all prayers must be completely spontaneous, that giving any thought to when we'll pray or what we'll say is somehow wrong, that we should pray only when the mood strikes us and we're 100% certain we "feel like it." In theory that sounds like a good way to make sure prayer never becomes forced or artificial. In practice, however, it can become a good way to make sure prayer never happens.

Surely it's possible to avoid both extremes and cultivate a prayer life that has elements both of regularity and spontaneity.

I. Examples of Fellow-Believers

Daniel 6:4-11 At [Daniel being made one of the top three administrators in the kingdom], the administrators and the satraps tried to find grounds for charges against Daniel in his conduct of government affairs, but they were unable to do so. They could find no corruption in him, because he was trustworthy and neither corrupt nor negligent. ⁵ Finally these men said, "We will never find any basis for charges against this man Daniel unless it has something to do with the law of his God." ⁶ So the administrators and the satraps went as a group to the king and said: "O King Darius, live forever! ⁷ The royal administrators, prefects, satraps, advisers and governors have all agreed that the king should issue an edict and enforce the decree that anyone who prays to any god or man during the next thirty days, except to you, O king, shall be thrown into the lions' den. ⁸ Now, O king, issue the decree and put it in writing so that it cannot be altered—in accordance with the laws of the Medes and Persians, which cannot be repealed." ⁹ So King Darius put the decree in writing. ¹⁰ Now when Daniel learned that the decree had been published, he went home to his upstairs room where the windows opened toward Jerusalem. Three times a day he got down on his knees and prayed, giving thanks to his God, just as he had done before. ¹¹ Then these men went as a group and found Daniel praying and asking God for help.

1. These men had observed Daniel habits and actions closely for some time. Where did they choose to attack and why?

2. While we are commanded to pray in Scripture, Daniel's specific practice is not commanded anywhere. Why then did he keep at it even when it put his life in danger?

3. What regular times of prayer may the early church have observed?

Acts 2:1, 15 When the day of Pentecost came, they were all together in one place. ...These men are not drunk, as you suppose. It's only nine in the morning!

Acts 10:3 One day at about three in the afternoon he had a vision. He distinctly saw an angel of God, who came to him and said, "Cornelius!"

Acts 10:9 About noon the following day as they were on their journey and approaching the city, Peter went up on the roof to pray.

His Word in My Life

1.) Respond to the following objections to regular prayer:

- I don't have the time
- I just know I'll forget.
- My family is never together. There's no good time to pray together.
- It all seems so mechanical.
- I don't know how to start.

2.) Evaluate: One of the reasons we tend to neglect prayer is because we live in a society that values doing over thinking.

II. The Greatest Example of All

1.) Read the following verses from the gospels. What can we conclude about Jesus' prayer-life?

Mark 1:35 Very early in the morning, while it was still dark, Jesus got up, left the house and went off to a solitary place, where he prayed.

Luke 5:16 But Jesus often withdrew to lonely places and prayed.

Luke 6:12 One of those days Jesus went out to a mountainside to pray, and spent the night praying to God.

John 17:1ff After Jesus said this, he looked toward heaven and prayed [at the conclusion of the Passover meal]... [for himself, his disciples, all believers].

Matthew 26:36, 44 Then Jesus went with his disciples to a place called Gethsemane, and he said to them, "Sit here while I go over there and pray." ... So he left them and went away once more and prayed the third time, saying the same thing.

His Word in My Life

1.) Agree or Disagree: We shouldn't make other people's responsibility to regularly pray for our needs when we can do that ourselves. This is just another example of how we ask others to live out our Christianity.

2.) Evaluate: Prayer ought to be a discipline of following Jesus.

SUMMARY

Discuss the following quotation: "Praying is very difficult work. This is the reason it is also very rare" (Luther).

Life with God

- Consider including the "Psalms for Prayer—A Daily Schedule" (page 254 CW) into your regularly prayer life.
- Compose (or find in Scripture) a short morning prayer and a short evening prayer for yourself. Save them.
- Compare your morning and evening prayers with Luther's (bottom of page 258 CW).
- Read Luther's *Small Catechism* on the Lord's Prayer (page 289-90 CW).
- Compose a brief prayer in light of each petition of the Lord's Prayer.
- Select a paragraph from your daily Scripture reading, adapt it as necessary, and pray it as a prayer:
 - Example: Matthew 18:10-14 (chosen at random) becomes:
 - Lord Jesus, send your Holy Spirit to teach me, so that I never look down on those whom the world might consider little ones. Let me be a blessing and not a hindrance to all the little ones I know. I thank you, Father, for sending angels to watch over them. Let me see the vision of glory those angels always see.
 - Lord, I'm amazed at the love you show in leaving your ninety-nine sheep to go after one that's lost. I thank you for going after me, finding me, and bringing me home on your shoulders. Let me learn to see the lost in the same way you do. Make me your instrument as you seek the lost. Amen.