

Focus: The Journey to Easter

Lesson 2



The Discipline of Celebrating Prayer

St. James Baptist Church

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The discipline of prayer

To pray is to change. Prayer is the central avenue God uses to transform us. If we are willing to change, we will abandon prayer as a noticeable characteristic of our lives. The closer we come to the heartbeat of God the more we see our need and the more we desire to be conformed to Christ.

“You ask and do not receive, because you ask wrongly, to spend it on your passions” (**James 4:3**). To ask “rightly” involves transformed passions. In prayer, real prayer, we begin to think God’s thoughts after him: to desire the things he desires, to love the things he loves, to will the things he wills. Progressively, we are taught to see things from his point of view.

Learning to Pray Real prayer is something we learn. The disciple asked Jesus, “Lord, teach us to pray” (**Luke 11:1**). They had prayed all their lives, and yet something about the quality and quantity of Jesus’ praying caused them to see how little they knew about prayer. If their praying was to make any difference on the human scene, there were some things they needed to learn.

Sometimes we are afraid that we do not have enough faith to pray for this child or that marriage. Our fears should be put to rest, for the Bible tells us that great miracles are possible through faith the size of a tiny mustard seed. Usually, the courage actually to go and pray for a person is a sign of sufficient faith. Frequently our lack is not faith but compassion.

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Meditation introduces us to the inner life, fasting is an accompanying means, study transforms our minds, but it is the Discipline of prayer that brings us into the deepest and highest work of the human spirit. Real prayer is life creating and life changing.

SPECIFIC SUGGESTIONS FOR PRACTICING THE DISCIPLINE OF PRAYER

Deepen your practice of intercessory prayer by choosing a few individuals or groups for whom you will pray in an intensified way in coming weeks and months.

Ask God to deepen your sensitivity to these persons over the course of time. Apply the Discipline of study to heighten your awareness of their needs and circumstances. Meditate on the truths you want to take hold in their lives by the power of the Spirit of God. Celebrate the reality of God's transforming work in their lives. Consider asking a few trusted friends to pray for them as well, sharing your specific requests as it seems appropriate to do so.

SCRIPTURE PASSAGES RELEVANT TO THE PRACTICE OF PRAYER

The Bible is filled with references to prayer, the intimate lifeline connecting human spirit with Holy Spirit. Here are a few passages that are rich with insights into the practice of prayer.

Models of intercession:

I Samuel 2:1-10 and **Luke 1:46-55** (praise and thanksgiving for the miraculous work of Go9d in human history)

Ephesians 1:1-19 (for growth in spiritual depth and wisdom)

Philippians 1:3-6 (for partners in ministry)

I Thessalonians 1:2-3 (remembrance of fellow believers)

“How-to” passages on prayer:

Psalms 62:8 (how to be honest in prayer)

Psalms 136:1-3, 26 (how to pray)

Matthew 6:5-14 (how and what to pray)

John 15:7 (the proper context for expecting answers to prayer)

Ephesians 6:18 (when and how to pray)

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Philippians 4:4-7 (how to experience joy and peace through prayer)

Hebrews 4:14-16 (how to approach God in prayer)

James 1:5-8 (how to approach God in prayer)

James 4:3 (how not to pray, and an explanation of unanswered prayer)

I John 3:19-24 (how to be confident in prayer)

The results of Prayer:

Isaiah 30:19-22 (God's responsiveness to us; divine guidance)

Jeremiah 29:12-13 (God's responsiveness to us)

Matthew 18:19-20 (what happens when we pray in community)

I John 1:19 (the prayer of confession)

REFLECTION POINTS

Reflection point: How is the practice of prayer leading you into a deeper experience of intimacy with God?

Reflection point: What are your greatest struggles or disappointments in prayer?

Reflection point: What has your practice of prayer been teaching you about yourself and your relationships?

Reflection point: What has your practice of prayer been teaching you about God?
