

WHY WE PRAY

"Exercise thyself unto godliness." -1 Timothy 4:7

During the 1980s, more than 17,000 evangelicals attending a conference on prayer were surveyed about their prayer life:

- On average, they prayed less than 5 minutes a day.
- Of the 2,000 pastors and their wives included, they prayed less than 7 minutes a day.

"Whatever varying religious exercises we may practice, without the two basic ones of Emmaus—prayer and Bible reading—the others are empty and powerless." -Richard Foster

"We must come to grips with the fact that to be like Jesus we must pray"(66).

Prayer is expected.

Jesus took for granted that his disciples would pray. Consider even further that the Father sent his Son to stoop so low as to teach his children how to pray:

- "And when you pray...But when you pray...And when you pray...This, then is how you should pray..." (Matthew 6:5,6,7,9)
- "So I say to you: Ask...; seek...; knock." (Luke 11:9)
- "Then Jesus told his disciples...they should always pray." (Luke 18:1)

Furthermore, in the life of the New Testament church, prayer is commanded:

- "Devote yourselves to prayer." (Colossians 4:2)
- "Pray continually." (1 Thessalonians 5:17)

"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." -Martin Luther

This much we know: Jesus prayed. Luke tells us, "But Jesus often withdrew to lonely places and prayed" (Luke 5:16). We will not be like Jesus without praying.

There are hurdles to overcome.

We have to realize that prayer is not just a duty but a royal privilege: "Let us then approach the throne of grace with confidence, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help us in our time of need" (Hebrews 4:16).

The problem is that often, we let hurdles cause us to stumble in our prayer life:

- Hurdle #1: We do not plan times to pray
- Hurdle #2: We doubt that anything will happen
- Hurdle #3: We lack a sense of nearness to the Lord
- Hurdle #4: We don't "need" to pray
- Hurdle #5: We forget the greatness of God and the grace of the gospel
- Hurdle #6: We haven't learned about prayer

Prayer is answered.

"Perhaps no principle of prayer is more taken for granted than this one—that prayer is answered" (78). Read Matthew 7:7-8. What does Jesus make abundantly plain is the principle of the Kingdom?

"I cannot imagine any one of you tantalizing your child by exciting in him a desire that you did not intend to gratify. It were a very ungenerous thing to offer alms to the poor, and then when they hold out their hand for it, to mock their poverty with a denial. It were a cruel addition to the miseries of the sick if they were taken to the hospital and there left to die untended and uncared for. Where God leads you to pray, He means you to receive." -C.H. Spurgeon

What's your commitment level?

Since prayer is expected, will you pray?

"Unless I'm badly mistaken, one of the main reasons so many of God's children don't have a significant prayer life is not so much that we don't want to, but that we don't plan to." (80)

For the purpose of godliness, will you pray? Today? Will you plan to pray tomorrow? The day after that?

Since prayer is answered, will you pray persistently?

We have to follow the example of Hannah, who persisted, continued in fervent prayer before the Lord until she received what she requested.

"Sometimes a failure to persist in prayer proves that we were not serious about our request in the first place." (81)

Persistence in prayer has many purposes:

- God uses it to strengthen our faith in Him. Faith would never grow if all prayers were answered immediately.
- Persistent prayer tends to develop deeper gratitude as well.
- God uses it to craft Christlike patience in us.

George Muller observed,

"The great fault of the children of God is, *they do not continue in prayer; they do not go on praying; they do not persevere.* If they desire anything for God's glory, they should pray until they get it. Oh, how good, and kind, and gracious, and condescending is the One with Whom we have to do! He has given me, unworthy as I am, immeasurably above all I had asked or thought!"