

Practice Makes Perfect (Almost): Prayer

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Meditation: Isaiah 55:1-2

Object of Prayer Practice

Richard Foster defines prayer as entering God's heart of love. It is the vehicle for relationship.

Every time I teach on prayer, people struggle to pray again thinking I am saying it is possible to do it the wrong way or in the wrong words or in the wrong spirit. Yes and no. Roberta Bondi says, "If you are praying, you are already 'doing it right.'"

1 Thess 5:17 "Pray without ceasing."

Luke 18:1ff Parable of the Unjust Judge

Introduction

1. My adventure began over forty years ago at Wednesday night prayer meetings with retired pastor Schroeder who prayed in German, one Wednesday ending with "und helfen uns . . . betet ohne Unterlass."
2. What did this mean, to pray without ceasing? How was it possible when you worked or talked with someone or did the 101 things we do in a day? Was I to be heavenly minded and no earthly good?
3. Example of Daniel (6:10) 3 times a day; *Didache* says Christians should pray 3X; *Ber 4:1* says Jews should pray 3X a day. Benedictines practice prayer all days and come together as community for the Office of the Hours. Seminary practice this year of 3X. But without ceasing?
4. Some have said we should be in an attitude of prayer all the time; others say literally we should set aside our lives to pray; most give up ever achieving such a thing.

Transition: let me open this parable for you that drives at the same point, then make application.

- The point: v. 1
- The parable: vv. 2-5
- The application:

1. Not to lose heart – continually coming (v. 5) – hear what the unjust judge says!
 - Matt 7:7-8 "Ask and keep on asking"
 - Luke 11:5-13 "the persistent friend"

- I don't understand fully, but it seems prayer is for us. We persist and in the process we change, our prayers change. When they match the Lord's will, we receive the answer.

2. Pray always

- Frank Laubach – missionary to Philippines in 1915; “to live in this hour in continuous inner conversation with God and in perfect responsiveness to his will”; experiment of thinking of God each moment.
- Madame Guyon – “a continuous inner abiding”
- Julian of Norwich – “Prayer unites the soul to God.”
- Brother Lawrence (1611-91) – “an habitual sense of God's presence”; “actual presence of God” = “an habitual, silent, and secret conversation of the soul with God.”
- Richard Foster calls us to “a practiced habit of divine fellowship” (128).

Conclusion

What is praying without ceasing? It is a life in relationship with God. Brother Lawrence said that eventually he never participated in prayer times, acts of devotion, etc. because he was always in prayer in his relationship with God. I think that is what it means.

Prayer Grammar

Richard Foster's book on prayer reflects on 21 different ways to pray, extending from simple prayer to contemplative prayer to radical prayer. Obviously, over church history we have found lots of ways to pray.

Luke 11:1-4 “Teach us to pray.”

Matthew 6:5-13

- Without showiness, v. 5
- Pray humbly to the Father, v. 6
- Don't pray empty phrases and lots of words, vv. 7-8
- Simply ask, vv. 9-13 – Rinker 1959.

Learn grammar of prayer by looking at biblical and traditional prayers.

- Prose prayers in Bible – Greenberg 1983.
- Psalms.
- Great prayers – Yancey 2006, 178 (14 listed).
- Paul's prayers – read through letters to discover and learn.
- Phyllis Tickle 2000.
- *Book of Common Prayer*.
- *Devotional Classics* 1993.

Prayer Fluency

Yancey 2006, ch. 12.

1. Adjust expectations – it is about relationship. It is like learning a foreign language or sex or running.
2. Choose a routine. Don Postema writes, “I wrote, 7:00-7:30 am: Prayer, in my calendar; I passed that up. Then I wrote, 7:00-7:30 am: God. Harder to pass up then.”
3. Show up – much of the benefit is consistency, like exercise.
4. Experience two worlds – prayer invites God into my world and ushers me into God’s (167).

Ben Patterson illustration – back problem with a dislocated disc for 6 weeks (Yancey 2006, 169).

Bibliography

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Philip Yancey. *Prayer: Does It Make a Difference*. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2006.

www.24-7prayer.com (see Prayer Wall).

Week 3 Handout on “Prayer”

If prayer is about “abiding relationship” with God, living in God’s heart, are you “praying without ceasing”? Reflect on the following quotes:

- Frank Laubach – missionary to Philippines in 1915; “to live in this hour in continuous inner conversation with God and in perfect responsiveness to his will.” Experiment on thinking of God each moment, each minute, each hour, each day?
- Madame Guyon (1648-1717) – “a continuous inner abiding.”
- Julian of Norwich (1343-1413) – “Prayer unites the soul to God.”
- Brother Lawrence (1611-91) – “an habitual sense of God’s presence”; “actual presence of God” = “an habitual, silent, and secret conversation of the soul with God.”
- Richard Foster calls us to “a practiced habit of divine fellowship” (128).

Outside the psalms, prayers and praying occur 140 times in the First Testament in prose sections. If you add the impromptu prayers of Jesus and the written prayers of Paul, Peter, and John, we have lots of examples to follow on how to pray. Reflect on the samples below on what they teach you about prayer.

- Numbers 12:13
- Genesis 32:10-13
- Jonah 1:14
- 2 Kings 18:14
- 2 Samuel 24:10
- 1 Samuel 1:10-11; compare 1 Samuel 2:1-10
- Nehemiah 1:4-11; compare Nehemiah 2:4 in context.

Do you have a plan for prayer that includes time, place, requests, answers? List your plan or determine one and write it down.

Bibliography

Richard Foster. *Prayer*. HarperSanFrancisco, 1992.

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