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Discipline 4: Prayer

If you have been practicing the first three disciplines, you have probably already been praying. Prayer starts with God and not us. If proper focus is placed on God, reading and studying scripture, and a sincere desire to communicate with our Savior, prayer is the result.

Think of prayer as a time of “pleading your case” with God. The imagery is of someone in a courtroom standing before the judge giving the reasons why his case is valid. What or how to pray is not always clear-cut. But we know from scripture we are to follow the model of the Lord’s Prayer in praising God, confessing sin, and on from there. T. W. Hunt recognizes this as “approaching prayer seeking God’s viewpoint.” It is an essential starting point because our human, sinful nature is always looking at what we think is best for us. If our prayer originates from our desires, we can miss what God has for us.

God hears and answers prayer from his followers. We see through the Bible how those who sought God handled prayer. Adam hid from God after he disobeyed God in the garden. His once close relationship was broken because of sin. Joseph recognized God’s providence in preserving the lives of the Hebrew people even though he was sold into slavery and imprisoned while waiting for it to happen. Daniel prayed to God when he had a question he could not answer. Paul prayed for his “thorn in the flesh” to be removed, but he realized that God may not remove it so that God could accomplish His purposes. We are all in different situations with various needs and requests. As believers, the Holy Spirit of God resides in us from the moment of belief (Ephesians 1:13). The Holy Spirit inside you will help you pray. Don’t rely on your own power, rely on God’s power.

Sin and disobedience can get in the way of powerful prayer. Is there unconfessed sin in your life? If so, deal with it right now. Confess it and ask God to forgive you and be willing to seek out others and ask their forgiveness (1 John 1:9). God is holy and pure. If we approach Him without taking the time to confess our sin and repent, our prayers are more our own words rather than effective prayer. God’s character is merciful, patient, and forgiving (Numbers 14:17-19). Don’t forget to ask God to clean your heart before jumping into prayer requests.

Public prayer and corporate prayer are different. Dan Crawford reminds us when leading a public prayer to not “talk to the people before God nor talk to God while ignoring the people. Rather, lead the people as you and they talk with God.” Prayer to God need not be long or full of spiritual vocabulary—God can understand your normal everyday words. Be conscious of the nearness of God when you or anyone else prays. Let God speak; be in a posture of listening so you can learn what God is wanting you to do.

Pray biblical prayers. Pray the Word of God. Meditate on scripture in your prayers and let it guide your prayers. Pray unceasingly (1 Thessalonians 5:17). It doesn't mean we stay head bowed and eyes closed all the time. It means we know God is indeed close and can hear our prayer at any time.

Henry Blackaby, in his now classic book, *Experiencing God*, lists eight happenings as a result of us seeking God's will in prayer:

1. God takes the initiative by causing you to want to pray.
2. The Holy Spirit, through the Word of God, reveals God's will to you.
3. You pray in agreement with the will of God.
4. You adjust your thinking and attitudes to God's truth.
5. You look and listen for confirmation or further direction from the Bible, circumstances, and the church (other believers).
6. You obey.
7. God works in and through you to accomplish His purposes.
8. You experience Him as the Spirit revealed when you prayed.

Thomas Wright, in his book *PrayTimer: Real Time for Real Prayer* cites five characteristics for those who wish to become prayer warriors: 1-Remain connected to the vine (Jesus); 2-Remain grounded in the Bible; 3-Listen for the Lord to Speak; 4-Pray in Truth [John 14:6]; and 5-Create a prayer plan that helps you pray.

Would you take some time each day to pray?