

Prayer

“Pray continually.” ~1 Thessalonians 5:17

As the years past birth become greater in number and the years before death fewer, it is evident that the most potent force on earth is regular prayer. Communication with God, particularly his communication with us, is more important than daily bread. We find spiritual nourishment in our communion with God through prayer and regular worship in ways we cannot imagine.

Prayer makes bearable the loss of a loved one, for we walk with the one who embraces us all forever. Prayer tempers our sinful pride when we think we are more important than others. Prayer celebrates the important transitions of life, and never stops, no matter our age.

One of the greatest discoveries about prayer, which many never make, is to find that prayer is more listening to God than talking. We can lift prayer after prayer to heaven, spending great amounts of energy and devotion to seek God’s help, and never listen to what he says.

“Prayer at its highest,” writes Frank Laubach, “is a two-way conversation and for me the most important part is listening to God's replies. We must listen like we have never listened before, and we will find the greatest results of our lives.

The most important, after we spend our lives trying to change God and the events of the world, is that our lives are changed. We become more humble, more gentle, and full of God’s spirit. Others can see the change, as we walk not in the ways of the world, or our own way, but the ways of God.

“The reality is, my prayers don't change God,” celebrates Lysa Terkeurst. “But, I am convinced prayer changes me. Praying boldly boots me out of that stale place of religious habit into authentic connection with God himself.”

It is not so much that we pray for ourselves to be changed, for that is too self-focused. It is more about our nearness to God which changes us. Moses, after he went into the tabernacle to hear from God, was glowing so brightly the people could not look directly at him.

Here was a man who had thought he was done with leadership. But God called him to become the greatest prophet of Israel, when he had intended to be a shepherd. He walked with God. He was changed by God. God’s purpose was now his purpose.

So we must pray, then we must pray again. And when we are done with that we must pray again.

Martin Luther, a monk who encountered God in a deep and personal way, prayed often and long. One of his most powerful sayings is about prayer. "I have so much to do," he said, "that I shall spend the first three hours in prayer."

Those times of retreat, from Sunday morning worship, when we intentionally step away from the ordinary, to a mountain retreat when there is no one there but God and us, are essential to the life of the growing Christian.

Jesus often went away for a time to pray by himself, and came back renewed for the task. "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". ~Mark 1:35

The beautiful thing about prayer is that we can talk with this same Jesus, and he can talk with us. Can you imagine the conversation that begins with, "Jesus, you remember that time you went away to pray, can you tell me what you said?"

We don't have to know the words to pray. Sometimes, the scripture says, the spirit can pray for us and we don't even need to speak. Being human, most of the time we don't know what to say anyway.

"Our prayers may be awkward," says Max Lucado. "Our attempts may be feeble. But since the power of prayer is in the one who hears it and not in the one who says it, our prayers do make a difference."

The fanciest words in prayer are sometimes the most ineffective. Simplicity, trust, breathlessly waiting for God, these are the keys to effective and life-changing prayer.

Finally, the call is to stop talking about prayer and do it. Morning, noon, night, and all points in between; sometimes with our eyes open, sometimes on our knees, and sometimes lying flat on the floor. All the times and postures of prayer are awaiting us all, dear reader.

Discover who you are meant to be in prayer. See how God changes you. We are not meant to be like those of the world. Distinct differences are essential to the child of God.

"There are parts of our calling, works of the Holy Spirit, and defeats of the darkness that will come no other way than through furious, fervent, faith-filled, unceasing prayer."
- Beth Moore