

LIVING THE CHRISTIAN LIFE

Lesson 2 w/Answers

The Discipline of Prayer

We continue our Christian Living study based on the twelve spiritual disciplines identified by Richard Foster. In this lesson, we examine the discipline of prayer. In our last lesson, we studied the Biblical approach to meditation, and we discovered that it referred to thinking, pondering, and considering God, Jesus, His creation and His laws. In this lesson, we will observe that prayer should be more focused on having direct communication with God regarding very specific things, and in seeking His good and perfect will in our lives.

In comparison, we will find that prayer comes from the heart, whereas meditation is more from the head. Or another way to put it is that prayer is more a matter of will than intellect. In prayer, Christ is revealed in us, as we allow Him—through His Holy Spirit—to lead us in our talk with God. Interceding on our behalf, Jesus' sacrifice on the cross and his resurrection from the dead enables us to "boldly approach the throne of God". In prayer, we can have an ongoing dialogue with God; and we can conduct that dialogue without flowery words. Additionally, it does not require a great deal of intelligence or intellect. We can go to God just as we are and open our heart to Him.

We will be examining some specific verses aimed at helping us understand and practice prayer, so that we can better talk with God.

Read the following and consider what they tell us about prayer.

1. Christ taught his disciples how to pray, and today that prayer is known as the model prayer, or Lord's Prayer. Read Luke 11:1-9. What are the key elements of prayer, as Christ used them in this prayer?
 - a. ANSWER 1: We should acknowledge God as the God above all gods, as the sole source of all that we need, including forgiveness.
 - b. ANSWER 2: We are to ask God for His forgiveness and for protection against Satan and his evil ways, which can easily ensnare us.
 - c. ANSWER 3: All of our prayers should align with God's will, which should be at the heart of all that we pray for.
 - d. ANSWER 4: We should also pray for our enemies—those who are against us—just as we pray for ourselves.
2. Read the following verses and collectively summarize what they tell us about ourselves and our relationship to Christ, and how that should play out in our prayer life?
 - 2 Thessalonians 3:1
 - Romans 8:19
 - 1 Corinthians 6:19
 - 2 Corinthians 3:18
 - Colossians 2:6-7
 - Colossians 3:15-16
 - a. ANSWER: These verses tell us that Christ is living in us, that our body is the temple in which the Holy Spirit dwells, and that we are to let Christ shine through us in all that we say, do, and think. When this happens, our prayers will reflect and reveal Christ living in us; and our talks with God will take on new meaning, new strength; and we will always be praying in God's will.

3. Our prayers should have at least four components or steps to them. First, we should begin by acknowledging God as our source of everything, and we should be calling out directly to Him. Secondly, our prayers should also be communicating with God. Matthew 7:6-8 tells us to ASK God—that is, to Ask, Seek, and Knock—and He will respond. Third, we are to pray believing He will answer; see Romans 8:37-39. And finally, and perhaps the most difficult of all, is to wait on the Lord's response. Isaiah 40:30-31, in the King James version, instructs us to "wait upon the Lord"; in the NIV translation, we are instructed "to hope in the Lord". Again, once we pray in the full belief that God will answer our prayer, we are to wait on the Lord and hope in the Lord; thereby leaving our time of prayer assured of God's love for us and confident that His sovereign will in our lives will be carried out according to his timing. Now read Matthew 8:5-10 and verse 13 and describe how this narrative fits with what we have just discussed.
- a. ANSWER: The Centurion prayed a specific prayer acknowledging that Jesus was the source of all things and had the power to heal the soldier's servant. His faith was strong, certain, and specific. He did not speak in flowery language, nor did he attempt to carry on some intellectually-challenging conversation with Jesus. He did not waver in his request nor was he lukewarm. His prayer is model of a man of faith seeking out Christ in a time of need, and Christ answering his prayer. Note as well that the Centurion believed Jesus, and did not need any further evidence of his power—just his word—and the Centurion knew his prayer was answered.
4. In addition, I would encourage you to attempt an exercise in "stringing pearls"—a method that Paul and other teachers employed, and one that will also help us in our prayer life. Stringing Pearls describes the rabbinical method many Bible teachers employed to get their point across to their students and increase these students' knowledge of the Bible. The teacher would string together parts of several verses to get one major point across—not taking anything out of context to bend God's word to our will, but applying individual verses to form a single communication. This enables us to write a prayer to God using just His Holy Word. Jesus also seems to have incorporated this method of teaching often. He was actually so aware of the Scriptures that he would use parts of verses to make a whole point. In addition to this approach, you can also use scripture that speaks to you. For example, how many of us have prayed by reading or reciting The 23rd Psalm, or some other favorite scripture? As an exercise in "stringing pearls", look up the following verses and write them out as though they were a single prayer; see if it does not allow God to speak to you in your prayer time.
- Psalm 1:1-2
 - Psalm 119:1-2
 - Psalm 116:1-2
 - Psalm 119:33-37
- a. ANSWER: "Blessed is the one who does not walk in step with the wicked or stand in the way that sinners take or sit in the company of mockers, but whose delight is in the law of the LORD, and who meditates on his law day and night. Blessed are those whose ways are blameless, who walk according to the law of the LORD. Blessed are those who keep his statutes and seek him with all their heart. I love the LORD, for he heard my voice; he heard my cry for mercy. Because he turned his ear to me, I will call on him as long as I live. Teach me, LORD, the way of your decrees, that I may follow it to the end. Give me understanding, so that I may keep your law and obey it with all my heart. Direct me in the path of your commands, for there I find delight. Turn my heart toward your statutes and not toward selfish gain. Turn my eyes away from worthless things; preserve my life according to your word. Amen."

May our prayer life grow stronger as we apply all that God has shown us in this lesson. Next week, we will look at the discipline of Study.

In Christ,

Wes