

DARING TO DO THE DISCIPLINES
(Part Three)
"Prayer"

Adapted from Richard Foster in *Celebration Of Discipline* New York: HarperCollins 1978 / 98, p.p. 33 to 46.

Text: Luke 11.1 – 4 (in pew Bible p. 1029 / in large print Bible p. 1601).

Intro:

-the 40 days of Lent offer us an opportunity to be liberated from *the suffocating pressure of our culture.*

- various disciplines practiced during Lent to help prepare us to observe the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus Christ.
- for centuries, Christians have practiced Spiritual Disciplines in order to encounter God and find spiritual enrichment.
- during this season of Lent we will explore the disciplines of meditation, prayer, study, service, confession, and worship.

-part 3 of series "*Daring To Do The Discipline.*"

- Spiritual Disciplines = transforming liberation of these helpful tools.
- Meditation (Psalm 119.97 – 104, 148) = transformational truth controls us.

-today's text reveals the powerful impact Jesus' example of prayer had on His disciples.

- question = one day Jesus was praying in a certain place (v. 1).
 - process = when he finished (v. 1).
 - effect = disciples wanted to learn how to pray (v. 2).
 - normal reflex = just as John also taught.
 - abnormal reflex = no interest in prayer.
 - **illust.** Billy Graham.
- answer = Jesus said to them, "When you pray say ..." (v. 2).
 - Christ provides a pattern (cf. longer version in Matthew 6.9 – 13).
 - illustration of persistent prayer (v. v. 5 – 8).
 - assurance of God's willingness to answer prayer (v. v. 9 – 13).
 - power of prayer in spiritual warfare (v. v. 14 – 28).

Take Home Point:

-prayer is the chief in the cluster of disciplines.

- deepest and highest work in our human spirit.
- William Carey: ... fervent, believing prayer lies at the root of all ... godliness.
- **illust.** More than Pennies

1. IMPORTANCE OF PRAYER

-to pray is to change – we begin to think God’s thoughts & desire the things that delight God.

- prayer is the main business of our lives.
- prayer is the top priority of our lives.

-Jesus’ example:

And in the morning, a great while before day, he rose and went out to a lonely place, and there he prayed (Mark 1.35).

-David’s pattern:

O God, You are my God; Early will I seek You: My soul thirsts for You; My flesh longs for You In a dry and thirsty land Where there is not water,. So I have looked for You in the sanctuary, to see Your power and Your

glory

(Psalm 63.1).

-we are often challenged and discouraged by the example of “spiritual giants.”

- need to remember that God always meets us where we are & slowly moves us along into deeper things.
- gradual progress of an athlete.
 - **illust.** Skiing On Sumac.

2. PATHWAYS TO PRAYER

-don’t make prayer complicated.

- **illust.** Devotional Life.
- like a child talking to his / her parent.
 - no embarrassment or *limitation.*

-picture the answers to your prayer - for God’s glory / according to his Word.

- don’t try to manipulate God.

-shouldn’t be a fatalist – “*if God wills ...*”:

- can pray for God’s will if you are seeking guidance.
- **illust.** O God We Have Had Enough
- partner with God for you / family / church / 4Cs / missionaries / work place / community.

-establish prayer targets:

- healthy, permanent marriages & strong families.
- church leaders & church services.
- life skills & usefulness in society / not a self-centred island.

Conclusion:

1. Know what God wants.

-there is a desperate need today, not for Christians to be more intelligent or gifted *but for Christians to be deeper and more genuine.*

-Richard Foster prays: May God give you and me the courage, the wisdom, the strength always us to hold the kingdom of God as the number one priority in our lives.

- to do this is to practice the Spiritual Disciplines.
- Spiritual Disciplines are tools which help us to reach above the physical world to enter deep spiritual life.

-say “yes” to God’s dare to the Spiritual Disciplines!

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- deepest and highest work in our human spirit.

-to pray is to change – we begin to think God’s thoughts & desire the things that delight God.

- prayer is the main business of our lives.
- prayer is the top priority of our lives.

2. Know how to do what God wants.

-avail yourself of the prayer tools we have at L.A.C.C.

- Pastoral Prayer, Prayer Chain, Prayer Partner, Prayer Time.

-don’t be discouraged if prayer seems overwhelming to you at the beginning.

- be patient with yourself in the process of climbing smaller peaks first before you tackle Mt. Everest.
- practice the pattern of prayer outlined by Jesus and be transformed during this season of Lent.

-**illust.** Always New

3. Know that you will do it.

-**Closing Hymn:** O For A Closer Walk With God (all verses).

Billy Graham

In his book *How I Pray*, Billy Graham writes:

I heard about a young president of a company who instructed his secretary not to disturb him because he had an important appointment. The chairman of the board came in and said, "I want to see Mr. Jones." The secretary answered, "I'm terribly sorry, he cannot be disturbed; he has an important appointment."

The chairman became very angry. He banged open the door and saw the president of his corporation on his knees in prayer. The chairman softly closed the door and asked the secretary, "Is this usual?" And she said, "Yes, he does that every morning." To which the chairman of the board responded, "No wonder I come to him for advice" (Craig Brian Larson *750 Engaging Illustrations*. Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1993, p. 420).

More than Pennies

In his sermon: "The Disciples Prayer," Haddon Robinson recalls: When my children were small, we played a game. I'd take some coins in my fist. They'd sit on my lap and work to get my fingers open. According to the rules of our game, once the finger was open, it couldn't be closed again. They would work at it until they got the pennies in my hand. They would jump down and run away, filled with glee and delight. Just kids. Just a game.

Sometimes when we come to God, we come for the pennies in his hand.

"Lord, I need a passing grade. Help me study."

"Lord, I need a job."

"Lord, my mother is ill."

We reach for the pennies. When God grants the request, we push the hand away.

More important than the pennies in God's hand is the hand of God itself. That's what prayer is about (Craig Brian Larson *750 Engaging Illustrations*. Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1993, p. 414).

Devotional Life

In the 1994 Winter Olympics, held in Norway, 23-year-old Tommy Moe of the United States won the gold on the men's downhill. It was a "beautifully controlled run," said William Oscar Johnson in *Sports Illustrated*, "on which he held tucks and thrust his hands forward in perfect form at places where others had stood up and flailed their arms."

After his victory, Tommy Moe explained his thought processes. "I kept it simple," he said, "focused on skiing, not on winning, not on where I'd place. I remembered to breathe – sometimes I don't."

The winner of the gold medal in the Olympics had to remember the most basic of basics: breathing! He kept it simple.

Likewise as we seek to have a strong walk with God, it doesn't take a rocket scientist to know where we win or lose. Spiritual strength depends on the basics. We need to make sure we're breathing in the things of the Spirit (Craig Brian Larson *750 Engaging Illustrations*. Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1993, p. 118).

O God We Have Had Enough

James David Ford, chaplain of the United States House of Representatives since 1979, told the following story about prayer ...:

In the spring of 1976 I sailed the Atlantic Ocean with a couple of friends. In a thirty-one-foot vessel, we sailed from Plymouth, England to New York – 5,992 miles. During the trip, we hit a real hurricane – some of the waves were thirty-five feet high – and frankly, I was scared. My father had said, "Don't go. You have five children. Wait till they're grown."

The hurricane went into its third day, and I thought of my father's words about the children. I thought, *Why am I out here? Was this thing that I thought was courageous really just foolhardy?*

The skies were black, and clouds were scudding by. I wanted to pray for God to stop the storm, but I felt guilty 'cause I'd voluntarily gotten into this. I didn't have to go across the ocean ...

Finally I came up with a marvelous prayer, seven words: "O God, I have had enough. Amen."

Within half an hour of that simple prayer, the sky in the west lifted like a screen in a theatre, and there was blue sky.

Was my prayer tied to the opening of the sky? I don't worry about it.

One thing is certain: simple, sincere prayers are sufficient (Craig Brian Larson *750 Engaging Illustrations*. Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1993, p. 419).

Always New

John Fischer writes in *Contemporary Christian Music*, "I have a bad habit. When my children tell me about something they've learned for the first time, I often act as if I knew that. Even worse, sometimes I tell them how the same thing happened to me years ago.

When my wife hears something "new" from the kids, her mouth drops open and her eyes widen. It's as if she has never heard this kind of thing before. The kids' faces brighten, and they feel as if they have actually enlightened their mother.

I used to think my wife was just acting and sooner or later the kids would find out and feel lied to. Then I realized it isn't an act at all. Though she may already have experienced what they are trying to tell her, she's never experienced it through them. Their personal "revelations" are entirely new.

It's the same with God. As all-knowing and sovereign as he is, I'm sure he's still eager to hear our prayers because he has never heard it quite the way we say it. We are all unique. We have our own signature attached to all we do and say. Our lives, our experiences, and our faith expressed to him are never old (Craig Brian Larson *750 Engaging Illustrations*. Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1993, p. 412).