
PERFECTING THE PRACTICE OF PRAYER

A couple years ago, a friend posted a picture of some of the Denver Broncos football players kneeling with their helmets off and praying before their game.

- He admirably did it to show the power of prayer because the Broncos won.
 - I asked if he believed they won because they prayed more than the Chargers, the team they defeated.
 - He said, "Yes."
 - I then suggested that the Seahawks, the 49ers, the Rams, and the Raiders must have prayed more than the Broncos in the preceding weeks, because the Broncos lost in all those games.
 - He replied, "Point taken."

Over 20 years ago, Pastor Rick Warren wrote the bestselling book, The Purpose Driven Life.

- One of the most valuable things about the book is the reinforcement of the daily practice of thinking about one's relationship with GOD.
 - Simply the discipline of daily reading Warren's study book, 40 Days of Purpose, helps people develop the habit of focusing on GOD each day.

There is great value in cultivating regular practices that nourish the life of faith.

- This is something JESUS sought for HIS followers in some of HIS teachings, including today's gospel passage.
 - Here, JESUS encourages the disciples to pray often with the promise that GOD always hears.
- Yet many feel that their prayers go unheard or unanswered.
- Many wonder: "Did I pray too much?" "Too little?"
 - "Did I not have enough faith?"
 - "Did I pray the wrong words?"

How often should one pray? And *how* should one pray?

- How might a person move closer to perfecting the practice of prayer?

Then JESUS told HIS disciples a parable to show them that they should always pray and not give up.

- And in this parable, JESUS gives us some valuable instructions.

"Pray more," JESUS is saying to them.

- Pray always.

Our worship services are designed to reflect this.

- The Prayer of the Day sets the theme for our focus of the morning.
- GOD'S Word is proclaimed; faith is confessed; prayers of intercession are made for ourselves and for the world.
- Communion is celebrated; prayers of thanksgiving are offered.
 - Our worship service is surrounded by and immersed in prayer throughout.

Nearly everything that happens during the day is an opportunity to pray.

- Prayers of concern; prayers of celebration; prayers of hope; prayers of fear; prayers of thanksgiving.

You can pray throughout the day.

- Pray for those who drive faster than you; pray for those who drive slower than you.
- Pray for those who annoy you; pray for those who make you happy.
- Pray for family members when they leave, or return, and while they are gone.
- Pray while preparing food, and before, during, and after eating.
- Pray at the start of the day and pray at the end of the day.
 - I remember reading a prayer that goes like this:
“Dear GOD, I thank YOU for this day. I thank YOU for keeping me from evil and from hurting others. I thank YOU for the good I’ve been able to do. I’m about to get out of bed now and ask that YOU go with me the rest of this day. Amen.”
- Pray more. Pray always.

JESUS is also saying, “Pray persistently.”

- In the gospel reading, the widow kept coming to the judge until he finally said, “I will grant her justice so that she will not wear me out!”

Prayer says something about your faith.

- Prayer is a sign of faith. After all, who prays to GOD when they don’t believe in GOD?
- Prayer is an act of faith. It says that you believe that GOD can do anything and will.
- Prayer is a witness to faith. It shows others who see and hear you praying that you believe.
- Prayer is a confession of faith. It says that GOD is the ONE to whom you can turn and the first ONE to whom you turn.

The widow needed the judge to act; she couldn’t resolve the situation on her own.

- And so, she was persistent in her pleas—her prayers—to the judge.

Faith calls for persistent prayers: pray until things are resolved.

- It doesn’t mean, though, that a certain number are needed.
 - *“And will not GOD bring about justice for HIS chosen ones who cry out to HIM day and night?”*
- Be persistent.

JESUS also encourages us, “Pray for justice.”

- The widow in the parable seeks justice, and her persistence results in justice for her.
 - JESUS then gives the assurance that, if an unjust judge will give justice, how much more so will our just GOD give to us.

This woman, this widow is a symbol of all the injustice in the world.

- There is so much that we can see and name, and often it feels that there is so little we can do.

I know of a church that, for a time would watch the news together each evening.

- And as the reports of injustice were announced, they would pray.
 - They prayed for the victims and the perpetrators.
 - They prayed for the situation and for resolution.
 - They prayed for protection for the people in the stories and for themselves.
 - They prayed for those who risked their lives and their reputation in order to help others.
- Nearly every news report we hear cries out for prayers for justice.

- And so, we can pray.
 - Pray for creation.
 - Pray for judges and juries.
 - Pray for the poor and those who suffer.
 - Pray for leaders and servants.
 - Pray for our congregation and for others and the work that we do for justice.
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So, here are three take away for this week:

1) Some things require not only prayer but action.

A man was caught in a flood.

- He prayed to GOD for help
 - A boat came by and they called to him to get in.
 - “No,” the man said, “GOD will save me.”
- The water continued to rise and the man climbed to the second floor of his house and he prayed again.
 - Another boat came by and called to him.
 - “No,” he said again, “GOD will rescue me.”
- The water rose further, and the man climbed to the roof.
 - He prayed more passionately to be saved.
 - A helicopter pause above him and let down a ladder, but the man waved them off.
 - “GOD will get me out of this,” he said.
- The water rose, the man drowned, and he went to heaven.
 - Before the throne of the ALMIGHTY, the man asked, “GOD, I believed and prayed for YOUR salvation. Why did YOU not rescue me?”
 - GOD replied, “Two boats and a helicopter. What more did you want?”

Some things require not just prayer but action.

2) Sometimes prayer needs modification.

- When I was in school and had test, and especially when I hadn't prepared well, I prayed for an “A.”
 - That prayer was rarely answered.
 - But when I changed my prayer, asking GOD to help me do my best, that prayer was always answered, and I always knew then what my best was based on my preparation.

You might pray for GOD to cure hunger, but then see no results.

- But if you alter that prayer to asking GOD to help you cure hunger, you will discover all kinds of doors opening for your service to those in need.
 - Sometimes prayers need modification
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3) Prayer will change you.

- You can only pray for something for so long before you find yourself looking for ways that you can take action.
 - You can pray for GOD to move a mountain, but if you pray long enough and hard enough, one day, you will wake up looking for a shovel and, in doing so, you become GOD'S answer to your prayer.

As I said earlier, prayer is an act of faith, but you know your faith has changed when, instead of just praying for rain, you come to pray with an umbrella in your hand.

Today, JESUS tells us, “Pray more. Pray persistently. Pray for justice.”