

Refuel Weekend Resources – Prayer Workshop by Judi Goudie

Spiritual Disciplines—Prayer

Submission, obedience, Presence

Martin Luther said, “To be a Christian without prayer is no more possible than to be alive without breathing.”

William Booth said, “Pray with all your might.”

E. G. White said of Prayer: “Prayer is the breath of the soul. It brings the heart into immediate contact with the wellspring of life, and strengthens the sinew and muscle of the religious experience.”

What is prayer? When do I apply it? How should it look?

Libraries are full of people’s opinions on prayer. Ultimately prayer is about our desire to meet with God; to fellowship with Him and to seek His will for our lives. How that looks will be different for all of us. It could be falling on our face before Him, kneeling beside our bed, sitting on a rock beside a lake or walking down a path and praying as we go.

A songwriter once responded to a question from the audience about how he composes songs. He said there are three aspects to his process: A quiet room, an empty page, and the question, “Is there something I should know?” Can this approach be applied to our prayer life?

A quiet room - anywhere we can focus on the Lord without distractions.

A blank sheet of paper - receptive mind!

A willingness to listen - Is there something I should know Lord? Speak to me by your spirit. Help me listen to your voice.

Throughout Jesus’ earthly ministry He spent time to be alone with God (Matthew 14:22-23). After Jesus had dismissed the crowd He went up on a mountainside to be alone with His father. How much more do we need a daily time of solitude to pour out our hearts to God? Do you have a daily pattern for prayer?

What is Prayer?

Prayer is a conversation with God. It is about what you and God are thinking and sharing. Simply put, prayer is the way you commune with God for the purpose of deepening your relationship with Him.

Prayer is not about the words you say but about a two-way communication with God. You will discover that words are not always necessary, and in those times of silence there is a deep connection with God.

A woman once said, "I'm going through such a rough time I don't feel close to God like I used to." Her friend responded "have you prayed about it?" She said, "I just don't feel like praying. I haven't prayed or read my bible in ages." The friend questioned, "Is it possible that the reason you don't feel as close to God is that you have left Him out of your problem, that you don't talk to Him about what you are going through?" Regular prayer brings peace even when God does not answer in the way we expect.

The Purpose of Prayer is Fellowship and Relationship

An Old Testament example of prayer is found in 2 Chronicles 20

Some men came to King Jehoshaphat and told him that a vast army was coming against them from Edom. Alarmed Jehoshaphat decided to pray and seek God's help. The people of Judah came from all over to pray. Jehoshaphat stood before them and he prayed to God. At the end of his prayer he said, "Lord, We don't know what to do, but our eyes are on you."

Right there before the people the Lord spoke through Jahaziel son of Zachariah and he said to them, "The Lord says to you, "Do not be afraid or discouraged because of this vast army, for the battle is not yours but God's."

King Jehoshaphat didn't wait for God to answer his prayer to celebrate, he told the people to have faith in the Lord and trust him and he would make them successful and they praised God even before going to battle.

King Jehosaphat faced a battle that he knew he could not win on his own. The first thing he did was call upon the Lord. Because he prayed and trusted God with the situation, God answered his prayer.

Prayer is Submission

What is submission? It is the action or fact of accepting or yielding to a superior force or to the will or authority of another person.

The world system says, "Do your own thing." God says, "Humble yourselves therefore under the mighty hand of God, that He may exalt you in due time" (I Pet.5: 6). The Scriptures are very clear about the fact that the Christian is not to be a self-seeking person, but a submissive person. As we submit to God, humbly seeking His face, realizing that we are nothing on our own, we give ourselves completely to Him. James 4:7 says, "Submit yourself then, to God. Resist the devil and he will flee from you."

Submission is not a popular word these days. However in order for us to have righteous lives, we MUST submit ourselves to God!

The only true way to rely on God is by truly resolving to trust God by drawing near Him through much prayer and bible study along with sacrificial living. Pride tempts us to live independently from God. We forget however that you cannot please God without faith. The promise is that

when we draw near to God, when we make our attempt to focus our easily distracted minds on God, no matter how feeble our attempts are, He will draw near to us.

Prayer is obedience.

The key to God's Heart is OBEDIENCE. Believers who desire to know God more walk in obedience to His revealed will.

Psalm 66:18 states, "If I had cherished sin in my heart, the LORD would not have listened."

We each need to consider our own lives and see if we are truly coming to God in prayer with the right attitude and the right relationship. How often are we fooling ourselves about God hearing and answering our prayers when sin is lying in our heart and we are unwilling to deal with it?

We need to do as the psalmist in Psalm 139:23 "Search me, O God, and know my heart; try me, and know my thoughts and see if there be any wicked way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting."

We should not despair that God has such stringent guidelines for approaching Him in prayer. We must never forget who we are speaking to when we pray. He has all rights to demand purity and holiness from us in our approach to Him in prayer. Do not let sin hinder your time with God in prayer.

James 4:3 says, "Ye ask and receive not, because ye ask amiss, that ye may consume it upon your lusts." James says we fight and scratch and struggle to get things but that is not the way to get it. PRAYER is the way our needs are met. James said that if you don't ask you will not get it.

The Bible tells us to pray about everything, "Don't worry about anything; instead, pray about everything. Tell God what you need, and thank Him for all He has done" (Philippians 4:6).

How do we pray? We pray through the Holy Spirit! Romans 8:26-27 tells us that the Holy Spirit helps us in our weakness. When we do not know what God wants us to pray the Holy Spirit prays for us with groaning's that cannot be expressed in words. And the Father who knows all hearts knows what the Spirit is saying, for the Spirit pleads for us believers in harmony with God's own will. The Holy Spirit helps us pray.

Ephesians 6:18 tells us to pray all the time. Does that seem like hard work to you? If we are praying all the time we wouldn't be able to do anything, would we? When we are told to pray all the time, this does not mean we stop doing things. It means we should always be thinking about God and talking to Him. We can pray for anything, at any time.

Prayer is Practising God's presence

Brother Lawrence, a 17th century Carmelite monk, practised the presence of God. He was converted at eighteen and entered the monastery in order to spend his life communing with God. Lawrence seemed to have but one gift: he practiced the presence of God in all that he did, and in

such a way that all around him also knew themselves to be in God's presence as well. Whenever he found himself in a mess, his only excuse was a simple complaint: "You see Lord," he would pray, "what a mess I make when you leave me to myself." Soon his fellow monks began coming to him to ask for his prayers and to consult him on questions about their own lives and faith. One by one, the fellow monks and priests learned that here was a man with a gift and skill more special than any they possessed. By his life's end, they had chosen him as their spiritual leader. Brother Lawrence went from being the dunce of the Abby to its Abbot, because of his remarkable ability to practice the presence of God.

What does it mean to "practice the presence of God?" Can we really be aware of His presence throughout the day and night? Experiencing God's presence doesn't apply just to those times when we are inside a church building. We should be aware of His presence throughout the day. But that awareness doesn't come "naturally." We need to know HOW to have that living, active relationship, staying in a spirit of worship, always aware that our Lord is with us. 1 Corinthians 3:16. "Do you not know that you yourselves are the temple of God and that the spirit of God lives in you?" If you stop and meditate upon this verse, it's an awe-inspiring concept. The Lord, Creator of the Universe, has chosen to live within us—to have a personal relationship with us! Isn't that awesome!

So, prayer is not a list of wants, it is not a duty I perform. Prayer is communion with God, sharing the desires of our heart. Prayer keeps the lines of communication open with God at all times. Prayer is submission, obedience and practising the presence of God.

"Real prayer," says Richard Foster, "is life creating and life changing". Prayer is about God changing us and the world in which we live to bring both into line with His kingdom of love. Prayer is about asking and listening, giving and receiving. It is perhaps **the** central discipline of the Christian life."