

PRAYER CHALLENGE DAY 1: PRAGMATICS OF PRAYER

This daily supplement is meant to help us “get there” on our prayer goals we discussed yesterday. As we joined the first church in that upper room, we found them, “constantly devoting themselves to prayer” for that period of 10 days after Christ’s ascension and before the Spirit’s arrival.

Here’s the basic bottom-line—I want to grow in my prayer life, and I want you to also! God’s heart to us in Jeremiah 33:3 ought to stir our anticipation of God’s power released through prayer.

*“Call to Me and I will answer you, and I will tell you great and mighty things, which you do not know.”
(Whoa, and wow!!)*

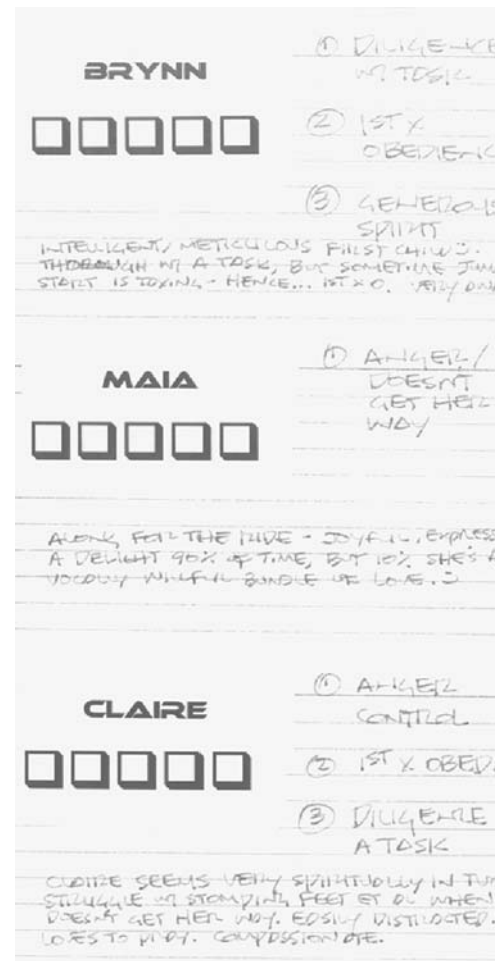
In yesterday’s membership class, we reviewed the factoid that “disciple” shares the same root as “discipline.” In other words, becoming a true follower doesn’t come without some intentional tactics. As Paul says in 1 Timothy 4:7, “Discipline yourselves for the purpose of godliness.”

And part of “getting it done” consistently is having a routine and/or regular place for prayer.

Certainly we’re not about boxing your prayers in...as 1 Thessalonians says, “pray without ceasing.” (By the way, that’s an entire verse if you’re looking to show off your Bible memory with your small group!)

Some Ideas to Consider:

1. Get a list of paper and inventory all the items that God might have you in prayer about. Divide the list into either 7 equal sections, or into 7 obvious categories.
2. Take five or seven 3x5 index cards and label the cards, one for each day of the week. Take your potential prayer list and transfer each item onto the appropriate card. I took a 3x5 for each of my kiddos and noted the primary character issues that I thought needed prayer and attention. I also included a summary of how God had made them and was refining them. This can help us turn our mentality toward an offensive battle, and not simply or merely a reactionary one—where things get dealt with because we’re “forced” to, instead of having chosen to do so.
3. Put the card in the path of one of your normal routines.
 - ➔ By the coffee pot. Turn on the pot, and during the brew time, voila, prayer time.
 - ➔ Put them next to the mirror or vanity to pull out each morning as you’re doing your routine. Every time you pull out the razor guys, pull out the prayers. Ladies, when you apply mascara, apply prayer too! If you’ve got a commute of even 10 minutes, redeem that space and time by praying. And don’t be afraid to go verbal. I’ve found that praying out loud in my car helps me stay focused. (And it’s not bad prep for those growing in the area of public praying—some of us need to take a step toward that in our small groups, etc.) Remember in Acts the church “devoted itself to prayer” (Acts 2:42).



➔ Maybe if you're a "shift worker" there are regular breaks you can use to lift those needs to the Lord. Bottom-line, sometimes it is more effective to add prayer to an already occurring regular routine than to try and carve or "find" more time out of an already busy life. Again, I'd never want to sell the Lord short by trying to get you to go minimal—but if ain't getting done now, small victories are more helpful than grandiose failures.

4. Get a tool that will help guide your prayers. Christian high school seniors are oftengiven Oswald Chambers "My Utmost for His Highest"—an outstanding daily to focus anyone's attention and prayertime upward. Grab a copy or get it online at numerous sites, such as <http://www.rbc.org/utmost>.

One prayer guide that I've LOVED is John Baillie's *Diary of Private Prayer*. He was a Scottish teacher and theologian and wrote in a manner that, though old, is fresh compared to our words and phrases. I've attached a copy of one of his entries. There is a morning and evening reading for each day of the month. So while this isn't to replace your own prayer, I find it kindles prayer—giving a wide array of items to consider as we grow in our prayers. (You'll find used copies on Amazon starting at \$3.50.)

So...I'll stop writing and let's start praying!

Together for Christ,

JOEL

EIGHTH DAY

EVENING

O GOD, the Father of all mankind, I would bring before Thee to-night the burden of the world's life. I would join myself to the great scattered company of those who, in every corner of every land, are now crying out to Thee in their need. Hear us, O God, and look in pity upon our manifold necessities, since Thou alone art able to satisfy all our desire.

Especially do I commend to Thy holy keeping:
All who to-night are far from home and friends:
All who to-night must lie down hungry or cold:
All who suffer pain:
All who are kept awake by anxiety or suspense:
All who are facing danger:
All who must toil or keep watch while others sleep.
Give to them all, I pray, such a sense of Thy presence with them as may turn their loneliness into comfort and their trouble into peace.

O most loving God, who in the Person of Thy Son Jesus Christ didst manifest Thy love to man by relieving all manner of suffering and healing all manner of disease, grant Thy blessing, I pray, to all who in any corner of the world are serving in Christ's name:
All ministers of the gospel of Christ:
All social workers:
All missionary workers abroad:
All doctors and nurses who faithfully tend the sick.
Accomplish through them Thy great purpose of goodwill to men, and grant them in their own hearts the joy of Christ's most real presence.

And to me also, as I lie down, grant, O gracious Father, the joy of a life surrendered to Christ's service and the peace of sin forgiven through the power of His Cross. Amen.



PRAYER CHALLENGE DAY 2

STRIVE FOR THE SPECIFIC

One of the typical traps we face when trying to turn up the heat on our prayer life is the lack of specifics. But to take it to the next level, we've got to get beyond vanilla.

"What do you mean?"

Y'know, the "God bless my marriage" prayer. I'll give you the fact that it's short and to the point, and that you've just gotten another checkmark in the challenge...but I think that is far from the potency our prayer might really have. So what's the key?

Specifics. It will not only grow the length of time we'd take in prayer...but also the depth.

A better prayer? "God, I need to learn to be more thoughtful with my bride. Help me please Lord notice, would you prompt me, to see those even small things I might do to demonstrate my love." Or maybe, "Lord, I find myself being especially critical of how my husband is acting. If there is something in me that is making me critical, Lord help me see that...I know you are so patient with me...more than I deserve. Let the love and grace and mercy you extend to me be reflected in my interactions."

The more specific the prayer, the more specific the answer.

Elijah, among many other biblical characters, gives us a glimpse into the power of specific prayers. In the duel with the 450 prophets of Baal, God answers in some very specific ways licking up the altar with fire, even after it was doused with water (1 Kings 18:24-28). In another situation, Elijah prayed that it would not rain and it didn't. He prayed again and, after a 3-1/2 year drought, it rained (1 Kings 18:41-45). Whether it be David or Moses or Paul...God's Word models ministry encounters characterized by the details.

Here are a few "specific" jump starts...

- Q: Do you have regular specific prayers for your children/family members. Not "Lord, bless Jake." But "Lord help me teach Jake self-control." "Lord, how do I do that?" "When will I?"
- Q: Is there a vice/habit/addiction that is sin or compromises God's best for our lives (Gal. 5:13)? Do you smoke? Overeat? Overspend? Have you got a critical spirit? If you drink, do you crave it? Are you in control of it? And the list goes on. Get at the details.
- Q: Is there a key life relationship in crisis? How's your marriage? If it's not in crisis, what's the next step or stage of growth? If it is, what's the next step in growth and maturity? (*Jill and I just saw "Fireproof," the movie on Sunday night. I went reluctantly, but left very thankful I'd seen it—a great reminder about the importance of sacrifice and service to one another in marriage.*)
- Q: Where's the next hill you'd take in your walk with Christ? Maybe it is the simple goal of consistent prayer—prayer with a spouse, perhaps.

And what was the point again? Be specific. That will take our prayers beyond the flippant exercise and into the realm of John 14:12 and Jeremiah 33:3. What do you say? Day 2...keep it going!!

Together for Christ,

JDEL



PRAYER CHALLENGE DAY 3

FROM COWARDLY TO CONFIDENTLY

“God’s got enough on His plate that He doesn’t really need or have time to take my prayer requests. Right?” Wrong!

“Well, then...um...there are more spiritual people in line in front of me. God probably takes His calls in order of how holy is the petitioner’s heart. And I’ve got a ways to go before I’m a Peter or Paul.”

Wrong.

“Maybe my requests really aren’t that big a deal to Him. In the scope of activities, events, and crises occurring on planet earth does God truly care about my new job or my bills or my math grade?”

Listen, any number of reasons could stand in the way of the welcome we’ve been granted—could cause us to retreat into a cowardly posture for prayer instead of the bold one we’re given in God’s Word.

And the counter point? Hebrews 4:14-16. This is a keeper—underline it, memorize it, meditate upon it...take advantage of it. In it, God gives us hope...and as it relates to prayer, it reminds us of the help we have through Christ.

“Therefore, since we have a great high priest who has passed through the heavens, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold fast our confession. For we do not have a high priest who cannot sympathize with our weaknesses, but One who has been tempted in all things as we are, yet without sin. Therefore let us draw near with confidence to the throne of grace, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need.”

As we’d unpack this passage, we find four great reminders for day three of our prayer challenge. We...

- 1 PRAY WITH A SETTLED CONFESSION** (V. 14)
And what’s that confession? Notice the present tense truth, “since we have a great high priest.” Not we “will have” or “might hope to have” a high priest, but “we have.” Hold fast, Hebrews says—don’t let go of the great news we’ve been given. Remember, as we’ve discussed the transition that is taking place in Acts, Christ’s work as our sacrifice is “finished” (John 19:30), and He now is seated on the throne “constantly making intercession for the saints” (Hebrews 7:25). It is settled.
- 2 PRAY TO A SYMPATHETIC COUNSELOR** (V. 15)
Christ understands our frame—He emptied Himself and took on flesh (Philippians 2:7-8). He faced the things we face, “yet was without sin.” And the amazing take-away from Hebrews 4? He then/now CAN sympathize with our weakness. Too often we let Satan use our failures or weaknesses to keep us away from the very place we must run when we’re struggling...to the throne. God is not some grumpy guy waiting to unleash a bolt of lightning on your life but one who says, “Come unto me” (Matthew 11:28) and “cast your cares upon Me” (1 Peter 5:7). Wow...
- 3 PRAY WITH A STRONG CONFIDENCE** (V. 16)
And this is the part I LOVE!! Right now, wherever you’re reading this—God is speaking these words, His words to you... “let us.” Let us what? Draw near. Don’t stay distant, don’t let anything distract or deter you from coming to the Lord in prayer. And notice now this fantastic truth, we are to draw near with...drum roll...confidence. Not arrogance, but confidence in the offer that’s been extended to God’s kids, “for such we are” (1 John 3:1).
- 4 PRAY AND RECEIVE SUFFICIENT CARE** (V. 16)
Before the throne of grace, then, and not on our own, is where we ultimately find what we need most—the grace and mercy of God. Question again...when do we find this grace and mercy? “In time of need.” Don’t judge the worthiness of your need, just bring it to God with a sincere and humble heart. Bring it to Him and let Him decide how to handle it, how He’d help. In *time of need*.

No excuses—only amazing truth about what awaits those who turn to the Lord regularly through prayer. Loved ones, let us lay hold of the riches that are ours through Christ (Philippians 4:19)! Let’s come not as cowards, but with confidence.

Together for Christ,

JOEL



So how's the revised prayer gig going? Found a time or spot to pray? Trying anything new to take the next step toward something more? Keep it going—remember, it's the only thing recorded by Scripture that the disciples asked Christ to teach them about. Not, "How does one perform cool miracles?" or "How do you go about changing water to wine?" but "Lord, teach us how to pray" (Luke 11:1)...

PRAYER CHALLENGE DAY 4 PART OF WHAT MAKES PRAYER HARD

It is October, and so in many ways what makes maintaining prayer difficult, what can delay our answers, is all around us—the demonic. No, I'm not trying to spook you or give undeserved attention to our adversary, but would remind us...

"For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the powers, against the world forces of this darkness, against the spiritual forces of wickedness in the heavenly places" (Ephesians 6:12).

While we only have hints at what is truly happening in the heavenlies, Daniel, chapter 10, offers some insight. After praying about the needs of Israel, an answer is immediately sent. But when God's messenger finally arrives with the response, 21 days have passed. The messenger is Gabriel, and his description reveals the battle that can delay God's answers to our prayers.

"Do not be afraid, Daniel, for from the first day that you set your heart on understanding this and on humbling yourself before your God, your words were heard, and I have come in response to your words. But the prince of the kingdom of Persia was withstanding me for twenty-one days; then behold, Michael, one of the chief princes, came to help me, for I had been left there with the kings of Persia" (Daniel 10:12-13).

Notice, Daniel's prayers were heard, "from the first day." And so it wasn't that God didn't hear or was hesitant to respond, it is that our battle isn't simply against what's seen, but what is unseen. Our response? As Paul goes on to say in Ephesians, chapter six, we are to put on the full armor of God—we are to do battle through prayer, to learn the lessons of persistence over time. Remember the woman before the judge in Luke 18:1-8? That passage offers a lesson not on the Lord's non-responsive nature, but on the character of consistent prayer He longs to see among His people.

When we pray we are engaging in an intense battle—we are engaging the battle between two kingdoms. And prayer is our vital link from the front-lines...it is the connection we not only must make, but keep. I like how John Piper puts it:

"Life is war. That's not all it is. But it is always that. Our weakness in prayer is owing largely to our neglect of this truth. Prayer is primarily a wartime walkie-talkie for the mission of the church as it advances against the powers of darkness and unbelief. God has given us prayer as a wartime walkie-talkie so that we can call headquarters for everything we need as the kingdom of Christ advances in the world. Prayer gives us the significance of front-line forces, and gives God the glory of a limitless Provider. It is not surprising that prayer malfunctions when we try to make it a domestic intercom to call upstairs for more comforts in the den."

Some of us have perhaps been praying a long time about an issue, a topic, a relationship...keep it going! Some have been asking for God to save a family member, bring back a wandering prodigal, open a door, renew a marriage...keep it going. God hears and answers. Just remember, too, that His answers are always more wise than our requests—sometimes there is a reason for letting us learn some key lesson over time. Perseverance? Laboring in prayer? Contentment? Humility? Faithfulness?

As you see the ghouls littering front yards and aisles at nearly every store, remember, "That's right...our battle isn't merely against flesh and blood," and press in to prayer.

Together for Christ & His Kingdom,

JDEL



PRAYER CHALLENGE DAY 5 "SHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHH"

Although we've all experienced it, parents probably know the following phrase particularly well:

"Is anyone even listening to me!"

It's frustrating when you're trying to have a conversation or share something—only to discover—no one is listening. And no surprise, God isn't really fired up either when His kids don't listen. We may say, "I hear you." But hearing and listening are different animals.

Throughout the Scriptures, we find God chiding His people because they weren't listening. They heard Him, but they didn't truly understand or act upon His Word.

"Hear, O My people, and I will admonish you;
O Israel, if you would listen to Me!
Psalm 81:1

"They have ears, but they do not hear."
Psalm 135:18a

Although we typically think of prayer as us saying stuff to God, prayer is communication, and communication is two-way. But that seems to beg the question, "Are you saying, setting me up, suggesting that God may speak to me/us?"

Yup.

"Maybe this Acts thing, this Holy Spirit study has gone too far?" Is that what you're saying? 😊 God has not only spoken, but continues to speak through His living and active Word. And that's the "listen" part of prayer. We read and meditate upon His Word, praying about what the Spirit might be prompting within our spirit—we are allowing the Lord to "speak" to us as we'd listen for understanding.

Now therefore, my sons, listen to me,
And pay attention to the words of my mouth.
Proverbs 7:24

God is speaking, through His Spirit, through His Word. Question...are we listening? Have you ever been around someone who has a hard time not talking? Sometimes, I wonder if that's what we're like when we're praying.

I remember being struck by one of my seminary profs who would often pray with long pauses in between his words. "Professor Grudem." "Yes." "What are you doing?" And the answer? "Listening." He wasn't doing what he was doing so someone would ask the question, he was doing it to be sure he was not going one-way in his communication with God.

So...how about it?

I've written enough—I'm stopping to listen 😊!

Looking forward to Sunday!

JDEL

