

Discipleship

Study 3: Prayer

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The Message

In other Bible studies we touch upon the subject of prayer in which we focus on specific prayers prayed by various people:

- a. Daniel's prayer in Daniel 9:1-19
- b. Hagar's 'prayers' in Genesis 16:1-15 & Genesis 21:8-20
- c. Jesus and the Lord's Prayer in Matthew 6:5-15 & Luke 11:1-4.

All these prayers are very different in both content and character; and when we study other prayers found in Scripture we soon realise the scope for creativity in prayer born from knowing God's heart. A healthy prayer life is a vital aspect of discipleship and growth, which is something the disciples recognised when they were moved to say to Jesus *"Lord, teach us to pray, as John taught his disciples."*¹

We can sometimes become disheartened in our prayer lives, and at these times it is important to remember that Jesus tells us that those who *"drink of the water that I will give them will never be thirsty. The water that I will give will become in them a spring of water gushing up to eternal life."*². We need to let our heart be moved by Scripture and spend time meditating on God's Word, declaring its truth in our lives.

What is prayer?

Prayer is many things:

- i. A declaration of truth
- ii. At the heart of relationship and intimacy
- iii. Knowing God's heart
- iv. A lifeline to the Lord
- v. A vehicle for confession
- vi. Worship & praise
- vii. A way to restore balance through humility
- viii. Drawing close to the Lord
- ix. A request for God to act from an open hand of need and hope
- x. Intercession
- xi. Joyful and continuous (1 Thessalonians 5:17);



Prayer is interlinked with faith, hope and love.

The evidence to support the fact that prayer is real, substantial and works is insurmountable.

¹ Luke 11:1b

² John 4:14

Jesus is the foundation stone or heart of discipleship. He is the “*pioneer and perfecter of our faith*.”³ His practice in prayer was:

- in secret, away from the crowds (Luke 5:15-16)
- in conflict, anticipating his death (John 12:27-28)
- in thanksgiving, upon return of the 72 (Luke 10:21)
- in intercession, for the disciples (John 17:6-19)
- in communion, at the transfiguration (Luke 9:28)
- in choices, choosing the disciples (Luke 6:12-16);

Don't you think it exciting that even Jesus as God still needed to pray?

Unanswered prayer

When we pray is our heart's desire to do God's will, or do we have our own private agenda? What is it that really matters – that God's will be done? As Christians we can struggle with unanswered prayer, but we have to try to understand why our prayers can remain unanswered:

- We ask with the wrong motives (James 4:3)
- We are not in obedience to God (1 John 3:22)
- We are not praying in faith (Matthew 21:22, John 16:24, Matthew 17:14-22)
- We pray in complacency (Proverbs 1:32)
- God answers in a way that we do not expect or understand (Isaiah 55:8)
- God can answer 'Yes, No, or Not Yet'
- We do not listen (James 1:19)
- We have forgotten that prayer is two way!!

Personal and Corporate prayer

We are told in Scripture to “*go into your room and shut the door and pray to your Father who is in secret; and your Father who sees in secret will reward you*”⁴, which concerns our personal and intimate prayer lives with God. Yet we are also told in Scripture the importance of corporate prayer (Matthew 18:19-20). We must also remember to put on the “*Put on the whole armor of God, so that you may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil*.”⁵

We know that at the end of the day God's will will be done no matter what we do – but His will may unfold in different ways through our prayers. For example, think how Abraham moved God's heart in Genesis 18:16-33.

Questions

1. Why do we pray? What are our motives?
2. Why is it important to know God's heart when we pray?
3. What can we learn from looking at what Jesus teaches on prayer?
4. From our own experience of things we have prayed for have we ever known prayer to be unanswered?
5. Whether prayer is personal or corporate, it is always powerful. Why is this?

³ Hebrews 12:2

⁴ Matthew 6:5-8

⁵ Ephesians 6:10-20

6. How do we know if we are praying correctly?