

# WHY DO WE STRUGGLE TO PRAY?

Dowlen Road, January 5, 2009 PM

## INTRODUCTION:

- A. It is an odd thing that so many disciples struggle to pray.
  - 1. I don't mean to be critical when I say that. The truth is I've struggled too. I get busy and fail to pray as I should. When I think about that, I feel guilty and regret my neglect.
  - 2. Over the years I've had a lot of Christians confess similar struggles. In our survey last fall many of you confided that you have struggled with prayer and wanted help with it.
  - 3. But the fact that many of us wrestle with this doesn't make it any less odd.
- B. Think about it:
  - 1. God has given us this awesome privilege (Psalm 34:15-18). All we have to do is turn our hearts to the Lord and pour out our adoration, our frustrations, our fears, our needs...and He hears (v. 15). But He does not simply hear. The Lord responds to our prayers and acts in our behalf (vs. 17-18). Prayer is a way of accessing the power of God for our lives. It is an amazing privilege. We can have a conversation with the Creator of the universe any time we choose; and we can do so with the confidence that He will hear us!
  - 2. Do you see now why I suggested that it is an odd thing that we struggle so mightily to pray? Prayer ought to be something we enthusiastically embrace as an integral part of our lives. How odd that it has become instead the source of guilt and regret.
  - 3. This must surely frustrate our heavenly Father who has extended the great privilege. However, it seems that many of us are just as frustrated by the situation.
- C. So why do we struggle to pray?
  - 1. If we are to develop a meaningful habit of prayer, then we need to tackle some of the barriers that get in our way.
  - 2. This question, then, serves as a good starting point for our study. Why do we struggle to pray? What are some of the things that hinder you?
  - 3. Some people say...

## BARRIER ONE: *I'm just too busy to pray!*

- A. Of all the factors that contribute to the neglect of prayer, this is the one that disciples cite most frequently.
  - 1. It comes as no surprise that this is a problem. Our lives are full.
    - a. We work. We commute. We have all kinds of activities going on in the evenings and on weekends.
    - b. Even the time in between is filled with cell phone calls, text messaging.
    - c. Then there is the radio, the IPOD, the TV, the game system, and the internet that fills whatever undistracted moments we might have during the day.
  - 2. While not necessarily sinful, these distractions impact our prayers.
    - a. They work in concert with each other to rob us of the time and solitude we need to pray.
    - b. A meaningful prayer habit requires time and solitude so that we can talk with our Father. Jesus understood this (Luke 5:15-16).
    - c. Often we are not praying because our busy lives lack these elements.
  - 3. The example of Jesus also provides the solution. Even though He was busy, He created the opportunity to pray. We must do the same thing.
- B. But I'm not sure we are truly getting to the core of our problem.
  - 1. It is true that many find it hard to find time to pray...on most days.
    - a. However, there are moments in all of our lives when we have no trouble finding time for prayer.
    - b. When the weatherman announces that there is a big storm headed directly for southeast Texas, do we struggle to find the time to pray?
    - c. Even with all of the work and confusion of an evacuation, when we fear for our families, our brethren, our property, somehow we find the time to talk to God and seek His help.
  - 2. Why is it that we can find the time at moments like these, but not at other times? Perhaps it's not really about time. Let's come back to that...

## BARRIER TWO: *I don't know what to say when I pray.*

- A. I think new Christians struggle with this one, especially if they come from a non-religious background and have never really prayed before.
  - 1. We can't see God, and yet we are trying to carry on a conversation with Him. This can be kind of awkward for someone who has never done it before. We can find it difficult to know what to say.
  - 2. But this isn't just something new Christians struggle with. Sometimes even seasoned disciples can fall into the trap of praying by rote – just mindlessly reciting the same things over and over again. Obviously this does not please our God who desires to have a conversation with us; who wants us to pour out our hearts. But when you start trying to do that – to really talk to God, it can be a bit awkward at first.
  - 3. Sometime we need the kind of help that Jesus' disciples requested (Luke 11:1).
- B. However, even in addressing this I'm still not convinced that we are getting to the core of our struggle. I'm not sure the real issue is about finding the words to say to God.
  - 1. There may be times when we struggle with this, but there are also times when it is no struggle at all.
  - 2. When the announcement is posted that my company will be cutting the workforce by 25% and I'm living from paycheck to paycheck, suddenly it isn't so difficult to find the words.
  - 3. Perhaps the problem, then, is not really with finding the right words. Perhaps it is something else. Maybe we need to dig deeper.

### **BARRIER THREE: *I don't feel worthy to pray.***

- A. Let's be clear that not everyone who prays has the right to expect that God will hear and respond (Psalm 34:16; 66:16-19).
  - 1. If I'm defying God's will for my life and making the choice to sin, I have no right to expect that God will respond when I call upon Him.
  - 2. But that's not always the problem with this barrier. Even some who are striving to please the Lord sometimes feel unworthy to pray.
  - 3. There are some elements of right thinking in the hearts of these people.
    - a. They have a sense of the awesome privilege it is to talk to God.
    - b. They also have a sense of their littleness before God (Psalm 8:3-4). Who am I to be talking to the Creator of the universe? But notice what the Psalmist goes on to say (vs. 5-6). While it is appropriate to have a sense of our littleness before God, we must also appreciate that we are nonetheless special to God and loved by God.
    - c. While prayer is not a right that we can demand, it is nonetheless a privilege that has been graciously extended to us, whether we feel worthy or not (Philippians 4:6-7).
- B. But again, I still wonder if we have really reached the core of our problem.
  - 1. There may be times when we struggle to pray because of a sense of our unworthiness.
  - 2. But there are also times when this is not a struggle at all. When you get the phone call that they've found a spot on the x-ray of your little granddaughter, we don't stop and think: "Do I really feel worthy to pray?" "Can I really find the right words?" "Do I have the time?" Whatever inadequacies I may struggle with just evaporate!
  - 3. So perhaps it isn't just an issue of our feelings of unworthiness. Perhaps there is more to it. Why is it that we can so easily pray at the moment of crisis, but struggle so much the rest of the time? Perhaps it is because the rest of the time, when I am not in a crisis...

### **BARRIER FOUR: *I don't really feel the need for God.***

- A. Think of the feelings we have when afflicted with a crisis (sick grandchild, approaching storm).
  - 1. There is fear at times like these. We ponder all the devastating possibilities.
  - 2. But there is also a feeling of helplessness. I'm being confronted with something beyond my control. I can't fix it. I need help.
  - 3. At times like these – when we are afraid and helpless – we instinctively turn to God. We pray.
- B. The problem is that, when we are not in the middle of a crisis, we don't feel that need for God.
  - 1. For most of us, this is how life is most of the time.
    - a. Most don't live every day with the fear that some problem beyond their control is about to devastate their lives.
    - b. In fact, we have it pretty good in this country. Most do not worry about where the next meal will come from and where to sleep tonight.
    - c. Most have all our needs well supplied and many of our wants as well.
  - 2. However, this great blessing can have a down side. We can begin feeling self-sufficient and less dependant on our God. Prayer becomes an inevitable casualty of this arrogant mindset.
- C. Let's be plain: one of the essential elements of a meaningful prayer life is proper sense of my daily dependence on God.
  - 1. Like the old song says, "I need thee, oh I need Thee. Every hour I need Thee." We need God every day.
  - 2. If for no other reason, I need to be communicating with God every day so I can nurture my relationship with Him.
    - a. Jesus was constantly communicating with His Father (Luke 5:16).
    - b. He urged us to do the same (Colossians 4:2).
    - c. We cannot have a relationship without communication.
  - 3. Beyond this, I need to talk to God every day because I need Him.
    - a. Every day I have to battle Satan (I Peter 5:8). Every day I face the potential of being spiritually devoured. I need God to be with me.
    - b. Every day I send my kids out to face this great enemy. I need God's help to get them ready.
    - c. Every day I wage a battle for lost souls (Matthew 28:18-19). As I reach out to the lost, there is literally an eternal crisis that breaks out. I'm doing something that makes a difference in where men and women will spend eternity. I need God's help (v. 20).
    - d. Every day holds the potential for growth and maturing in Christ. I need God's help to become the person He wants me to be.
    - e. Every day I face choices, some of which can profoundly impact my life. I need God's help.
  - 4. I fear that, at the core of our struggle to pray, is the absence of this sense of how much we need God. But the truth is we have simply been deluded by our arrogance. I need Him all the time (Psalm 73:25-28).

### **CONCLUSION:**

Isn't it amazing that we serve a God who longs to be near to us, who wants to be part of our lives every day? Have you allowed Him to draw near to you? If you are harboring sin in your life, you're keeping Him away. Why not get rid of this terrible barrier and give God the place He deserves in your life.

- David A. Banning