

Christian Norms

Prayer

Prayer—Why?

1. Prayer is a Privilege

- a. *Let us then with confidence draw near to the throne of grace, that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need. Hebrews 4:16*
- b. "What comes into our minds when we think about God is the most important thing about us." A.W. Tozer
- c. "How God thinks of us is not only more important, but infinitely more important. Indeed, how we think of Him is of no importance except in so far as it is related to how He thinks of us." C.S. Lewis
- d. *Formerly, when you did not know God, you were enslaved to those that by nature are not gods. 9 But now that you have come to know God, or rather to be known by God, how can you turn back again to the weak and worthless elementary principles of the world...Galatians 4:8-9*
- e. *For the eyes of the Lord are on the righteous, and his ears are open to their prayer. But the face of the Lord is against those who do evil. 1 Peter 3:12*

2. Prayer is Normative

- a. *"And when you pray, you must not be like the hypocrites. For they love to stand and pray in the synagogues and at the street corners, that they may be seen by others. Truly, I say to you, they have received their reward. 6 But when you pray, 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.7 "And when you pray, do not heap up empty phrases as the Gentiles do, for they think that they will be heard for their many words. 8 Do not be like them, for your Father knows what you need before you ask him. Matthew 6:5-8*

3. Prayer is Faith-filled

- a. *And without faith it is impossible to please him, for whoever would draw near to God must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who seek him. Hebrews 11:6*
- b. "I have so much to do today that I'm going to need to spend three hours in prayer in order to be able to get it all done." Martin Luther

4. Prayer is Humility

- a. *I am the vine; you are the branches. Whoever abides in me and I in him, he it is that bears much fruit, for apart from me you can do nothing. 6 If anyone does not abide in me he is thrown away like a branch and withers; and the branches are gathered, thrown into the fire, and burned. 7 If you abide in me, and my words abide in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be done for you. John 15:5-7*

5. Prayer is Powerful

- a. *Therefore, confess your sins to one another and pray for one another, that you may be healed. The prayer of a righteous person has great power as it is working. James 5:16*
- b. *About that time Herod the king laid violent hands on some who belonged to the church. 2 He killed James the brother of John with the sword, 3 and when he saw that it pleased the Jews, he proceeded to arrest Peter also. This was during the days of Unleavened Bread. 4 And when he had seized him, he put him in prison, delivering him over to four squads of soldiers to guard him, intending after the Passover to bring him out to the people. 5 So Peter was kept in prison, but earnest prayer for him was made to God by the church. Acts 12:1-5*
Verses 6-11 recall how God sent an angel to rescue Peter from prison. When he realized this, he went to the house of Mary, the mother of John whose other name was Mark, where many were gathered together and were praying. Acts 12:12

6. Prayer is Perspective

- a. *Let your reasonableness be known to everyone. The Lord is at hand; 6 do not be anxious about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus. Philippians 4:6-7*

Prayer—How?

1. Prioritize Prayer

- a. *Now as they went on their way, Jesus[d] entered a village. And a woman named Martha welcomed him into her house. 39 And she had a sister called Mary, who sat at the Lord's feet and listened to his teaching. 40 But Martha was distracted with much serving. And she went up to him and said, "Lord, do you not care that my sister has left me to serve alone? Tell her then to help me." 41 But the Lord answered her, "Martha, Martha, you are anxious and troubled about many things, 42 but one thing is necessary. Mary has chosen the good portion, which will not be taken away from her." Luke 10:38-42*

2. Plan to Pray

- a. *When Daniel knew that the document had been signed, he went to his house where he had windows in his upper chamber open toward Jerusalem. He got down on his knees three times a day and prayed and gave thanks before his God, as he had done previously. 11 Then these men came by agreement and found Daniel making petition and plea before his God. Daniel 6:10-11*
- b. *"Failing to plan is planning to fail."*
- c. *"Failing to plan to pray is planning to fail to pray."*

3. Pattern your Prayer Time

- a. *Pray then like this:
"Our Father in heaven,
hallowed be your name.
10 Your kingdom come,
your will be done,
on earth as it is in heaven.
11 Give us this day our daily bread,
12 and forgive us our debts,
as we also have forgiven our debtors.
13 And lead us not into temptation,
but deliver us from evil. Matthew 6:9-13*

Use Acronyms:

Adoration
Confession
Thanksgiving
Supplication

Praise
Repent
Ask
Yield

4. Pray Scripture

- a. *And this is the confidence that we have toward him, that if we ask anything according to his will he hears us. 15 And if we know that he hears us in whatever we ask, we know that we have the requests that we have asked of him. 1 John 5:14-15*

5. Participate in Corporate Prayer

- a. *And they devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers. Acts 2:42*

6. Progress in Prayer

- a. *Epaphras, who is one of you, a servant of Christ Jesus, greets you, always struggling* on your behalf in his prayers, that you may stand mature and fully assured in all the will of God. Colossians 4:12*

*Other translations translate "struggling" as "wrestling in prayer," "laboring fervently," and "striving earnestly." The Greek word is "agonizomai" which has to do with intense struggling, as if engaged in an athletic contest or warfare. Our English word "agonizing" can be traced back to this word in Greek.

7. Persist in Prayer

- a. *Rejoice always. Pray without ceasing, give thanks in all circumstances; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you. Do not quench the Spirit. 1 Thessalonians 5:16-19*

8. Persevere in Prayer

- a. *And he told them a parable to the effect that they ought always to pray and not lose heart. 2 He said, "In a certain city there was a judge who neither feared God nor respected man. 3 And there was a widow in that city who kept coming to him and saying, 'Give me justice against my adversary.' 4 For a while he refused, but afterward he said to himself, 'Though I neither fear God nor respect man, 5 yet because this widow keeps bothering me, I will give her justice, so that she will not beat me down by her continual coming.'" 6 And the Lord said, "Hear what the unrighteous judge says. 7 And will not God give justice to his elect, who cry to him day and night? Will he delay long over them? 8 I tell you, he will give justice to them speedily. Nevertheless, when the Son of Man comes, will he find faith on earth?" Luke 18:1-8*

Fasting

Fasting—Why?

1. Fasting is Normative

- a. *6 “And when you fast, do not look gloomy like the hypocrites, for they disfigure their faces that their fasting may be seen by others. Truly, I say to you, they have received their reward. 17 But when you fast, anoint your head and wash your face, 18 that your fasting may not be seen by others but by your Father who is in secret. And your Father who sees in secret will reward you. Matthew 6:16-18.*
- b. But let not your fasts be with the hypocrites; Matthew 6:16 for they fast on the second and fifth day of the week; but fast on the fourth day and the Preparation (Friday).
Didache (The Teaching)—Ancient Christian document.

2. Intensify our Prayers

- a. *I ate no delicacies, no meat or wine entered my mouth, nor did I anoint myself at all, for the full three weeks. Daniel 10:3*
- b. *And when they had appointed elders for them in every church, with prayer and fasting they committed them to the Lord in whom they had believed. Acts 14:23*

3. Increase our hunger for God.

- a. *Therefore, I tell you, do not be anxious about your life, what you will eat or what you will drink, nor about your body, what you will put on. Is not life more than food, and the body more than clothing? Matthew 6:25*

4. Put our flesh in its place.

- a. *All things are lawful for me,” but not all things are helpful. “All things are lawful for me,” but I will not be dominated by anything. 13 “Food is meant for the stomach and the stomach for food”—and God will destroy both one and the other. The body is not meant for sexual immorality, but for the Lord, and the Lord for the body. 1 Cor. 12-13*

Fasting—How?

1. **Select the kind of fast. (Most often food).**
2. **Select the duration.**
3. **If ambitious, consult a medical professional.**
4. **Fast. Don't just not eat.**

Group Questions:

1. When did you most enjoy praying/When was your prayer life the strongest?
2. When do you typically pray?
3. What are some of the challenges to regular prayer and fasting?
4. What has helped you the most in your prayer life?
5. Personal—In the strength of the Spirit, what changes will you make in prayer and fasting?