

Rhythms of a Disciple

Rhythm #3: Prayer

Prayer was a big part of Jesus' lifestyle. There are many, many instances where Jesus prayed publicly and privately. It was an integral part of His personal life and His public ministry. He cultivated a relationship with the Father by practicing both talking and listening to Him. Here are just a couple of examples:

- "But Jesus Himself would often slip away to the wilderness and pray." (Luke 11:1)
- "Now it came to pass, as He was praying in a certain place, when He ceased, that one of His disciples said to Him, "Lord, teach us to pray," (Luke 5:16)

As disciples of Christ, if we desire to be like Jesus, we must cultivate a healthy prayer life.

"It has become increasingly difficult for me to distinguish prayer as a spiritual discipline from all the others. The longer I journey in the spiritual life the more I experience all of life as prayer and the other disciplines as different ways of praying." Ruth Haley Barton, "Sacred Rhythms"

Most of us are already familiar with basic prayer. We know how to go to God and make requests. But for many of us, we don't know how to go beyond that. How do we break out of the prayer rut, where we bring a litany of petitions to Him?

Today, we're going to focus on one method to help us do that. It effectively combines prayer and scripture reading. George Mueller describes it here:

"I saw more clearly than ever, that the first great and primary business to which I ought to attend every day was, to have my soul happy in the Lord. The first thing to be concerned about was not, how much I might serve the Lord, how I might glorify the Lord; but how I might get my soul into a happy state, and how my inner man might be nourished. For I might seek to set the truth before the unconverted, I might seek to benefit believers, I might seek to relieve the distressed ... and yet, not being happy in the Lord, and not being nourished and strengthened in my inner man day by day, all this might not be attended to in a right spirit.

"Now I saw that the most important thing I had to do was to give myself to the reading of the Word of God and to meditation on it, that thus my heart might be comforted, encouraged, warned, reprov'd, instructed; and that thus, whilst meditating, my heart might be brought into experimental [experiential], communion with the Lord ...

The first thing I did, after having asked in a few words the Lord's blessing upon His precious Word, was to begin to meditate on the Word of God; searching, as it were, into every verse, to get blessing out of it; not for the sake of public ministry of the Word; not for the sake of preaching on what I had meditated upon; but for the sake of obtaining food for my own soul.

The result I have found to be almost invariably this, that after a very few minutes my soul has been led to confession, or to thanksgiving, or to intercession, or to supplication; so that

though I did not, as it were, give myself to prayer, but to meditation, yet it turned almost immediately more or less into prayer ...

“The result of this is, that there is always a good deal of confession, thanksgiving, supplication, or intercession mingled with my meditation, and that my inner man almost invariably is even sensibly nourished and strengthened and that by breakfast time, with rare exceptions, I am in a peaceful if not happy state of heart.

I dwell so particularly on this point because of the immense spiritual profit and refreshment I am conscious of having derived from it myself, and I affectionately and solemnly beseech all my fellow-believers to ponder this matter.”

(George Mueller, as quoted in Donald Whitney’s “Spiritual Disciplines of the Christian Life”)

As Mueller says, meditation is the missing link between **Reading Scripture** and **Prayer**.

(NOTE: For a fuller treatment on prayer as a spiritual discipline, see the article “Spiritual Discipline Series: Prayer” by Calvin Wittman)

Practice

- 1) Go to a quiet place
- 2) Find a good piece of scripture to meditate on (Psalms are always good candidates for this exercise, as are stories of Jesus, and chapters from the epistles, but there are many others.)
- 3) Ask the Lord’s blessing on your reading, and invite Him to guide you
- 4) As you read, let your heart align with the verses and phrases you come across. Begin to talk to God, thanking Him or make requests of Him as the verse dictates. If the passage talks of God’s goodness, begin to extoll His goodness to you personally. If the passage is asking God for justice and vindication, ask Him to bring those things to injustices around you. In this way, let the scripture guide you into deeper prayer.

Sample Passages to Practice With

Psalm 19:7,8,14

*“The law of the Lord is
perfect, restoring the soul;
The testimony of the Lord is sure, making wise the simple.
The precepts of the Lord are right, rejoicing the heart;
The commandment of the Lord is pure, enlightening the eyes...”*

*Let the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart
Be acceptable in Your sight,
O Lord, my rock and my Redeemer.”*

Luke 11:1-13

“It happened that while Jesus was praying in a certain place, after He had finished, one of His disciples said to Him, “Lord, teach us to pray just as John also taught his disciples.” And He said to them, “When you pray, say:

*‘Father, hallowed be Your name.
Your kingdom come.
‘Give us each day our daily bread.
‘And forgive us our sins,
For we ourselves also forgive everyone who is indebted to us.
And lead us not into temptation.’”*

Then He said to them, “Suppose one of you has a friend, and goes to him at midnight and says to him, ‘Friend, lend me three loaves; for a friend of mine has come to me from a journey, and I have nothing to set before him’; and from inside he answers and says, ‘Do not bother me; the door has already been shut and my children and I are in bed; I cannot get up and give you anything.’ I tell you, even though he will not get up and give him anything because he is his friend, yet because of his persistence he will get up and give him as much as he needs.

“So I say to you, ask, and it will be given to you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you. For everyone who asks, receives; and he who seeks, finds; and to him who knocks, it will be opened. Now suppose one of you fathers is asked by his son for a fish; he will not give him a snake instead of a fish, will he? Or if he is asked for an egg, he will not give him a scorpion, will he? If you then, being evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to those who ask Him?”