

The Importance and Difficulty of Consistently Praying

by Tim Conway

This sermon delves into the importance and challenges of prayer versus Bible reading in the Christian life. It emphasizes the need for both prayer and Scripture, highlighting the intertwining nature of drawing close to God through prayer and meditating on His Word. The sermon stresses the difficulty of persistent, heartfelt prayer, the necessity of seeking God's face, and the power of intercessory prayer. It also explores the impact of prayer on spiritual battles, the importance of praying according to truth, and the significance of persistence and faith in prayer. The speaker encourages a deep, unwavering commitment to prayer, drawing inspiration from biblical examples like Jesus and the apostles.

Scripture: Philippians 1:19, Colossians 4:2, Psalms 27:8, Matthew 26:36, Luke 6:12, James 5:16, Hebrews 4:16, Isaiah 62:6, 1 Thessalonians 5:17, Ephesians 6:18

Topics: "The Power of Prayer", "The Importance of Scripture"

Description

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Transcript

Great. OK, well, the question that we're going to look at today, I thought maybe we'd just deal with one because I think it's fairly involved. It does deal with prayer.

I think it's extremely timely. The question was actually set forth by Clayton last week. And because we're looking at an eight day span of some devoted prayer and fasting, I thought that this would be a great one to look at today.

So here's how the question's posed. In the Christian life, is it right to speak of prioritizing either Bible reading or prayer over the other? Specifically, limiting my question to Bible reading and prayer, leaning out body like Scripture over against prayer. And you see what's happening.

When the question's being asked this way, it's really kind of putting, as he progresses here in his question, you'll see that he fully recognizes that that's the case. But the question itself is this. Should one receive, i.e., one hour of Bible reading, one hour of praying? Admittedly, we do see that the blessed man is the one who meditates on God's law day and night.

So that's Psalm 1. So I mean, basically what he's recognizing is this, as a man who is meditating on God's law day and night. Now, meditating on it and actually being in it reading, there can be some overlap there. But I think meditating on God's law day and night is a manifestation of a person who has a mind that's being renewed by the Word, a person who's giving himself to being in the Word of God.

And then the blessed man is the one who meditates on God's law day and night, Psalm 1, verse 2, and that we should be devoted to prayer. So now he's gone from, hey, we need to be meditating on God's law day and night, and we need to be devoted to prayer, Romans 12.12, or pray without ceasing, Colossians 4.2. So what he's really recognizing is, hey, both need to be a reality in our lives all the time. We see commands to be sober-minded, keeping alert for the purpose of prayer, Colossians 4.2, 1 Peter 4.7, this present darkness against the spiritual forces of wickedness in the heavenlies, Ephesians 6. Still further, Jesus says that if you abide in me and my words abide in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be done for you, John 15.7. It seems that both are present here, and one is not given emphasis over the other.

In other words, is one more critical than the other in the arsenal of the Christian soldier? I also fully realize that the question may present a false dichotomy between the two. So to even ask the question as if one is more important or necessary than the other is not valid. Lastly, would personal disposition come into play here? For example, I find it much easier to read and study the Bible than to pray.

Should I therefore be all the more intentional, give myself to prayer, just because it's the more difficult of the two? And you might actually pose the question the opposite way. If somebody actually has a disposition towards one, should he just all the more give himself to that which he has a disposition for? So I'm trying to take this time to get a better grasp on these two things and appreciate anything you'd have to share. Thanks, brother.

And I know you gave a little addendum. I don't, I didn't think it necessarily all the more clarified things. So anyway, the issue here is, should one receive more time and attention than the other? Now, if we just think about Scripture, we're going to see a lot of overlap.

We're going to see, you know, brother, it's like when a man gets asked, a man who's in the ministry gets asked the question, well, which is more important, the church or your family? You're actually pitting two things against each other that Scripture never does. If a man is in the ministry, the man has a responsibility towards both. He has a responsibility for everything that God has given.

If God says that you have a responsibility towards your wife and you have a responsibility towards your children and you have a responsibility towards the church, well, you don't want to drop the ball on any of them. And so I think asking this question is somewhat like that. However, you're not going to be able to go to the Bible itself, something that is just, or maybe I'm using the word disposition, but he's just talking about, no, he uses it, personal disposition come into play here.

He says, I find it much easier to read and study the Bible than to pray. I suspect that for, I don't even know, I just suspect that for 90% or 95% of Christians or maybe for all Christians, that right there, right here, this may have to do with each of us personally. I mean, we'd almost have to talk to maybe everybody on the

screen here and just ask, and maybe I will in a little bit.

But typically, historically, like if you just take certain men who, certain men who I know are men of prayer, like Lloyd-Jones or Robert McShane or Spurgeon or Ravenhill was a big one to talk about prayer, just is beyond any question, the highest activity of the human soul. Now I recognize, I recognize right off, you're not going to find that the scripture says that, but he says prayer is beyond any question, the highest activity of the human soul. Well, if he's right, we don't want to just talk about prayer.

We should start by actually engaging in some. So let's do that. Let's pray.

Father, as we come to talk about Your Word, as we come to talk about prayer, Lord, we want to look at this in a way that's profitable. I want to look at this in a way that is going to be helpful and stir the brethren and help us as we approach into a time of prayer and fasting. Lord, I pray, may the Word come alive for Kevin and for their families and for John and the team over there for the Hamiltons.

We know our brethren in different places are seeking to labor and I know that there in Lebanon, there's been a threat made and there's a danger and Lord John is asking for conversions. He's asking for the team there to be stirred up. He's asking for things that we simply cannot produce in our own strength.

And we desire that here at home. We desire the church to be stirred, to be burdened, to pray, to fast and unified in seeking Your face. We seek Your face right now.

We pray that You'd help us in these next few minutes as we look at this subject. We ask all of this in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.

Now, these quotes I'm gonna give to you, I don't think you're gonna find that these men have written and preached and that you'll be able to find quotes where they're gonna tell you how difficult reading the Bible is. I know for some people reading is difficult, but for a lot of us, it's not that difficult. I know to be disciplined, there's, I mean, I recognize that to be in the Word of God on a daily basis, it takes a level of discipline.

But for most people, and I think what these men, these are the names of men that you know. I think what they're saying here is typically what we find to be true. Now, listen, the face with God.

Lloyd-Jones again. The most difficult thing in the world when a man is speaking to God, is at his very acne. So you hear, these are separate quotes.

I've given you like four or five different ones from Lloyd-Jones right there. But you heard this, the most difficult thing in the world. That's what he thinks prayer is.

He also says this, it is the highest activity of the human soul. And therefore, it is at the same time, the ultimate... I am absolutely convinced that you can go through the reformed circles and you can repeat and I just remember John saying and telling me when he went to Nicaragua and he found a reformed church. I have always believed that if you want to feel the pulse of the church, one of the things that excites me pastorally is to see the prayer meetings full.

And it was when I asked the church, you may remember this some time ago, maybe several months back, maybe six months back. I asked the church during one fasting because our church has a week of prayer and fasting. And if you were there, hands went up all over the person.

Then if you look at just simply how much they know their Bibles and how much they can argue doctrine. Now look, the word of God, we don't want to slight it. It is absolutely essential to the Christian life.

Don't get me wrong in that. Now, listen to this. A barrage, I came across a quote from him.

I know the name. He's either an old Baptist or he's an old Anglican, if I'm says. All decays begin in the closet.

I mean, you want to decay in your Christian life, look at your closet. You want to begin to spiral downward, look at the closet. If your life without much, sure a whole lot is not going to make amends for this.

And you know, the truth is, here's one of the things that's different about the word of God and about prayer is that if I studied the word, draw on that from a year ago, but you know what? My prayer life a year ago does not work for me today. That's one of the big things. This is absolutely essential that it be kept fresh.

I'm not saying we shouldn't be in the word of God all the time, but I'll tell you this. I can be the Psalm 1 guy and I can meditate on the word that I've studied in the past, that I have up here, even without being in the word, but you can't, there's no substitute for prayer. It's not like I can live on the prayers of yesterday or a week ago.

Ravenhill said this, no man, I don't care how colossal his intellect, no man is greater than his prayer life. He says this, prayer is not a preparation for the battle. It is the battle.

In other words, that's where you go to battle on your knees. Andy Hamilton has said very similar things. He has said, brethren, we're over there on the ends of the earth.

We're out there, we're on the field. He said, but the battle is won back here, you all being on your knees. See, that's the reality.

We can't win the battle. I may meditate on truth that I looked at is fought on our knees. Ravenhill again, prayer in its highest form is agonizing soul sweat.

That's the issue right there. Typically, we don't think about reading Scripture in an agonizing soul sweat fashion. Now look, I recognize there are times you have to dig in the Word.

There are times you're stumped. There's times you hit a wall. There's times you don't understand, but see even there, what happens? Lifting your voice up to the Lord.

Ravenhill again, prayer is the most unexplored area of the Christian life. Now, when I came across that, look, this is true. I suspect that there are things to be experienced in our prayer life that if we would press further in, we would have further experiences.

And I've heard the experiences of different men and women. And I know that there is more to be had. Of course, if we're going to start quoting people, we have to quote Spurgeon.

He said, I know of no better thermometer to your spiritual temperature than this. The measure of the intensity of you to be helped to pray and do not give up praying because you cannot pray. For it is when you think you cannot pray, that is when you are praying.

Prayer girds human weakness with divine do. And then McShane, Robert Murray, he says, a man is what he is on his knees before God and nothing more. I mean, see this, now I know these are about men, but these are the men that we respect.

Now, I don't know, you may never heard of Barrett, but most of you have probably heard, you've heard of Martyn Lloyd-Jones, you've heard of Ravenhill, you've heard of Spurgeon and McShane. This is their estimation. Their estimation is this is where the battle is fought.

This is hard. There is an agonizing soul sweat that's related to this. The quotes like this, where there tends to be somewhat of a unanimous respect in response to this, that this does tend to be the most difficult.

This tends to, I mean, if you hear the most, this is Lloyd-Jones perspective, this is the most difficult thing in the world. And look, maybe some of you have seen the quote from his wife. His wife says, a lot of people, they think of my husband as being this great Bible expositor, but she said, my husband is primarily a man of prayer and an evangelist.

Have you ever come across those words by Bethan? He is a man of prayer. This is an area that he's familiar. And I think we would all recognize this.

I've never read anywhere in my Bible where Christians are exhorted to be careful lest they pray too much. But prayer, as you move through the New Testament, I don't find the same impassioned pleas. Yes, we're told that His word needs to abide in us.

But when you think about how the New Testament, especially, we're not told that we pray too much because the reality is we don't pray too much. The Lord is never concerned that we pray too much. No one prays too much.

The real issue is that we tend to get bogged down with the cares of this world. We tend to neglect prayer. We tend to get weary.

We tend to have busyness overtake us or indifference, or we get cold like weeds. The cares of this world are always trying to strangle us. And the truth is, when you come to Scripture, you know what you find repeatedly, like almost in every single epistle of the New Testament, you find pray without ceasing that.

But we might want to talk about our prayers to be guided by the promises of God. We want to be able to argue our case before God. And so we need to be able to plead His promises.

That comes from the Word. We need to be able to plead His character. That comes from the Word.

I mean, we need to learn from the men who pray in Scripture. We need to learn how to pray. I mean, when they said, Lord, teach us to pray, how would we ever know what He said unless we go to the Word? When He turns around and He says, pray like this, our Father who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name.

When He gives some fundamental aspects of what genuine prayer looks like, how would we ever know that unless we were in the Word? I mean, see, we don't want to exclude one for the sake of the other. I would say this, Scripture needs to be a firm foundation for our. Christian, with all these appeals to pray, one of the things you do not want to do with these verses is coming away saying prayer doesn't matter.

We get the most impassioned pleas in Scripture to press on. Prayer is important. This is absolutely essential.

It's not optional. It's not inconsequential. The Lord Himself, and He says, men ought always to pray and not lose heart.

Why? Brethren, I would just ask you this. Are we ever told that we need to read our Bibles and not lose heart? I haven't read that. Why? I can tell you this.

When I get done reading, I don't feel like exhausted. I don't feel like this was some task of agonizing soul sweat. I don't.

But praying right and trying to pray and trying to press in in prayer, Scripture says stay awake at all times praying. That's what the Lord Himself said as well. And I guess here's probably the question.

If these men see this to be this valuable thing, don't faint at this. This is how you watch. This is how you keep on your toes.

And here's the question that we have to ask ourselves. If indeed this is right, if prayer is most difficult, if prayer is harder, if it's the most difficult thing in the world, I would just ask ourselves this. Let's do inventory.

Where are we at with this? And this isn't a static thing. It's not like, well, I had a good prayer life a year ago. This, when we're told this, pray without ceasing, be constant in prayer, continue steadfastly in prayer, pray at all times.

Does it characterize my life? It likes the soft way. If the Bible, if reading our Bibles is easier, then it's not gonna be so taxing on the flesh. It's not gonna be such a battle to continue with it for most people.

I know some people have an aversion to reading. They don't like it. But I guess the question to ask ourself is this.

What's the truth? I mean, what's the reality about our prayer life? And you know what? I would just say this. If we do spiritual inventory and we say, hey, it's not where it should be, then I just plead with you, brethren, with a week of prayer and fasting coming that starts tomorrow. Let that change.

Think, rethink this. Rethink the importance. That's what I wanna emphasize.

I mean, as we do spiritual inventory here, maybe what our life looked like when our prayer was good, a season in our life when prayer times were sweet, close, where there was fire, where there was an earnestness, where we couldn't hardly pray enough. But I mean, we need to do away with all the smokescreen now. Jesus isn't telling us to worry about where we were at a year ago.

When He's telling us not to lose heart, it's got to do with right now, where we're at now. Does that characterize our life now? Is it characterized by a continuation in prayer? Are we fighting with this? Or you remember that the great Old Testament, one of the great Old Testament pictures of all of this is Jacob wrestling with the angel of the Lord. I mean, this wrestling, do we wrestle? Are we insistent? You see, this is what makes it difficult.

When we're gonna seek to persevere in prayer, we have to remember this. You know what I don't find with reading the Bible? I don't find that it is pressing me to keep knocking and it'll be open. I guess in a way that yes, if we keep digging, if we search for wisdom out of the Scriptures as for hidden treasure, I recognize that it has a way of yielding up its treasures.

But you know, when they asked Jesus, teach us how to pray. He said things about prayer right there concerning importunity or persistence or perseverance in prayer. I don't find that we're ever pressed in the same way when it comes to reading Scripture.

Oh, Scripture's important. We need to hide it in our heart. It undergirds our prayer life, but it seems like there's a difficulty.

It seems like there's an importunity. It seems like there's a perseverance that comes along with prayer in Scripture because there aren't things to pray for. So I hear people sometimes, I don't know what to pray for.

Oh, there's an infinite number of things to pray for. When we fail to pray, it's never because we can't pray. And it's not because there aren't to what.

It's largely due to the fact that we get weary. We love ease too much. We're too entangled by things.

We get distracted. We lose sight of how much of a battle is won on our knees. We forget.

Brethren, we do. We forget that there is truth to what Amy Hamilton says that people, and it can be an open door and an opportunity to take the gospel to these people. But what I need more is what we can't do.

What's beyond the power of man. Do you know one of the... We get independent. We forget.

We forget. We forget how absolutely utterly dependent we are on the Lord for everything and anything. That's what happens.

That's the problem here. And that's one of the beauties of being in the word of God as well because it keeps reminding us of that. But we forget how utterly destitute we are without God.

And the thing about prayer, the thing about prayer is that it's that which God gives to us to lay hold of him. And I guess when I think about the emphasis that I'm putting on the prayer here, you have to remember what I just said. So often we stop doing it because we forget how desperately, desperately we need the Lord.

Sometimes I hear people say prayer changes things. What prayer is, is it's simply, it's that connection where we lay hold on him and God is the one who changes things. And scripture describes this God to us.

And that's essential. See, we got to have the word of God. We don't discard the word of God.

Oftentimes brethren, I find that when I go out to pray, I love to pray outside, walking outside. I want to work on Bible memorization or I want to open up my phone and begin to read scripture. Why? Because it reminds me of the truth.

It reminds me of who God is. Again, we come back to that. If we're really going to be convinced of who God is and what his promises are, then the scripture needs to be fresh in our minds.

Scripture aids us in approaching God. If you're going to make a case with God, you want to plead like Moses did. How did Moses plead? I mean, he's pleading, well, you know the text.

What will the Egyptians say? And I think of David. David talks about the fact that God had been his help in the days past. I mean, when you go to scripture, what it does is it arms you with the ammunition to come to God and to see those arguments come from scripture.

If we're going to go to him and we're going to plead with him, what will the Egyptians say? Well, that's a biblical argument. If we're going to go to him and we're going to plead, Lord, you're a long suffering. Lord, you sent your son into this world to save sinners.

Lord, you haven't just dealt with mankind in judgment. You've dealt with mankind in tremendous mercy. And we see it at the cross.

We see it in Jesus laying his hand on a leper and healing him on a blind man and giving him sight on a dead man and bringing him out of the grave. Lord, these are the things you sent your son into the world. And the first miracle he did was he turned water into wine.

What does that tell us about you? That gives us boldness. Are we not told to boldly approach the throne of grace? How are we going to be bold? I'll tell you, the boldness comes from things like, well, if I confess my sins, he's faithful and just to forgive them. Or if little children, I write to you that you don't sin, but if you sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous.

I'll tell you what the doctrine of justification does. The doctrine of justification comes from scripture. And because I've got a God who says that if I'll confess my sins, he's faithful and just to forgive them.

And so I can come to him. Even after you do things like David did, where you kill a man and you have sex with his wife. And he says, blessed is the man.

Does he not say that's quoted in Romans chapter four? Blessed is the man against whom God does not hold. And brethren, this doctrine of justification is absolutely essential in our approach to the Lord. You see, again, there's overlap here.

We don't discard the word, but if we're gonna come and we're gonna boldly approach the throne of grace. And why do we come? Again, we've got to remember. It's because we have needs.

We need mercy. I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me. We need to remember these truths.

They inflame us into praying right. You think about this. I mean, look, how does this help us pray? When you pray, this is again the overlap, the essential place of scripture when we think about ourselves coming before the Lord.

You know these verses. When you pray, we're told not to be like two people. When you pray, don't be like the hypocrites.

They love to stand and pray in the synagogues at the street, call it secret. And your Father who sees in secret. And when we ask, doesn't scripture say we'll receive? We seek, we find, we knock, it shall be opened unto us.

You see, you go to scripture and you read this. The Father who sees in secret will reward you. Okay, we're coming on to a week of prayer and fasting.

Who doesn't want that reward? That encourages me to pray. I want it. Brethren, it's not just that I want it, I need it.

I've got to have God's help. I've got to have it. Also, 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. Don't be like them. Your Father knows what you need before you ask Him.

You see, the problem with hypocrites and the problem with Gentiles is that fundamentally, their prayer is broken. That they don't pray in a way that pleases the Lord. There's two fundamental essential components to prayer.

We see them in scripture. What does God require in prayer if He's going to answer the prayer? And the answers is what we're after. Brethren, it is not carnal to want God to give you things when you pray.

That's why we pray. Oh, there's other reasons. We worship, I recognize.

We can pray for others, there's inner. They're lacking. One does it to be seen, one does it because he thinks in his multiplicity of words, he's going to be heard.

But in both cases, these guys lack what God's looking for. What does he look for? Look, Jesus said, whatever you ask over and over and over, that's what Catholics pray like pagans. That's how the Gentiles pray.

They think that how they pray is going to give them an answer. Christians, they trust the God who answers prayer. They trust that He is, and they find out who He is.

Anyway, the other essential component is righteousness. And we know this, we see this in 1 John. Whatever we ask, or Clayton mentioned John 15, 7, if ye abide in me and my word abides in you, you shall ask what you will and it shall be done unto you.

You see, if we're submissive and obedient and His word abides in us, that means we're doing it. Then we ask and we receive. Same truth is found in 1 John 3, 22.

Whatever we ask, we receive from Him because we keep His commandments and do what pleases Him. And you know what? What's true of Gentiles, the pagan? They don't try to keep. They don't try to keep God's commandments.

Again, Catholicism. I remember that. You get drunk to keep God's commandments.

Jesus says, you prove to be my disciples if my word abides in you. Wise man, foolish man, we all remember that. But if we want the two essential components, why am I looking at this? Where's our faith? Faith comes where? Faith comes by hearing.

Hearing what? Who is that, Pedro? The word of God. God's commandments, we find them in Scripture. Again, you see how the prayer... Deep, I'll say this again.

You show me a man or a woman who deeply wrestles with God in prayer. The depth of that prayer life will be based on their depth of a knowledge of Scripture. And they'll go hand in hand.

Now, I still believe one is harder than the other. One is the actual wrestling. But one of the things you want to do is you remember what David prayed in Psalm 119 concerning the word? He said, show me what from your word.

Anybody remember? Wondrous things. Wondrous things. Who doesn't want to see wondrous things in the word? I want to see them.

So even there, there's overlap. I mean, what we don't want to do is put these things in two different compartments. One thing is while you're praying, you should have your head filled with Scripture.

Another thing is that while you're in Scripture, you should be praying that God will give you life. Matt Tomlinson told me one time that, I'm trying to think, I think I have a book over there on my shelf. And brethren, I think that's right.

I mean, you go to God in prayer, but what you do is you said it was just, it was a great blessing to his soul. So what else? We do come across this. I mean, you can make out of this what you want, but in Acts 2.42, they devoted themselves, devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers.

Now there is an order there. And I would say that we definitely want the apostles' teaching. We want truth.

Brethren, we got to pray according to truth. We need to know the God we pray to. We have to believe that He is.

But there is an order. And I hope you recognize that every promise, we are told this, if we are in Christ, every promise is yea and amen. Obviously the promise is for good.

And you know, you know how Hebrews 13 says, He has said, He will never leave you nor forsake you. I mean, that is Old Testament. That was not spoken by Jesus Christ directly to His followers.

That is something that was spoken by Yeshua. It was spoken in several places. You can find it in the Old Testament.

That promise is ours. And the author of Hebrews knew it full well. And he grabbed it.

And without explanation, he simply says, this is what God said. It's a promise. If you look at how many different, listen, scripture says this, we formerly at one time, we were, anymore, we were once far off, but we've been brought near by the blood of Christ.

And there is now one new man in place of the two. One new man. Those who were, brethren, He's brought us close.

He's preached peace to those who are far off and to those who are near. And now we both have access. Through Him, we both have access in one spirit to the Father.

And so we're no longer strangers and aliens. We're no longer, we are fellow citizens. Don't let the dispensationalists rob you guys.

This is key. Because one of the things we wanna plead with God is His promise. If there's anything that God has given us to plead, anybody, through their theological system, rob you of the promises of God.

When you go into scripture, you find a promise, you take it to God. And if God has given you a promise, be done with the ifs. Oh, brethren, there are too many things that we know about God and too many promises that He's given that for you to be, if it's your will, if it's your will, wait a second.

There is so much that we know to be God's will. And I think Sturgeon's absolutely right. Too many of those ifs, they speak more of unbelief than they speak of anything else.

Brethren, how about this? See, this is the kind of thing that will send you into a week of prayer and fasting different than if you didn't hear it. And it's fire that gets motivated by scripture. What? Psalm 37.4, delight yourself in the Lord and He will give you the desires of your heart.

I mean, think about alighting myself in you as I ought to. And then that spawns prayer. Lord, kindle the love in my heart.

Kindle the first, Lord, I think He will give you the desires of your heart. Lord, You said that. I do delight in You.

It's not always perfect, but Lord, You said that You'd give me the desires of my heart. I desire to overcome sin. That's the desire of my heart.

I desire more of You. I desire You to manifest Yourself to me. I desire You to meet with me when I pray.

I desire, Lord, to be victorious. I desire, anyway, texts like that. Or how about this one? Whoever has my commandments and keeps them, He it is who loves me, and he who loves me will be loved by my Father and I will love him and manifest myself to him.

I'll tell you one of the things I want in prayer is I want God to manifest Himself to me. I want Christ to manifest Himself to me. Christian, you know seasons of dryness.

What makes prayer difficult? Because there's a fight. You remember Andy Hamilton? Typically does not happen when you open up the Word of God. Now, I know you might be sleepy.

You might fight sleep while you're in Scripture. But going to the Lord in prayer and just feeling dead, this is where the battle is. What makes prayer difficult? You know one of the things? When I read my Bible, I'm guided by the Word.

In other words, I've got a path to follow. You say, what do you mean? I mean this. Okay, I open up my Bible.

I was reading today. The problem with prayer is it's free. I mean, there's more freedom.

There's more, and that actually can be more difficult. I mean, if we're gonna take the time in prayer to listen, to find God, to hear God, I mean, we're asking for things. There can be a carnal tendency to simply dive into prayer and ask our list of things.

But you know, if we're gonna prayer properly, Lord, teach us to pray. Okay, pray this way. Our Father who art in heaven.

Okay, immediately you're starting not looking at yourself, not looking at your own needs. This is difficult because you know what a lot of the old prayer warriors would talk about is we need to pray until we're

praying. In fact, I think that that was one of the Spurgeon.

Spurgeon said, what did he say? He said, pray for prayer, pray till you can pray. I think I read that from John Wesley before. Wesley said that he gave himself to praying.

Brethren, it was the duty till he had brought his heart into the frame of the duty. He would not leave confession of sin till his heart was broken for sin. He would not leave petitioning for grace till his heart was quickened and enlivened in a hopeful expectation of more grace.

He would not leave the rendering of thanks till his heart was enlarged with a sense of the mercy and you're gonna succeed with the Lord, it takes time. We have to pray and keep going. I've been in times of my life where I've been out in this field over here praying and I'm coming back to the house, but I just feel like I haven't broke through.

I feel like I have to turn around and go back. If we're gonna pray, we have to designate time to it. If you're gonna fast, I mean, fasting can be pretty taxing on the flesh.

It can be a taxing thing. It can be battle, getting across the deadness, getting over. And then you got the devil.

Richard Sibbes, one of those old Puritans said this, when we go to God by prayer, the devil knows we go to fetch strength against him and therefore he opposes us all he can. You know, I get a distinct sense that the devil will oppose prayer far more than he'll oppose you reading your Bible. Oh, he's okay with that.

I mean, the demons know truth, but when we go to praying, he knows that we do go to fetch weapons against him. We go to fetch power against him. That's the reality.

To pray well, it requires persistence. We know the opportunity. You go to the friend at night, Jesus paints the picture.

That man gets up and he gives him what he wants, not because he's his friend, but because of the opportunity, because he keeps at it. You know what God said? This is a favorite of Charles Leiter's that he preached on one of his messages on prayer. Isaiah 62, six and seven.

On your walls, oh Jerusalem, I have set watchmen. All the day and all the night, they shall never be silent. You who put the Lord in remembrance, take no rest and give him no rest until he establishes Jerusalem and makes it a praise in the earth.

You see, we're to give him no rest. We're to keep going. We're to keep up our importunity.

We can't find him. We're looking for him. Where is he? Lord, come.

Do you remember how it was with Absalom? Absalom had Ab convince David to let him come back, Absalom's presence. And then Absalom sent for Joab and Joab didn't respond. And anyways, I got this little book on prayer over here.

A lot of you guys know this, The Hidden Life of Prayer. And there's a little quote in here concerning that account. And the author says this, what profit is it to dwell in Jerusalem if we do not see the King's face? In other words, here you got Absalom living in Jerusalem for two years, but he can't see the King.

And finally he says, that's it. You brought me back to Jerusalem. I can't see the King.

Joab, I'm going to burn your fields until you get me a showing with the... And even though Absalom turned out to be a wicked man, his passions... Listen, brethren, do you want to live in Jerusalem and not see the face of the King? I'll tell you, it's typically not those who are flippant, those who play at prayer, who are going to see the King's face and be exposed to the glory. You know what? We want to come out of prayer like Moses, where our faces shine. But how does that happen? You know how long Moses was with the Lord? I mean, he was up there 40 days and 40 nights.

This takes time. And maybe you've never noticed it before. There's a very interesting account in the book of Acts.

I'm going to read it to you. It's Acts 20 verses 13 and 14. But going ahead to the ship, we set sail for Asos, intending to take Paul aboard there.

For so he had arranged, intending himself to go by land. And when he met us at Asos, we took him on board and went to... ..journeys, is traveling land. And you know, it doesn't really say why, but I think I know why.

He needed to be alone. He needed to be with the Lord. And he got away.

Brethren, I can tell you, early on in the ministry, I came across something where a man was encouraging. He was encouraging. And I don't think he was just encouraging men in the ministry.

I think he was encouraging everyone to take some time, to set aside a day and just get alone with the Lord. And I did that. I went over to our church, but I had the better part of two days probably, or 24 hours, I forget what it was, just seeking the Lord.

And it was massively profitable. And then the Lord visited. Brethren, we need to pray until we pray.

We need to pray until we find Him. And the psalmist says, you've said, seek my face. My heart says to you, your face, Lord, do I seek.

Hide not your face from me. That's what we want. I mean, Absalom was a wicked man, but he had a good desire.

He said, don't put me in Jerusalem and don't let me see the King. And I'm telling you, brethren, don't be satisfied to have otherwise. Don't play and peddle around in prayer to where you know nothing about what that is.

And that's hard. That's different. Brethren, there is a reality.

Oh, I know you can be reading Scripture and you can read truths in Scripture and it can come alive and the Spirit of God can cause you to see God, to see the triune realities from Scripture. I recognize the Scripture plays, but even then when you see that, if that happens while you're talking or if that happens while you're reading Scripture, and express our thanksgiving to God, intercession is hard. I remember I've told some of you this before, but I remember spending some time with Andy Hamilton and we were in a discussion and I recognized he was asking me about people in my life, certain men.

And I got the distinct sense, Andy knows those guys because he prays for them. And I have found, I think Andy has from his usual time where he simply intercedes for people. That's not easy.

For one, you need to know something about people. You need to have a heart of love for people and you're not asking for yourself. It can be a very carnal thing to just list off all the things you want for yourself or you think you need for yourself.

It's not wrong to pray for ourselves. But if you're really gonna give yourself in the kind of intercessory prayer for other people, that's hard and it takes time and there's difficulty. And you know what? There's real difficulties with regards to prayer and sin.

We know in Scripture that if we cherish iniquity in our heart, the Lord would not have listened. And you come to the New Testament, it says, men, you need to live with your wives in an understanding way. If you don't, your prayers are hindered.

It also, there's another text there in 1 Peter that talks about being self-controlled and sober-minded for the sake of your prayers. But if we've got, that's another thing. I mean, if you're just gonna go out and you're gonna not even pray until you've got a clean slate with God, how many people try to pray and they've got things in their life that are absolute barricades to being heard, that there's a wall in the way of even finding God's face.

See, there's a level of difficulty. And I think these men had it absolutely right. You need to pray for prayer.

You need to pray that God would teach you to pray. You need to pray for stamina in prayer. You need to pray.

Our problem is, brethren, that we have a proneness to weariness. We have a proneness to feigning. We read about waiting on the Lord and we are a people who tend to be impatient.

We want results now. And yet God often has to be sought. That's not vain repetition.

Importunity is not vain repetition. Hail Mary is vain repetition. The coming back to God over and over and over again.

And some of you may full well know that, I mean, I read that Mueller prayed for certain things for 50 years before he received an answer. Can I tell you something? You know that this is true. You know that when a need is first, everybody will pray then.

But where's the man and the woman that's still praying about it months later? You see, there's a different level of intensity. Everybody prays. Go to the prayer meeting and make the request.

Everybody prays when the request is made at first. But you show me the man and the woman that 10 months later is still praying for it, or a year and a half later. And I know there's a place.

There's a place for us to be reminded. There's a place for us to be setting his arguments before the Lord and it stirs your own soul. And we need each other for that.

We need each other. This is an area we have to keep each other wrestling. We have to keep each other faithful to this, to pursuing God.

We are a desperate, desperate people. We are weak, chime in at this point. You see at times, especially in Paul's requesting prayer, you see, I started keeping an eye on things that prayer accomplishes.

And so like in Philippians chapter one. So yeah, I think to take a step back, it's just the false, it's like which hand is, which hand was the first hand that started drawing the other one? Like you just, the two are inseparable. And so as I've thought about Bible reading and prayer, I've thought about that drawing.

But Paul's talking about prayer. He says, for I know that this will turn out for my deliverance through your prayers in the provision of the spirit of Jesus Christ. And so it's a prison epistle on there in the book of Philippians.

And then in Colossians, you see that, okay, devote yourselves to prayer. Keep keeping alert in it with an attitude of thanksgiving, praying at the same time for us as well, that God will open up to us a door for the word. And so I just started keeping an eye on things that prayer accomplishes.

And in my own life, well, you know what? I feel like I'm just, I'm learning. I'm learning about prayer. And it's been helpful to hear and even as I've talked with others about how difficult prayer can be at times, I was... Do you know the delayed response of so many of our prayers is one thing that makes it difficult? Because I personally find when I grab this book, some of me have to agonize for, I mean, we're going back to the Lord over and over and over again.

And so it's, yeah, they say that God doesn't meet with us in glorious ways during our prayer. But even then, if we're gonna really pray like, Lord, I'm gonna pray until I find you. I mean, Wesley said, I am going to pray until I find God.

I'm gonna pray until I'm praying. Well, if you have a secular job, that can be more difficult to, I mean, a man in the ministry can go out in the field and say, okay, I'm gonna pray until I pray. A guy that has to be at work at eight o'clock, that can pose challenges.

And yet, I don't think we wanna be content with not finding the Lord. And that takes, Andy Hamilton calls it gut busting. But our Lord Himself, I mean, if we look at His example, our Lord knew Scripture.

He could quote Scripture. He could fight off, ward off the devil by quoting Scripture. But look at Him.

He was out there. He was out there in the dew of the night and under the moonlight. And He prayed, He knew.

They knew they woke up in the morning. Where's Jesus? He hadn't been in bed all night. They knew where He was.

They knew He was a man of prayer. That's why they asked Him, teach us to pray, because they knew. If anybody can teach us, it's Him, because we see Him.

We see Him plead with the Lord. We see Him. And I don't think that was unusual that He took three of them out there to the garden and they heard Him pray.

I think they heard His Father the same way we have to. He was an example and He was a pattern of that. He depended on His Father.

He trusted His Father. He needed His Father. He needed answers to prayer.

He's going to pick the 12 disciples and He goes out, He prays, spends the night in prayer. I mean, if He needed His Father that badly, how much more do we? Well, anybody else want to chime in?

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