

Series: Characteristics of Devout Christians
The Discipline of Prayer
Isaiah 56:1-7

Introduction

"There are many things that are essential to arriving at true peace of mind, and one of the most important is faith, which cannot be acquired without prayer." - John Wooden

"..the true test of spirituality [is] in the freedom to live among people compassionately...Prayer frees us to be controlled by God." — Richard J. Foster

Isaiah 56:1-7, "Thus says the LORD: "Keep justice, and do righteousness, For My salvation *is* about to come, And My righteousness to be revealed. Blessed *is* the man *who* does this, And the son of man *who* lays hold on it; Who keeps from defiling the Sabbath, And keeps his hand from doing any evil." Everyone who keeps from defiling the Sabbath, And holds fast My covenant— Even them I will bring to My holy mountain, And make them joyful in My house of prayer. Their burnt offerings and their sacrifices *Will be* accepted on My altar; For My house shall be called a house of prayer for all nations." ([Isa 56:1-7 NKJV](#))

Have you noticed that when a person is spiritually healthy, it seems like nothing bothers them? A person with excellent spiritual health can remain calm and maintain a joyful outlook regardless of the circumstances. One critical indicator of spiritual health is gratitude. When you're spiritually healthy, you are grateful for even small things. Ungrateful people let even the smallest things drive them crazy. Learning to be grateful even when things don't go your way is one of the ongoing challenges of life.

The spiritually healthy are at peace even if things don't go the way they want them to. All of life is really a collection of days, and some days are better than others. But have you ever asked yourself, "Why is it that some days are better than others?" If you were to reflect on the past couple of months of your life, you would probably conclude that a few days were great, most days were average, some days were not so good, and perhaps even a couple of days were downright horrible. But what made the difference? Was it due to something outside your control or because of your control?

Usually, if a day doesn't get off to a good start, it very rarely ends as a good day. Once a day gets away from you, you tend to go into survival mode. And a day can get away from you in so many ways. Most days will almost certainly go wrong unless you consciously take the time to focus and plan for your day!

So an important question is, "How do you plan for your day?" Because not only is this a characteristic of successful people in life, it also sets devout Christians apart.

Devout Christians know how their best days begin, and consistently experience good days because they have developed some basic Christian disciplines. These characteristics set them apart from the average Christian.

Today we will look at one of these characteristics - the discipline of prayer. More specifically, it is a daily commitment to prayer. Devout Christians always begin their day with prayer. It is this spiritual routine that helps them focus their day. It may be five minutes of devotions and prayer with a morning cup of coffee. It could be a conversation with God in the car as they drive to work; or a talk with God as they take a morning walk or jog. But without fail, all devout Christians begin their day with prayer. When they don't follow their routine, the day very rarely finishes as a good day.

A devout Christian vigorously defends their morning routine. They would prefer to get up an hour early than skip their spiritual routine. They know that a day that doesn't start well tends not to end well. It is simply too difficult to shift the momentum of a day.

So how do your best days begin? Have you ever tried beginning your day with prayer? Christian prayer is having a conversation with the Living God! We pray because we believe in God, and we believe that He hears us when we talk to Him. Even if it's brief, a focused and disciplined daily prayer will undoubtedly impact the rest of your day.

Morning prayer is our invitation to God to guide and direct us throughout the day.

I. A Routine of Prayer

The best place to start is with a routine that includes a morning prayer time. There's a story about three frogs sitting on a lily pad just outside the palace of a great king. "If two frogs decide to jump into the pond, how many frogs are left?" The answer is, "Three." Because deciding to do something is not the same as doing it. The point is, Devout Christians pray! They have a daily commitment to prayer. They don't hope they get around to praying each day. They just do it! They pray every day!

Prayer is not merely a good intention; it is a priority. Daily prayer has become an ingrained part of their life. If you ask believers, "Do you pray?" they all say yes. Unfortunately, the great majority of Christians don't have a regular habit or plan when it comes to prayer. They pray whenever the mood strikes them. You've got to do better than that if you want to impact the world in the ways God intends us to.

The New Testament truth is that the Christian life is not sustainable without daily prayer. A devout Christian knows this and has made a daily commitment to prayer. That commitment has caused them to develop a routine of prayer. What does that mean, exactly? Well, dynamic Christians tend to pray at the same time every day.

They tend to pray in the same place every day. And they tend to pray in the same way every day. Too often, believers tell themselves that they will pray when they get around to it. Sadly, they don't usually get around to it, and so they develop the habit of not praying each day. Unfortunately, it's always easier to develop bad habits than good life-changing ones.

Good habits are developed intentionally. And prayer is one of them. Many people throw up a prayer to see what happens, and of course, very often, nothing does. So they get frustrated and stop praying. When devout Christians pray, they don't throw up a prayer to see what happens; they have a plan and feel comfortable leaving things in God's hands.

They have a routine and a format for their praying. Could it be that many believers don't pray because no one has shown them how to develop a plan and routine of prayer? Some of the best prayer warriors have forged out their routine by trial and error. They figured out what worked and what didn't work for them through sheer perseverance. Some of them took decades to develop their routine of prayer.

A lack of prayer support is one of the great tragedies of modern Christianity. We do an awful lot of talking about prayer, but we spend very little time praying, and even less teaching people how to pray. We assume that people know how to pray. But the truth is when most people make an earnest attempt to pray, they haven't got the foggiest idea how to begin. If that's you, don't lose heart! A true prayer warrior is always eager to help you learn how to establish a routine of prayer. One of the greatest gifts you can give someone is to help them develop a sustainable prayer life. Helping a person develop a routine of prayer that works for them is the very first step towards spiritual growth.

So, how is your prayer life? There is perhaps nothing more telling about your life as a Christian than the answer to that question. You can't teach what you do not know and practice! I'm sure each of us needs improvement in this area! But the point is, each of us should be trying to establish or improve our daily routine of prayer.

Nothing will change your life, like establishing a solid routine of prayer.

II. The Classroom of Silence

C. S. Lewis was one of the great Christian voices of the twentieth century. He also published a book titled *The Screwtape Letters*. In the book, an apprentice devil named Wormwood receives an assignment to tempt a young man to fail. So, he immediately starts thinking of the many ways he could lure in the young man. But his uncle Screwtape writes him a stern letter rebuking his efforts and counsels young Wormwood not to waste his time trying to dream up new ways of tempting a person. He explains that the best plan is very straightforward. It consists primarily of creating so much noise in the person's life that they can no longer hear the voice of God.

When C. S. Lewis penned those words, the idea of television was brand new. Think of how much more noise there is in our world since the introduction of television to our society. And with the development of computers and smartphones, the level of noise in a person's life has increased exponentially. With all the noise around, us it makes it immensely more difficult for us to hear the voice of God.

God told the prophet, Elijah, that He often speaks to us in a still small voice. Satan has a plan to fill your life with noise that drowns out the voice of God. He knows the more time you spend in silence, the more clearly you can hear the voice of God in your life.

Of course, not all noise is terrible. Beyond the silence, some forms of noise lead us closer to God, while others lead us far from him. Music is a powerful form of communication. But does the music you listen to lead you closer to God or further from Him? The same is true of conversations. Some conversations inspire us to be better, while others have the opposite effect.

Can you imagine God saying, "Fill your life with noise." Would you pray, "Lord, fill my life with more noise?" It seems more often that God is calling out to us, "Come away to the peace, and quiet and rest." Sitting in silence can be very awkward and can feel like a waste of time. However, focused silence can be very powerful!

The first attempts at most things we do are less than successful. A child learning to walk is a perfect example. The first few steps are always slow and painful. But after weeks and weeks of effort, walking becomes automatic. A great life of prayer develops in the same way. Over time, the quiet time you have with God becomes something you long for and enjoy. It is out of this kind of focused silence or Christian meditation that clarity emerges.

What many people fail to realize is that passion and purpose are the by-products of personal clarity. People with clarity have a much greater sense of who they are and why they are here. They know what matters most, and it empowers them to focus and prioritize their days. So, how do you get this clarity? We learn to listen for the voice of God in silent meditation.

Clarity emerges from talking to God. The world does it through transcendental meditation or yoga or chantings and mantras or visualization. (many times talking to demons) People who live with high levels of passion and purpose spend time alone working out who they are, what they are here for, and what matters most. While intercessory prayer may be vocal and forcefully bombarding Heaven with a call for Divine intervention, clarity of purpose and focus comes by waiting to hear from God.

Jesus said, "Come unto me all you who are weary and heavy-laden, and you will find rest for your soul." Come to the quiet. Isaiah 30:15 says, "In quietness and confidence shall be your strength." The world is noisy and distracting. It is in the silence that we find God and our true self. The Bible says Jesus often retreated to a quiet place to pray. (it doesn't say he went off looking for a quiet place.) He

already knew where he was going. Have you ever considered stepping back from the noise of life for a few minutes each day into a quiet place of prayer?

It is crucial to have a quiet place. The world draws us toward noisy places, making quiet places harder and harder to find. Quiet places don't mystically appear at the moment we need them most. We find them and use them regularly. Do you have an everyday quiet place?

A quiet time of meditation and prayer is critical to your spiritual development. It is through this discipline of prayer that we learn to discern God's direction and guidance for our life.

III. A Response of Obedience

When we hear the voice of God, our response should always be one of obedience. One of the great struggles of the Christian life is surrendering our will to the will of God. Part of our decision-making process should always be, "What does God want me to do?" Have you ever set aside what you wanted to do what you felt God wanted instead? Too often, we resist God's will. The question we should ask is, "God, what do you think I should do?" The answer to that question always gives us a clear direction.

Devout Christians are committed to listening to the voice of God. If we could get our generation to live their faith with passion and purpose, we would once again capture the attention of our age for the cause of Christ. To develop a discipline of prayer, all you need is a plan that helps you focus on God! Focus and simplicity are all that you need! If you prayed for five minutes each day, it would revolutionize your life.

A discipline of prayer can change your life, and it won't take a hundred years for you to realize it. If you would commit to pray for five minutes each day for the next thirty days, I am confident you would see a dramatic difference in your life! But remember, deciding to do it is not the same thing as doing it! If the plan you choose isn't working, don't give up! Try something else!

It is astounding how little time most Christians spend in prayer. If each one of us began to meditate and listen to God, our church would explode with enthusiasm and hope. Whether you start with one minute or five minutes every day, try doing it for thirty days and see if it doesn't make a difference in your life. The more deeply rooted you become in your daily habit of prayer, the more your conversations with God will spill over into other moments of your everyday life.

Don't race through the prayer process. Spend your minutes speaking to God about everyone and everything you are grateful for. The key is to recognize that God is right there with you in your quiet time. Nothing will give your life more meaning than developing a vibrant and sustainable quiet time with God. Prayer will help you to identify what matters most and will strengthen your heart and give you peace of mind.

Our world desperately needs people of prayer and virtue who have been in the presence of God. (some Daniels, Elijahs) People in your neighborhood need your prayers, your church needs your prayers, your friends need your prayers, and your colleagues need your prayers.

Every family needs a cornerstone of prayer. When there are no prayerful giants among us, we begin to lose our way spiritually.

Conclusion

We have a mission to transform our world, and the best faith action springs forth from a vibrant prayer life. Our efforts to transform our culture must be deeply rooted in our Christian faith and birthed in prayer. Without Christ at the center of your life, every benevolent effort you make becomes disconnected and quickly diminishes into just another form of social work. Don't get me wrong—social work is good, but we are called to more than that.

Acts of kindness naturally flow out of devout Christians. Our commitment to a disciplined life of prayer deepens our devotion to God. So let prayer lead you into a deep and lifelong friendship with God. It is a great moment when you realize that your life with prayer is much better than a life without it.