

The Discipline of Prayer

(Excerpts taken from Richard Foster's Celebration of Discipline)

Open: Think about some of your frustrations with, confusions about, and obstacles to prayer. Jot them down and refer to them as we consider this important discipline.

Some Preliminaries:

1. Of all the Spiritual Disciplines prayer is the most central because it ushers us into perpetual communion with the Father.
2. Prayer is the central avenue God uses to transform us. If we are unwilling to change, we will abandon prayer as a noticeable characteristic of our lives.
3. "You ask and do not receive, because you ask wrongly, to spend it on your passions" (James 4:3). To ask "rightly" involves informed passions. In prayer, real prayer, we begin to think God's thought after him: to desire the things he desires, to love the things he loves, to will the things he wills.

Prayer: The Main Business

1. All who have walked with God have viewed prayers as the main business of their lives.
 - a. Mark 1:35 are a commentary on the life-style of Jesus.
 - b. David's desire for God broke the self-indulgent chains of sleep (Ps. 63:1).
 - c. The apostles determined to give themselves continually to prayer and the ministry of the word (Acts 6:4).
 - d. Martin Luther: "I have so much business I cannot get on without spending three hours daily in prayer."
2. Many of us, however, are discouraged rather than challenged by such examples. Rather than flagellating ourselves for our obvious lack, we should remember that God always meets us where we are and slowly moves us along to deeper things.

The Power of Prayer

1. In our efforts to pray it is easy for us to be defeated right at the outset because we have been taught that everything in the universe is already set, and so things cannot be changed.
2. The Bible prayer-ers prayed as if their prayers could and would make an objective difference (cf. 1 Cor. 3:9)
3. This comes as a genuine liberation to many of us, but it also sets tremendous responsibility before us. We are working with God to determine the future! Certain things will happen in history if we pray rightly. We are to change the world by prayer.

Learning to Pray

1. Real prayer is something we learn (cf. Luke 11:1)
2. I began praying for others with an expectation that a change should and would occur.
3. To understand that the work of prayer involves a learning process saves us from arrogantly dismissing it as false or unreal.
4. One of the most critical aspects in learning to pray for others is to get in contact with God so that his life and power can flow through us into others.
5. We begin praying for others by first quieting our fleshly activity and listening to the silent thunder of the Lord of hosts.
6. Sometimes we are afraid that we do not have enough faith to pray for this child or that marriage. Our fears should be put to rest, for the Bible tells us that great miracles are possible through faith the size of a tiny mustard seed.

The Foothills of Prayer

1. We should never make prayer too complicated. Jesus taught us to come like children to a father. Openness, honesty, and trust mark the communication of children with their father.
2. Jesus taught us to pray for daily bread. Have you ever noticed that children ask for lunch in utter confidence that it will be provided?
3. We must learn to pray against evil. The old writers urged us to wage spiritual warfare against “the world, the flesh, and the devil.” We must never forget that the enemy of our souls prowls about like “a roaring lion” seeking whom he may devour (1 Pet. 5:8).
4. We need not worry that this work will take up too much of our time, for “It takes no time, but it occupies all our time.” It is not prayer in addition to work but prayer simultaneous with work. We precede, enfold, and follow all our work with prayer. Prayer and action become wedded.