

This Is Why Your Prayers Matter

I have been a Christian for more than 40 years now. A lot has happened in my life, and a lot of changes have taken place during that time. But I want to let you in on a little secret I've learned: The longer you know the Lord, the more you realize you need to keep growing spiritually.

In what we call the race of life, some take off with a burst of energy and cross the finish line with flying colors. Others may take off, stumble, but get up on their feet again and still finish. And some take off with a burst of energy but then collapse, and they never get up again.

Why do some succeed while others fail? It comes down to choices—hundreds and thousands of choices we make every day, every week and every year. We make our choices, and then our choices make us.

It also comes down to discipline, a word we don't like nowadays. Show me a person who is successful at anything, and I will show you a person who applied discipline. I heard about a concert violinist who was asked how she became so skilled. She said it was "planned neglect." She explained that she planned to neglect everything that was not related to her goal.

If you want to grow spiritually, there are certain things you don't want in your life—and there are other things you do. There are certain principles that constantly must be in play in your life, and one of them is prayer. To be a growing Christian, you must have a prayer life.

There are a lot of ways and a lot of places you can pray. You can pray publicly. You can pray privately. You can pray verbally. You can pray silently. You can pray kneeling down,

standing up, sitting or lying down. You can even pray while you are driving, but just make sure you keep your eyes open. The main thing is to pray. The Bible tells us to “pray without ceasing” (1 Thess. 5:17).

Sometimes we may feel as though God hears our prayers more in a church than he hears them in the mall, at the beach or walking down the street. God is not any more present in a place where we gather for worship than He is in any other place. God is omnipresent, which means he is present everywhere.

In the Bible, we find people praying in all kinds of places. David prayed in a field. Peter prayed on the water and underwater. Jonah prayed from the belly of a great fish. God will hear your prayer from wherever you are.

Daniel prayed in a lion's den. He had been elevated to a place of great influence in the kingdom of Babylon. King Darius trusted his words, but Daniel had enemies, political opponents who wanted him out of his place of authority. The problem with Daniel was there were no skeletons in his closet. There were no scandals. So they said, in effect, “The only way we're going to nail this guy is if we find something to do with him and his God.”

They knew Daniel had a habit of praying three times a day. He would go into his house, open the windows, get down on his knees and face Jerusalem. Then he would pray. Everyone knew that about him. Of course, a law was passed and signed that no one could pray to God except the king.

Daniel heard about it, and what did he do? The Bible says that “he went into his house. And his windows being open in his chamber toward Jerusalem, he kneeled on his knees three times a day, and prayed, and gave thanks before his God, as he had been doing previously” (Dan. 6:10b).

Is that what you would have done under those circumstances?

Daniel gave thanks to God. He understood that God was in control. The Bible tells us to “give thanks unto the Lord, for He is good, for His mercy endures forever” (Ps. 106:1). I don’t give thanks because I feel good. I don’t give thanks because things are always good. I give thanks to the Lord for He is good. It makes all the difference in the world. It’s a good reminder that our sovereign, powerful, good God is always in control. So we give thanks to the Lord. That is exactly what Daniel did as he offered his prayer. We need to always be praying.

Sometimes we have the luxury of spending time in prayer, and sometimes we can only send up a quick prayer to the God of heaven. You might be called to the principal’s office. You might be called to the boss’ office. You might be called to the Oval Office. You’re saying, “Lord, give me wisdom. Give me the right words at the right moment.” I’ve seen the Lord answer prayers like that. Pray all of the time, everywhere.

Christ himself was a model of prayer. He was always praying. In the garden of Gethsemane as he was contemplating the horrors of the cross, he prayed, “He went a little farther, and falling on His face, He prayed, ‘O My Father, if it is possible, let this cup pass from Me. Nevertheless, not as I will, but as You will’ (Matt. 26:39). On the cross he prayed for his enemies, saying, “Father, forgive them, for they don’t know what they do” (Luke 23:34b).

Before Jesus raised Lazarus from the dead, he “lifted up His eyes and said, ‘Father, I thank You that You have heard Me” (John 11:42b). Before he fed the 5,000, He “took the five loaves and two fish, and looking up to heaven, He blessed and broke and gave the loaves to His disciples” (Matt. 14:19b). The Bible also tells us that children were brought to Jesus so He could pray for them (see Matt. 19:13).

If Jesus felt the need to pray, then how much more should we feel it? Jesus was God, yet He prayed all the time. He would

pray through the night. Do you pray? We are commanded to pray. We ought to always pray and not give up. {eoa}

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