

The Importance of Prayer

gospelreformation.net/the-importance-of-prayer/

Guy
Richard

April 1,
2018



All of us as Christian leaders readily acknowledge the importance of prayer—especially prayer for those to whom we are ministering. But most, if not all, of us struggle in actually putting this conviction into practice. We know that we ought to pray more than we do, but we fall short of actually doing it. Martin Luther once lamented that every time he tried to pray, it was as if “a hundred thousand hindrances at once intervene[d]” and the devil himself attempted to “throw all sorts of reasons for delay” into his path to keep him from praying. I, for one, can identify with Luther on this point. Far too often, I struggle to overcome the many “hindrances” that arise in my daily schedule, and I allow Satan’s “reasons for delay” to keep me from praying. And my guess is that many of you are like me in this.

It is certainly very encouraging to know that someone who was as mightily used-of-God as Luther was could struggle with prayerlessness just as mightily as we do today. It holds out hope for us that our own struggles in prayer will not keep us from being similarly used of God. And we need to remind ourselves of that, so that we don’t lose hope and give up

altogether. But we also need to remind ourselves of how important prayer is not only for our own sakes but also for the sakes of the people to whom we minister and the world in which we live. We need to remind ourselves that prayer is important because God answers prayer, because we are all busy people, and because we so easily lose our focus in ministry. And we need to let these reminders motivate us to actually spend time in prayer.

God Answers Prayer

The first thing we need to remember is that prayer is important because God answers prayer. Jesus Himself told us that this was true approximately 9 times in the Gospel accounts (see, e.g., Matthew 7:7-11; 18:19; 21:22; Mark 11:24; Luke 11:1-13; John 14:13-14; 15:7; 15:16; and 16:23); and His own example in prayer demonstrated it repeatedly as well. Outside of the Gospels, we see James baldly declaring that the reason Christians are in want is directly related to the fact that they do not pray (James 4:2); and we see John insisting that “if we ask [God] anything according to his will...we know that we have the requests that we have asked of him” (1 John 5:14-15). To be sure, in each of these passages, there are qualifications or conditions given: we are to ask “according to his will” or in the name of Jesus, and we are not to ask “wrongly, to spend it on [our] passions.” These qualifications or conditions should be enough to keep us from ever assuming that our prayers will always be answered regardless of what we ask for. Prayer is not a genie-lamp that we can rub and receive every wish we might happen to make. But we should not allow these qualifications or conditions to numb us and prevent us from feeling the weight of what the Bible is actually saying here, which is, quite obviously, that God answers prayer. As JC Ryle has said, in the Bible

“Nothing seems to be too great, too hard, or too difficult for prayer to do.”

We need to let that sink in and motivate us to pray.

We All Lead Busy Lives

The second thing we need to remember is that prayer is important because we all lead busy lives. I frequently tell people that my life constantly feels like I am trying to fit 30 pounds into a 10-pound bag. There is never enough room in my schedule to fit everything that I want to fit. And I think most people will be able to identify with me at this point. We are all busy, and because we are busy, we do not pray as much as we ought. We think we are too busy to pray. But we need to be reminded that we are actually too busy *not* to pray. Martin Luther—the same Martin Luther who lamented his own prayerlessness—recognized this and said:

“I have so much business I cannot get on without spending three hours daily in prayer.”

Now, whether or not three hours is the right amount of time to spend in prayer is beside the point. The point is that it is precisely because we are busy that we need to be spending extended time in prayer. Luther realized this. He understood that God could cut the time required to do any of the tasks on his schedule and that God could move the hearts and minds of the people with whom Luther was dealing. We need to remember that God is God and that we are not. And we need to take our busyness—and our people’s busyness—to the Lord in prayer

We Easily Lose Focus

The third thing we need to remember is that prayer is important because we so easily lose focus in our lives. We so often lose sight of the forest for the trees. We get caught up in the busyness of programs and activities. We even get caught up in the good work of sermon preparation. Believe it or not, there is such a thing as studying too much. This is most especially true when our study time keeps us from praying. We need to remember what EM Bounds reminded us in his book *Power Through Prayer*:

We are constantly on a stretch, if not on a strain, to devise new methods, new plans, new organizations to advance the church and secure enlargement and efficiency for the gospel. This trend of the day has a tendency to lose sight of the man or sink the man in the plan or organization. God’s plan is to make much of the man, far more of him than of anything else. Men are God’s method. The church is looking for better methods; God is looking for better men.”

It is so easy to get sidetracked in plans, methods, programs, and activities. We need to be reminded continually that prayer is more important than these plans, methods, programs, and activities. It is more important because God really does answer prayer, because we are all busy, and because God works primarily in and through people instead of methods or programs. We need to remember that...and pray!



[Print View](#)