

Question: I believe prayer is important, but I find it difficult to maintain my prayer life. Do you have any suggestions to help me?

Prayer is important to our daily walk with God, and it is an expression of our faith in his presence in our lives and his loving purpose for each of us. At the same time, prayer can be a fearful experience. Sometimes we may fail to pray because we fear that we will not receive an answer to our prayers. At other times, we may fear the Heavenly Father will respond to our requests in a way that requires something of us. Whatever our problems with prayer, I have found three principles in the words of Jesus that are helpful. Jesus said: “Ask and it will be given to you; seek and you will find; knock and the door will be opened to you. For everyone who asks receives; he who seeks finds; and to him who knocks, the door will be opened” (Matthew 7:7-8).

Jesus began by saying, “Ask and it will be given to you.” Since the Lord God knows what we need before we ask, we are not praying to inform him. Instead, our prayers should indicate our sense of need for him and our dependence upon him. Some do not pray because of a lack of faith. Others do not know how to pray. Sometimes we do not pray because we are ashamed of some sin in our lives. But one of the greatest reasons we may not pray very often is that we have little sense of our need for the Lord. We have so much material wealth that we are satisfied with our lives and have little sense of deeper needs within. But as James said, “You do not have because you do not ask” (James 4:2). When we realize our deep spiritual poverty apart from the wisdom and power of God in our lives, then we will pray.

Jesus also said, “Seek and you will find.” Seeking involves asking God for help plus effort on our part. Prayer is not an easy way out of a situation for a lazy person. For example, praying that God will “give us this day our daily bread” does not mean we should sit idly by waiting for him to place food in our mouths. Instead, it should mean that we are praying for an opportunity to earn and have the things necessary to provide food for our families. Sometimes God answers our prayers by providing a way for us to answer those prayers ourselves. Our efforts do not replace the need for dependence upon God, but neither does prayer eliminate the need for our

active involvement. We must be ready and willing to seek out the answers to our prayers as God provides for us.

Finally, Jesus said, “Knock and it will be opened to you.” Knocking involves asking plus effort plus persistence in prayer. Prayer must become a way of life, not just an occasional crutch in times of need or fear. What do you think about a friend who only comes to see you when he is in trouble or has some or want? In the same way, how do you think our Heavenly Father must feel when we talk with him only in times of desperation? A healthy prayer life develops out of a regular and consistent walk with God in praise, gratitude and love. Then, he gladly helps us in our times of need.

Jesus taught many other helpful things about prayer. If you have not done so, I encourage you to meditate upon the Lord’s prayer (Matthew 6:9-13; Luke 11:1-4) as a model for learning how to pray. However, I do believe application of the above three principles is very basic to a healthy and growing relationship with the Heavenly Father through prayer.

[Send questions or comments to University Church of Christ, 801 N. 12th, Murray, KY 42071 or phone 270-753-1881. This article is reproduced on the web: www.nchrist.org] 2014/03/21