

Everyday with Jesus
July 24, 2016

I have lived through several life stages now and want to warn you who are younger than me about what is coming. When I was in middle and high school, I never gained weight no matter what I ate. Other than riding my bike or playing sports in the neighborhood, I didn't think about exercise. This was still true when I was in my 20's.

But then about age 30 things changed. I became the pastor of Emmanuel Baptist Church and spent my days at a desk instead of walking to classes and working as a janitor. So my activity level went down and my waistline started going up. I realized I needed to change my eating habits. So I cut back on my lunches and snacks.

At about age 55 I started noticing other changes. I was not sleeping through the night all the time. I did not have as much energy as I used to have. I started developing some arthritis and other aches and pains. My skin and finger nails got thinner. These are normal changes that come with age, and there is nothing much you can do about them. It is just part of getting older. But it is really hard to accept that you can't do what you have always done.

The things that make up my "quality of life" have changed. To maintain a good quality of life I have to watch how much I eat. I intentionally exercise. I have to work more on my relationships with family, since all my nieces and nephews are now adults with busy lives.

I tell you all this to encourage you. No matter your age I encourage you to develop good habits that will help you have a good quality of life throughout your life. It is never too early to develop good habits. You need good eating habits, exercise habits, relationship habits, time management habits, and spiritual habits.

Spiritual habits are activities that will benefit your relationship with Jesus. Today I want to recommend what I believe is one of the best spiritual habits to begin if you are not already doing so. To introduce this spiritual activity, I want you to look with me at a particular Bible verse.

Hezekiah 4:1 (RSP) "Start your day by meeting with God for 20-30 minutes (minimum)."

For the confused, there is no Bible book by the name of Hezekiah. Nor is there a verse in the Bible that commands us to start our day in prayer. There isn't even a recommendation that we begin our day with prayer. We ARE told to pray. But we are not told to start our day in prayer. We are not told to have a "quiet time", "daily devotions", "personal worship time", "time with God" or any similar phrasing for a focused time of prayer.

However, I have found that starting my day with prayer is one of the best spiritual habits I can do. Just as breakfast is the most important meal of my day, my meeting with God is the most important activity of my day. I know this from personal experience. Prayer is vitally important to your relationship with God. And starting your day with prayer is a good spiritual habit to form now for the rest of your life.

Jesus sets the example for starting your day in prayer.

Mark 1:35 (NIV) Very early in the morning, while it was still dark, Jesus got up, left the house and went off to a solitary place, where he prayed.

There are other passages that show how much Jesus prayed all during the day.

(Passages showing Jesus' habit of prayer: Matthew 14:23-24; Mark 14:32; Luke 5:16; Luke 6:12; Luke 9:28)

At least once He spent an entire night in prayer. We are not commanded to pray this way, but Jesus shows how important prayer is to our relationship with God. Jesus prayed like this because He needed to. If Jesus needed to pray like this, we certainly do. Let me give you some reasons we need to pray.

We pray to fellowship with Jesus.

There is comfort in just hanging out with Jesus, where you just enjoy being in His presence. This is what we will be doing in heaven. This is one of the blessings that is ours in Christ.

1 Corinthians 1:9 (NIV) God... has called you into fellowship with his Son Jesus Christ our Lord,...

God has called you into a relationship with Jesus. Christianity is not a religion as much as it is a relationship. **Relationships need quantities of quality time.**

Relationships become more shallow over time without personal sharing. Relationships need quantities of quality time where we share our hearts with someone else. Those of us who are married know this is so. It is from shared times that a relationship grows.

There are some days you don't have much time to give each other. If one or both of you are working a full time day job, and also working in Vacation Bible School, then there wasn't any quantity of quality time to spend on your relationship this week. There were no evenings at home to relax, to have a leisurely supper together, and talk about what is happening in your lives.

There are other times in the life of a marriage or in families that are like that. But when the busy time is over, you need to take the time for each other to maintain your love relationship. You need quantities of quality time with each other.

We need this in our relationship with Jesus too. We need quantities of quality time with Jesus in order for our relationship with Him to grow strong and stay strong. Look at some of those strong aspects with me.

We pray to focus ourselves on God and thank Him for life and other blessings.

In the first chapter of the book of Romans, in the Bible, Paul, the missionary, tells us the two chief sins of all people. The first is a neglect of God as the focus of our lives. The second is a failure to give Him the thanks He deserves for our lives. He states it this way...

Romans 1:21 (NIV) For although they knew God, they neither glorified Him as God, nor gave thanks to him...

Again, the first of our two chief sins is a neglect of God as the focus of our lives. The second is a failure to give Him the thanks He deserves from us. Knowing this, we should be working to reduce the frequency of these two sins in us. Make praise and thanksgiving key parts of your prayers to God.

Another reason we pray is that **We pray to commit our day to Him.**

Psalm 19:14 (NIV) May the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart be pleasing in your sight, O LORD,...

Every day brings challenges to our obedience. Every day brings problems. Every day brings people who are hard to deal with. Every day we are faced with the tendency to live self-focused lives instead of God-focused lives. A good habit is to start off your day by recognizing this tendency of sin in you and putting Jesus as Lord of your day.

We pray to learn of our sin.

All those who were in VBS this week are familiar with the following passage. It was the memory verse for the week.

Psalm 139:23-24 (NIV) Search me, O God, and know my heart; test me and know my anxious thoughts. See if there is any offensive way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting.

The point of teaching you this verse was not just to memorize it. Our goal was that you would realize the importance of what it says and would start praying it to Jesus. Make this verse a prayer of yours. Ask God to look into your heart for sinful attitudes, desires, beliefs, etc. Ask God to reveal to you what He finds in you and your behavior that is sinful. Just as you go to a doctor to diagnose what is wrong with your body, you must go to God for a diagnosis of what is wrong with your heart, mind, and spirit.

We pray for help to resist temptation.

All of us face temptation every day. Many of us face the same temptations every day, even many times in one day. We all need the help of Jesus to resist temptation, which is the point the writer makes in the following verses.

Hebrews 4:15-16 (NIV) For we do not have a high priest (Jesus) who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but we have one who has been tempted in every way, just as we are--yet was without sin. Let us then approach the throne of grace with confidence, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help us in our time of need.

We pray for wisdom and solutions to problems. Paul the missionary writes that...

Philippians 4:19 (NIV) And my God will meet all your needs according to his glorious riches in Christ Jesus.

So bring your needs of this day to God in prayer. Jesus said as much in His model prayer in the Sermon on the Mount.

We pray to understand the Bible.

Psalm 119:125 (NIV) I am your servant; give me discernment that I may understand your statutes.

These are all good reasons for starting your day in prayer.

So I encourage you to choose a place to be alone and undistracted by other people. When my children were small, I got up earlier than anyone else in the home so it would be quiet and I would not be distracted. But it doesn't have to be the absolute first thing you do in the morning. When my sons were teens attending the local high school, which started very early in the morning, I dressed, got them up, ate breakfast, took them to school, and then had my morning quiet time. Find a time and place that is best for you to concentrate on God.

Martin Luther is a famous pastor from the 16th century. He was sitting in the barber chair one day getting a shave. The barber asked him about prayer. Luther explained: "A good barber must have his thoughts, mind and eyes concentrated upon the razor and the beard and not forget where he is in his stroke and shaving. If he keeps talking or thinking of something else, he is likely to cut a man's mouth or nose—or even his throat."

Luther's point was that you don't want your barber distracted by other things when he is shaving you, or even cutting your hair. He might make a mistake that you don't want to live with.

There are activities and relationships that are so important to us that we need to concentrate on them alone without any distractions. I hope you are learning to pray quick prayers all during your day. But there is great benefit to having a concentrated time of 15-30 minutes of prayer where you focus exclusively on God.

I encourage you to make it the priority for your day. Give God first place in your day. Write your appointment with God in on your calendar. Arrange your other appointments around that one. You don't have to tell people that you are meeting God. Some won't understand. Others will insist that you can pray at another time. They'll say, "I can only meet you at this time", often meaning that they want to meet then and not rearrange their schedule around yours. Don't let them. Don't let others control your schedule with God. Put God first in your schedule.

Since there is no command to have a concentrated time of prayer each day, don't feel guilty if you are not in the habit of prayer. But I encourage you to form the habit. Choose the habit of prayer. Choose to start your day with prayer. Do it because you need to.

I believe you will see the benefit of doing so as you do it awhile. You will also realize the benefit if you do it for awhile and then get out of the habit. You will see negative changes to your life when you quit which will teach you the importance to your soul of doing so.

Invitation

If it sounds as if I mean for you to make Jesus the most important person in your life, you are right. That is exactly what I believe you should do. Do it because Jesus died for you.

Jesus died in your place, to save you from the penalties you would have to face for your sins against God. Jesus gets you off the hook of your own sins. You can be forgiven of sin today by receiving Jesus as your Savior and turning your life over to Him as your Lord.