

Intro:

Bible study material taken from Donald S. Whitney, *Spiritual Disciplines for the Christian Life* (Colorado Springs, CO: NavPress, 1991)

People go to great lengths to hear from the heavens. In New Mexico there is the Very Large Array. It consists of 27 radio telescopes and is one of the largest arrays in the world. It was featured in the movie "Contact". All around the world there are more and more of these big radio telescopes trying to make contact with heaven.

Guess what, you don't need a big telescope, you can pray. Scientists use the Very Large Array, but God "has a Very Large Ear continuously open to us. He will hear every prayer of His children, even when our prayers are weaker than a snowflake. **That's why, of all the Spiritual Disciplines, prayer is second only to the intake of God's Word in importance.**"¹

If we don't study God's word and prayer, everything else we do is going to be powerless, we are just doing it in our own power.

Research shows the majority of people in the United States still pray.

- But what are they praying about and to whom?

1. Prayer is Expected

a. Jesus expects us to pray.

- i. This is not just some impersonal requirement. The person, the Lord Jesus Christ, in all of his humanity and with all of His authority expects us to pray. When Jesus was with His disciples he told them how to pray. This is recorded in Mt. 6.
 1. Mt. 6:5, "And when you pray..."
 2. Mt. 6:6, "But when you pray..."
 3. Mt. 6:7, "And when you pray..."
 4. Mt. 6:9, "Pray then like this:..."
- ii. And in Luke,
 1. Luke 11:9, "And I tell you, ask, and it will be given to you, seek, and you will find."
 2. Luke 18:1, "And he told them a parable to the effect that they ought always to pray and not lose heart." Parable of the persistent widow.
- iii. If Jesus appeared to you in person and said He expected you to pray, would you become more faithful in it?

b. The bible tells us to pray.

- i. In addition to the words of Jesus, the unmistakable expectation of God from the rest of the New Testament is that we pray.²

¹ Donald S. Whitney, *Spiritual Disciplines for the Christian Life* (Colorado Springs, CO: NavPress, 1991), 65-66.

² Donald S. Whitney, *Spiritual Disciplines for the Christian Life* (Colorado Springs, CO: NavPress, 1991), 67.

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1. **Colossians 4:2-4** (ESV Strong's) Continue steadfastly in prayer, being watchful in it with thanksgiving. ³ At the same time, pray also for us, that God may open to us a door for the word, to declare the mystery of Christ, on account of which I am in prison— ⁴ that I may make it clear, which is how I ought to speak.
2. **1 Thessalonians 5:12-22** (ESV Strong's) We ask you, brothers, to respect those who labor among you and are over you in the Lord and admonish you, ¹³ and to esteem them very highly in love because of their work. Be at peace among yourselves. ¹⁴ And we urge you, brothers, admonish the idle, encourage the fainthearted, help the weak, be patient with them all. ¹⁵ See that no one repays anyone evil for evil, but always seek to do good to one another and to everyone. ¹⁶ Rejoice always, ¹⁷ pray without ceasing, ¹⁸ give thanks in all circumstances; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you. ¹⁹ Do not quench the Spirit. ²⁰ Do not despise prophecies, ²¹ but test everything; hold fast what is good. ²² Abstain from every form of evil.
 - a. You might think of praying without ceasing as communicating with God on one line while also taking calls on another. Even while you are talking on the other line, you never lose your awareness of the need to return your attention to the Lord. So praying without ceasing means you never really stop conversing with God; you simply have frequent interruptions.³
 - ii. God doesn't just give us a suggestion to pray, He tells us to pray.
 1. This means too little time, too many responsibilities, too many kids, too much work, too little desire, too little experience, etc., do not exempt us from the expectation to pray. God expects every Christian to be devoted to prayer and to pray without ceasing.⁴
 - iii. We should have great confidence in why we pray.
 1. Hebrews 4:16 (ESV Strong's) Let us then with confidence draw near to the throne of grace, that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need.
 - iv. We pray for a reason. We need to hear from God.
 1. *"God also expects us to pray just as a general expects to hear from his soldiers in the battle. One writer reminds us that "prayer is a walkie-talkie for warfare, not a domestic intercom for increasing our conveniences."⁴ God expects us to use the walkie-talkie of prayer because that is the means He has ordained not only for Godliness, but also for the spiritual warfare between His Kingdom and the kingdom of His Enemy. To abandon prayer is to fight the battle with our own resources at best, and to lose interest in the battle at worst.⁵"*

³ Donald S. Whitney, [Spiritual Disciplines for the Christian Life](#) (Colorado Springs, CO: NavPress, 1991), 68.

⁴ Donald S. Whitney, [Spiritual Disciplines for the Christian Life](#) (Colorado Springs, CO: NavPress, 1991), 68.

⁵ From the book *Desiring God: Meditations of a Christian Hedonist* by John Piper, copyright 1986 by Multnomah Press. Published by Multnomah Press, Portland, Oregon 97266. Used by permission, page 147. Donald S. Whitney, [Spiritual Disciplines for the Christian Life](#) (Colorado Springs, CO: NavPress, 1991), 68-69.

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2. This much we know—Jesus prayed. Luke tells us, “But Jesus often withdrew to lonely places and prayed” (Luke 5:16). If Jesus needed to pray, how much more do we need to pray? Prayer is expected of us because we need it. We will not be like Jesus without it.⁶

c. Things that stop people from praying.

- i. Sometimes it is a lack of discipline.
 1. People don't carve out the time needed.
- ii. Sometimes it is a lack of faith.
 1. People don't want to admit it, but they don't really know if prayer works.
 - a. That is why it is so important to have praise reports. I try to tell people when I have prayers answered right away.
 - i. Especially if it is something that only God can do.
 - ii. Or when it is something that brings Glory to God, that is what God desires.
- iii. Impatience, People are used to talking and hearing an answer right away. We are talking to God who is Spiritual and looking for an answer that is material.
 1. If all prayers were answered as fast as text messages or instant messages there would be holes in the knees of everyone's pants.
- iv. Lack of awareness of real need means little real prayer.
 1. There is a difference in remembering a person by name and knowing details to pray for.
- v. We think we are self sufficient.
 1. John 15:5 I am the vine; you are the branches. Whoever abides in me and I in him, he it is that bears much fruit, for apart from me you can do nothing.
 2. Many times people are cruising through life and are on auto-pilot. If they don't think anything is wrong they don't see a need to pray.
 - a. We are supposed to be talking to God to get our next assignment.
- vi. Lack of concern about sharing the gospel of Jesus.
 1. When our awareness of the greatness of God and the gospel is dim, our prayer lives will be small. The less we think of the nature and character of God, and the less we are reminded of what Jesus Christ did for us on the Cross, the less we want to pray.⁷

2. Prayer is learned

a. By praying.

1. You can read and watch, but nothing is more important than doing.
2. The spirit will guide you and teach you.
 - a. John 16:13 When the Spirit of truth comes, he will guide you into all the truth, for he will not speak on his own authority, but whatever he hears he will speak, and he will declare to you the things that are to come.

b. By Meditating on God's word

1. We should have a smooth transition from bible intake into prayer.
 - a. In Psalm 19 David is talking about the truths of God's word.
 - i. V.7 “the law of the Lord is perfect, reviving the soul.”
 - b. As you read God's word and practice praying along with His truth, it will become more natural to pray.
 - i. Psalm 19:14 (ESV) Let the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart be acceptable in your sight, O LORD, my rock and my redeemer.

⁶ Donald S. Whitney, *Spiritual Disciplines for the Christian Life* (Colorado Springs, CO: NavPress, 1991), 69.

⁷ Donald S. Whitney, *Spiritual Disciplines for the Christian Life* (Colorado Springs, CO: NavPress, 1991), 70

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2. George Mueller- One of the greatest prayer warriors I have read about, had this to say about bible intake, meditating on God's word, and then moving into prayer.
 - a. "Before this time my practice had been, at least for ten years previously, as an habitual thing, to give myself to prayer after having dressed in the morning. Now, I saw that the most important thing was to give myself to the reading of God's Word, and to meditation on it, that thus my heart might be comforted, encouraged, warned, reprov'd, instructed; and that thus, by means of the Word of God, whilst meditating on it, my heart might be brought into experimental communion with the Lord."⁸

c. We should Pray together

- i. .When the disciples asked Jesus to teach them how to pray, it wasn't just a random question. He had just prayed with them.
 1. Luke 11:1 (ESV)The Lord's Prayer 11 Now Jesus was praying in a certain place, and when he finished, one of his disciples said to him, "Lord, teach us to pray, as John taught his disciples."
- ii. We shouldn't learn new phrases, but listen for the focus.
 1. God does not desire that we have robotic sounding prayers that we all say the same things the same way.
 - a. Matthew 6:7 (ESV) 7 "And when you pray, do not heap up empty phrases as the Gentiles do, for they think that they will be heard for their many words.
 2. I say this with caution, but repetition is rarely from the heart.
 - i. Jesus gave us a guided prayer when he taught the disciples to pray, but He wasn't commanding them to pray the exact words every time.

d. We should read about prayer

- i. Do a study of prayers in the bible
- ii. Read a book about great people of the faith who were prayer warriors.
 1. David Brainerd
 2. George Mueller
- iii. Make sure the book on prayer lines up with your theology of God.

3. Prayer is Answered

a. The Bible tells us so

- i. God hears our prayers.
 1. Psalm 65:2 (ESV) O you who hear prayer, to you shall all flesh come.
- ii. God answers our prayers.
 1. Matthew 7:7-8 (ESV) Ask, and It Will Be Given 7 "Ask, and it will be given to you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you. 8 For everyone who asks receives, and the one who seeks finds, and to the one who knocks it will be opened.
- iii. But God is not a genie in a bottle
 1. Andrew Murray comments boldly, but I think rightly, on Christ's pledge. "Ask and you shall receive; everyone that asks, receives." This is the fixed eternal law of the kingdom: if you ask and receive not, it must be because there is something amiss or wanting in the prayer. Hold on; let the Word and Spirit teach you to pray aright, but do not let go the confidence He seeks to waken: Everyone who asks receives.... Let every learner in the school of Christ

⁸ Donald S. Whitney, *Spiritual Disciplines for the Christian Life* (Colorado Springs, CO: NavPress, 1991), 74

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therefore take the Master's word in all simplicity.... Let us beware of weakening the Word with our human wisdom.⁹

2. If your prayers are not answered, make sure they are in line with God's will.
 - a. Luke 22:42 "Father, if you are willing, remove this cup from me. Nevertheless, not my will, but yours, be done.

⁹ Donald S. Whitney, *Spiritual Disciplines for the Christian Life* (Colorado Springs, CO: NavPress, 1991), 78.