

Have We Lost The Biblical Vision Of Prayer? Adapted from an article by Tom Roma, LCMS website

A book, *UnChristian*, by David Kinnaman and Gabe Lyons found that “young people engage in a nearly constant search for fresh experiences and new sources of motivation. They want to try things out themselves, disdaining self-proclaimed experts, and if something doesn’t work for them, or if they are not permitted to participate in the process, they quickly move on to something that grabs them.”

Several key components of youth today – fresh experiences, sources of motivation, trying new things, yet bouncing around between them. And this begs the question, “Has prayer become boring?” Do youth identify prayer with church and buildings, or with their own relationship with Jesus Christ?

Teens often worry about relationships with other teens, but their relationship with Christ is put on the back burner. Prayer as a spiritual discipline is a term that sounds time-consuming, boring, lame, uninteresting, etc. However, ESource, says, “God uses prayer disciplines to mold, conform and transform us, His children, to His will, and to lead us through this life to the next.” Prayer needs to highlight “our action toward God”, not as a set model to follow. (Complete article is on our website.) It’s a subtle difference, but this difference may help remove our expectations. It removes our desire for answers to prayer and allows “our heart to have a conversation with God” (Psalm 27:8).

Thomas Merton poses a great question about prayer, “What is the use of prayer if we have so little confidence in God that we are too busy planning our own kind of answer to our prayer?”

Francis Pieper says, “Prayer...is the continuous longing for the heart of God....Prayer, empowered by the Holy Spirit, is tied within the hearts-strings of the created human.” Romans 8:26-27 says, “In the same way, the Spirit helps us in our weakness, We do not know what we ought to pray for, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us with groans that words cannot express.” The Spirit reveals to God when we are unable, exposing the depths of our heart.

Martin Luther likened prayer to a pulse of a living human – so long as the heart beats, so long does the Spirit continue to pray unceasingly for the Christian.

Psalm 141:2 says, “May my prayer be set before you like incense. . .” When was the last time you saw incense (or smoke) rise down? It seems awkward to think about something that is made to raise as flowing down. Our mentality of prayer should be set ad an act that rises, whatever the consequence, in trust that our Lord Jesus does indeed hear our petitions, desires, wants, and needs (Matt. 7:7).

Jesus created a prayer that recognizes God, our need as humanity, and recognizes the world around us that continues to tempt us. It’s a prayer that focuses on our basic needs. God doesn’t need us to pray. . . He already knows what we will say!! **But we need us to pray. We need to be aware and reaffirmed that God continues to walk with us, providing for us, loving us!**

In John 17, Jesus himself prays three lengthy prayers audibly in front of the disciples and us. Prayer is not supposed to tell God things He doesn’t know, but to remind us of things that we’ve forgotten – chiefly, of Christ himself!

Praying is often helped by praying scripture--praying God’s words back to Him. Dietrich Bonhoeffer wrote Psalms: The Prayer Book of the Bible. The emphasis is not on what God can do for us, but what He has already done in us through Christ and His action on the cross. The Psalms helps put words to the groaning that the Spirit places in our hearts. We can begin to translate the voice lost through our technology – the voice of the Spirit within us, praying for us, reassuring us, and reminding us of our Everlasting God who walks daily with us.

How do we teach our youth what we have learned – that prayer is as a spiritual discipline?

There really is no... one to ten step outline to try. No perfect plan to begin teaching your youth about prayer as a spiritual discipline. The entire idea of a spiritual discipline is something that needs to be worked at. It is an action that is different for all people. For some, it is setting the alarm 15 minutes earlier. For some people, it is staying up 15 minutes later and committing yourself to praying or resting in God during this time. Many are the excuses not to pray – like sleeping in, keep reading, keep watching TV and just too tired like the disciples with Jesus in the Garden of Gethsemane. Jesus asked 3 times, why could you not keep watch? Then he says, “Watch and pray so that you will not fall into temptation, the spirit is willing, but the flesh is weak.” Matt. 26:41

In teaching this lesson of prayer as spiritual discipline, allow freedom in prayer. Allow participation and experience in praying before God. It may be a great idea to each pick out a Psalm to be read in the morning, revisit that Psalm around lunchtime, and then pray that Psalm in the evening. Daniel prayed three times a day, (Dan. 6). Times can be altered to fit your time schedule. However praying Scripture will be fresh, a source of motivation, new, and should not be boring! Or maybe you stress to the youth that instead of setting a time, they set a place or action, i.e. like the sound of a siren or the flashing lights of an emergency vehicle. If they are going to meet a friend, tell them to pray for her/him or them enroute, or to sit down for three minutes in the mall in prayer, reading a Psalm, or sitting still with our vision raised before God through the Spirit before shopping.

Prayer is not about receiving, but about giving. It is an experienced reminder that Christ continues to guide us and live in us. Prayer is trusting that God hears, not trusting that God gives us the answer we expect.

Prayer in itself returns our vision to God, removing ourselves from the temptations that surround us and often suffocate us. It is looking at heaven wherever we are, and allowing the Spirit to work within us. Prayer is the spiritual discipline that takes action – and a commitment to this action – one that may oftentimes seem sacrificial to our busy technologically-overrun schedules. But this action is pretty representative of the action of Jesus Christ at Golgotha on our behalf, right? The Sacrificial Action!!