

I Believe in God...But I Don't Pray Much

Welcome/Prayer

Before you begin, pray for understanding of the scripture, enlightenment that the Holy Spirit may guide your understanding, discernment that you may see how this lesson applies to you, and courage to surrender those things that hinder your spiritual growth.

Foreword

Our current sermon series, "The Christian Atheist," is based on a premise that there is more than one kind of atheist in the world. The one we typically associate with the word, "atheist," is a person who denies the existence of a deity or a supreme being. A second one is a "Christian Atheist," or a person who believes in God but gives little thought to Him in everyday living. In our preceding study, we concluded with a passage from Paul's letter to the Philippians where he states, "Don't worry about anything; instead, pray about everything." (Philippians 4:6a NLT) In this study, let's look out how we can more closely align our actions with our beliefs so that we can become a praying people.

Preparation

Before you begin the study and discuss the key segments of the message, read aloud the following verse in the different translations:

1 Thessalonians 5:17

Never stop praying. (NLT)

Pray continually. (GNV)

Pray without ceasing. (KJ21)

...pray all the time (MSG)

Introduction

Recall a notable finding (mentioned in the sermon) from a particular research survey on prayer habits: the typical American follower of Christ prays approximately five minutes per day, and the average pastor prays 39 minutes per day. In contrast to Paul's admonition in the above scripture, it's clear that we are not living up to our calling. We believe in God, but we don't pray much.

1. How much time in an average day do you spend in prayer?
2. Are you satisfied with your prayer life? Why or why not?
3. How do you think American Christians' prayer habits compare with believers in the Early Church? (Hint: Read Acts 1:14)

Break it Down

I don't pray much because...

"I'm too busy."

We live in a fast-paced, consumeristic world, and we've become accustomed to—and thus expect—instant gratification. Satan tells us that if we slow down or fail to keep up with the Joneses, the world will pass by us. Trying to find the quietness in the noise of life to invest in prayer seems, at least on the surface, as though it would be better used to accomplish some *measurable* task. But, again, our key scripture from Paul reminds us differently; we are to "pray

all the time.” The sermon for this lesson offered two suggestions on how to temper our busy-ness to make time for prayer: (1) schedule it; and (2) “rapid-fire prayers.”

1. How does life get in the way of spending time in prayer?
2. When would be the best time in your day to schedule prayer?
3. What are some “rapid-fire” prayers you could pray?

“I don’t think I need to.”

Oftentimes we find ourselves giving prayer time to the “big” matters and act as though we don’t need God in the mundane. Accordingly, it is usually when circumstances overwhelm us that we call on Him and plead for His mercy. That kind of prayer practice ignores the truth that Jesus once communicated to His disciples, “Those who remain in me, and I in them, will produce much fruit. For apart from me you can do nothing.” (John 15:5 NLT).

Prayer is what connects us to God in the name of His Son. If we are going to accomplish anything of lasting, significant value, we need to pray...not just occasionally, but without ceasing.

1. Share about a time that you used prayer in an emergency situation?
2. Do you commonly pray about routine matters? Why or why not?

“I don’t understand it.”

There are several misunderstandings about prayer—how it works, how to do it, etc. Sometimes it’s so confusing that we simply decide not to do it. Yet, as we learned in the sermon, prayer is really a way of communication. We don’t have to understand every detail or process of prayer; because God is involved, there will always be an element of mystery and a measure of faith to be exercised. Not understanding prayer is not a reason not to pray; instead, we must believe and put our trust in God to answer as He sees fit. Recall Jesus’ words in Matthew 21:22 (GWT): “Have faith that you will receive whatever you ask for in prayer.”

1. What are some questions or misunderstandings you have about prayer?
2. Discuss any reservations or fears of praying aloud before others?
3. Who is someone you’ve learned about prayer from, and share what you learned?

“I’m not sure it really matters.”

None of us want to admit that we don’t believe in the power of prayer. It’s likely that each of us has felt at one time or another that our prayers really didn’t matter (e.g., the cancer spread; he didn’t get the job; she lost the baby). But, if we’re praying only five minutes per day, aren’t we merely demonstrating a Christian Atheistic behavior?—that we believe in God, but living as though **He** doesn’t matter? The truth is that prayer does matter. Craig Groeschel recommends using the acronym, “PUSH,” meaning “Pray Until Something Happens.” Even when we feel as though our prayers are falling on deaf ears, the truth is that God hears every one of them.

1. Share about a particular prayer that has seemingly gone unanswered and how you’ve responded.
2. How have you or your circumstances been changed by prayer?

Conclusion

St. Augustine said, “Work as if everything depends on you, and pray as if everything depends on God.” When we do that—individually and collectively—we will vanquish Christian Atheism from among us. Make the commitment today to break the five-minute per day statistic.

Close in Prayer