

NOW WHAT? Back to the Basics

DISCIPLINE – Part1 THE EXERCISE OF PRAYER

Review

A person is born of the Spirit and receives Jesus Christ as Lord. Now What? Well they learn the truth that they are living in a hostile world and even within them there is a battle between the flesh and the spirit that is raging. They learn their main job is to kill sin.

How are they to stand strong? The first leg is 'Doctrine'. It is belief in the Truth that bring stability to the Christian life. The second leg is 'Discipline'. There are habits, disciplines, or "means of grace" that enable the child of God to run their race successfully.

Paul calls the Church, through the Spirit, to "train yourself for godliness; for while bodily training is of some value, godliness is of value in every way, as it holds promise for the present life and also for the life to come."¹ "Exercise (Gr *gymnazo*) is the word from which we get gymnasium. Exercise takes determination and discipline. Godliness comes at a price but it is profitable ... now, here and hereafter."²

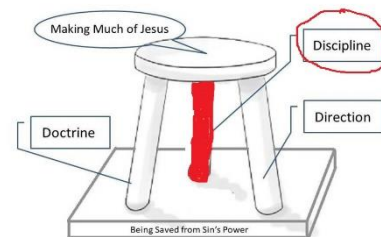
The first exercise that a new Christian must learn is prayer.

Introduction

When a baby is born, the doctor anecdotally slaps the babies bottom to induce a cry. That cry is the confidence that this baby is alive and well. When new born children of God first awaken in their New Birth their primary response is to call "... upon the name of the Lord shall be saved" (Acts 2:21, ESV). When Paul wrote the Church in Corinth the first time, he describes Christians as "... called to be saints together with all those who in every place call upon the name of our Lord Jesus Christ ..." (1 Corinthians 1:2, ESV). There is a sense where prayer is not so much what a Christian does, but who they are.

The wonder of God's grace is that he invites us to pray. He looks forward to us praying. He expects us to pray. Hear the kind invitation in Hebrews 4:16-17.

Now What?



¹ [The Holy Bible: English Standard Version](#). (2016). (1 Ti 4:7-8). Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles.

² Hindson, E. E., & Kroll, W. M. (Eds.). (1994). [KJV Bible Commentary](#) (p. 2502). Nashville: Thomas Nelson.

A Welcoming Invitation to Pray

¹⁴ Since then we have a great high priest who has passed through the heavens, Jesus, the Son of God, let us hold fast our confession. ¹⁵ For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but one who in every respect has been tempted as we are, yet without sin. ¹⁶ 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.

There is no shortage of teaching in God's Word about prayer. The Bible literally explodes with instruction and example of holy prayer. From Genesis to Revelation we are instructed on prayer. In Genesis 4:26 (ESV), after sin entered the world; after the earth started to be inhabited, we read, "... At that time people began to call upon the name of the Lord." The Scriptural record closes with a prayer: "Amen. Come, Lord Jesus!"³

- Jesus taught much on prayer.
- Jesus modelled a life of prayer.
- The Apostles, sought prayer for themselves and others.
- Prayer is a command.
- Prayer is a weapon of warfare.
- Prayer is the very breath of a Christian, as Matthew Henry wrote.

We are welcomed to pray and never so much as in this passage before us. The early readers were ready to pack it in and abandon the better Jesus with the not-so-better Judaism. This letter is intended to strike terror in the heart of the Christian who might contemplate leaving Christ and returning to the old order. So in the call to keep on, keeping on, we read this encouragement, "Let us then with confidence draw near . . ."

We should "draw near" is the Greek verb⁴: προσέρχομαι [pros-er-khom-ahēe] which is in the same word grouping as the noun: προσευχή [pros-yoo-khay], or to pray. The author writes, "Because we have a High Priest, we should pray." The high priest stood between man and God. Jesus is our High Priest. He has ascended to Heaven. He sits at the right hand – the position of honor – beside the Father. He is our heavenly go-between. Because he is there – we should pray!

But he is our GREAT high priest. He is great because he made a perfect, once-in-a-lifetime sacrifice. He is great because his ministry received the commendation of God and he is in God's presence right now in heaven. He is great because he is the Son of God, the heir, the Christ of the living God. He is great because his work was completed on earth but continues in heaven. Because he is great "*he is able to save to the uttermost those who draw near to God through him, since he always lives to make intercession for them*" (Hebrews 7:25, ESV).

³ [The Holy Bible: English Standard Version](#). (2016). (Re 22:20). Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles.

⁴ Strong, J. (1995). [Enhanced Strong's Lexicon](#). Woodside Bible Fellowship.

He is great in that he can sympathize with us. He understands us. He has been tempted and tried as we have. But he didn't sin. If you need help from God, there is no one better than the Lord Jesus Christ to talk to. So, what is the conclusion?

"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." (Hebrews 4:16, ESV)

There is not an event in our lives whereby we don't need mercy (forgiveness for sin) or grace (enabling power). ***The greatness of our Savior does not restrict us from approaching him. It is the very basis whereby we may come to him.*** John MacArthur writes, "Jesus not only had all the feelings of love, concern, disappointment, grief, and frustration that we have, but He had much greater love, infinitely more sensitive concerns, infinitely higher standards of righteousness, and perfect awareness of the evil and dangers of sin."⁵

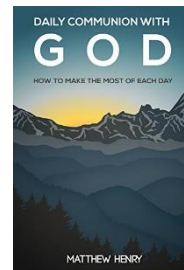
The One who understands us perfectly will also provide for us perfectly. A.W. Pink writes,

"Boldly is not contrasted with reverently and tremblingly. It means literally 'saying all,' with that confidence which begets thorough honesty, frankness, full and open speech. 'Pour out your heart before Him.' Come as you are, say what you feel, ask what you need. Confess your sins, your fears, your wandering thoughts and affections."⁶

Pastoral Recommendations of Prayer

Matthew Henry

There was a time when almost every evangelical household had a commentary on the Bible, written by Matthew Henry. Matthew Henry was born in Wales in 1662 in a godly home that was undergoing conflict with the state church. He was an unusually gifted child. There is evidence that he read portions of Scripture even at the age of 3. He was born again before his teen years. He lived out his years as a pastor. In 1712, he preached sermons that were published as Directions for Daily Communion with God. These sermons were compiled into a book which is still available today: [Daily Communion with God: How to Make the Most of Each Day](#). In this book, Henry, follows the pattern of the psalmist who wrote:



"But I call to God, and the LORD will save me. Evening and morning and at noon I utter my complaint and moan, and he hears my voice" (Psalm 55:16–17, ESV).

⁵ MacArthur, J. F., Jr. (1983). *Hebrews* (pp. 111–112). Chicago: Moody Press.

⁶ Pink, A. W. (2000). *An Exposition of Hebrews* (electronic ed., p. 222). Escondido, CA: Ephesians Four Group.

So, this morning I want to follow the advice of Matthew Henry by borrowing his headings that provide a practical guide to our prayer lives. Let me close with some practical recommendations from myself and Pastor Henry!

1. Start Every Morning with Prayer

David wrote in Psalm 5:3 (ESV), “³ O LORD, in the morning you hear my voice; in the morning I prepare a sacrifice for you and watch.” We read of the godly man, Daniel, “*When Daniel knew that the document had been signed, he went to his house where he had windows in his upper chamber open toward Jerusalem. He got down on his knees three times a day and prayed and gave thanks before his God, as he had done previously*” (Daniel 6:10, ESV).

To start the day with prayer reminds us who is chief, who is important, who comes first. One saint told me that in those minutes prior to swinging their legs out of bed and after the alarm sounded, they imagined their bed as an altar and prayed: “[Because of your great mercies, God, I] *present [my body] as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to [you], which is [my] spiritual worship . . .*” (Romans 12:1–2, ESV).

I pray in concentric circles. I pray for myself. I usually pray for things that the Lord reveals to me in my devotional bible reading. I pray for my wife and my family. I pray for certain members in my extended family that I’m aware of that need prayer. I pray on a rotation for the Church elders and deacons and the Church. I pray for certain missionaries.

Taking time each morning, for as much time as you can, in prayer is an important way to start the day.

2. Spend Every Day with God

This is undoubtedly what Paul meant when he wrote, “*pray without ceasing*” (1 Thessalonians 5:17, ESV). How do we who work, who have God-given commitments pray throughout the day. King David wrote, “*Lead me in your truth and teach me, for you are the God of my salvation; for you I wait all the day long*” (Psalm 25:5, ESV). Matthew Henry teaches that waiting means a constant eye on God watching for him and his direction throughout our day. “*To wait on God, is to live a life of desire towards him, delight in him, dependence on him, and devotedness to him.*”⁷

Here’s my understanding of “waiting” on God throughout the day. Proverbs 3:5–6 (ESV) teaches us, “⁵ Trust in the Lord with all your heart, and do not lean on your own understanding. ⁶ In all your ways acknowledge him, and he will make straight your paths.” “In all your ways acknowledge him.” This we can do as work, as we drive, as we shop, as we eat, etc. It is a matter of believing that Christ is always with and always interested in the life and the events of your day. It’s that silent prayer as you get in your vehicle. It’s that silent prayer as you touch the welding rod to its work. It’s that silent prayer as

⁷ Beeke, Joel R.; Jones, Mark. A Puritan Theology: Doctrine for Life (Kindle Locations 33093-33094). . Kindle Edition.

you attend to your baby's cry. It's that silent prayer before you answer the phone. It's that silent prayer before you enter the classroom.

"In all your ways acknowledge him." It is the attitude of the child to his or her father on whom they trust and on whom they know cares deeply about what they are doing. It's that child that looks at Daddy and says, "Look Daddy. Look at what I'm doing!" It's the attitude of a slave to his master. In all I do I only want to do their will. In everything I do I consult my boss and desire that I do this in honor and for his glory.

3. End the Day with Prayer

David wrote, *"In peace I will both lie down and sleep; for you alone, O LORD, make me dwell in safety"* (Psalm 4:8, ESV). "When we lay down to rest at night, Henry advised us to lie down with thanksgiving to God."⁸ It's a good time to review the day and say, "Thankyou."

For me I love to end the day with the 23rd Psalm on my mind. I especially think as I remember the words: *"Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life, and I shall dwell in the house of the LORD forever"* (Psalm 23:6, ESV). I consider the "goodness" of God to me that day – the blessings that he allowed me to experience. I also think of his mercy. I have sinned deeply and often that day. And by confessing my sin I can rejoice in the mercy of God who did not consume me. I also remember (and more so in these latter years) that if I should die before I wake, "I shall dwell in the house of the Lord forever."

Conclusion

Pastor Henry challenges us with these words, "You may as soon find a living man who does not breathe, as a living Christian who does not pray." Let us pray at the start of the day. Let us pray at the end of the day. Let us pray all day. Let us pray because Jesus is our great high priest. Let us pray because he is the one who is ultimately praying for us. Let us pray because we are welcomed, invited to pray. Let us pray about all things, everywhere, all the time.

Let us pray.

⁸ Beeke, Joel R.; Jones, Mark. A Puritan Theology: Doctrine for Life (Kindle Location 33140). . Kindle Edition.