

Developing Prayer Principles

The maturity of the Inner Man is vital if we are to pray like the Apostles. While this maturity can take many years to attain we need to start the journey as soon as possible. In one sense this begins at salvation, but in another sense we come to this point again and again in our walk with the Lord.

Developing the 'Spiritual Man' is probably a major desire of most Christians, even though they mightn't use that precise term. However, for most of us it's been an ad hoc thing.

We have spurts of interest in the deeper things of God, work at perfecting our interior life, then for various reasons, let it lapse. Some time later the stirring starts again and we begin to focus on it once more, usually going through seasons of such interest, but rarely committing long periods to it, and so our progress is haphazard.

However it's evident from Scripture that the development and nurture of the Inner Man is an ordered and disciplined lifestyle. Sometimes because of that very idea, modern Christians reject it as a traditional religious practice akin to ritualism and formalism.

How wrong we'd be to think like that. John and Charles Wesley gathered like-minded Christians around them in a group called "The Holy Club". They regularly met to encourage one another (Prov. 27:17) and out of this came the movement we know as the "Methodists".

Note the name: Methodists! They had a method, a disciplined order of lifestyle.

We shouldn't think that simply because discipline, method and order are required, it's necessarily wrong or like Catholicism.

It can be strongly argued that early Jews used such method and order in their spiritual education and instruction.

The life of a Rabbi revolved around such a concept, as we see with Jesus and the twelve disciples. Remember that the word "disciple" comes from the word "discipline"! The three and a half years the disciples shared with Jesus were far from experiences that 'just happened'. Jesus the Rabbi was using a well-known way of nurturing, challenging and testing those who were committed to Him.

As the Father spoke to Jesus, He would lead the disciples along the next stage of the path, revealing new truths to them, opening up new vistas, and deliberately bringing them closer and closer to maturity.

Today we would do well to reconsider such a disciplined lifestyle. Naturally I'm not talking about being rigid, controlled or legalistic in this, but free and receptive to the Spirit as He "*blows where He wills*" (John 3: 8).

We won't grow in the Lord unless we're consistent and disciplined in our walk. However, the discipline we're talking about here is not sticking to a programme, like ACTS, but being open to what the Spirit tells you, and having a willing heart, ready to obey.

A disciplined prayer life doesn't necessarily mean you pray at the same time each day, in the same place, and in the same way. You *may* do these things, but you shouldn't feel guilty if you break the pattern.

The best example of a disciplined (read "*obedient*") prayer life is found in Jesus. He never spoke out of His own mind or will. He deliberately chose to listen to the Father.

Some Christians think that Jesus somehow just received messages from His Father and churned them out like a computer, so to speak. Rather, Jesus chose to submit His will, emotions and mind to Abba. In doing this He was able to act solely on the Father's will, either by doing what the Father was showing Him or speaking what the Father had already spoken to Him (John 5: 19).

That is the pattern we need to follow and imitate. His prayer life was an example for us. It was, and still is, the perfect pattern of prayer.

Developing our Inner Man brings us closer and closer to living in the Spirit, and praying the prayers of the Spirit.

Think about that for a moment.

" Praying the prayers of the Spirit." Wouldn't you like to be so attuned to the Father that you only pray what the Father by the Spirit shows you to pray? What freedom there is in that!

In order to live such a spiritual life we will need to exercise our Inner Man, learning how to be sensitive to the Holy Spirit and attentive to Him.

We're so used to using our minds when praying that we often unwittingly block out the still small voice. A basic spiritual principle is this:

**It's in the mind that you hear the Logos,
but it's in the spirit that you hear the Rhema.**

We need to cultivate the sensitivity of our spirit so we can tune in to the Rhema Word of the Lord. Of course the Rhema can come at any time; during a counselling session, as a Word of Knowledge, during ministry time, etc. But generally these Words come while we're actively engaged in something, while we're busy.

However there's another level of the Rhema that comes when you're quiet, in a receptive attitude, and focussed almost totally on the Lord. It's this level of the Rhema that's developed within as you learn to sit quietly in His presence, looking away unto Jesus, and seeking Him and Him alone, and for no other reason than to be with Him!

This can be hard for us. We're so used to seeking 'something' from the Lord, asking Him for an answer to prayer, etc, that we can easily ignore HIM!

Even having said this, there are times when we seek to 'experience' Him. But stop for a moment. What are we saying when we want to 'experience Him' ?

It sounds right enough. But once more we're seeking 'something' from Him, an *experience* – but still not HIM for Himself !

It really is surprising how greedy and self-seeking we can be. Even when we desire to be wholly devoted to God, somehow the flesh creeps in and taints our endeavour.

It's a bit like people who want to worship the Lord so much that they focus more on the act of worship than Him. In the end they end up worshipping 'worship'. It's so easy and can happen to any of us. However, don't despair about it. God knows our intentions and His mercy will override the weakest attempt and bring it to fulfilment. That's why He's the God of grace and kindness!

The Hebrews who had a willing heart were the ones that contributed to the building of the Tabernacle. A willing heart, despite its own carnality, is still what God desires. The carnality of man can be dealt with by grace and mercy. The hardness of heart is a great offence to the Lord. It usually requires chastisement, and even judgement – sometimes severe.

Get a willing heart even though you might have mixed motives to begin with. Tell God you want to be wholly devoted to Him, but there's still a mixture within you. Since He knows this already He will overlook the taint and accept the heart-felt attitude. The mixture can be separated as He works on you later, but the willingness of heart is the prime thing He's seeking.

Another way of saying this is: God wants you to be single minded about Him, and that's a heart condition.

The consistent nurturing of your Inner Man will gradually bring you to the point of willingness, obedience and transformation. It could be said that God isn't all that interested in 'changing' us. Rather His intention is that we be transformed!

A lot of Christians use their prayer and devotional life as a pathway for change. They want to be changed on the inside; to become more spiritual; to live a holy life. All of which is good and honourable.

Nevertheless, if we're honest, this attempt to be inwardly changed often ends up becoming a religious work. It saps our energy and because it's 'work' it will ultimately bring frustration and despair. Even worse, it can deceive you into thinking you're spiritually progressing when in fact the spirit of religion has blinded you from seeing the true state of your soul.

One of the saddest things I've seen is when believers spend years cultivating their interior life, but which, unknown to them, is actually devoid of true spiritual anointing. The wasted time, energy and application makes me shudder. Having spent six years living in a monastery proved this to me.

And don't be proud! It can happen to Bible-believing, Spirit-filled people too. Think of all those Christians who have a certain doctrine or teaching that becomes more important than God Himself. Some denominations and movements have even named themselves after their favourite doctrine, belief or experience.

So it's not necessarily the amount of time you spend in prayer that's the key, it's what your heart is like as you do.

I've been thinking lately how great men of God like Martin Luther and John Wesley spent considerable amounts of time in the presence of the Lord yet still failed to identify wrong teachings they believed in.

For example, Luther was a man who spent hours in prayer each day and long arduous hours in studying the Word. Yet he failed to see that his anti-Semitism could not at all be supported by Scripture (see Rom. 8: 23) and that eventually it would be one of the motivations for Hitler's slaughter of six million Jews.

Likewise, John Wesley loved the presence of the Lord and gave many, many hours to his devotions with Him. He gave up his life to study the Word of God, wrote thousands of hymns, preached twice a day even up to the age of 80. Yet despite all this he couldn't see that the doctrine of the Baptism of Infants was un-Biblical.

These examples should ring warning bells for us. You can be wholly devoted to God, spend hours and hours in worship, study and ministry and yet still be blind to some truth that's staring you in the face.

It only goes to show that even the most anointed, God-called, and devoted servant of God is not immune from error.

So, it's not the amount of time we give in prayer that's so important but that our heart be totally open to Him ready to accept correction and change if needed.

Blessings and the Lord's favour upon you,

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