

# DISCIPLINES OF PRAYER

CITY SESSIONS: SPIRITUAL DISCIPLINES FOR LIFE



# DISCIPLINES OF PRAYER

- Despite the vital importance of prayer surveys suggest that a large percentage of Christians spend very little time in sustained prayer.
- Many may pray periodically here or there but rarely spend more than a few minutes – if that – in conversation with God.



**PRAAYER IS EXPECTED**



# PRAYER IS EXPECTED

- Jesus expects us to pray: Matt. 6:5-9, Luke 11:9; 18:1
  - Remember, prayer is not an impersonal discipline. It is a person, Jesus, who expects us to pray to him.
- God's Word makes it clear!
  - “Devote yourselves to prayer; stay alert in it with thanksgiving.”  
Colossians 4:2
  - “pray constantly” 1 Thessalonians 5:17
  - These two passages are direct commands.

# PRAYER IS EXPECTED

- “As it is the business of tailors to make clothes and of cobblers to mend shoes, so it is the business of Christians to pray.” – Martin Luther
- It is not only a divine command, but also a royal invitation.
  - God desires to communicate with us in his love.
- It is even a gospel expectation.
  - “you received the Spirit of adoption, by whom we cry out, “Abba, Father!” Romans 8:15
- Jesus Prayed
  - We will not be like Jesus without it.

# PRAYER IS EXPECTED

- Why do many believers not pray as they know they should?
  - Lack of discipline: it is not planned.
  - Doubt that anything will happen if we pray.
  - Lack of sensing God's nearness.
  - Little awareness of real need: things are going well.
    - "...you can do nothing without me." John 15:5
  - Little awareness of the greatness of God and the gospel.
  - Haven't learned about prayer or how to pray.



PRAYER IS LEARNED



# PRAYER IS LEARNED

- “No matter how weak or strong your prayer life is right now, you can learn to grow even stronger.” – Whitney
- “He was praying in a certain place, and when he finished, one of his disciples said to him, ‘Lord, teach us to pray, just as John also taught his disciples.’” Luke 11:1
- What are ways that we can learn to pray?



# PRAYER IS LEARNED

- By Praying!
  - “Reading a book about prayer, listening to lectures and talking about it is very good, but it won’t teach you to pray. You get nothing without exercise, without practice. I might listen for a year to a professor of music playing the most beautiful music, but that won’t teach me to play an instrument.” – Andrew Murray
  - The Holy Spirit teaches praying people how to pray.
  - “When the Spirit of truth comes, he will guide you into all the truth.” John 16:13

# PRAYER IS LEARNED

- By Praying Scripture
  - Read a section of the Bible with an open heart and mind.
    - Try to read it with fresh eyes.
  - Be aware of what the Holy Spirit wants you to see in that passage.
  - Pray about whatever strikes your heart.
  - Pray the passage back to God. Read it and make it your prayer as you speak to the Father.

# PRAYER IS LEARNED

- By Praying with Others
  - “Lord, teach us to pray.” Luke 11:1
  - Remember, do not simply copy (“Do not heap up empty phrases” Matt. 6:7) but see others as a model, just as Jesus gave a model prayer to the disciples.
- By Reading about Prayer
  - “The one who walks with the wise will become wise” Proverbs 13:20
  - “No matter how difficult prayer seems for you now, if you will persevere in learning how to pray you can always enjoy the hope of an even stronger and more fruitful prayer life ahead of you.” — Whitney



**PRAYER IS ANSWERED!**



# PRAYER IS ANSWERED!

- “Ask, and it will be given to you. Seek, and you will find. Knock, and the door will be opened to you. For everyone who asks receives, and the one who seeks finds, and to the one who knocks, the door will be opened. Who among you, if his son asks him for bread, will give him a stone? Or if he asks for a fish, will give him a snake? If you then, who are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father in heaven give good things to those who ask him.” Matthew 7:7-11

# PRAYER IS ANSWERED!

- When we “ask and receive not” we must consider:
  - There is a possibility something is amiss or wanting in our prayer
  - God has answered, but not in an obvious way
  - God intends for us to persevere in praying about the matter awhile longer
  - Other things to consider?
- We must learn to examine our prayers!

# PRAYER IS ANSWERED!

- “I cannot imagine any one of you tantalizing your child by exciting in him a desire that you did not intend to gratify. It were a very ungenerous thing to offer alms to the poor, and then when they hold their hand out for it, to mock their poverty with a denial. It were a cruel addition to the miseries of the sick if they were taken to the hospital and left there to die untended and uncared for. Where God leads you to pray, He means you to receive.” – C. H. Spurgeon

## ONE FINAL THOUGHT ON PRAYER

- “Although God hears everything, including every prayer and every thought, He does not hear our prayers with a view to answer them (see Isaiah 59:2) until we repent and come to Him through faith in Jesus Christ and what He has done (see John 14:6) Instead of relying on our sincerity or spirituality to turn the ear of God, we trust in the righteousness of Christ... so we always come to our Father in the name of His Son, praying with the help of the Holy Spirit.” – Whitney





# HOW TO IMPROVE YOUR PRAYERS



# WHY OUR PRAYERS ARE OFTEN DIFFICULT

- Our environment and internal state (emotions, distracting thoughts, etc.) can present significant obstacles in prayer.
- With all of the noise and distraction that surrounds us today, we more than any generation in history must discipline ourselves to enjoy the blessings of focused prayer and intimate fellowship with the Spirit of God.

# HOW TO IMPROVE YOUR PRAYERS

- Follow Jesus' Example
  - Matt. 4:1, 14:23, Mark 1:35, Luke 4:42
  - We must practice them to be more like Jesus!
- Minimize Distractions in Prayer
  - Turn off or put away distracting electronics. Go for a walk.
- Raise Your Attention to the Presence of God
  - “But the Lord is in his holy temple; let the whole earth be silent *in his presence*.” Habakkuk 2:20
  - “Be silent *in the presence* of the Lord God...” Zephaniah 1:7
  - If you are aware that you are in God's presence, shouldn't you worship him in your prayers?

# HOW TO IMPROVE YOUR PRAYERS

- Express Faith in God
  - “I am at rest in God alone; my salvation comes from him. He alone is my rock and my salvation, my stronghold; I will never be shaken.” Psalm 62:1-2
  - Sometimes prayer can be filled with more fear and doubt than faith; patient expectation before God can help build that faith and submission to God’s providence in these moments.
- To Be Physically and Spiritually Restored
  - After sending the disciples out for the first time, Jesus said this when they returned: “Come away by yourselves to a remote place and rest for a while.” Mark 6:31
  - Understand the role that prayer and worship plays in physical and spiritual restoration.



# SUGGESTIONS FOR GROWING IN PRAYERFULNESS



# SUGGESTIONS FOR GROWING IN PRAYERFULNESS

- “Minute Retreats”
  - Learn to “improve” a stray minute here or there even on the busiest of days.
  - This isn’t relaxing, but looking to Christ and resting in Him by faith.
- A Goal of Daily Time Alone with God
  - “Without exception, the men and women I have known who’ve made the most rapid, consistent, and evident growth in Christlikeness have been those who develop a daily time of being alone with God.” – Whitney
  - We **MUST PLAN** these times, or other things will fill our time.

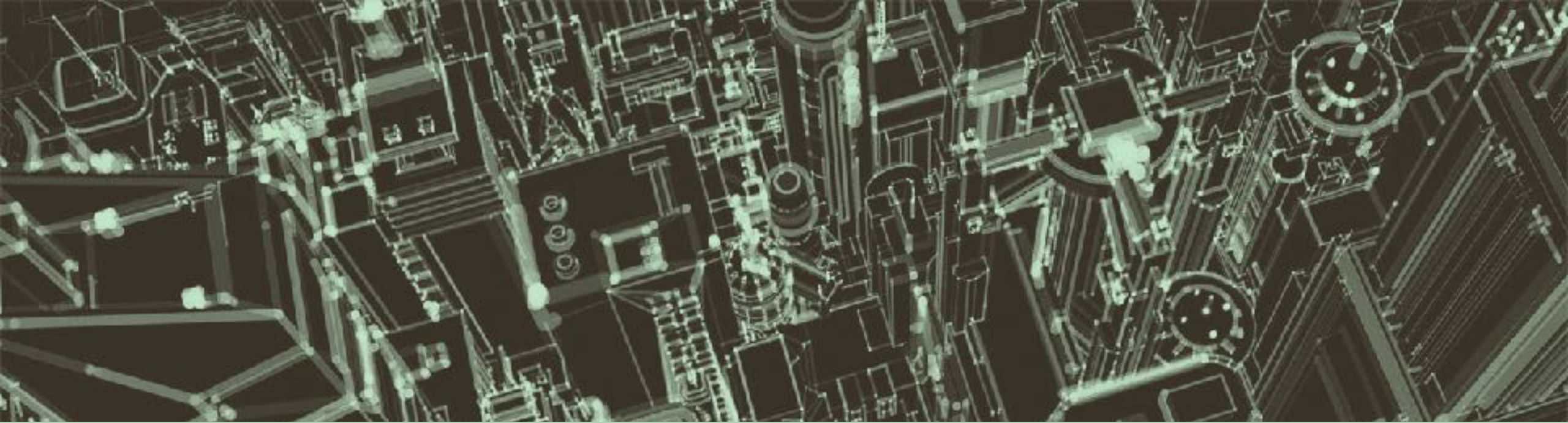
# SUGGESTIONS FOR GROWING IN PRAYERFULNESS

- Getting Away for Spiritual Renewal
  - This could be finding an empty room to spend a few hours, and evening, or a Saturday in. Or it may involve spending a night or weekend at a retreat center, lodge, etc.
  - Again, this must be planned!
- Locate a special place to regularly go for longer periods of focused, worshipful prayer.
- Trade off daily responsibilities with a spouse or friend.

“Retire from the world each day to some private, even if it be only the bedroom (for a while I retreated to the furnace room for want of a better place). Stay in the secret place till the surrounding noises begin to fade out of your heart...Give yourself to God and then be what and who you are without regard to what others think...Learn to pray inwardly every moment...Call home your roving thoughts. Gaze on Christ with the eyes of your soul...All of the above is contingent upon a right relation to God through Christ and daily meditation on the Scriptures. Lacking these, nothing will help us; granted these, the discipline recommended will go far to neutralize the evil effects of externalism and to make us acquainted with God and our own souls.”

– A. W. Tozer





QUESTIONS?

