

PRAYER AND THE DEVOTIONAL LIFE

(Matthew 7: 7-11)

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1. One of the most important issues in prayer is our capacity to focus: to rid ourselves of distractions, preoccupations, and noise. Silence: active listening
2. There are several aspects to prayer, as found in the Psalms:
Praise: We acknowledge the power and majesty of God
Petition: We ask for certain things (in his will)
Confession: We acknowledge our awareness of failure, sin, struggle
Forgiveness: We ask for grace
Thanksgiving: We express our gratitude for specific gifts received
Intercession: We ask on behalf of others, for others
We Make Commitments: We vows, promises, declare intentions
3. Prayer involves the discipline of silence--when we are not talking
And the discipline of waiting: some prayers/answers take time
4. Prayer can also be quite spontaneous, so that we don't have to "watch what we say," but we can talk openly and frankly with God (the psalmist did: he told God when he was angry, frustrated, disappointed, doubting, confused, afraid, depressed, etc.
5. Our devotional life can also be strengthened by reading scripture in new ways (an entire gospel together, or a letter of Paul all the way through); or in the careful selection of passages that mean a lot to us--and can be memorized
6. Reading the autobiography of a spiritual hero can inspire us to practice the development of spiritual gifts inside of us: choose a person known in history, or alive today, that is an inspiration. Ask yourself: what particularly traits (character) do you most admire in them?
7. Choose a list of virtues (the gift of the Spirit) and consciously make a promise to develop that gift in yourself: joy, peace, love, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, humility, self-control (Galatians 5:22)
8. Share daily at one meal as a family (or special friend) the most important things that have happened to you that day, and give thanks (say grace) over those experiences--AND the sacred gift of food.
9. Rise early (before dawn) one day per month, and greet the day and the sunrise in silent appreciation for God's creative act; do the same with the end of the day, at sunset. Take one evening a month, and meditate on the night sky and the vastness of God's universe.
10. Take silent moments of ten minutes periodically, and use the gift of memory to recall and celebrate the most treasured event of each of the most recent ten years of your life
11. Take a hymnal, choose four favorite hymns, and read every stanza of one hymn per day--then sing your favorite stanza out loud