



DISCUSSION GUIDE

Best Practices - Prayer
Pastor Stephen Hayes
Sunday Jan 6, 2019

Main Idea – Many people have good intentions, but bad practices. To have good practices in life, one must have good prayer communication with God. Through prayer, one is able to continually work toward becoming a better person.

Practice makes perfect

- Many people have good intentions, but also have bad habits.
- Good habits come from practice. Everything worthwhile comes from practice.
- It is not possible to have a meaningful relationship with God apart from good prayer habits.
- Good prayer habits enable one to become a better person and to live a better life.
- When we pray we learn to trust God's judgment more than our own.

Proverbs 3:5-6 – Trust in the Lord with all your heart, and lean not on your own understanding; in all your ways acknowledge Him, and He shall direct your paths.

Life's circumstances are navigated by prayer

- God works alongside us when we pray.
- **Matthew 7: 24-27 – Therefore whoever hears these sayings of Mine, and does them, I will liken him to a wise man who built his house on the rock: and the rain descended, the floods came, and the winds blew and beat on that house; and it did not fall, for it was founded on the rock. But everyone who hears these sayings of Mine, and does not do them, will be like a foolish man who built his house on the sand: and the rain descended, the floods came, and the winds blew and beat on that house; and it fell. And great was its fall.**
- Prayer produces the solid foundation on which to build our lives.
- Through prayer, God will show us how to proceed with each step of our lives.

A process is required to reach perfection

- It is possible for one to reach perfection (the ability to avoid any kind of sin.) But, it is usually a long process that takes practice.
- **James 1:4 – But let patience have its perfect work, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking nothing.**

- **Matthew 5: 48 – Therefore you shall be perfect, just as your Father in heaven is perfect.**
- We are not perfect, but God is – and we can work toward that state of perfection. In that way we can become like God; functioning without sin.
- Prayer is the communication channel through which that perfection becomes possible.
- **Philippians 3: 12-14 – Not that I have already attained, or am already perfected; but I press on, that I may lay hold of that for which Christ Jesus has also laid hold of me. Brethren, I do not count myself to have apprehended; but one thing I do, forgetting those things which are behind and reaching forward to those things which are ahead, I press toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus.**
- In one's pursuit of perfection one must avoid perfectionism. Perfectionism focuses on flaws, and thereby distorts and diverts one's attention.

Stay focused; don't get distracted

- The process of sanctification (growing closer to God as one moves away from sin) is the goal. **Hebrews 10: 14 – For by one offering He has perfected forever those who are being sanctified.**
- Prayer connects one to God.
- As we pray, we can employ fasting to disconnect from the world. We want to ignore those things that prevent us from clearly communicating with God. We won't hear clearly from God if we are being distracted.
- Once we have disconnected from worldly distractions, we should pray in a simple, straightforward, conversation with God. We can say things to God that we would not usually talk about with other people.
- The Old Testament prophet Habakkuk was someone who was comfortable with straightforward conversation with God. **Habakkuk 1** records Habakkuk's honest words to God, where he asked simple, straightforward questions. **Habakkuk 2:1 says, "I will stand my watch and set myself on the rampart, and watch to see what He will say to me, and what I will answer when I am corrected."**
- After honestly expressing ourselves to God, we should intentionally be still and listen for God's answer. God will directly respond without anger to our honest questions and emotions. He will be straightforward back to us, as we were with Him.

Growth in sanctification is evidenced by how we select our words

- Our flesh responds to what we say. We act better when we speak better. **James 3: 1-5 – My brethren, let not many of you become teachers, knowing that we shall receive a stricter judgment. For we all stumble in many**

things. If anyone does not stumble in word, he is a perfect man, able also to bridle the whole body. Indeed, we put bits in horses' mouths that they may obey us, and we turn their whole body. Look also at ships: although they are so large and are driven by fierce winds, they are turned by a very small rudder wherever the pilot desires. Even so the tongue is a little member and boasts great things.

- Through our words our actions change. We respond to what we have said.

Watch your words

- We can resist the negative things in our natural environment by speaking correctly. Words that are carefully considered can keep us directed on the path of sanctification.
- **Proverbs 18:21 – Death and life are in the power of the tongue, and those who love it will eat its fruit.**
- If one can control one's tongue, the rest of the path toward perfection becomes much easier.

Words are a weapon

- Words are powerful. They can do harm as well as good. **James 3: 7-12 – For every kind of beast and bird, of reptile and creature of the sea, is tamed and has been tamed by mankind. But no man can tame the tongue. It is an unruly evil, full of deadly poison. With it we bless our God and Father, and with it we curse men, who have been made in the similitude of God. Out of the same mouth proceed blessing and cursing. My brethren, these things ought not to be so. Does a spring send forth fresh water and bitter from the same opening? Can a fig tree, my brethren, bear olives, or a grapevine bear figs? Thus no spring yields both salt water and fresh.**
- When we say negative, poorly-considered words we draw Satan's attention. When we say negative words we "kick up dust" that puts us on the devil's radar.
- We have to be careful the good things we have integrated into our lives do not become compromised by bad language. **1 Corinthians 15: 33 – Do not be deceived: "Evil company corrupts good habits."**
- Our words reflect what is in our hearts. The heart and tongue are paired together, just as are our body's other pairs (two legs, two arms, two ears, etc.)
- **Luke 6: 43-45 – For a good tree does not bear bad fruit, nor does a bad tree bear good fruit. For every tree is known by its own fruit. For men do not gather figs from thorns, nor do they gather grapes from a bramble bush. A good man out of the good treasure of his heart brings forth good; and an evil man out of the evil treasure of his heart brings forth evil. For out of the abundance of the heart his mouth speaks.**

Prayer is a safe place

- When you feel you must express your negative emotions and thoughts, do so to God privately.
- Prayer is a safe place to talk to God in a straightforward, honest conversation.
- Prayer is a safe place to work through – and make sense of - life's events.
- Prayer is practice for perfection.
- Prayer puts you in the presence of the “Perfecter”.
- Life is better where God is.

Reflective Questions for Best Practices - Prayer

1. The beginning of the new calendar year is a good time to identify and reset habits. Is there a new habit you would like to develop this year? How might you use prayer to help you?
2. What is the difference between a spontaneous prayer of emotion, and one that is a controlled conversation with God? Which type requires practice?
3. If prayer can be silent, why, do you suppose, Pastor Stephen emphasized the power of our spoken words?
4. Can you explain the connection between our spoken words and the condition of our hearts?

CHURCH