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Ten Ways To Improve Your Prayer Life

MAY 20TH 2011 BY NEWS

Ten Ways To Improve Your Prayer Life

Moses went to a mountaintop to hear God. Jesus fled to the desert.

But for many Christians, their most regular place for praying is whatever pew they sit in on Sundays. Work, children, chores and other duties make stopping for prayer seem a luxury.

In today's culture, some even joke that that Charles Wesley's quote "pray and never faint," refers to passing out from an overloaded schedule.

"We forget to intentionally make space for prayer," said Betty Kay Hudson of First United Methodist Church in Lancaster, S.C.

That's not the way it's supposed to be. Souls, like vines, tend to grow wild and weak when untended.

No matter the season on the church calendar - Advent, Lent, Easter, Pentecost -- or all of the times in between, prayer is the gasoline that fuels Christians.

"Prayer is the catalyst," says the Rev. Jeffrey Kersey, a United Methodist minister in Lexington, S.C.

Prayer, like tennis, takes practice to become accomplished. Spiritual guides and sages, pastors and other church members are filled with advice and counsel.

Here's some of that wisdom condensed into 10 tips about prayer:

You are worthy.

Do not feel guilty about the quality of your prayer life, or fall victim to doubts and despair about your worthiness to talk to God. Each of us has a spiritual gift. So remember John Wesley's words: "In Christ we gain more than in Adam we lost."

The more you pray, the richer your prayers become.

To deepen your prayer life, don't be a slacker. Like anything in life, to become good at prayer you must be disciplined. Just as running is an exercise in physical fitness, prayer is a spiritual discipline.

Prayer is active.

Prayer involves action; namely being attentive to God's voice in your life. Listening for God means stopping and sitting still. It means paying attention to what God may be saying to you at any point in your life.

Prayer should not be an afterthought.

Prayer was the backbone of Jesus' ministry. Often, he broke away from his disciples to spend time with God. In the same way, prayer is essential to individual lives and to the life of the church. Break away from your daily routine for quiet time in prayer.

Surround yourself with people who are seasoned at praying.

People who've established prayer routines have much to teach those wanting to draw closer to God. Seek out those who can help guide and encourage your prayer life.

God doesn't require eloquence.

Don't worry if you fumble for words when you pray. God is not looking for Toastmaster's graduates, but sincerity (not that you can't have both at once). If the words won't come, God still knows what's in your heart. Lift up that desire.

Prayer need not involve words.

The great Christian saints all write of prayer as a time of sitting quietly with God. Jesus even went off for 40 days of prayerful solitude. Take a deep breath. Exhale. Follow the breath as it flows in and out of your body. Think of it as the spirit of God breathing life into you.?

Prayer is a time for conversation with a friend: God.

Whether you see that friend routinely or just every once in awhile, know that whenever you turn to God, you're turning to someone who loves you.

Ask God for help if you get stuck.

Maybe you've hit a dry spell. There's no shame in asking God to guide you to pray in a new way.

The three Ls of prayer: Listen, listen, listen.

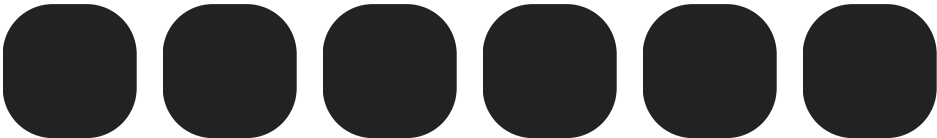
Listening for God is central to prayer, according to the great saints. It's so critical that St. Benedict began his famous Rule with this command for monks: "Listen with the ear of your heart."

And remember, prayer can happen anywhere -- it doesn't have to take place in a church. *Susan Hogan is a freelance writer based in Chicago. Emily Cooper and Jan Surratt of the South Carolina United Methodist Advocate did reporting for this story.*[/i]

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Guard Receives Morale Builder In Dexter

MAY 17TH 2011 BY NEWS

DEXTER, Mo. – For about two weeks the Missouri National Guard has been on the ground in southeast Missouri leading the charge with flood relief efforts. There is no doubt the 24-hour missions the soldiers have been running has been demanding on the hundreds of troops in uniform. The community members who have personally been affected by the constant rain and flooding have also had their fair share of trials.

Gurdsmen in Dexter had the opportunity to be recharged spiritually at a morning worship held at the armory. Capt. David Spears, Missouri National Guard chaplain, lead the service.

Spears, who serves with the 1140th Engineer Battalion in Cape Girardeau, opened up by asking for prayer requests and praises from the troops. One recurring sentiment was the concern for the people in the communities these Soldiers were helping. The focus was not on themselves and their wants or needs, but those they have been helping during this disaster.

“It sure is nice to be working at home, serving our people and helping out our community,” said Spears.

These Soldiers said they knew the struggles they were currently facing were short-lived because they would soon return to a life of normalcy. However, the nearby residents remained with the devastation and destruction left from the wake of the floods. On the flip side, these same residents were also reaching out in gratitude and concern for the very ones helping them out.

“Certainly these people have been affected by this in a very adverse way, but they’ve been able to reach out to you guys which has given them something to feel good about,” said Spears.

Staff Sgt. Allen Kanell, who is the fulltime supply sergeant for the 1221st Transportation Company in Dexter and lives in nearby Poplar Bluff, had interest in both sides of the coin. Kanell has been assisting with the mission, helping the units working out of his armory, while at the same time personally concerned with his fellow neighbors.

“The community has accepted these guys really well,” said Kanell. “Some people have come up and tried to buy their dinners. One gentleman brought gallons of ice cream and filled their freezer up.”

These acts of kindness demonstrated to the Soldiers how appreciated they are.

“I know it’s a tragedy, but it’s one of the times personally I feel we’re doing one of the best things we can do as the National Guard, we’re helping our own,” said Kanell. “We’re here taking care of our town, our community.”

For many of the troops, the message was a great motivator and came at a time when they needed that extra push to drive on and complete the mission at hand.

“I thought it was wonderful,” said Kanell. “I think today is a blessing to all of these guys. Today seems to be the day everybody got to take that deep breath.”

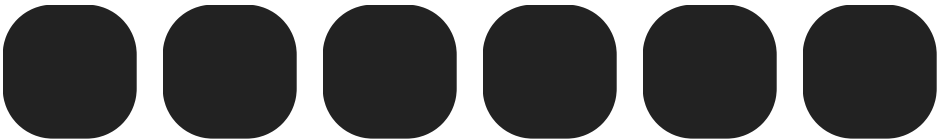
*By Jennifer Archdekin,
Missouri National Guard*

Photos Above: Top Photo - With his Bible open, Staff Sgt. Allen Kanell of Poplar Bluff listens intently to a Sunday morning message. Capt. David Spears, Missouri Army National Guard chaplain, delivered a sermon to some of the soldiers at the Dexter armory who were serving on flood duty. Bottom photo -

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Pastor Sees Silver Lining In Flood

MAY 13TH 2011 BY NEWS

Pastor Sees Silver Lining In Flood

DORENA, Mo. - When the U.S. Army Corps Engineers blew the Birds Point levee along the Mississippi River May 2, the waters washed away as many as 100 homes and 133,000 acres of fertile farmland. It also flooded a small Southern Baptist church.

"The church is gone," said LeRoy Davenport, pastor of Dorena Baptist Church. "I've seen aerial pictures, and it's gone."

The church building is still there, but at one point the muddy waters were up to the edge of the roof. The day after Mother's Day, when the National Guard allowed property owners to inspect their homes via boats, a man reported to Davenport that he stood in the window ledge and could see pews floating inside.

The church had been around since 1946 and had never had floodwater in it, thought it came close a few times.

When the floodway was activated, it was done so in part to save the town of Cairo, Ill., which experienced a record crest along the Mississippi River and a swollen Ohio River. With rain continuing and water levels at historic levels, the Corps said there was "no way to stop all flooding, but rather to do our best to reduce the risk to life and property in the region."

This spring the Mississippi River has experienced precipitation 125 to 150 percent above normal. Corps experts estimate it will take up to two months for water to recede from the floodway, assuming there is no additional rainfall.

After the water has receded, it will take another 20 to 30 days for the land to dry out.

If there's an upside to the manmade

<images/Blog Images/Local News/5.14.2011 FLOOD DORENA.jpg>

flood, it's that the residents of the floodplain and members of Dorena Baptist at least had some warning. Most of the church's small membership lived outside the floodplain in East Prairie, but two who lived in mobile homes had to move the homes to higher ground and are now out of work.

"We knew it was coming, and kept praying," Davenport said. "We got the piano, pulpit and Lord's Supper table out, but not everything. The rest of it is gone. The brick on one side of the building is gone, too. Then, if the water goes down like they're telling us, there may not be any roads left."

Davenport said there isn't a lot to be cheery about and recovery is going to be hard work, but he sees a glimmer of hope in the dark waters. There are lots of discussions floating around, including rebuilding and permanently relocating.

"Maybe God just wanted us to move this church into town," he said, referring to East Prairie. "Whatever He wants, that's what we'll do. There's no growth possibility in Dorena simply because there's nobody down there. It's hard to leave the site of your home church, but maybe this is what God wants us to do."

Volunteers Needed

In addition to Dorena Baptist, two other Missouri Baptist churches flooded in the recent surge of the Mississippi River. Shining Light Baptist Church in Charleston and Hooe Baptist Church in Oran also were impacted. First Baptist Church in Morehouse has been among those to open as a shelter.

Volunteers are needed for large-scale cleanup as the water recedes.

Rick Seaton, a men's ministry specialist with the Missouri Baptist Convention and the state's disaster relief coordinator, said he anticipates at least a two- or three-week response in the area.

"We currently have mud-out teams beginning in the Poplar Bluff area and are presently looking into the need for other areas," he said. "We also need chaplains now and through

next week. If you are available to respond at any time, please contact our office."

The Missouri Baptist Disaster Relief office can be reached by email at **dmaier@mobaptist.org** or by phone at 1-800-736-6227, extension 631.

In St. Louis, the chainsaw work in the wake of the Good Friday tornadoes is finished. St. Louis Metro Baptist Association and local churches report that they anticipate being able to fulfill any further requests for assistance. The official disaster relief response site has been shut down.

"Some have been on this site for over two weeks straight, and there were around 328 jobs completed," Seaton said. "We are very thankful to everyone both in state and out of state who have responded and helped in this area."

Photos Above: Top Photo - Jo Ann Haas of First Baptist Church in Oak Ridge and Dan Dickerson of First Baptist Church in Millersville prepare trays of food for flood victims at the feeding station at First Baptist Church in Morehouse. Bottom Photo - Davie Price of Calvary Baptist Church in Neosho and Andrew Gruber of South Side Baptist Church in Fulton remove flood soaked flooring from a home in Poplar Bluff. (Photos by Bob Greenlee/Baptist Press) Brian Koonce is a staff writer for The Pathway, newsjournal of the Missouri Baptist Convention.

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Benedict XVI: Prayer Reveals Need For God

MAY 12TH 2011 BY NEWS

Benedict XVI: Prayer Reveals Need For God

VATICAN CITY, - Benedict XVI is urging people to spend more time in prayer, which he called an expression of man's profound need for meaning and understanding.

"Dear brothers and sisters," the Pope appealed at the end of today's general audience, "let us learn to spend more time before God. Let us learn to recognize in silence the God who has revealed himself in Jesus Christ, to recognize in the depth of ourselves his voice that calls us and leads us back to the profundity of our existence, to the fount of life, to the source of salvation, to make us go beyond the limits of our life and to open ourselves to the measure of God, to the relationship with Him who is Infinite Love."

Benedict explained to those gathered in St. Peter's Square that "man is religious by nature: he is as 'homo religiosus' as he is 'homo sapiens' and 'homo faber.'"

He noted that man has an innate need to "find a light to give an answer to the questions that have to do with the profound meaning of reality; an answer that he cannot find in himself, in progress, in empirical science."

Benedict XVI explained that "homo religiosus" is not confined to the earlier eras of history, but that man in every age -- from cavemen to the Digital age -- seeks "in religious experience the ways to overcome his finitude and to ensure his precarious earthly adventure."

Thirst for the infinite

"Man bears within himself a thirst for the infinite," he continued, "a nostalgia for eternity, a search for beauty, a desire for love, a need for light and truth, which drive him toward the Absolute; man bears within himself the desire for God. And man knows, in some way, that he can address himself to God, that he can pray to him."

The Pontiff said that the attraction toward God "is the soul of prayer, which is cloaked in many forms and modalities according to the history, time, moment, grace and finally the sin of each one of those who pray."

He added that prayer is a mindset, and not a "series of practices and formulas." Prayer, he said, is "a way of being before God, rather than carrying out acts of worship or pronouncing words."

"Prayer has its center and founds its roots in the most profound being of the person," the Holy Father continued. "That is why it is not easily decipherable and for the same reason, it can be subject to misunderstandings and mystifications."

"Also in this sense we can understand the expression: it is difficult to pray. In fact, prayer is the place par excellence of gratuitousness, of the tension toward the Invisible, the Unexpected, the Ineffable. "Because of this, the experience of prayer is a challenge for everyone, a 'grace' to be invoked, a gift of the One whom we address."

On one's knees

Benedict XVI also commented on the dynamic of prayer, which is the result of man being "a creature in need of help, incapable of achieving by himself the fulfillment of his existence and his hope." Given this creature-Creator relationship, the Pope said that consequently, prayer "has one of its typical expressions in the gesture of kneeling."

"It is a gesture that bears in itself a radical ambivalence: in fact, I can be obliged to kneel -- condition of indigence and slavery -- or I can kneel spontaneously, confessing my limit and, hence, my need for the Other," the Pontiff explained. "To Him I confess that I am weak, needy, a 'sinner.'"

"In the experience of prayer," the Holy Father said, "the human creature expresses all his awareness of himself, all that he is able to understand of his existence and, at the same time, he addresses himself wholly to the Being before whom he is, he orients his soul to that Mystery from which he awaits the fulfillment of his most profound desires and help to surmount the indigence of his life. "In this looking at the Other, in this addressing 'the beyond' is the essence of prayer, as experience of a reality that surpasses the sentient and the contingent."

"However, the full realization of man's search is found only in the God who reveals

himself. Prayer, which is the opening and raising of the heart to God, becomes a personal relationship with Him. And even if man forgets his Creator, the living and true God does not fail to call man to the mysterious encounter of prayer."

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Don't Hack Me Off

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Don't Hack Me Off

Do you ever find it difficult to control your emotions? Anger can quickly show itself before a person has time to maintain control. Many times, anger is destructive - creating hurt and broken relationships.

There are typically 5 *WAYS TO DEAL WITH ANGER*. They are:

1. Suppression of Anger
2. Open Aggression
3. Passive Aggression
4. Assertive Anger. (The Biblical Example of self-controlled confrontation)
5. Drop Anger All Together

There are countless stories of relationships that have soured by anger. Whether it's a misunderstanding or an intentional act, time has a way of making these situations far less important when there's a little distance down life's highway. What was a huge item in the moment, can fade into history and is hardly recognizable as an event.

Pride often creeps in to the personal argument of who needs to apologize to whom. It becomes comical that both sides can be 100% convinced they are absolutely and unequivocally innocent of all wrong.

But the Bible doesn't offer a lot of wiggle room in this area of how to handle anger. The fix is not such a simple recipe to execute. But here are some ideas of how to resolve anger that has brought about damaged relationships.

SOLUTIONS TO ANGER

- 1. Don't hang out with angry people.** Try to distance yourself from angry people and the company you keep. Proverbs 22:24-25.
- 2. Deal with it.** Don't store it up. Deal with it right away. Ephesians 4:26.
- 3. Check Your Volume.** Speak in a kind manner. Soft answers good. Harsh words build anger & wrath. Take a walk. Proverbs 15:1.
- 4. Make the First Move.** Keep a short reconcile list. WHOEVER REALIZES THE BREAK IN THE RELATIONSHIP ... Go make it right . Matthew 5:23-24. Matthew 18:15
- 5. Come with the solution and not an opinion.** Don't blame. It's not about telling your point of view. Seek to help. Avoid Pride.
- 6. Don't go to motive until you've gone face to face.** Avoid guessing the motive of someone's action. You could misread it.

7. Eyeball to Eyeball meeting. "A Come to Jesus Meeting."

8. Pray for those that persecute you. Let Christ rule your life. Matthew 5:44.

9. Be Slow To Anger. Proverbs 16:32. Be sure to make it a habit to be slow to anger.

Many times, you will find the Fruit of the Spirit to be a great guide when dealing with anger issues. These are found in Galatians 5:22; “But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, 23 gentleness, self- control; against such things there is no law.”

It has been said, that God may not rewire you and your anger issues will disappear. However, you might find that He will provide you a longer fuse.

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