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## Prayer

*“pray continually.”* – 1 Thessalonians 5:17

It is not difficult to view prayer as an integral part of our spiritual life. It might be hard to learn prayer as a spiritual discipline. It is slightly different than the other disciplines because it almost always must involve other disciplines and spiritual activities if it is to be effective in our lives. Dallas Willard says:

*But prayer will not be established in our lives as it must be for us to flourish, unless we are practicing other disciplines such as solitude and fasting. In many Protestant churches prayer and Bible study are held up as the activities that will make us spiritually rich. But very few people actually succeed in attaining spiritual richness through them and indeed often find them to be intolerably burdensome.<sup>1</sup>*

Of all the disciplines, prayer is probably the one we feel most comfortable with. We are just not that good at it. Therefore, the goal of practicing prayer as a discipline is to explore it in fresh ways. For example, many have only experienced prayer as *talking to God*. One of the most joyful revelations is to experience the reality that prayer is just as much *listening to God*.

If this kind of listening prayer is new to you, you might be concerned with how to know what you are hearing. Is it God's voice? My voice? Satan's voice? There are several guidelines as you listen to assist you in this area. First, it is important to ask if what you are hearing is in harmony with Scripture. Second, is it persistent. In other words, does the prompting keep coming back. Third, if you are still having difficulty determining, seek the counsel of other wise and mature Christians.

A problem in prayer is that we have a tendency to view it merely as *something that we do*, rather than *someone we are with*. Prayer is relational. It is just as relational as walking and talking with a friend.

- As you begin to practice prayer as a spiritual discipline, try to pray in new and different ways. For example, if you always pray silently, attempt to pray out loud. If you always pray with your eyes closed and head bowed, pray with your eyes open and face raised to God. If you pray with your hands folded, consider praying with your hands open or raised.
- Taking prayer walks can be a wonderfully refreshing exercise. If you walk your neighborhood, pray for the people whose homes you pass. If you walk during your work day, consider praying for your co-workers or family. If you walk in a public place, pray for the salvation of those around you. The ideas are only as endless as your creativity allows them to be.
- Consider praying passages of Scripture. Many are familiar with praying the Lord's prayer. It is especially easy to pray the Psalms. Where possible, make these prayers personal by exchanging your name or personal pronouns.
- Find a place that inspires prayer within your heart. Many neighborhoods have a church building that is open for times of prayer.
- You might find it helpful to utilize Richard Foster's three directions of prayer: upward, inward, and outward.

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<sup>1</sup> Dallas Willard, *The Spirit of The Disciplines* (San Francisco: Harper & Row Publishers, 1988), 186