

Secret to Prayer: “Just Do It!”

“Now Peter and John went up together into the temple at the hour of prayer...”
(Acts 3:1).

“And it came to pass as we went to prayer...”
(Acts 16:16).

“And when they had prayed, the place was shaken where they were assembled together...”
(Acts 4:31).

Browsing through the twenty-eight chapters of the Book of Acts we quickly see the importance the early church placed on prayer. (Acts 1:14,24; 2:42; 3:1; 4:24-31; 6:4,6; 9:40; 10:2,4,9,31; 11:5; 12:5; 13:3; 14:23; 16:25; 22:17; 28:8) Prayer provided the basis for the spreading of the Gospel to the known world. The church began with prayer when about one hundred and twenty gathered together in the Upper Room to await, in prayer, the outpouring of the Holy Ghost. This resulted in a ten-day prayer meeting yielding results that are still being seen two thousand years later. Thus, prayer served as the launching pad for the birth and growth of the church.

Prayer was a way of life for them and it was a priority in their Christian walk. Surprisingly, there is very little teaching on the “how to” of prayer in the Book of Acts; however, there are a whole lot of examples. Many books have been written on Prayer and I have read some of them. I have reached the conclusion that the best way to learn how to pray is to pray. Like the slogan says, “Just do it!” When Jesus walked on this earth, he really spent a large portion of his ministry in prayer; sometimes whole nights. He also taught others how to pray; not by running seminars and special conferences, but by being caught in the act of prayer. He took his disciples through the “School of Prayer” by giving them on-the-job training. He showed them by example and they then tried it on their own. We must all develop a prayer life; a lifestyle of prayer.

**Prayer isn't a method...
It's a way of life.**

A pastor traveled by ship to visit a church across the ocean. While on the way the ship stopped at an island. There the pastor met three fishermen. When they found out that he was a pastor they excitedly said, “We be Christians too!”

The pastor asked them if they knew the “Lord’s Prayer.” To his surprise he learned that the fishermen had never heard of it.

“What do you say when you pray?” inquired the pastor.

“We pray, ‘We be men, you be God, have mercy on us!’”

The pastor was appalled at the primitive nature of their prayer and spent the day teaching them the “Lord’s Prayer.” The fishermen were willing students and could recite the prayer with no mistakes. The pastor was so proud of his achievement.

On the return trip the ship stopped at the same island again. As the ship drew closer to the shore he could see the three fishermen rushing toward the ship. They cried, “Pastor, we come hurry to meet you!”

“What is it that you need?” asked the pastor.

“We be so sorry. We forget your fine, fine prayer. We say, Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name... and then we forget the rest of the words. Please tell us the prayer again.”

The pastor replied, “Just go back and pray, ‘We be men, you be God, have mercy on us!’”

Martin Luther, when he was a monk, had so many responsibilities that he became too busy to pray. He was supposed to quote from his prayer books every day. He would “stack up” his prayers for weeks and then he would take some days and get “prayed up.” In 1520 he ended up sick in bed for five days. He got further behind with quoting from his prayer book and soon he was three months behind with his prayers. Then, he simply gave up.

Prayer is not a matter of quoting prayers from a book. It is not mere repetition of words that we recite three times a day. Some tend to force prayer into a place that it was never supposed to be. Prayer should never be a struggle. Prayer is not a chore; something that is endured. We have made prayer difficult and painful. It is not a ritual but time we spend with a friend who hears, and answers our needs.

“Let us therefore come boldly unto the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy, and find grace to help in time of need” (Hebrews 4:16).

When Jesus walked on the earth, prayer had become a formality rather than free expression. There were written prayers for all occasions. Prayer had become a ritual rather than something that was spontaneous from the heart. There were set prayer times much like the Muslims have today as they bow towards Mecca at specified times. Prayers had become very long, filled with big words. It was believed that whoever was longer in prayer was heard more quickly. The louder and wordier the prayer the better. They used repetitious words and phrases (Matthew 6:5-8). These tendencies should not creep into our churches. Prayer can become a matter of

pride rather than an expression of our heart and our being in need. Listen to the brand new Christians pray. They have not been taught “how to” yet. They talk to God as their friend.

A famous preacher once said, “It is not that prayer has been tried and found wanting. It is rather that it has not really been tried.” It is unfortunate and incorrect for us to look to God as a last resort. We go to him because we have nowhere else to go. “Then we learn that the storms of life have driven us, not upon the rocks, but into the desired haven.”

Mark Foster said in his selected sermon outline, “When God Builds You a Prayer Room” that we should “never make God a last resort. If you don’t pray now, while you have the chance, He may put you in a place where you will have to pray.”

The first and only thing that will work is the last thing that we will try: PRAYER!

Abraham Lincoln once said, “I have been driven many times to my knees by the overwhelming conviction that I had nowhere else to go.”

Why should we only go to God in times of emergency, when we don’t have anyone else to turn to? It is common for people to pray in times of emergency. At these times prayer is never far from our lips. Mother Teresa had a better idea when she said, “Prayer is the mortar that holds our house together.” Why wait until our house is falling apart before we pray? If you want to know how to pray; “Just do it!”

Study Questions

1. Give five Scriptural references to prayer in the Book of Acts.

- 1) _____
- 2) _____
- 3) _____
- 4) _____
- 5) _____

2. What is the best way to learn how to pray? _____

3. How did Jesus teach others to pray? _____

4. What is a “prayer life”? _____

