

I want to address a subject that many of us struggle with: Prayer. Does prayer makes any difference and if it does make a difference, what difference does it make? Does prayer really work and if so, how? Last week we said that prayer is a privilege and something that Christians ought to do. We are taught by scripture to pray for all things and we know that prayer is important, but many still struggle with prayer because they've not got answers they were hoping for. We know we need to take time to talk with God but it doesn't appear to get us anywhere, which is frustrating because we hear people talk about the power of prayer. It sometimes feels like God is ignoring us!

Some people find the act of praying difficult because they get easily distracted: *Okay God, here I am, I have this need and.... Is God really listening or am I just talking to myself? ...what shall I have for dinner?* Can you relate to this problem? Some may be sceptical about prayer and you think it is just wishful thinking. You think the whole idea of the Creator of the universe listening to one prayer among billions is ridiculous. You believe in prayer but God has so many prayers to listen to, so why should he listen to yours? Does prayer make any difference or are we just wasting our breath? So much of our frustration with prayer has to do with a lack of understanding of what prayer is, and until we've grasped what prayer is, we will never understand the difference it can make in our lives.

Using Biblical evidence, I hope we will be convinced that prayer is the single most important act for anyone who seeks to follow God. It's through prayer that we learn the will of God for our lives and we can't be strong in the face of temptation unless we pray. Prayer makes us the people God and it makes us spiritually healthy. We can't get faith right until we get prayer right. Jesus understood the importance of prayer and the difference it makes, and He prayed all the time.

Mark's gospel ch 1, tells us that Jesus was tired from all the healing He had done and He went away to a quiet place and prayed. Jesus supported His ministry by praying continually. He prayed before He began his ministry. Jesus prayed to renew himself. He prayed before he chose his disciples. He prayed as he evaluated his ministry, and as He served and healed people. Jesus even prayed when He was dying on the cross. Jesus knew that prayer wasn't optional. He knew that in order for him to accomplish what God wanted him to do, He needed to pray. If Jesus thought it was that important to pray, don't you think we should be praying?

In Luke 11, Jesus taught the disciples how to pray and He gave them the Lord's Prayer, and He taught them the importance of prayer. The Lord's Prayer was a gift from Jesus himself! Then *Jesus underscored that the key to effective prayer is to pray persistently and habitually which is true.* If I go to the gym once a month, do you think it will do me any good? If I follow my diet once a week, do you think it will do me any good? Prayer works the same way: *For prayer to make a difference it must become a habit.* I think we forget this. We pray for something once and we're disappointed when nothing changes. Perhaps we think that God didn't hear us? God hears everyone but prayer is deeper than that.

Jesus teaches the disciples that that God always answers prayer, and when we ask God will answer. Whenever we search, we will find. Whoever knocks, God will open the door. Jesus says this is true for everyone. Everyone who seeks God persistently in prayer will receive an answer, because God answers prayer and the power of God through prayer is available to everyone. Notice what Jesus did not say in this text. Jesus did not say everyone who asks receives the answer they want, we don't always find what we're looking for, or have door we want opened. God answers prayer and we often miss this because we're looking for the answer we want or expect. We try to restrict God through the narrowness of our prayers, and God cannot be restricted by our narrow view. So we miss answered prayer because we are only looking for one outcome.

Jesus says that when we seek God in prayer, He will give us His Holy Spirit, and the purpose of God's Spirit is to love, shape, guide and empower us. This means that prayer is not putting our order in to God, but prayer is the one essential practice that brings us closer to God, and allows us to be formed by His love. ***Prayer isn't just getting something from God; it's building a relationship with God.*** Prayer develops our relationship with God and that's why it should be a habit.

Prayer is not meant to persuade God, it's meant to change us. ***Prayer doesn't give us what we want from God; prayer helps us want what we need from God.*** What we need is a relationship with God and like any relationship this only comes through talking to God. But our problem is that we don't want a relationship; we want a road map. We pray: *Lord God, I don't need much of your time, I just want some direction here. What should I do?* God replies: *Stay with me for a while, let's spend some time together. I want to show you some things.* We persist with our demanding prayers, and expect God to deliver like an automated machine. And then we complain that prayer doesn't work!

God wants us to bring Him our needs and desires along with our questions and doubts. God loves us and wants to deepen His relationship with us through prayer. And when we develop that relationship with God, we find that abiding in his love and being the people He has created us to be, is where fulfilled life is found. The more we experience a relationship with God, the more we'll want to please God, and change our lives. And when we change, we'll discover that it's easier to pray *Lord, I want to fit into your plans, instead of God, please fit into my plans!*

Do we want a deeper relationship with God and have Him make an impact in our lives? Then we have to be prepared to pray ***Lord, whatever you want, that's what I want too! Let Your will be done in my life!*** When we are ready to surrender to God in prayer, life becomes more interesting and fulfilling than we would ever imagine.

If we are serious about building a prayerful relationship with God, I have a simple suggestion for us. If we all do what I'm about to suggest, we will experience the difference that prayer can make in our lives. For the next seven days start your day with prayer. It doesn't have to be a long time, just five to ten minutes. You can stay in your bed, sit in a chair or do it at the breakfast table. Get Bible study notes or turn to your favourite passage of scripture, and read the devotional or scripture passage. When you find that you are quiet on the inside, pray: ***Lord, I want to get to know you better. I want to know your love. I want a relationship with you.*** Then share with God what's on your mind and heart. Don't hold back, just share it. He is listening and wants to hear from us. Be sure to include not only your own needs but the needs of others. Before you end your prayer time, pray: ***Lord I want to please you. I want to do your will. Whatever it is you want, that's what I want too. I want to fit into your plans. Show me the way.***

Jesus knew the power of submitting to God's will. Perhaps Jesus' most important prayer was the one he prayed in the Garden of Gethsemane. His capture and crucifixion were close at hand and He was emotionally and spiritually exhausted. He was tempted not to go through with God's plan, and He pleaded with God to let the bitter cup pass from him. It was at that moment when He said the prayer that changed everything: ***Lord, not my will but yours be done.*** This was not Jesus' first prayer to God for He had been praying throughout His whole life and ministry. He had developed such love and trust for His Father God that when it came to the moment of truth, Jesus was prepared to surrender to God's will.

As a result, the world was changed. It is my belief that what enabled Jesus to follow His God given mission for us and our world, was His consistent prayer life throughout His ministry.

Just imagine how close we could feel to God if we prayed more. Imagine what God could show us if you prayed more. Just imagine what God could do through each one of us if we prayed more. Imagine the strength and wisdom we could have if we prayed more, and imagine the person we could become if we prayed more. Imagine the relationships that could be healed if we prayed more.

Imagine the impact this church would have in terms of outreach into our community, if everyone in your congregation developed the habit of prayer. Does prayer work? Yes, it does if we submit to God, and in prayer say with honesty; ***Lord, Let Your will be done in my life!*** You have your Why Booklets, please try to use them this week for prayer works! In Jesus name; ***Amen.***