

The Priority and Potency of Prayer

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My wife and I recently realized we've become quite the "strategists" with our children. This is unfortunate. When our children share dilemmas for our consideration, we are too quick to offer (oftentimes) dogmatic counsel without asking clarifying questions and, more shamefully, without praying. You would think that now that our kids are moving into adulthood, we wouldn't fail in this area still. We do, and we need the following two reminders from Scripture.



First, prayer was a priority in Jesus' life and the early church.

The next time you read through a Gospel (especially Luke!), count how many times Jesus either prays or says something about prayer. The number might be larger than you think! Here are just two examples of Jesus praying.

And rising very early in the morning, while it was still dark, he departed and went out to a delicate place, and there he prayed. (Mark 1:35)

In these days he went out to the mountain to pray, and all night he continued in prayer to God. (Luke 6:12)

An obvious, but necessary, take-away is this: if the Son of God prioritized prayer, we are foolish to do otherwise.

The early church followed her Savior's example. I once looked for instances in Acts of the church praying together and I counted at least a dozen. That number didn't even include statements like Acts 1:14, "All these with one accord were devoting themselves to prayer, together with the women and Mary the mother of Jesus, and his brothers." Even thousands of new believers in Jerusalem, from the beginning, were committed to prayer (2:42).

The disposition of the early church was one of prayerfulness. This is demonstrated, to highlight just one example, after Peter and John had been imprisoned for preaching the gospel and then released: "When they were released, they went to their friends and reported what the chief priests and the elders had said to them. And when they heard it, they lifted their voices

together to God and said, 'Sovereign Lord . . .'" (4:23-24). Once they heard what happened, it was far more important to first talk to the Lord who reigns over all than to talk with each other.

Second, prayer is potent!

It's not just that we should discipline ourselves to pray because we see others in history, most significantly Jesus, prioritizing prayer. When we pray, we experience God's power! I'll highlight just two situations in which we might enjoy the potency (power; effectiveness) of prayer.

First, the potency of prayer is experienced in gospel proclamation. When the early church was praying after the release of Peter and John, part of their prayer was the following.

And now, Lord, look upon their threat and grant to your servants to continue to speak your word with all boldness, while you stretch out your hand to heal, and signs and wonders are performed through the name of your holy servant Jesus. (4:29-30)

The result? "And when they had prayed, the place in which they were gathered together was shaken, and they were filled with the Holy Spirit and continued to speak the word of God with boldness" (v. 31). I yearn for this boldness in speaking of Christ when I'm around that unbelieving relative, or interacting with the lost coffee shop worker. And, just think, God's aid and that kind of courage is only a prayer away.

Second, the potency of prayer is experienced when trying to make wise decisions. Look no further than Jesus who, before he chose his twelve apostles (Luke 6:13-16), spent the whole night in prayer (v. 12). Prayer sometimes leads to surprising decisions that could only be made after communing with God. In Jesus' choice of apostles, some certainly looked at those twelve and said, "What were you thinking, Jesus?" Prayer, though, gives confidence to do what a prayerless person wouldn't.

Let us pray?

So how is your prayer life? And what about your church? Is prayer a priority? Someone once said, "You can do more than pray *after* you have prayed but not *until*." And when we consider it's potency, why wouldn't we be eager to pray?