

Prayer Isn't Easy -- It's Essential

by Shane Idleman

Prayer is the foundation of a healthy walk with God, and without it, everything falls apart.

Duration: 23:51

Scripture: 1 Thessalonians 5:16

Topics: "Prayer Life", "Spiritual Growth"

Description

This sermon emphasizes the critical importance of prayer in our lives, highlighting how everything stands or falls on our prayer life. It discusses how a healthy prayer life is essential for a vibrant walk with God and how many moral failures in Christian ministry are linked to a lack of prayer. The speaker stresses the need for radical lifestyle changes to prioritize prayer, as it impacts every aspect of our lives, relationships, and spiritual growth.

Transcript

But I just always have this burden because we don't really pray, we don't, we miss that mark of prayer, we miss the power of prayer, it's not a priority, it's an afterthought. Sometimes we try to squeeze it in and our prayers become methodical, they become organized, they become, you know, it's, we've lost that and I really wanted to talk more about it but the service concluded and that was my heart so I just thank God for actually revitalizing my heart on that topic this morning and I just started to write down based on if my people are called by my name will humble themselves and seek my face and pray and turn from their wicked ways. And everything, you must understand that everything stands or falls on prayer.

Everything stands or falls on your prayer life. Do you know that marriages do not fail where the husband and wife are praying together and contending? They don't, they cannot because that is the foundation, that is the anchor. Churches will not fail that are praying powerfully and are broken and humble and seeking God, they can't because everything stands and falls on that prayer life.

Because what I found out is a very healthy and vibrant prayer life means a very healthy and vibrant walk with God. It's a byproduct, you can't, you can't have one without the other. Of all those men I've studied and talked to you guys before about that have had moral failure in the church, there's a book I have that they interviewed the 240 top leaders that fell in Christian ministry, none of them had a prayer life or devotional life anymore, they're all too busy.

And that's what I mean by everything stands or falls on our prayer life. And if I could just get that point across and what happens is we have to make some radical lifestyle changes. What I mean by that is we have to position ourselves in such a way that we become praying people, that's what's going to bring everything together, that's what's going to bring your life together, your relationship with your kids, marriages cannot fail where the husband and wife sometimes together but many times separate, I don't wake Morgan up at 4.45 I'd be in trouble.

So we, sometimes we come together and we do pray yesterday and this morning for a bit with the kids and everything stands and falls on that and I get just so frustrated sometimes because people don't understand that's the answer. They come in for counseling and I say listen you got to go spend some time with, I'm too busy I don't want this just tell me, I can't tell you what to do your hearts got to break. And that's my kind of beef with counseling you guys know I poke fun at it now and then and I don't do that you know kind of tongue in cheek because I think it's important and we need to meet with people and talk with them of course and kind of your history and your background obviously plays a role in this and 1997, 98 I went in for counseling with you know I've talked about this before with my ex-wife and I did not want to hear what this pastor was saying because you're sitting there hearing everything you don't want to hear.

We'd get out and we'd just argue about everything, everything, it wasn't, it was like you this and you just bashing each other's counseling appointment, it wasn't until God broke me and my prayer life was powerful that I began to change. No counseling, no mentor, no church rehab program, nothing. That moment, that encounter with God in the prayer closet changed everything and it's continued to this day.

So that's why I don't want to discourage like counseling or doing this because they're important of course we need to work through things and get you know but at the root of everything if they don't have that prayer life that sustains, that's where everything stands and falls. I talked to a young man the other day that was, his wife is leaving and trying to get Morgan to talk with her and she's just done, she's met somebody else and I don't love you anymore and we know the whole thing and I encourage you guys gotta you know spend some time in prayer and you gotta, well I'm doing all, you know I've tried that and I've tried this and no I just need, what can I do now and I don't want, no you don't understand. That is the answer, that is the answer, broken and humble prayer, a person petitioning God saying God I've been wrong, will you move, break my heart.

Not what I'm gonna tell him to do, do these seven steps, try this, try to bring her flowers, what is this? So and I just get so frustrated sometimes because the very thing that people need is the very thing they avoid but it's American Christianity, show me the fast food approach, let me get out of this the easy way, can I put on my charge car, can we just work it out, can we go to therapy, no, you need to spend time in the prayer closet, the power of prayer, everything stands on this and if I was a young adult right now, I'd be saying man I need to focus on praying more, petitioning God and looking to his word. If I can instill anything into my kids, it's going to be the power of prayer. Not correct theology even though that's vitally important but I believe that comes from a right understanding of God through the prayer closet and I think that's just what he put on my heart because the greatest threat today in the church, you know we talk about, you'll hear it on the radio show, I emailed you guys, I talked about drifting from absolute truth and liberalism and relativism but the greatest, really the greatest threat is prayerlessness because when you have churches or Christians, and I'm talking about truly praying, not talking about quick little, you know, this, this and this real quick but I mean truly praying and I'm going to talk about that in a minute, that's when you see God moving and doing things because you can't, a prideful man or prideful woman cannot truly be prayer warriors, they can't go together because the prayer closet will crush and break everything

in you because that's when you lay open and bear before God, nobody knows yourself better than God does.

You know we can come up here and say these great prayers and wasn't that wonderful and oh heavenly father thou art so wonderful of heaven and earth and you know I've heard beautiful prayers but there's no heart in it. Everything stands or falls on this. Think about this, prayer affects everything.

Without holiness no one will see the Lord, we've taught on that but without prayer no one, I'm sorry, without holiness no one will see the Lord but without prayer nobody will know the Lord personally and when you see people drift from the Christian faith ten times out of ten there's no prayer life and that's why I see how that's the anchor, not only it's the anchor it's the thermostat of the heart. Our prayer life is directly related to our spiritual maturity and our love for God without a question. Prayer affects our holiness, we live differently.

Prayer affects our giving, we want to give, time and money and energy it affects our giving. Prayer aids in suffering, if we're suffering or if there's fear and there's anxiety that'll cure, that'll cure it. The prayer closet cures fear and anxiety, that's one of the best things.

I'm going to talk about that actually this coming Saturday in Proverbs, he's talking about fear and anxiety and I want to work that in later. But it also, prayer affects being a better spouse, do you want to be a better spouse, do your kids need a better husband or father or mom or wife? Prayer affects everything, see how this changes everything because we can read the scripture and leave arrogant. We can read the scripture and nothing changes.

The Pharisees knew the scripture, they questioned Jesus, they knew the letter of God, they had it down. But it was that heart of prayer and brokenness and mercy that they lacked. Prayer also makes us better employees, helps us make wiser decisions and it is directly related to the filling of the Spirit.

Do you know that the New Testament talks often about being a vessel? A vessel has no direction of its own. A vessel isn't moving around, a vessel is just something that's empty that God uses. And the prayer, the upper room, we all know the prayer time in the upper room wasn't a few hours, it was days of petitioning.

God rewards that diligence, that seeking after Him. And sometimes it comes later, not immediate, not immediate gratification, it's the pain of discipline or the pain of regret. We'll face one or the other when it comes to prayer.

The filling with the Spirit, I couldn't, I can't promote this enough, but that truly happens when we pray. And what do I mean, and I'm not going to go real long here, but what do I mean by prayer? Because all of us have our perceptions and this and that, and I want to talk to you guys briefly, what I should have talked Saturday night at some point, but what I mean is you have to be shut out to be shut in. You have to shut out everything, outside voices, noise going on in your day, you've got to be shut in to where you can hear God.

Sometimes I put on, you put in earplugs, that's Morgan, put in earplugs, close the office doors and just go sit there and pray or put worship on and shut out because it takes time to unwind everything. Our thoughts are going a million miles a minute, where I've got the schedule, I've got to work, I've got to do this, we've got to shut out all those voices and just hear and listen for the still small voice of God, because it will not

compete for your time. Have you ever noticed that God's not up there going, hey, hello, listen, and trying to get in edgewise? He stands back, He says, you'll hear my still small voice, but if you begin to listen or remove those things that are distractions, it's not like He competes for our time, He wants it all, and it's up to us to make that time.

I know it's difficult, however, it's very rewarding. Stop listening to all the voices so you can hear the still small voice. Also wait, wait and remove the things that are diverting your attention, and this is hard for me, the first 5, 10, 15 minutes I'm thinking of all the things I have to do today, what about this, especially this morning, what am I going to say, you know, and just all these things are diverting your attention, so you've got to wait patiently on the Lord, and as I begin to wait, it's amazing what happens, you've got worship on, blessed redeemer, lead me to the cross, and it just starts to break, I can't explain it, there's a breakthrough that happens, the Lord comes in and just begins to minister and heal and restore, there's no more fear and anxiety, now I can get up and preach, I'm ready for the day now, those who have prayed well have also studied well, and it begins to shape that heart, it's like the heart has to slow down and remove all these outside distractions, all these things, it might mean taking a drive, this is why I go to the aqueduct sometimes, or it might mean up early or bed late or whatever it is to find that prayer closet, it's not the location that's important, it's the stillness.

It's amazing how the Bible records that Elisha, listen, he saw that God was not in the fire, God was not in the earthquake, God was not in the wind, he was in the still small voice that followed, and that's how the father leads off, and the enemy wants to rush and push, God stills us, the enemy wants to hurry, God says wait, and it's the still small voice that leads, that confirms, that reassures, and when I came out of there my whole day, I would tell Morgan, I'm ready for the day, something has happened the last hour and a half, two hours, where God's changed my heart, I have to speak about this, I have to let people know, but my point was this morning when I got that text, God, Lee, I was upset, I was PO'd, so I can't study now, what's this guy, what am I supposed to come up with?

You can't bail out the day of, but you can if you're trusting on God, because he used that to say, Lord, I probably would have sped right through my whole devotional time, and on a personal note too, I won't even go there today, some other time, but we wait in line for traffic, we wait in line for movies, we wait in line for everything, but we don't know about waiting on God, because I found that it's in the waiting time that you begin to be strengthened, you can sit there for 10, 15, this isn't working, what's going on, but it's in that waiting time that God says, how bad do you want it?

It's almost like it takes that much time to wind down, still your heart, calm your heart, sit and wait, and then everything, I mean, I got clarity on the direction of the church more, I was able to finish all the notes, all these points that were coming to me, the radio program, what I said today, it just came out this morning, I was able to write down some notes, He just fills me with the Spirit after that waiting time, and I don't mean to beat up on short minute devotionals, I love the Oswald Chambers book, it's one page, and we're going to start that, I'm going to explain on the 19th, I love those things, but those are not enough for the onslaught of the enemy, I mean, if we're giving Hollywood 3, 4, 5 hours a day, surely, and we're going to give the Holy Spirit 5 minutes or 10

minutes, but I'm talking about the radical Christian life, I'm talking about the transformed life, I'm talking about the exchange life, and I'm already looking to get to bed early and get up in the morning, I know that sounds weird, but I told Morgan, I can get more money, but I can't get more of God, when He fills you with His Spirit, you don't want anything else, now I can talk nice to my family and lead my family, lead the

church, because He broke me, and then it comes again, pride comes up, and you get upset, and moods, and so you got to go back in the prayer closet, that's Jesus Himself, every, you would say, He went alone to a secluded place, when it was light, wasn't even light yet, why is He praying, we don't have to, He stayed up all night in prayer, yet we don't have to, so I

would say, I would submit to you that prayer is the most important discipline that you will ever foster in your life, without a shadow of a doubt, I actually didn't get through my Bible reading today, but it doesn't even matter, because that prayer time was so special, and I will get through it at some point, but we can get so, I got to do this, my checklist, I got to get through, I got to get through, I got to get through, I'm trying to get through the Bible, I'm trying to get through every year, every year, I'm going my 10th year, 10th year, 10 times through, 25 times through the New Testament, I'm trying to get through and get, and that can become almost idolatry, and because I just, you know, Jeff, you know, huh, you're shaking your head, I see, but you're reading it just to read it,

I got through, I got to get through, I got to get through, and verses, sometimes now, I just stop on a, oh my God, what was that verse, where does my help come from, it comes from the Lord, heaven of maker and earth, though he holds Israel in his hands, your foot will not slip, that Psalm right there, I just stopped, and how do you explain that to people, they think you're weird and fanatical, but I just stopped, oh my God, where does my help come from, I looked to the hills, where does it come from, it comes from a creator of heaven and earth, that's my sustain, I just had to stop, I'm done, right there, I'm putting in the Saturday sermon, and he just, he just works on my heart right there, so you can't have a methodical set out thing, because sometimes you run too far ahead of God, he

says, hold on, come back to this, that's why I love the minor prophets, and some of those words are just piercing, oh Israel, you stiff neck people, you always reject the counsel of God, oh, and then what, Lord, if I'm in rebellion in any area, and just, and he breaks me on certain things, and you should, and just how scripture comes alive, my point is, it needs to be a fluent time of prayer, not with a quick agenda, and got to get through this, I've got a checklist, I pray for, there's so many prayer requests in this church, Lord, please bless the needs of the congregation, and specifically, and sometimes it gets specific, but in that, he's changing me, and breaking my heart, and saying, Lord, and I come out of there, Lord, thank you for my kids, and my spouse, and the church, you know,

you just, you just come out there, a changed person, why do you come out a changed person, because the heart is open before God, genuine repentance takes place, now you're filled with the Spirit of God, he's spoken to your life, now you can, you're ready for the day, Martin Luther is busy, as he said, he said, I'm too busy not to pray, you can, you, you're, we're too busy not to pray, we have to, when faith ceases to pray, it ceases to live, if I could get everybody to remember that quote from Ian Bounds, you would be amazed at how radically your life would change, if you remember, as soon as your faith ceases to pray, your faith will cease to live, it will wither, it will die, 10 times out of 10, this isn't even, when you talk to married couples, when we're counseling, and everything,

they're ready for divorce court, this, they're bitter, prayer life is gone, prayer is non-existent, you cannot have prayer, and all this more immorality and stuff going on, they do not go together, unless it's a hypocrisy, and just going through the motions, heathen prayers, and just, it is that important, there's a calm, there's a quietness, there's a reassurance, finally, you have to prioritize, you have to prioritize your day, you have to, I don't care if it's morning, afternoon, evening, wherever it is, you've got to structure, Morgan knows, my day is structured around my prayer time, in the morning, my whole day, if I get to bed

late, and that's ruined, my whole day's shot, and people used to make fun of us, oh, you got to get to bed early, yeah, yeah, I sure do, absolutely, you're

up watching David Letterman till 12 o'clock, and you have no, you know, Howard Stern in the morning, of course, there's no power in your life, because you've got to structure, that doesn't mean the same for you, you can go to bed at midnight or 11, there's no one o'clock sometimes, I mean, as long as there's a point where, but by seven o'clock, I'm done, I can't even have a conversation with people, I can't study, I can't even, I can just read biographies, and maybe some magazines or something, because my brain is just shut off, because it's up early, working early in the morning, and that's what works for me, being in construction, I love getting up two hours before the sun's even up, and that is my, I wouldn't trade it for the world, but every year we have a baby, I'm up all night, and

that gets ruined for a week, and there's emergencies, I've been a couple's houses, you know, houses late, and then getting up, and then kids are up sick, and then, you know, so I'm not talking about it, sometimes it doesn't happen, but that's, I try to get right back to that, right back to that priority, and God, I think, rewards that, because He is a rewarder of those who diligently seek Him, and it's that, it's in that diligence, and that's my final point here, is you have to press through, you have to press through, He rewards discipline, God rarely rewards something done immediately, He will, I mean, obviously, you avoided temptation, a good decision, there's rewards there, but He rewards consistency, let me see you save, and let me see you give consistently, those who want to be

elders, and leaders in the church, let me see your godly character be consistent over years, who those who want to serve, let me see consistency, those who want to seek me with all their heart, let me see consistency, so He rewards that diligence, and that seeking Him, there might be a few days ago, I didn't get much, Lord, help me with this, I mean, when I, sometimes when I fast, and my mind's not, you know, working, sometimes it's like, I don't get anything out of it, but later in the day, something happens, and it just, I can't explain it, but He rewards that persistence, last thing I put down here, it can't be forced, or worked up, it must be brought down, it can't be forced, prayer cannot be forced, and it cannot be worked up, and we see that a lot in the church, you know, I've come,

I've spoken so many different places, I've seen dead formalism, where, and it's hard as a spirit-filled believer, you really don't fit in anywhere, do you, you don't, you go, some of the dead churches, you want to wake them up, say, hello, wake up, that's dead formalism, some of the hyper charismatic Pentecost, you want to say, stop it, God's not in any of that, where do I fit in, where do I fit in, because it can't be worked up, it can't, all these prayer rallies, the reason they don't work a lot of times, is you've got arrogant people coming up just with an agenda, they haven't truly broke, a real prayer, you couldn't hear the prayers very well, in a real prayer meeting, the groans, the people, the travailing, the crying out to God, Lord, I don't know what to pray, your book, your

Romans says, the spirit intercedes with groanings that we cannot even utter, because of that innermost, that spirit within us, crying out, Abba, Father, that's what it looks like, it can't be brought down, it can't be forced, it has to be, actually, it can't be forced or worked up, it has to be brought down, and I just would conclude with final point, as I said three times, my final point, but this one really is, you've got to ask God for a baptism of love, a baptism of anguish, David Wilkerson taught many years on this message of a call to anguish, and I've also heard people talk, Jim Cimbala out of Brooklyn Tabernacle, this baptism of love that he talks about, and these shouldn't be weird words or scary words, baptism means to be overwhelmed, and when God overwhelms a person with his

spirit, with his love, and you start to see sin as he sees it, the love of God, when the love of God truly comes in and affects your heart, that's what the baptism of the Holy Spirit is, the filling of the Holy Spirit, the unction of this Holy Spirit, it's when the spirit moves and baptizes you with love of how God sees it, that's why you'll read a lot of experiences that people have, like Dio Moody, when he was walking down the streets in Chicago, he had to go and go into a room for hours when the spirit filled him mightily, this baptism of love, this over, he said, I couldn't even explain it, there were joy, this love unspeakable, but you've got to ask God for it, you've got to seek, you've got to say, Lord, I want that, I don't know what it looks like, but I want all of you, and I will

die trying, and I want to walk the walk, and I need you to move in behalf of my life, that's what I want to share tonight, because there's nothing, I wish I could preach this every other Saturday, because we can go through Proverbs, we can go through expositionally, we can go through topically, we can, yeah, that wasn't that great, that makes sense, uh-huh, but it's not until it's actually applied in the prayer life, if I could just get people praying, and breaking, and repenting, that's all the spirit needs, that when he talks about, I just need an empty vessel, that's it, that's what it looks like, let's close with that, Lord, I just pray, Lord, that we're all challenged tonight, I pray that everyone in this room would change, Lord, or just reinforce their prayer life tonight, that we

would be a church praying, and crying out to you, Lord, that you would move, and Lord, I do pray that you would honor that with revival here, Lord, whatever that looks like, you revive your people, awaken the sleeping giant, Lord, awaken your church, Lord, I pray for these people tonight, Lord, just speak to them in the late night hours, Lord, with whatever means there is possible, and begin to shake, and to stir, and to convict, so that we receive, Lord, this overwhelming sense of your presence in our lives, Lord, we want nothing more than that, and I pray this in Jesus' name, amen.

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