

DISCIPLINE FOR GODLINESS

DISCIPLINE OF DEVOTION

As my personal understanding of the interior life has developed, I have learned that apart from the well-known Scriptural calls to prayer, there are **two great human reasons we ought to pray**.

The first is because of what prayer does to our *character*. Prayer is like a time exposure to God. Our souls function like photographic plates, and Christ's shining image is the light. The more we expose our lives to the white-hot sun of His righteous life (for, say, five, ten, fifteen, thirty minutes, or an hour a day), the more His image will be burned into our character — His love, His compassion, His truth, His integrity, His humility. As we have seen, this was true of General William Harrison, who maintained a disciplined devotional life for over seventy years. People say his presence brought a distinct sense of Christ.

The second corresponding reason is that prayer bends our *wills* to God's will. **E. Stanley Jones**, the world-renowned missionary and man of prayer, explained it like this: "If I throw out a boathook from the boat and catch hold of the shore and pull, do I pull the shore to me, or do I pull myself to the shore? Prayer is not pulling God to my will, but the aligning of my will to the will of God."

What tantalizing personal benefits are offered by time spent in the presence of God in prayer! Herein lies the spiritual desolation of our day. As **Dallas Willard** has said in *The Spirit of the Disciplines*, "The 'open secret' of many 'Bible-believing' churches is that a vanishing small percentage of those talking about prayer ... are actually doing what they are talking about." This is especially true among men, to our detriment and shame. As **George Gallup's statistics show**, men are considerably less likely to pray than women.

My own experience in talking with full time pastors corresponds with this, because many will candidly admit their prayer lives are undisciplined and even minimal. Sometimes I have heard what amounts to an attempt to find dismal comfort in mutual confessions of failure — "You are sort of okay, and I guess I am too."

Why do so many men fail in personal devotions and prayer? Partially for the same reason they attend church less and read less: they are not as spiritually sensitive and open as women. Also, more men are dominated by the time-crunching production ethic of the marketplace, which makes them feel galaxies away from meditation and prayer. But most fail because they simply do not know how to go about cultivating the disciplines of the interior spiritual life.

Bible Study: Discipline for Godliness

Discipleship Series:

Pastor Eddie Idefonso

This section's teaching on the devotional life, and the following section on prayer, will, if taken to heart, help you develop a fruitful interior life.

As we begin, there are *some necessary caveats*. **First**, one's prayer and devotional life cannot be reduced to a few simple rules. These areas of spiritual experience are far too dynamic and personal for simplistic reduction.

We must also be cautioned against imagining from the outline we are using (*meditation, confession, adoration, submission, and petition*) that there is a prescribed order for devotion, for there is not and never has been. Life's rhythms sometimes demand that we launch directly, for example, into petition with **"Lord, help me!"** Other times will be spent almost entirely in confession, or meditation, or adoration.

As we discussed in the preceding section, reading God's Word is essential to developing a Christian mind. All Christians should be systematically reading through the Bible, once a year if possible, so that our minds are being perpetually programmed by the data of Scripture.

This understood, there is yet another step: *meditation* — which involves personalizing and internalizing a segment of the Word. We will discuss next week.