

Good and Bad Habits - Prayer

Sermon transcript

Share briefly about a **pattern** of communication that you have with someone.

For example,

- *My mother lives interstate so I don't see her very often, but every week, on Sunday afternoon, we have a video call and catch up. I'm able to see and hear how she is going, to share about my week and to lean on her wisdom.*
- *My husband and I live busy lives. Often we don't see each other during the day. So, every night, before we head to bed, we have a cup of tea and talk over the day. Once a month we have 'date night' and twice a year we get away for a weekend together.*
- *Family life can be hectic with everyone juggling different activities. Some days it feels like I barely see my kids. I always try to make the most of the time driving to and from school. We chat about what is happening, what we are looking forward to and the challenges we might face. In the afternoon, we debrief and discover what we can learn from the day. My kids always amaze me with their insights.*

Think for a moment about the most important relationship you have. It might be with a spouse, a child, a sibling, a friend.

How do you communicate with each other – do you catch up over a meal; are there regular phone calls; do you rely on text messages or email? Do you have regular patterns of communication? What communication is most important in that relationship? How would the relationship suffer if that communication was missing?

In any relationship, communication is critical. We need to make space in a relationship to express our thoughts, to share our needs and to communicate our love and appreciation.

We also need to make space to listen and to hear from others, to absorb their perspectives, to understand their needs and to adjust our behaviours. A relationship cannot exist without communication. When our lives are busy, we develop patterns of communication, or habits, that keep us connected.

Prayer is communication between God and people. Prayer is crucial in our relationship with God. God longs that we spend time with him. We need to spend time with God. Just as Jesus needed to spend time in prayer to gain strength and wisdom and compassion.

Today we are going to focus on three good habits for prayer.

1. Pray persistently and consistently

Jesus taught his disciples about prayer. In Matthew 7:7-8 he said, *"Keep on asking, and you will receive what you ask for. Keep on seeking, and you will find. Keep on knocking, and the door will be opened to you. ⁸For everyone who asks, receives. Everyone who seeks, finds. And to everyone who knocks, the door will be opened."*

Invest in prayer. Be persistent in your communication with God. Ask for the things that are on your heart. Seek the presence and the goodness of God. Knock and listen for his response. Ask. Seek. Knock. Pray persistently.

GOOD HABITS



Sometimes it can be challenging to pray persistently. There will be times in our lives when it seems that no matter how intently we listen, God is silent. There will be times when we pray and it seems that God does not answer. Jesus instructs us to pray persistently. We are not to become discouraged but to continue to communicate with God. Ask, seek, knock. Persistent prayer continues to seek God's will and his direction. Persistent prayer stays focussed. Persistent prayer means that we continue to open our hearts to God, even when we wonder how effective our prayers are.

Paul reminds the people of the church to *"Never stop praying"*. (1 Thessalonians 5:17)

Good communication needs to be consistent and persistent. This doesn't mean constantly pestering someone for something or being in each other's space all the time, but about consistently being willing to deepen our understanding of each other, our awareness of each other's needs, our movement towards each other and our common goals.

Practical suggestions:

So, how do we develop a habit of persistent and consistent prayer? Here are a few suggestions:

- ☐ Set a daily alarm to remind you to stop and pray. As you develop this habit, increase the number of alarms per day.
- ☐ Carry a small stone in your pocket. Whenever you touch the stone, take time to pray.
- ☐ Place post-it notes around your home, car, office etc. Write Scripture verses, prayer points or thoughts on them that remind you to pray.
- ☐ Create a prayer calendar. "Things that are important to us are written in our calendars. If you want to be intentional about setting aside time to pray, you need to plan for it."

— **Dave Ferguson**

If one strategy doesn't work for you then try another. Be persistent and consistent.

2. Pray privately and in community with others

Share about a time when the prayers of another person have encouraged, comforted, or strengthened you.

Jesus often withdrew to pray privately. Luke 5:16 gives just one example of Jesus leaving his disciples and pausing his ministry to spend time with God in prayer. Praying alone is good for the soul and allows us to present our personal thoughts, needs and emotions to God.

When we explore the Old Testament, we find that prayer, in community with others, has been an important part of worship and connection throughout history. The Psalms are prayers that were used in worship. We continue to use them both privately and publicly, thousands of years later. When we read Acts, we discover that prayer, played an important part in meetings of the early church.

They all met together and were constantly united in prayer, along with Mary the mother of Jesus, several other women, and the brothers of Jesus (Acts 1:14).

All the believers devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching, and to fellowship, and to sharing in meals (including the Lord's Supper), and to prayer (Acts 2:42).

GOOD HABITS



When we pray together, we:

- Encourage and build each other up. When we praise God together and give thanks for each other, we encourage and build each other up. As a community we become more resilient.
- Strengthen each other. When we pray for common prayer points, we build solidarity and strengthen each other.
- Comfort each other. When we pray for each other's needs we bring each other comfort and feel supported in our challenges.
- Provide each other with accountability. When we confess to God in community, we find forgiveness and accountability.

Praying in community unifies us and brings us closer together as the body of Christ.

¹³ Are any of you suffering hardships? You should pray. Are any of you happy? You should sing praises. ¹⁴ Are any of you sick? You should call for the elders of the church to come and pray over you, anointing you with oil in the name of the Lord. ¹⁵ Such a prayer offered in faith will heal the sick, and the Lord will make you well. And if you have committed any sins, you will be forgiven.

¹⁶ Confess your sins to each other and pray for each other so that you may be healed.
James 5:13-16

How can we develop good habits in praying in community?

Practical suggestions:

- Join or organise a regular prayer meeting.
- Pray with your family each morning.
- Pray with a friend when they share a need or something for which they are grateful.

3. Pray with purpose

Have you ever endured a conversation with someone that went on and on with no apparent purpose? How long did it take for you to look for an escape?

As Jesus taught his disciples about how to pray, he said, *"When you pray, don't talk on and on as people do who don't know God. They think God likes to hear long prayers. ⁸ Don't be like them. Your Father knows what you need even before you ask"* (Matthew 6:7-8).

We might be critical of ourselves at times, feeling that we fail if we don't spend hours in dedicated prayer each day. Think about what you want to communicate to God and allow space to listen to his responses.

Jesus went on to teach his disciples how to pray with purpose:

- Give praise to God.
- Pray for God's will to be done in our world.
- Ask for the things you need.
- Pray for forgiveness.
- Pray for your relationship with others.
- Pray for strength to live like Jesus.

GOOD HABITS



Practical suggestions:

- Make a plan for your prayer time.
- Write down your prayer points to stay focussed.
- Keep a prayer journal. This can be a wonderful way to see how your relationship with God has developed over time. You may also go back and use these prayers during times when you simply do not know how to pray.
- Use the Prayer Room or another prayer resource.

4. Maintaining good prayer habits

"We do not forget to eat: we do not forget to take the shop shutters down: we do not forget to be diligent in business: we do not forget to go to our beds to rest: but we often do forget to wrestle with God in prayer..." — **Charles Spurgeon**

- Schedule time with God - start with 5-10 minutes
- Incorporate prayer throughout your day
- Pray through Scripture or music

How will you continue to develop good prayer habits that deepen your relationship with God?

I love the Lord because he hears my voice and my prayer for mercy. Because he bends down to listen, I will pray as long as I have breath! (Psalm 116:1-2)