

Secrets to prayer revealed

Dan Nelson – pastor

Calvary Chapel of the Ojai Valley

Starting something new can be an intimidating prospect for many people. While some people avoid change with their every breath, others love the challenge. January is full of new things, new goals, and new choices. For many, there is no better time than now to start the year off doing something that could really change your life. Pray!

At our church we are putting a focus on prayer this year. While we already like to think of ourselves as people of prayer and do pray regularly, we acknowledge that the spiritual life of the Christian as described in Scripture can be so much more than we experience today. The opportunity and access to God that we have as followers of Christ is phenomenal and so few really experience that. We are committed this year to grow in prayer.

This past Sunday I presented six aspects of prayer that I believe are quite helpful to understanding this important spiritual discipline. These do not comprise to be a comprehensive lesson on prayer but a starting place in taking a person who already prays to somewhere deeper. I use an acronym for the word, prayer.

Here it is:

P: Praise — The Bible says in Psalms 104:1 to enter the courts of God with praise. This is how we approach God, with a heart of praise and thanksgiving. We acknowledge who God is and what he has done. This genuine recognition brings forth praise. Jesus taught that to recognize who we are addressing is how prayer begins.

R: Repent — Jesus started his ministry with the call to repent because he said the kingdom of heaven was at hand. If we want this same kingdom powerfully present in our lives, repentance remains key. To make the necessary life changes and respond to the call of God is still the message today. To repent is to reject certain lifestyle choices, ideologies, philosophies, associations, actions, and deeds that are objectionable to God. In other words, to make distinctions regarding what thinking or behaviors that, although permeated in the culture or part of your previous experience, will not be part of your life going forward. The Christian should live a life of repentance. This is not just a onetime thing. And this is a starting place toward effective prayer. The book of James talks about the effective, fervent, powerful prayer of the righteous man. This righteousness requires regular decisions of choosing what is “right” and rejecting what is “wrong.”

A: Ask — Many of God’s people never ask him for anything. Sometimes people consider themselves unworthy to be blessed by God. Others presume God will say “No” or is waiting to punish them. Jesus said over and over again: “Ask!” Further, the Bible teaches that many don’t have because they don’t ask. James tells us that some people do ask but they do so for the purpose of selfish gain. God’s people need to learn how to ask him for what they need.

Y: Yield — Jesus taught us in the garden by his own example when he yielded his own will to that of the father’s. We also need to learn how to yield our requests to the will of the father. Sometimes we ask for the wrong things. Have you ever done that? I know folks who thank God for saying “No” to an emotional plea for “Mr. or Mrs. Right” only to learn that he/she was really “Mr. or Mrs. Wrong.” If you and I are being completely honest, we will admit that there

are many things that we have asked for that the best answer has been “No.” Our will and prayer request must be yielded to God’s will.

E: Expect — After looking at all the times when Jesus taught his followers to agree together on something and ask in his name, it is clear that Jesus wants people to learn something about expectations. In short, faith is part of the process and cannot be replaced by something more shallow. The Scriptures teach of the person who doubts God’s willingness or capacity to answer prayer as one who shouldn’t have that request granted. We must learn how to pray in faith.

R: Respond — If one has approached God with a heart of praise and thanksgiving, having repented from sin, asked in the name of Jesus Christ, and yielded the request to the wisdom and sovereignty of God, tested his request in light of the word of God, and has expected God to answer, and then he will make some personal decisions as a response to that. The challenge to Christians is how do you respond differently as a result of that prayer. We make decisions every day based on our belief. We get into our car because there is some belief that it can transport us to a new place. We go to work because there is a general faith that there will be a paycheck on payday. We eat food with an understanding that this can satisfy hunger. The point is that genuine faith produces responses and a godly expectation of prayer results in new behaviors.

To learn to really pray is one of the most life-transforming, exciting pursuits one can think of. More adventurous than an Indiana Jones search for a lost ark, for many it can be a challenge-filled search for “a lost art” of genuine communion with the spirit of the God of the universe. Don’t let this opportunity pass you by. Now is the perfect time to explode into something really worthwhile. Pray!

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Dan Nelson is a frequent contributor to the Ojai Valley News and currently serves the Ojai Valley Ministerial Association and community as editor of the Religion Column. Permission is freely granted to reprint the article in its entirety. Dan Nelson is pastor of Calvary Chapel Christian Church of the Ojai Valley.



P.O. Box 1443
Ojai, CA 93024
(805) 640-9498
www.calvaryojai.org

Sunday Worship:

9:00 & 10:45am
Calvary Chapel Ojai Valley
195 Mahoney Ave., Oak View

Mid-Week Study:

7:00pm Thursday
Calvary Chapel Ojai Valley
195 Mahoney Ave., Oak View

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