

Yesterday, many people gathered on the lawn at City Hall in downtown Ojai to pray as part of our National Day of Prayer celebration. People from different backgrounds, understandings, and approaches joined together in a united effort to both acknowledge God in worship and gratitude, and to petition his help in the affairs of this world and in our lives. One might say that the National Day of Prayer celebration in the Ojai Valley was one of "unity in spirit" as we prayed together.

Prayer is a large part of so many people's lives, and yet for others, it is a mystery. It seems that some people really understand the concept of prayer and the power behind it and others are baffled. Jesus' disciples came to him one day and asked him to teach them how to pray. But why? Is it because they had never prayed before? Surely not, for although they were regular folks with average education and occupations, they still grew up in and around religion. They knew how to pray, at least according to the way those around them prayed. But they saw something different in Jesus. You see, Jesus prayed. I mean really prayed. And they seem to notice a correlation between Jesus' prayer life and the power that they saw.

One account tells of the crowds that got up one morning and looked for Jesus to get his help and they could not find him. Later it would be discovered that he had arisen before dawn and sneaked away to a quiet place to pray. The busyness of his day was so demanding that he needed to get up early for inspiration and strength, he needed to pray. How about you? Do you have a demanding schedule? Do you ever feel like people are pulling you in different directions and it is difficult to find rest? Me too. We need to do what Jesus did; pray.

At another occasion, just before "the 12" were chosen, the Bible records that Jesus had prayed all night. Doesn't this cause you to wonder why? What was it that Jesus gained by praying? Do you have any important decisions to make? I do. Would it ever make sense for us to invest a night and pray before making those life choices? This is what Jesus did.

For many, prayer is their spiritual obligation. They say the words that they have to say before life can resume, before they can eat, before they can go to bed, whatever. Is that what prayer is? Saying the words that one is supposed to say? The Scriptures encourage us to pray without ceasing. That speaks of a 24/7 kind of prayer life. If prayer is merely saying the words of a religious obligation that would be exhausting. Yet Jesus said that it should be a very light burden in following him.

I remember the story of Jesus in the garden when he asked his followers to pray. They fell asleep. Isn't that so much like us? Yet his grace was there to cover them. At one point Jesus informed Peter that there was a spiritual attack on his life but, not to worry, he had prayed for Peter. The promise today is that he remains an intercessor for all of us, covering us in our deficiencies, especially while we don't know how to

pray. Isn't that good news?

Jesus spent a lot of time in restoring people to a life of prayer. He cried out, "It is written, my house is to be called a house of prayer" as he cleansed the temple of all the filth of religious hypocrisy. You know, the Bible teaches that we are his "house" today. And God still wants his house, our lives, to be "houses of prayer."

Have you ever noticed it's hard to fight with someone and pray with them at the same time. Further, it is awfully difficult to remain mad at someone that you are truly praying for. There is a direct correlation to our prayer connection with God and his grace and compassion flowing through our lives. Yes, I did say "prayer connection." Isn't that what prayer really is? Plugging into the true source of power. Connecting with the mind and heart of the Almighty. Communing with the spirit of God that transcends time and space. And Jesus said as you approach God in prayer in his name, you will be accepted. Why would that be controversial? Isn't this great news? Isn't this one more reason why they call it "the gospel"?

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. This article was published in 2006. Permission is freely granted to reprint the article in its entirety. Dan Nelson is pastor of Calvary Chapel Christian Church of the Ojai Valley.



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Sunday Worship:

9:00 & 10:30am
Calvary Chapel Ojai Valley
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Mid-Week Study:

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