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Maturing toward Wholeness in the Inner Life

Chapter Eleven

Prayer

Being with God and Interacting with Him about All We Are Doing Together

- 1 - Jesus lived a life of prayer. He often withdrew from activity to be with his Father. In his humanity, prayer was the source of his strength.
- 2 - Jesus taught a life of prayer. He formed prayer in his disciples by example and teaching. Prayer is foundational to being his follower.
- 3 - The apostles lived and taught a life of prayer. It permeates the New Testament. They learned prayer from Jesus. Prayer empowered the Church's birth and growth.
- 4 - Examine Judeo-Christian history. You will find no one who walked with God or accomplished great things for him who was not a man or woman of prayer.
- 5 - What is prayer? Prayer is interacting with God. I talk to him; I also listen for what he is saying to me. Prayer is two-way communication.
- 6 - There is something special about prayers we form using our own words. What father does not love to hear honoring words from his own child?
- 7 - But we do not know how to pray. We need the Holy Spirit to help us—Romans 8:26. The disciples asked Jesus to teach them how to pray—Luke 11:1.
- 8 - We also learn much about how to pray through prayers that have stood the test of time among God's people down through the centuries.
- 9 - The prayers of David (and others) in the Psalms have shaped the worship and prayers of our spiritual forefathers and mothers for millennia.
- 10 - The prayers of Jesus and his followers, found in the New Testament, laid the initial foundation for Christian worship and prayer.
- 11 - We have received a rich heritage in the prayers of Christian history, formed by ones who walked with God, representing every Christian tradition.
- 12 - Unaided, we can pray amiss. The heart may be innocent, but the understandings which form prayers may be wrong—even spiritually dark.
- 13 - Scripture includes repetition in prayer—Psalm 136. Repetition supports meditation, facilitating hearing God more thoroughly and accurately.
- 14 - Some equate prayer only with intercession. Intercessory prayer is certainly essential! We will focus on prayer as it relates to living in the Presence.

15 - Prayer is primary in practicing God's Presence. To learn how to live in God's Presence continually, we must learn how to pray continually.

16 - The biblical directive to pray without ceasing—1 Thessalonians 5:17—seems unattainable. But it is a command. Let's ask the Lord to teach us how.

17 - "Rejoice always, pray without ceasing, give thanks in all circumstances" (1 Thessalonians 5:16-18). Rejoicing, praying, giving thanks are to characterize our lives.

18 - "Perfection" is different from "maturity." We will never be perfect in praying without ceasing, but we can increasingly mature toward it.

19 - Jesus directs us to abide in him (John 15:5). He said apart from him we could do nothing. "To abide" means "to remain." Remain for how long?

20 - The Scriptures say we are to be filled with the Spirit (Ephesians 5:18). For how long? Is this just a one-off experience? Or a way of life?

21 - Praying without ceasing, abiding in Christ and being filled with the Spirit all point to one reality—living in continual communion with God.

22 - This is the condition for which we were created. We can re-learn this. But the old life must be brought to the cross that a new life may be formed.

23 - When we try to pray without ceasing, our mind wanders. Keeping our mind on anything involves learning to bring our mind continually back to it.

24 - To learn prayer as a lifestyle I practice shortening the intervals when my thoughts are not on God. I look for ways to bring my thoughts back.

25 - There is no "right" way to shorten the intervals between returning my thoughts to God, but history has many examples from which I can learn.

26 - In New Testament times the liturgical day in Judaism included set hours for prayer (Acts 3:1). Cornelius, a Gentile, prayed them (Acts 10:30).

27 - Cornelius was a Roman centurion, an army officer with 100 men under him. He had a demanding schedule, but he "prayed continuously" (Acts 10:2).

28 - "Seven times a day I praise you" (Psalm 119:164) guided early Christian houses of prayer (monasteries) to set hours of prayer day and night.

29 - Historically seven hours of prayer have been used by Christian communities: upon rising, 6 am, 9 am, noon, 3 pm, 6 pm and before retiring.

30 - How can I develop a lifestyle of prayer? 1) Start with one prayer time a day. It can be short! Connect with God.

31 - In learning any discipline, we start where we are. Don't overdo. Attempting too much too soon will be counterproductive. Let it take time.

32 - The more we are with God, the deeper our desire to be with him will grow. Once one prayer time per day is established, 2) add a second one.

33 - Two prayer times a day might look like one in the morning and one in the evening. In time, 3) a third one might be added at noontime.

34 - A next step may be 4) to set our watch timer to sound every so often—once an hour? Upon hearing it we pause to speak briefly, quietly to the Lord.

35 - For example, as I write this, my watch timer is sounding every five minutes. I pause for a 5-second prayer. I don't feel interrupted; I feel empowered.

36 - Each of us can discover unique ways to return our thoughts to God throughout the day for a 5-second prayer. The result will be transformative.