

Tips for Prayer in Isolation (Growing in Isolation Week 2)

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[0 : 00] Hi, everyone. My name is Jesse, one of the pastors at One Harbor. You're watching the second teaching in our series, Growing in Isolation. And in the first video, Donnie took us to Jesus's amazing teaching from John 15 on abiding in him. And I want to pick up on that metaphor of being a branch, abiding in Jesus. He talked about these branches being grafted into the vine, which is Jesus, and how we being branches are meant to bear fruit as we're connected and abiding in him and remaining in him. So what we see in that passage, though, is this call of Jesus to abide in me. And that's a verb. That's an action verb. That's a call for us to do something that is saying, hey, there's some active obedience you got to do on your part. And that means it requires our efforts.

And so all you grace referees out there that are ready to blow the whistle on me, remember what Dallas Willard said, right? Grace isn't against effort. It's just against earning. And so one of the chief ways we can abide and grow as a disciple of Jesus during this time of isolation is through prayer. And that's what I want to talk about today. Prayer is one of the fundamental ways we abide in God. Now, I'm sure some of you listening love to pray, and you can pray the paint off the walls. But I'm also confident that there's many of us like me who struggle with prayer, right? Prayer is something that, man, we wish we did a lot more. We're inconsistent with it. And then when we do pray, it just kind of feels weird and unnatural to us. Well, guess what? That's where all of us start. Man, if you're on this side praying the paint off the walls, I know that you started on this side where prayer just didn't feel normal. It was a little more weird. And I want to encourage you, those of us who might be struggling with prayer, don't give up. Prayer moves from weird to wonderful the more we practice it. That's the thing. Prayer is something that we practice. It's something that we exercise and do more and more. And it's one of the chief ways that we actually exercise our faith and grow in our faith.

Prayer is an exercise in faith. I mean, think about this. The Bible says in Hebrews 11 verse 1, now faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen. Faith is confidence that the God we can't see is real. It's confidence that he is who he says he is to include being a God who speaks to us, being a God who listens to us and listens to our prayers.

[2 : 31] Now, prayer is exercising what Hebrews 11 verse 1 is saying. It's exercising the convictions of things unseen as we speak to an invisible God. Think about this. Think about prayer like going to the gym to work out your muscles. The more consistent you work out, the more you do that, the stronger and bigger your muscles get. So when you practice prayer, what we're doing is we're exercising faith just like being in a gym, exercising our muscles. And the result is the more we do it, the more faith is going to grow. And practically what that looks like, it just means God becomes more real to you.

Now, let me explain it this way. You can believe that fire is hot by reading about it, by hearing about it from others. But there's a deeper understanding when you experience the contact of flame on your skin. Now, prayer is to our hearts like the flame is to the skin. It brings us into contact with the living, all-powerful, almighty, loving, gracious, holy God. But the kind of prayer that brings us into contact might not be the kind of praying that we're taught growing up. Many of us think of prayer like kind of akin to mailing Santa our Christmas list. Now, what I mean by that is we come to God with all of our needs. We ask him to fix this situation, give us that thing, thank him for our dinner, you know, that kind of stuff. We often think of prayer as coming to seek God for what's in his hands. Now, don't get me wrong, that is an aspect of prayer. But I want to say, man, there's much more to prayer than just that. See, when you look at prayer throughout the Bible, what we see is people primarily seeking God's face, seeking God's favor. And guys, that alone is a game changer for your

prayer life. Our prayers should prioritize seeking God's glory more than his gifts. Now, I'm not saying asking God for things is bad. That's not what I'm saying. But as Tim Keller said, until our hearts are shaped by his glory, they aren't ready to receive his gifts. That is why Jesus taught us the model prayer by starting with seeking God's glory, right? He starts with our father in heaven, hallowed be your name. Let your name be holy. Let your name be the greatest, the most important, the highest in my heart. And not only for myself, but all over the world, may your kingdom come and will be done. He has a start there. Now, as we seek God's glory, what we experience is that we experience a drawing closer to the father's heart. And prayer is one of the key ways we journey deeper into the father's heart. And when that happens, and we experience God for all that he is, our hearts are so satisfied and we are better prepared then to bring our needs to God. And one of the chief reasons we're prepared is because we've reminded ourselves who God is. Many of us come to God, to be honest, as if he were a moody king that we're afraid to upset. We ask for things sheepishly because we're insecure, because we don't have insight into the character and goodness of God. Think about this. A little child that feels safe and secure in their parents' love isn't afraid to ask for anything. And they're also not afraid of what their parents' response is going to be. Whether that's yes or no, they're satisfied with it because they trust them. And this is how God wants us to come to him, right? We're his children. He saves us and calls us his children. He says, call me father. That's how he wants us, how that relationship is meant to exist. And the more we know him as father, we know his love, and the more we know his character, we're going to come with greater and greater boldness. And that means we're going to pray big prayers. We can come and pray big prayers for big things, knowing that however God chooses to answer, whether that's yes or whether that's no, he does it for our good. So when we pray for our family or friends, we pray big prayers. When we pray for economic situations or work situations or this COVID-19 thing that we're experiencing, we pray big prayers. When we pray for God to move in our cities and our churches, we pray big prayers. Now, the interesting thing is for whatever reason, I don't know why, it's a bit of a mystery. God has chosen to work through the prayers of his people.

So let's not neglect prayer. And to be honest, that's easier said than done. One of the things that stands in the way of prayer, frankly, is our busyness. Our biggest opponent to prayer, it isn't Satan. It isn't sin. It's our schedules. We don't make time to pray.

And I want to say this, if you don't schedule a prayer time, it won't happen. Take it from me, I learned this. I've watched other guys learn this as well in their lives. And guess what, man? What we see actually, when you look at the Bible, God's redemption plan, he's calling us back to himself. He wants us to build our lives around abiding in him.

When he delivered Israel out of Egypt and brought them to Mount Sinai and gave them the law, that law was what it did. It reordered their lives on a daily, weekly, seasonal basis of coming to him and abiding in his presence. The same thing happened after Pentecost. The Holy Spirit fell, Peter preached, a ton of people were saved, and they started to live their lives around rhythms of abiding in God. The great historian of revival, J. Edwin Orr, has made famous the statement, no great spiritual awakening has begun anywhere in the world apart from united prayer. Christians persistently praying for revival. A return to regular, consistent prayer that seeks God's glory is the common factor leading up to and within revivals and renewals and awakenings throughout history. And it often looks like this, a group of people move from scheduling prayer around their lives to scheduling their lives around prayer. George Whitefield was one of the great preachers of the Great Awakening in the 1700s. Historical accounts mention how great an order he was, but look at what was happening behind the scenes. Before a meeting, George Whitefield would spend hours and sometimes all night bathing an event in prayers. Fervent church members kept the fires of revival going through their genuine petitions for God's intervention in the lives of their communities.

[8 : 49] That's amazing stuff. Now, let me give you some hope because all that can be really overwhelming. I'm not saying we all have to start praying through the night or five hours a day all of a sudden, but to quote an old proverb, if nothing changes, nothing changes. So let's start with a doable goal.

Let's fix a prayer time in our daily schedule. This is what I do. I get on my phone. I've set a repeating alarm every single day to remind me to pray because if I don't, I forget it. And don't set a goal when you pray to pray for a certain period of time. Don't do that. Make the goal simply to journey deeper into the Father's heart. You could do that in 30 seconds. You can do that in 30 minutes.

The point is length of time isn't the goal. It's seeking Him, seeking His glory. Now, before we wrap up, let me give some practical handles for prayer. The first and last thing I want you to remember that the Holy Spirit's got your back in prayer. Romans 8, it talks about how even when we don't pray as we ought to, the Holy Spirit's there praying on our behalf for us. So it's like having a guy on your team batting cleanup who never strikes out and always hits home runs. That's who the Holy Spirit is. So take the pressure off yourself. There isn't a perfect way to pray, and God isn't up there like an American Idol judge. Now, if you've never prayed before, it may be kind of tough to know where to start or how to start. Thankfully, God put a ton of prayers in the Bible for us to use. Think about using the Lord's Prayer that Jesus taught us in Matthew 6. It's a great prayer to pray. Number 6, verses 24 to 26, it's this great priestly prayer that we could pray for others and pray over others. You can pray the Psalms. The Psalms are the prayer book of the Bible. Just don't try to pray all of them at once.

You can also pray from a prayer book that guides you in prayers. Now, I want to say, be careful here because not all prayer books are equal. I personally use and enjoy Phyllis Tickle's Divine Hours. Weird name, great prayer book. All of this to say, friends, let's take advantage of this unique moment in our lives. COVID-19, yes, it has disrupted so much, but what if we stopped and considered how we can reschedule our lives around rhythms of feeding our faith and abiding in Jesus?

Thanks for watching, guys. There's going to be some questions that are going to pop up on the video right now. Enjoy your discussion time.