

MEN'S LIFE BLOOMINGTON & GOD @ WORK

Tuesday, November 14, 2017

Conversations to Connections

Definition: Viewing prayer as an ongoing conversation with God is a great way to develop a life of prayer. We should seek to move those conversations to heart-felt connections with God. We can offer praise for God's involvement in our lives or bring requests to him. There is much we can learn about how to consistently connect with God in prayer.

Audio Segment: *Without Ceasing*

Segment Questions:

- How would your prayer life be different if you had honest heart-to heart conversations with God like David does in the Psalms?
- Why do you think it is hard to keep your focus on God and not on your own circumstance and goals? What do you think would change if you were to focus on praising God's attributes?
- Do you find it interesting that God wants us to pray unceasingly? How would you paraphrase the meaning of 1 Thessalonians 5:16-18 listed on other page? In the face of circumstances that are sometimes painful and distressing is there any correlation between praise of God and rejoicing?
- I Chronicles 16:11 tells us to Look to the Lord and His strength; seek His face always. How does looking to the Lord and seeking His face keep us spiritually in tune with God and His purposes?
- In Matthew 11: 28-30. Jesus calls us to come to Him and share His yoke--that is easy and light. Musician Tim Timmons says of prayer, "Prayer changes nothing but Jesus changes everything". How do you respond to this statement? Agree? Disagree? What was he trying to say about prayer, Jesus, our burdens, and his yoke?
- Share about a situation in your life when you had to look outside yourself and just trust God. What was the experience? What did you learn about surrender? About God?

Action Questions:

- Use the five devotional titles on the previous page to create a statement about what you hope your prayer life could grow into.
- These prayer devotionals point us to a deeper intimacy with God. What steps do you feel God's Spirit is leading you to take to move more toward that intimacy? How does his Word fit in?

PERSONAL APPLICATION:

- Worry is usually caused by a feeling that we have lost control. The truth is that there's very little we control. But God... He is in control of the universe! Today, every time a worry pops into your mind, stop and talk to God about it, then replace your thoughts with something true, lovely, and good from God's Word! That's the path to peace along your journey.
- Taking time to focus on Who God is and giving Him praise is a perfect way to begin our prayers. Why don't you take time this week to write out a list of God's attributes? Then, begin your conversations with God by sharing the things that you appreciate about Him.

Think about the times when you are able to sit down with one of your closest friends and talk in an undistracted way. Where do your conversations go? We did some remodeling in our home two years ago, and I created a space where on most days Julie and I sit together in the late afternoon sun and debrief. After starting with surface-level talk about the day, the conversation often moves to a deeper level. We start to talk about what is really going on: with our family, our hopes, joys, fears, and heartaches. This type of conversation fosters a deeper connection between us, and God desires to have the same kind of conversations with us. The Psalms show us how David, through heart-to-heart prayer, brought his whole heart to God and how God continually brought David back to His loving truth.

How do we begin to really connect with God? The devotionals suggest that our prayers should always be **Heart-to-Heart conversation** with a focused **Start with Praise** and praying **Without Ceasing** will help us develop the **Consistency with God** in order to see his working and purpose in our lives so that we are spiritually in tune enough to be able to **Surrender** it all to Him.

In full disclosure, prayer is not something I do either well or enough. However, one of the most impactful Bible studies I've done was a study on the Attributes of God, and it changed my prayers. I began to be intentional about starting my prayers with praise to God by reflecting on his attributes, which changed how I saw everything and brought a freshness to prayer.

One of my favorite places to spend time is on the Lake Michigan beach, watching and listening to the waves hit the beach. They come on relentlessly, never ceasing. Sometimes I sit there playing in the sand while the waves are gently lapping the shore. Other times it's stormy and the waves are huge, thunderously pounding and churning everything they touch. The waves come on unceasingly. The constancy and intensity of our prayers should be similar.

"Without ceasing" doesn't mean that we are talking with God nonstop. It's rather an attitude of being aware that God is always with us. We can immediately turn to Him in every moment in a continual conversation throughout the day. It allows us to stay connected to Him on a moment-by-moment basis. A previous Men's Life study challenged us to see God's miracles in our lives on a daily basis. Being more mindful of God's constant presence in my life makes it easier to pray without ceasing. Reflecting on the Attributes of his Sovereignty, Goodness, and Steadfast Love etc., can move us to moment by moment prayers of praise.

I've not always maintained a steady spiritual growth through the years, but it is crystal clear that during those times when I have been walking close to God, I have been able to weather the difficult times and trust God through them. Praying without ceasing and consistency in the Word keep us spiritually in tune with God. As the connection with God grows, the easier it is to trust and surrender to God. I want to stop "having eyes that do not see" and instead have eyes that see God's ongoing work in my life, seeing the connection with my God, my life, and my prayers.

Psalms 22:1-2 1My God my God, why have you forsaken me? Why are you so far from saving me? 2My God, I cry out by day, but you do not answer, by night but I find no rest.

Psalms 75:1 We praise you God, we praise you, for your Name is near: people tell of your wonderful deeds.

1 Thessalonians 5:16-18 16Rejoice Always, 17Pray continually, 18Give thanks in all circumstances; for this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus.

1 Chronicles 16:11 Look to the Lord and His strength; seek His face always.

Galatians 2:20 I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me. The life I now live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself for me.