

## **Excuses and Hurdles to Prayer**

### Expanded Outline for *A Call to Spiritual Reformation*, Week 7

#### **Chapter 7 Overview**

##### I. I Am Too Busy to Pray (111-14)

1. One of our most overworked excuses
2. Car without gas illustration
3. Mary and Martha (Luke 10:38-42) provides insight on Jesus' view of our "busyness"
4. Prayer and sex (1 Cor 7:4)
5. "At the end of the day, if you are too busy to pray, you are too busy. Cut something out." (114)

##### II. I Feel Too Dry Spiritually to Pray (114-17)

1. Two presuppositions behind this excuse
  1. The acceptability of my approach to God in prayer ought to be tied to how I feel
  2. My obligation to pray is somehow diminished when I do not feel like praying ... my mood or my feelings determine what I ought to do
2. Two parables apply
  1. The persistent widow (Luke 18:1-8) – do we have the faith to persevere?
  2. Going to the friend at midnight (Luke 11:5-8) – shame culture
  3. Implicit in both is that God may not answer immediately

##### III. I Feel No Need to Pray (117-19)

1. I may affirm the importance of prayer, in reality I may treat prayer as important only in the lives of other people
2. God's kindness in bringing us down a peg or two; God's judgment would leave us in our vaulting self-esteem (see Josh 9 – the Gibeonite deception when Israel failed to pray; 2 Kings 20:12-21 and 2 Chron 32:31 – Hezekiah and the Babylonians)

##### IV. I Am Too Bitter to Pray (119-20)

1. When injustice or unfairness is directed towards, we can respond with a spirit of revenge, bitterness, malice, gossip, etc. leading to prayerlessness
2. We may not want to pray because we know that disciplined, biblical prayer would force us to eliminate sin that we rather cherish
3. Jesus' response: by forgiving others, we demonstrate we desire the Father's forgiveness (Matt 6:14-15; Mark 11:25)
4. Since God has forgiven us, we should forgive others (Eph 4:31-32)

##### V. I Am Too Ashamed to Pray (120-21)

1. Adam and Eve hid from God (Gen 3:8)

2. We cannot hide anything from God, so instead of cowering in shame, we should run to God for forgiveness

## VI. I Am Content with Mediocrity (121-22)

1. Some want enough of Christ to be identified with him, but not enough to be inconvenienced
2. God's response: James 4:2-10

## **Chapter 8 Overview**

### I. Introduction (123-24)

1. Although some are particularly gifted in the ministry of prayer, we have come far enough to recognize that we cannot justify relative prayerlessness by appealing to the gifting of others. One of the most important steps we can take is to recognize where we are.
2. "Few of Paul's prayers have greater potential to help us surmount the hurdles of spiritual dryness and lack of faith than the one in Philippians 1:9-11. It can help us overcome our excuses for prayerlessness." (124)

### II. Paul Prays for What Is Excellent (124-33)

1. 3 clues about the excellent/distinguishing things are
  1. "What is best" must be delicate or subtle or difficult to spot, because it requires increasing love that is constrained by "knowledge" of the gospel and "depth of insight" (comprehensive moral insight)
  2. "What is best" as things that differ (put to the test things that are different) or superior things (discern and approve superior things, things that really matter)? Both: perceive how things differ and choose what is best.
  3. "What is best" as informed by one of the dominant themes of the letter: spiritual maturity (Phil 1:6; 3:10-14)
2. Putting the three clues together: "These excellent things are nothing less than all the elements characteristic of maturing Christian discipleship, and we cannot discern and approve them unless our love abounds more and more in knowledge and depth of insight ... he wants their hearts and minds to become profoundly Christian, for otherwise they will not discern and approve what is best" (128)
3. Practical examples
  1. What do you do with your time?
  2. What have you read in the past six months?
  3. How are your relationships within your family?
  4. Do you make time for personal prayer?
  5. How do you decide what to do with your money?
  6. Has your compassion deepened over the years?

7. Is your reading and study of the Bible so improving your knowledge of God that your wholehearted worship of the Almighty grows in spontaneity, devotion, and joy?
8. Behind the answers to these questions are choices ... choices that must spring from a heart transformed by God's grace.
4. A word to clergy

### III. Paul's Prayer Is Tied to the Long View (133-37)

1. Long-term goal of love abounding leading to discernment: transparent purity, utter blamelessness, and a life full of righteousness.
2. Explanation of two expressions
  1. "Filled with the fruit of righteousness" (11) – characterized by the conduct – the actions, words, and thoughts – that God himself judges to be right.
  2. "Until the day of Christ" (10) – "with a view to the day of Christ"
    - a) The forward-looking dimension so characteristic of other prayers of Paul
    - b) Christians should live in such a way that they show they remember they are moving toward that day and are utterly constrained by it
3. "Even now, Paul's prayer insists, Christians are to be as holy as pardoned sinners can be this side of eternity. And we are to pray toward that end. It is in this way that Paul's prayer for what is excellent is tied to the long view, to the day of Jesus Christ" (136)

### IV. Paul's Prayer Is Not Idolatrous, but Praises God (137-143)

1. The pursuit of excellence can be wretchedly idolatrous. The ultimate test is the test of our motives: personal ego and self-fulfillment vs. discerning love and directed to the glory and praise of God
2. Examples of Bishop Stanway and Martyn-Lloyd Jones – if the things we value are taken away, is our joy in the Lord undiminished?