

APPS SERIES BY DAVID H. MCKINLEY

PIETY

Most people, when they hear the word, *fasting*, think of hunger.

Patients associate *fasting* with pre-surgery preparation, *NPO*, which is the abbreviation for the Latin term, *Nil Per Os* (Nothing by Mouth).

Fasting is important in the area of medicine, but it is also important in your spiritual life. Fasting is a spiritual discipline, often combined with another spiritual discipline, prayer. And yes, disciplines are a part of the personal development of spiritual growth. Disciplines are practices or exercises intended to cultivate godly character and personal piety.

"...discipline yourself for the purpose of godliness; for bodily discipline is only of little profit, but godliness is profitable for all things, since it holds promise for the present life and also for the life to come" (1 Timothy 4:7b-8 NAS).

I like the way this passage is paraphrased in *The Message*: "Exercise daily in God—no spiritual flabbiness, please! Workouts in the gymnasium are useful, but a disciplined life in God is far more so, making you fit both today and forever. You can count on this. Take it to heart. This is why we've thrown ourselves into this venture so totally. We're banking on the living God, Savior of all men and women, especially believers" (1 Timothy 4:7-8 MSG).

What are some of the spiritual disciplines? Celebration, confession, fasting, fellowship, humility, frugality, meditation, prayer, reflection, stewardship, service, simplicity, solitude, study and worship.

Today, the words, *piety* or *pious*, are often used in a derogatory fashion. To speak of someone being "pious" is to speak of someone who is insincere or pretentious.

I found it interesting that an online dictionary defined *pious* as "...making a hypocritical display of virtue."

In the 1828 edition of the Noah Webster dictionary, *pious* is defined as "Godly; reverencing and honoring the Supreme Being in heart and in the practice of duties He has enjoined; having due veneration and affection for the character of God and habitually

obeying His commands; religious, devoted to the service of God."

What a difference a few decades can make in linguistic transitions! However, public piety without private devotion *is* hypocrisy.

"The sacrifice of the wicked is an abomination to the LORD, but the prayer of the upright is acceptable to him" (Proverbs 15:8 ESV).

God is not interested in public displays of religion; He wants private authenticity from within.

Today, I want to focus on an "App" for daily living—the spiritual discipline of *prayer*. Prayer is the mark of true piety. It is not an ornamental practice for opening, closing and transitioning church gatherings, but rather the daily devotion and discipline of those who pursue a genuine relationship with God.

"The LORD is far from the wicked, but he hears the prayer of the righteous (Proverbs 15:28 ESV).

God sees. He hears. He answers when we pray!

Daily prayer is a strange practice for some people and yet, it is the most natural of all responses to call to God when in crisis, trouble and need. Prayer may seem unnatural to some because it is the opposite of self-reliance and self-sufficiency. Is prayer your only hope or your least concern?

Prayer is a discipline that engages us with God and brings pleasure to Him.

P-R-A-Y-E-R

Prayer begins with the character and nature of God revealed in Scripture. "If one turns away his ear from hearing the law, even his prayer is an abomination" (Proverbs 28:9 ESV).

Prayer begins with an approach based on who God is and what He is like, not where we are and what we need.

"What comes to our minds when we think about God is the most important thing about us... Worship is pure or base as the worshipper entertains high or low thoughts of God. For this reason, the gravest question before the Church is always God himself, and the most portentous fact about any man is not



Piety

Proverbs 15:8

Tongues

Apps Series, Part Nine

David H. McKinley, Pastor
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Scripture: Proverbs 15:8



The prayer of the upright is acceptable to the LORD.



The sacrifice of the wicked is an abomination to the LORD.



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APPS SERIES BY DAVID H. MCKINLEY

PIETY >>> CONTINUED

what he at any given time may say or do, but what he, deep in his heart, conceives God to be like.”

—A.W. Tozer

We cannot shape the God of our prayer after our own design or imagination. God is revealed in His Word. He is holy, righteous, all-powerful, eternal, all-knowing, just, faithful and true.

Prayer begins with God, not with us. Thus, the first step and our approach to God through prayer is not telling Him about us, but telling Him about Him: “You are God and I am not. I come to honor You, to hear from You, to follow You!” An inadequate view of God leads to an inadequate view of prayer.

Repentance is the response of the heart, turning from empty formality to sincere faith.

Look at this verse again: “The sacrifice of the wicked is an abomination to the LORD, but the prayer of the upright is acceptable to him” (Proverbs 15:8 ESV).

The contrast between *sacrifice* and *prayer* is very interesting. Proverbs does not give itself to broad discussions of religious practice, but where mentioned, the reference is clear, sharp and penetrating.

“To bring a sacrifice to God empty of essential reverence mocked the meaning of the sacrificial system. God desired a worshipful heart or no worship at all. Sacrifice had meaning when worshippers understood the significance of the sacrificial ritual in the worship of God. Empty ritual performed by the wicked induced God’s wrath.” —House and Durham

You should not attend public worship to be seen, to develop a network, to make contacts or to find a mate. All those things can happen through genuine fellowship, but if your motive in public performance is anything less than God himself, you must repent!

Worship is not a place to harbor hate while singing of love, to hoard in greed while giving small tokens. God despises religious motions where no thought is given to Him in worship.

Prayer is a place of silence before God, a place where we listen to His evaluation of our practice rather than where we command His performance.

Asking in faith is pleasing to God. Prayer is

a place of asking and petitioning God. God wants us to ask—an acknowledgement of our dependence upon Him. Jesus taught us to ask God to meet our daily needs, “Give us this day our daily bread...” (Matthew 6:11 ESV). God loves genuine, sincere and disciplined prayer.

“...the prayer of the upright pleases him” (Proverbs 15:8 NIV).

“... the prayer of the upright is His delight” (Proverbs 15:8 NAS).

“And without faith it is impossible to please him, for whoever would draw near to God must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who seek him” (Hebrews 11:6 ESV).

Yielding to God is the end of all true and sincere praying. Prayer that brings surrender, brings joy to the heart of God. Prayer brings change—a change that is reshaped according to God’s path rather than your own pursuits apart from His will.

“Prayer is surrender—surrender to the will of God and cooperation with that will. If I throw out a boat hook from a boat and catch hold of the shore and pull, do I pull the shore to me, or do I pull myself to the shore? Prayer is not pulling God to my will, but the aligning of my will to the will of God.”

—E. Stanley Jones, Missionary to India

“Your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven” (Matthew 6:10 ESV).

Expressions of gratitude bring joy to the heart of God. Prayer is as much about *thanking* as it is about *telling*.

“...do not be anxious about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus” (Philippians 4:6-7 ESV).

“... give thanks in all circumstances; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you” (1 Thessalonians 5:18 ESV).

I think it is important to point out that you will not always *feel* thankful. There is a difference in feeling

APPS SERIES BY DAVID H. MCKINLEY

PIETY >>> CONTINUED

thankful and expressing thanks. God is honored when a faith-filled heart expresses thanks, even though life is not what you hoped for or desired. God knows! He is blessed when you give thanks to Him in all circumstances.

When your heart contemplates the Giver, not just the gifts, then you can rejoice in His faithfulness and grace.

Relationship with God through Jesus Christ is what makes conversation through prayer acceptable. How can you be righteous and gain God's acceptance? You can't through your own merit. It is only through Jesus Christ, and then you can come before a holy God in prayer. You owe a debt, you cannot pay; Jesus paid a debt, He did not owe. You can receive a deposit of grace only through Jesus Christ, making you righteous before God.

"For our sake he [God] made him [Jesus] to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God" (2 Corinthians 5:21 ESV).

"To pray in the name of Jesus Christ means to pray in the awareness that our prayers have no worthi-

ness or efficacy apart from His atoning sacrifice and redemptive mediation. It means to appeal to the blood of Christ as the source of power for the life of prayer. It means to acknowledge our complete helplessness apart from His mediation and intercession. To pray in His name means that we recognize that our prayers cannot penetrate the tribunal of God unless they are presented to the Father by the Son, our one Savior and Redeemer." —Donald Bloesch

Have you tried to come to God through your own merit or have to come to God through His Son and your Savior, Jesus Christ? If you have tried to come to God by any way other than through His Son, the most important prayer you can ever pray is this:

Father, I come to you in the name of Jesus Christ and Him alone! I am a sinner. I have fallen short of Your standards and have disregarded Your authority in my life. I need forgiveness through Your grace. Here's my life; I open my heart. I give myself to You. Help me to live every day for You and for Your glory.

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