

Prayer: Abiding in God's Love

Prayer is a Way of Life

"But I do not account my life of any value nor as precious to myself, if only I may accomplish my course and the ministry which I received from the Lord Jesus, to testify to the Gospel of the Grace of God."

Acts 20:24

Today's verse of Scripture comes from an oration that the Apostle Paul gave to the elders of the church in Ephesus. And in this oration, Paul says that he does not account his life to be of any value or to be precious to himself. Rather his life's purpose is to accomplish the course and ministry that he received from Christ, to testify to the Gospel. This short scripture passage indeed has a profound meaning, since it applies to everyone's life. We are not to account our lives as valuable and precious unto themselves. Why? Because one day each life on earth will end. The greatest value in life is how we live it in relationship to Christ, because in the end, our souls will go to Him either for eternal reward or eternal punishment.

Have you ever heard the phrase "prayer life"? For instance, have you been asked the question "How is your 'prayer life'?" Most people, when asked this question, will either say they don't know what we're talking about, or that their "prayer life" is not good.

Let's go to something more practical, we'll come back to "prayer life." For those who are married, what if someone asked you "How is your married life going?" What would be your answer? And what would your answer be based on? Most definitely, if your married life is going well, it's because you spend time with your spouse, you are patient, you don't need to win on every point, you aren't afraid to be vulnerable, etc. And most definitely, if your married life is not going well, it's because you're not spending time together, you've lost patience, you keep score, and it's hard to be vulnerable. If you want an improved marriage, the first thing to do is to commit to spend time with your spouse, and then the other things fall into place. In a marriage, both parties have to think many times about what is good for the marriage, not necessarily what is the best for each party. Sometimes each party puts their own needs or desires on the shelf for the good of the marriage.

Now, back to "prayer life." Central to Christianity is our relationship with Jesus Christ, a "marriage" that is established at our baptism. And just like a marriage, central to our relationship with Christ is spending time with Him, abiding with Him. If our "marriage" to Christ is not all that it could or should be, the source is most likely time. Because when we spend time with someone, we become more comfortable, more patient, more trusting, more loving, more vulnerable and ultimately that relationship grows. Again, this applies to our relationship with Christ, just as it does in a married relationship with a spouse.

"Married life" means that marriage doesn't fit into a compartment. Rather, our entire life is lived under the umbrella of marriage. The marriage is a central component to life. In the case of marriage, there may be components that are lived outside of marriage-i.e. husbands can still go out with their guy friends, and wives with their girl friends. But marriage is central to their lives.

A solid "prayer life" is central to our existence as Christians. Everything in our life ideally fits under the umbrella of prayer, of "pros-efhi", doing everything under the blessing of Christ. Unlike marriage, and the narrow example I gave of a component lived outside of marriage, there ideally is no component that is lived outside of the "pros-efhi", the prayer and blessing of Christ. THIS becomes the most central component of our lives, prayer defines us, rather than we defining it. Rather than finding a way to get prayer into life, we find a way to get life under the umbrella of prayer. Again, this is the ideal. And this is the ideal for which we will struggle out entire lives.

In examining the question, "How is your prayer life?" there are a few answers. 1) Great - Prayer is a vital and central part of every day, at the beginning, at the end and throughout. 2) Improving - While I have not mastered prayer, and there is still some work to do, prayer brings me joy and is something I strive to integrate more into my life. 3) Needs some work - I am still struggling with how to set up a prayer life. I pray but it is inconsistent. 4) I don't pray at all, or reserve prayer for real moments of need - This answer means that we really don't understand what prayer is, and without a prayer life, a life of faith, Christian works, grace, etc., is going to be difficult, if not impossible, to experience. However, if you are at #4, do not despair. Because a life of prayer is not something one has to wait to begin. Unlike marriage, we don't have to look to find the right mate. We are already "married" to Christ through baptism. And Christ is so patient and accepting, that we can jump back in at any time. He continually invites and encourages us.

Prayer is a way of life. How is your prayer life?