

Rhythms Week 1, 2021

Cultivating the Virtue of Faith through the Practice of Prayer

What makes for a beautiful, compelling life? What characterizes and cultivates such a life? *Rhythms of Renewal** is a weekly series of meditations designed to help us grow in the virtues that characterize a beautiful and compelling human life by helping us engage in practices that cultivate such a life. This week, we will seek to grow in the Virtue of Faith by engaging the practice of Prayer.

Faith is primarily about entrusting ourselves to God. It's not just about holding to a set of beliefs or ideas. It's about giving our attention and affection to God throughout the day and welcoming God's activity in our thoughts, speech, and actions. This kind of attention leads to a deep wonder and acceptance of the mystery of God, his love, and his ways.

Prayer is a practice that cultivates faith. Jesus, the "pioneer and perfecter of our faith" (Hebrews 12:2), was a deeply prayerful person who relied on God's presence continually and taught his disciples to pray as he prayed.

A note of encouragement: Don't feel the pressure to read everything at once or to implement everything. Take your time with this rhythm over the week. Choose one or two questions to dwell on at a time. Choose one or two practices to implement. Start where you are and let the Holy Spirit build your rhythms slowly. The hope is grow to be deep people.

1. REFLECT. Consider these questions on your own or with a prayer partner/group:

- Why do you think Prayer is a practice that cultivates Faith?
- How have you experienced Prayer as a life-giving practice?
- What makes practicing Prayer difficult for you?
- Can you recall a time you experienced wonder? How did it interact with your faith? Your prayer life?

2. UNMASK THE CORE LIE: A powerful core lie we often believe is: "I've got this."

One of the great obstacles to our practice of prayer is the belief that we either cannot trust God and therefore must handle life without God, or that we don't need to trust God and therefore choose to handle life without God. Read the anti-Psalm below as a way to reflect on this.

Anti-Psalm 121

I survey the threats all around me – no one is coming to help me.

God will not help me;

The world is cruel and impersonal. I'm on my own.

My safety and security are up to me; no one is watching over me.

God does not protect his people. God may as well be asleep.

I am my own keeper; I toil alone in the heat of the day.
Either I will seize the day or it will seize me;
there are never enough hours in the day.
Who but myself will protect me from harm? No one.
I'm on my own to make a life for myself.
I've got this... unless I don't.
Either way, it all ends in the grave eventually.

Notice the core lie at work in your life. Where in your life do you notice yourself believing the lie of "I've got this"? Perhaps it is in the sense of not being able to trust God or in the sense of not needing to trust God? If that doesn't feel like your core lie, what do you think it might be? Ask the Spirit to give you wisdom and give you the curiosity and courage to confront the core lie. What do you feel when you are believing this? What thoughts or behaviors accompany or follow this belief?

3. REMEMBER THE CORE TRUTH. *God has you. God keeps your life. God is near. God will help you. Pray this core truth, using the psalm below:*

Psalm 121

I lift up my eyes to the hills— from where will my help come?
My help comes from the Lord, who made heaven and earth.
He will not let your foot be moved; he who keeps you will not slumber.
He who keeps Israel will neither slumber nor sleep.
The Lord is your keeper; the Lord is your shade at your right hand.
The sun shall not strike you by day, nor the moon by night.
The Lord will keep you from all evil; he will keep your life.
The Lord will keep your going out and your coming in
from this time on and forevermore.

Become curious about believing the core truth. What do you feel when you are believing the truth instead of the lie? What thoughts or behaviors accompany or follow this belief?

4. FOOD FOR INSPIRATION & IMITATION. *Look at how Jesus exemplifies faith & prayer in Matthew 26:36-39:*

Then Jesus went with them to a place called Gethsemane; and he said to his disciples, "Sit here while I go over there and pray." He took with him Peter and the two sons of Zebedee, and began to be grieved and agitated. Then he said to them, "I am deeply grieved, even to death; remain here, and stay awake with me." And going a little farther, he threw himself on the ground and prayed, "My Father, if it is possible, let this cup pass from me; yet not what I want but what you want."

5. Questions for Prayerful Examination

- When you think about becoming the person you long to be, what do the virtue of faith and the practice of prayer have to do with your becoming that person?

- How do you think practicing prayer might help you become a better friend, neighbor, family member, ally, spouse, parent, roommate, or co-worker?
- What do you find inspiring about Jesus' life of faithfulness and prayer, and what's one way that you can imitate Jesus's practice of prayer in your own life this week?
- Where in your life do you need God's help right now?

Group exercise: Sometime over the next three days, send a message to your City Group or prayer partner, asking them to pray for you about something specific. Be vulnerable.

6. MICROPRACTICES FOR THE WEEK.

Arrow Prayers. We'll offer some of these each week. The title comes from Sally Lloyd Jones, whose "Jesus Storybook Bible" many of us have loved and used. The idea is that prayer doesn't have to be complex to be meaningful and real. Here are some "arrow prayers" for this week's practice:

- God, I need your help. Help me.
- Lord, I believe. Help my unbelief.
- Jesus, be with _____, whom you love and who needs your help.
- God, you are trustworthy and good. Help me to trust you with _____.

Habit Stacking. Habit-stacking is the practice of adding a new habit onto something you already do habitually (e.g. brushing your teeth, doing the dishes, or walking to work), a term we learned from James Clear, *Atomic Habits*. Some ideas:

- Pray the Lord's Prayer when you wash your hands. It takes 22 seconds - following the CDC's best practices!
- Print the "Liturgy for Handwashing" (on the website) and place it by your sink to transform your washing of hands or dishes into prayerful time.

Micro-Practices of Prayer in Community & Mission

- Ask someone to pray for you today about something specific, and ask how you can pray for them.
- Pray for someone you encounter today who seems burdened or lonely. Ask God to help you bless that person.
- Pray for a neighbor you have seen many times but haven't gotten to know. Ask God for the desire and opportunity to befriend your neighbor.
- Pray for God to show you something new today about how racial injustice affects someone other than you. Ask for God's help to grow in empathy, humility, and love.

**Rhythms of Renewal is adapted with permission from resources by our friends at City Church Philadelphia.*