
Deacon/Elder Lecture Outlines

Lecture 20

Prayer, Fasting and Meditation

I. Introduction

- A. Have you ever stopped in a large city and marveled at the giant skyscrapers that reach hundreds of feet into the air? Certainly they are striking monuments to the ingenuity and creativity of man's God-given mind.
- B. Credit for such masterpieces goes to many places -- like the architect, engineers and the workmen themselves.
- C. But the efforts of all these workmen would account for little if it were not for the many and varied tools they must use to do their work -- from the humble pencil, hammer and pliers to the large, complicated, powerful bulldozers and cranes.
- D. In the same way, the spiritual building we are constructing out of our very lives -- the temple of God's Spirit (I Corinthians 6:10) -- depends for its successful erection upon certain simple tools of Christianity.

God has given us the tools to help us grow, overcome and draw near to Him. How we use these tools will determine how God can use us, both as leaders in His Church now and in His Kingdom in the world tomorrow. These tools are Bible study, prayer, fasting and meditation.

II. SPS

We are going to see how we should use personal prayer, fasting and meditation -- the tools of Christian growth.

III. Prayer

A. Why Should We Pray?

1. God Is the Source of Everything Good

James 1:17 -- In this modern, science-oriented, mechanical society in which we live, it is easy to forget that God is the source of every good gift. Even some members of God's Church sometimes look

to God only as a last resort -- when they are really desperate.

God is the source of wisdom, understanding and knowledge (Proverbs 3:6, James 1:5). He is the source of peace (John 14:27) and of power, love and a sound mind (II Timothy 1:7). God is the source of promotion and advancement, not men (Psalm 75:6-7). He is our protector (Psalm 91). He forgives us and heals us (Psalm 103:3). And when our ways please Him, He grants us favor even with those who hate us (Proverbs 16:7).

John 3:27 -- Once God calls and begins to work with us, we can receive nothing apart from Him. Realizing this, we should be diligent to seek Him in prayer regularly. Without His direction, guidance, favor, power and help, we can accomplish nothing worthwhile (John 15:5). What we do ultimately accomplish, or the spiritual progress we make or fail to make, is in direct proportion to our realization of this fact (Psalm 127:1).

2. God Requires That We Ask

Matthew 7:7-11 -- God knows our needs even before we ask, but He requires that we ask and seek that which we need to draw near to Him in a close, personal, father-child relationship. He wants us to learn to trust, rely on and look to Him as the source of everything.

Luke 18:1-8 -- In addition, God wants us to learn to persevere in prayer. The parable of the unjust judge shows us this principle. By praying faithfully and steadfastly about problems or needs until God definitely answers one way or another, we build perseverance and faith into our character (I Corinthians 15:58).

B. When Should We Pray?

There is nothing permanent about a spiritual mind in a physical body. Therefore, we must renew God's Spirit in us daily (II Corinthians 4:16). God tells us to ask, seek, come to Him positively and persistently, regularly and often, to receive the power of His Spirit (Luke 11:5-13). A light bulb is useless unless it is in contact with the source of power, and so are we.

1. Example of Jesus

Jesus set the example for us of getting up early in the morning and spending the first part of His

day in prayer before anything else could interrupt (Mark 1:35). David said in Psalm 5:3 that he also prayed early in the morning.

2. Example of Daniel and David

In Daniel 6:10 and Psalm 55:16-17 Daniel and David, men entrusted with the highest governmental powers of major kingdoms, very busy men, set the example for us of coming before God in prayer regularly. We need to make these examples part of our way of life.

Praying people are producing people, without exception. You must pray regularly. Nothing is more important. The closer you can stay to God and the more often you come to Him in prayer, the less you will sin and the more you will accomplish.

If you really grasp the fact that all you need and want comes from God -- that your success or failure, happiness or troubles are in direct proportion to the extent to which you commit everything to Him in believing prayer -- you will not make plans or do anything without seeking His counsel and help (Proverbs 3:5-6).

3. Pray Always

Be instant in prayer. Ask for wisdom before business meetings, protection before traveling, compassion and patience before going home tired to your wife and family at night. You need to pray always and begin to literally walk and talk with God (I Thessalonians 5:17-18).

C. Have a Proper Attitude and Perspective in Prayer

1. Pray With Purpose

While it may be helpful, when one is first converted, to "pray by the clock" to learn how to pray, leaders in the local church should have progressed beyond that stage. If you are praying merely to log time or "get in" your prayer, you are not as effective as you should be. Frankly, a much more practical approach than "clock watching" is to develop and maintain your individual prayer list.

After you have prayed, do you feel closer to God, realizing that your prayer was heard and that it will accomplish something, or do you merely feel relieved that you have "gotten in" your prayer for

the day? Most of us find ourselves slipping into this rut from time to time. Resolve to pray with more purpose.

Just before you pray, remind yourself that you aren't going through the motions of prayer just because as a Christian you are supposed to pray, but you are praying because you need to pray -- because you need the help and spiritual strength that only God can give. Ask God to help you pray with more purpose and to help you get rid of any tendency to approach prayer as a daily ritual.

2. Realize to Whom You Are Praying and That God Is Listening

As you come before God in prayer, be fully conscious and aware of the power, majesty and holiness of the eternal Creator God to whom you are praying. Don't approach Him sleepily, carelessly or casually and fail to have a deeply respectful, humble attitude. Realize that you are coming before the very throne of the ruler of the universe!

Just as important, realize as you pray that you have the undivided attention of this magnificently brilliant, all-powerful divine being. Unless you do sense and feel that you are getting through to God, your prayers won't be truly effective.

3. Be Positive and Big-Minded in Prayer

Hebrews 4:16 -- We should come confidently and boldly to the throne of grace. We should be positive in prayer, confident that God is hearing us and will answer (Matthew 21:22).

Philippians 4:6 -- Don't neglect to sincerely and wholeheartedly thank God for the many blessings you have received. This is an important way to be positive as you pray, focusing your attention on positive aspects of your calling and your life.

Another important part of your prayer should be for God's Work. By praying for God's Work we become more big-minded in our perspective and get our minds off our own day-to-day problems, which are generally of little importance by comparison.

IV. Fasting

A. Why Do You Fast?

Many in God's Church fast only because they realize

that Christ taught His disciples to do so, and they feel that it is something they should do as a part of the routine of Christian living. They don't fast with a real understanding of the purpose of fasting. As a result, they may go without food and drink for a day without receiving much real spiritual benefit from the fast.

How about you? Do you fast to measure up to some self-righteous standard you have set for yourself, or do you fast with the sincere intent to draw closer to God and to humble yourself before Him?

Fasting is one of the greatest tools God gives to help us think like Him and to act like Him. Jesus Christ can mold and shape our spiritual thinking through our drawing near to Him. Our goal is to become like God -- not to be an ascetic, purposely hurting ourselves to gain favor with God.

To take on God's nature, we need to overcome our own carnal nature and the pull of Satan. Fasting gives us the help we need to counterattack these destructive attitudes and pulls.

Fasting shows that we rely on God totally. Complete abstinence from food and water shows our utter weakness as humans while reassuring us of God's supreme power to change our lives. The true fast -- the fast with the purpose of drawing closer to God -- is the fast that God blesses.

B. How to Fast More Effectively

A fast that is pleasing to God and is effective involves more than merely going without food and drink for a day. Here are three points that will help you fast more effectively.

1. Fast With a Purpose in Mind

The Bible examples of fasting indicate that you should have some specific purpose in mind when you fast. (A few examples are: II Samuel 12:16 -- David fasted when he wanted God to heal his son; II Chronicles 20:3 -- Jehoshaphat proclaimed a fast when the Moabites and Ammonites invaded Judah; Matthew 4:2 -- Christ fasted to draw especially close to God before His temptation by Satan).

Your purpose might be to beseech God for help with a particular problem -- physical or spiritual. It might be to show God your serious concern in praying for someone's healing. It might be to

seek to know God's will in a particular matter, or it may be just a matter of realizing you have not been as close to God as you should be and you want to earnestly seek to draw close to Him. You may want to fast in order to pray more fervently for God's Work.



The point is that you should have some specific purpose or purposes in mind. If you have more than one purpose in mind, limit yourself to two or three at the most, so that you can better concentrate on them during your fast.

2. Devote Your Full Attention to the Fast

Isaiah 58:3 -- If we go about our regular routine when we fast, either seeking pleasure or exacting all our labors, our fast will not be effective in helping us draw near to God.

Think about some of the Bible examples of fasts. You can be sure that David did not go about his routine activities while fasting and beseeching God to heal his son. And Christ got away from His regular routine for His 40-day fast. In fact, He even left His disciples and His usual environment to go into the wilderness. We usually can't do that, but if we could, our fasts would be more effective and we would be able to draw closer to God.

The principle to remember is to take whatever steps are possible in your particular case when you fast in order to give yourself as much as possible to prayer, study and meditation.

3. Center Your Prayer, Study and Meditation on the Purpose of Your Fast

Use your time to pray, study and meditate about the specific purpose you have in mind. Don't spend a lot of time studying or praying about some other problems or subjects. Zero in on and concentrate on the particular problem or problems at hand.

V. Meditation

A. What Is Meditation and Why Meditate?

Meditation is simply taking a certain theme, problem or scripture and dwelling on it -- asking why, how, when, where and what is the end result -- then determining whether or not that is the result you want. It is a matter of looking at things from God's

point of view, and is the key to keeping things in their proper perspective.

You can meditate about God's purpose for mankind and your part in it. You can meditate about your weaknesses and faults and what you need to do in order to overcome them. You can meditate about a particular passage of Scripture.

Take Leviticus 26:14-16 as an example. Do you know what terror is? Do you want to find out? Read the rest of the chapter. Dwell on it. Roll it over in your mind -- make it personal. This is God's promise to you if you won't change. Do you want it? Of course not.

After meditating and dwelling on it, you see much more graphically the need to change. Without meditation, you can understand the Scriptures, but you cannot convict yourself of the need for personal change.

B. How to Meditate

Proverbs 4:26 -- Ponder your course of action -- your way of life. Consider the end -- look before you leap. The book of Proverbs is a ready-made key to meditation. These are the conclusions Solomon came to through meditation. Read them and reverse the process. Read the conclusion and go back and fill in the thinking and meditation.

Psalms 1:1-6 -- Blessed is the man who savors and loves God's law, because it is good and right, and who meditates on it day and night. The ungodly do not meditate and are not grounded and rooted in God's Word, but are shallow like chaff.

Joshua 1:8 -- God commands you to meditate on His laws day and night, so that you obey and do them.

The place to begin is with the Ten Commandments. Let's take, for example, the Fifth Commandment, "Honor your father and your mother, that your days may be long upon the land." It is the first among those that govern our human relationships.

The Church has long emphasized the importance of family. The family is the basis for decent society. Meditate on what that actually means! Understand why obedience to parents and respect for authority leads to happiness and stability. Bring it down to the grassroots level of your own home and family.

The reason to obey the Fifth Commandment is awesome! You'll realize this more and more deeply as you run this theme through your mind.

Another positive example of how to meditate would be to think about the peace the world will enjoy in the Millennium. No more will collective selfishness cause the heartache and problems we see today. It will be a society based on outgoing concern for others. Think how you can live that way of love now. Deeds are just our thoughts in action!

C. When to Meditate

Genesis 24:63 -- Isaac meditated in the evening. That can be one very good time, because the pressure of the day is over and you are in a reflective mood. Of course, anytime you feel the need to be alone and consider a matter of importance is the right time. At any rate, don't just daydream and let your mind wander. Meditate on a definite theme in conjunction with God's Word and law, or on a personal problem or situation in your life. You'll be amazed at the results and the changes you make in your life.

VI. Conclusion

In this lecture we have examined the topics of prayer, fasting and meditation. They are the tools of our spiritual trade. And just as any master workman should be adept at using the tools of his profession, so also should we who have been called to build the spiritual house of God be sure to excel at the use of these spiritual helps.

Interoffice Memo

To: All Pastors
From: Joe Tkach Jr.
Subject: Deacon/Elder Lecture Series

Department

Department

Church Administration

Date

November 3, 1989

Phone

This lecture for January is the last in the series. We plan to take a two-year break and resume with a slightly different format after the Feast of Tabernacles in 1991. No more DELS binders will be sent to new deacons and elders as of this mailing. Deacons and elders ordained in the meantime will not receive the materials until the program resumes in 1991. But if you feel there is a need to provide information such as that contained in "The Duties and Responsibilities of a Local Church Elder" or "The Duties and Responsibilities of Deacons and Deaconesses" you may share your copy on a temporary basis.

If you have comments and suggestions for the DELS program, we'd be glad to hear them. We want to make the next program as useful as possible.

Thank you for your hard work in making the series successful!

