



God at the Center: Habits for Spiritual Growth – #1

Talking with God in Prayer – Prayer as a daily Habit

I would like to engage you in a Lenten Series – one inspired by the author Luis Palau as part of the *Discovery Series of Our Daily Bread*. In this series, you will be challenged but mostly encouraged to establish or strengthen some spiritual habits that will materialize into a closer relationship with God in Christ Jesus our Lord. Journey with me and find yourself in a time of renewal leading to a lifetime of healthy habits.

God has called us to a joyful and victorious life. While there's no formula that delivers the ultimate faith-filled life, God has given us ways to daily strengthen our faith. *God at the Center: Habits for Spiritual Growth* outlines clear steps we can take to build the fundamentals of faith to spiritual maturity. These steps are: Talking with God in Prayer, Reading God's Book, Cultivating Dependence on God, Practicing Obedience to God, Serving God and Others, Becoming God's Ambassador.

While at seminary, I was introduced to the game of golf by my colleague Greg. One element of his teachings that stood out (besides the grip of the club and stance) was his repetition: "Practice Makes Permanent." One time I reacted with, "Don't you mean, 'Practice makes Perfect?'" His response was a wide grin and "you'll see for yourself." After playing the game now for over a decade, I found Greg's mantra to be spot on.

The same can be said for *prayer*, as it is one of those things that you learn by doing. You can be given the tools for prayer like inspirational bible verses, someone's experiences

with prayer or someone else can even pray for you, but no one can do *your* praying for you.

It is not until you begin to pray yourself, that you will ever understand this tenant of our faith life – prayer. At any moment, whatever the situation, we are free to speak with our heavenly Father. We are encouraged to communicate (meaning both talking and listening) with God through prayer.

I am impressed and sometimes surprised to see how much time Jesus – yes, the Son of God, dedicated to prayer. He never considered himself too busy to pray. As the obligations increased and he faced big decisions, he went away alone to pray. (Luke 5:15-16) Can you form a similar habit?

Martin Luther once said, "Just as the business of the tailor is to make clothing, and that of the shoemaker to mend shoes, so the business of the Christian is to pray." So, just connecting with God for a New York minute as we rush through our morning or nighttime routines will not qualify as setting aside a specific time each day for personal prayer and reflection.

As you seek to establish a prayer routine, strive for order, consistency and faithfulness. It helps to set a time to pray, but avoid legalism – see prayer as an opportunity rather than a law. Do not neglect your responsibilities as a bread winner, parent, spouse or student in order achieve your goal and most of all, do not feel guilty or beat yourself up for missing *your* goal.

Keep working at it – praying continually (1 Thess. 5:17) bearing in mind that there is nothing magical about the time of day to pray...The prophet Daniel prayed at set times throughout the day, King David meditated on the Lord in the night watches and Jesus took prayer retreats sometimes alone. All in all, setting a workable time for prayer and sticking with it will help you establish a healthy spiritual habit – and yes, in the process you too would realize that *practice makes permanent*.

Redeemer Lutheran Church

92-10 217th St., Queens Village, NY

www.RedeemerQV.org ~ 718-468-8868