**Press On: To the Prize**

(Perseverance: Press On with Joy, Press On with Prayer, Press on with Hope, Press on to Heaven)

 Why does it seem so difficult to live the Christian life these days?

One main reason is that we’ve gotten distracted and lost our perspective. We’ve made walking by faith far too complicated and human-centered. The apostle Paul reminds us that once you have decided to follow Jesus, there should just be one focus:

“but I focus on this one thing: Forgetting the past and looking forward to what lies ahead, 14I press on to reach the end of the race and receive the heavenly prize for which God, through Christ Jesus, is calling us.” (Phil. 3:13b-14)

We are to “press on,” as perseverance is the key that unlocks all that God has promised us. We must learn what forgetting really means, learn to focus forward, and learn to focus on pressing on with joy, with prayer, with hope, and with the prize in mind, Heaven.

**Press On: With Prayer**

Why Don’t We Pray?

**11. We do not know how**

We “THINK OR FEEL” we do not know how to pray. Perhaps we are inexperienced in prayer, or rarely pray out loud or with other people. We may feel insecure because we “cannot pray like the Pastor prays,” or as eloquently as some other Christians in our lives. (lack of confidence)

 But to whom do we pray? When we pray, out loud or silently, alone or with other people, in the kitchen or in the sanctuary, we pray to our Heavenly Father; an audience of one. We know how to talk to a close friend or loved one. Prayer should be a conversation with the closest friend of all, God.

**10. Boredom with lifeless rituals**

So often in our Christian lives, we settle into a comfortable routine. If this happens in our prayer lives, we soon end up saying the same words, the same way, at the same time, and begin to lose the significance of our prayers. We like something that is familiar, but familiarity, can breed…. apathy. Always be aware, that the “same old prayer” that you pray, has fresh meaning to God every time He hears it. So, pray with life. Or, vary your prayers, so that you do not fall into the apathy trap that can happen with the same prayers, repeated frequently.

**9. Fear**

We don’t pray, because we are afraid of opening ourselves up to God, or each other. We fear intimacy, and do not want to expose our inner selves to any one, including God. However, God already knows how you are, and what you look like on the inside, so relax! If you are a Christian, God views you through the lens of Jesus, which vastly improves your appearance. God views you through Jesus, as a forgiven and free, beloved child of the Heavenly Father. We are also afraid of how God might change us, what God might do, or ask of us, if we pray.

**8. Busyness**

We don’t pray, because we “say” that we don’t have the time to pray. Actually, we don’t choose to prioritize prayer, so it gets shoved to the “leftover time,” or “extra time,” all of us have in our days. This usually means that prayer does not happen at all, or that we pray in the seconds it takes us to fall asleep. We do not take the time to pray with others, because there isn’t time. Again, there is time, but we choose to use it in other ways.

**7. Laziness**

Just being honest, many times, we don’t pray, because we are lazy. It is difficult to pray, or to initiate prayer with another person. Prayer takes effort, so we choose the passive things, which require little from us. Laziness, in life of prayer, is a sin issue.

**6. Because it seems pointless**

If we are honest with ourselves, we sometimes don’t pray, because we do not see the point. We think, (but rarely say out loud,) “Well, God will do what He wants regardless of whether I pray or not, so why worry about it?” But, we forget, prayer changes us. It can change our perspective, our attitudes, and our actions. God also values the prayers of His children greatly, and promises to answer; yes, no or wait, and to act, according to His will.

**5. Unhealthy Guilt**

We don’t pray, because we haven’t been praying, and we feel guilty about that fact. Guilt is a good thing, if it causes us to turn back to God. Unhealthy guilt, (or shame) usually prevents us from praying, because we are afraid of what God thinks of us for not praying. This unhealthy guilt stems from a wrong view of God, as the wrathful, vengeful God, just waiting for you to open up that prayer window, so He can throw a lightning bolt through to zap you for not praying. If you are in Christ, God is not angry with you, He loves you. The lack of a prayer life disappoints Him, but He is ready to help you pray, through the Holy Spirit, if you will ask Him to do so. In Christ, you are able to go to God, and worthy of His loving attention.

 **4. Disappointment with God**

So, God didn’t do what you asked Him to do. It may have been a very good thing for which you asked, but God either said “no,” or appeared to say nothing at all. Sometimes we feel deeply wounded, because God didn’t do what “seemed like” the “right” thing from our perspective. We are hurt by, and genuinely disappointed with God, and that’s okay. God can handle our disappointment, because He loves us, and He knows the whole story. He knows what is best for us, and how tests of our Faith make us stronger.

**3. Anger**

We are often prevented from praying because we have unresolved anger. Sometimes this anger is with some one who hurt or disappointed us, but often, we are angry at God. Anger is a natural human emotion, and can be handled without it becoming sin. (Eph. 4:26-27) Unresolved anger, can turn to bitterness and apathy. If you are angry at God, for doing, or not doing, something, tell Him about it. (Anger is a normal emotion. Just remember you are His child, and you need to honor Him. He can handle your emotions, He created them.)

**2. We do not know who we are….**

If you are in Christ, you are a new creation, the old has gone, the new has come. (2 Cor. 5:17)

You are a son/daughter of God, beloved and treasured. You are a Christian, saved by grace, and living every day in grace. You are God’s “masterpiece,” His best work. (Eph. 2:8-10)

1. **We do not know, or remember, who God is**

**So What?** (Apply)

1. What has been your experience with prayer? Why is it so difficult to pray? Did any of the reasons above resonate with you?
2. Why is it so vital to “press on” with prayer? What can be gained by perseverance in prayer? How will you address your own personal reasons for not praying?