

LIVING AN AUTHENTIC FAITH, PART 4

Pray without ceasing. (1 Thessalonians 5:16, ESV)

YOU MAY PLAY YOUR GOLF AT A CLUB where you keep a lot of what is dear to you in your locker. If not, you have a garage. For a golfer, it's pretty much the same.

In our locker, in our closet, in the garage alongside our car, we deposit the many necessities and accessories of the game. They pile up, these deposits, becoming a mountain of the old, the outdated, and the unwanted. Until that day...

Isn't it funny that you can, in a golfer's quiet desperation, go back to that collection of misfits and find a gem just when you need it most? They're faithful like dogs, those old clubs, and when you turn to one in an hour of need, finding its worth again as a producer of straight drives or a maker of many putts, you rejoice at what you've been given.

Prayer is such a depository. When we take time to walk with God in conversation, or to sit and put into words for him the ponderings of our heart, we make a deposit of trust with the Lord of the universe. We may say, "Lord, I don't know where I am," or "Father, I know exactly where I am and I don't like it at all," or "Creator God, I thank you for where I am, for in this place I have found your blessing." These are all real expressions like those we have prayed and heard prayed. They rest before the throne of God, as a praise or a petition. And this we know: he hears and holds them all.

But prayer is more than that, for during its minutes and hours, God deposits into us as well. "They who wait for the LORD shall renew their strength," Isaiah expressed in a way that nearly every believer has clung to those words with hope through the years. Isaiah gave us an insight into God's work in us, something we can anticipate any time we go to prayer. For God knows our destiny, God touches our hurts, God sings over our sorrow and alongside our rejoicing. God has the answers.

A person of authentic faith believes all this. She does not mouth prayers out of rote practice, but rather out of real trust. He does not tack on "in Jesus' name" because it is some kind of Christian incantation, but rather because he is certain that Jesus carries our prayers to the Father, standing by the words we speak. This is all amazing truth, like God himself. And by this truth, we keep on believing and keep on praying.

Opening questions Where do you keep all your golf goodies? Do you recall a serendipitous discovery among them? • What make someone "a person of prayer" in your mind?

READING 1 Samuel 1:9-17; Matthew 6:5-8; Psalm 5:1-3

Heartfelt prayer (1 Samuel 1)
What is especially striking to you about this scene of Hannah's prayer? What did she place in the "prayer depository" and what did she take from it?

Hidden prayer (Matthew 5)
Why do you think Jesus taught that personal prayer should be done in secret? Who is prayer meant to connect us with, and how does private prayer accomplish this? *Read Luke 6:12.* How did Jesus model solitary prayer?

Anticipation in prayer (Psalm 5)
What was the pattern and content of David's prayer? What is the connection between faith and expectation when it comes to prayer? Is it possible for our expectations to not be met in prayer?

Written by Jeff Hopper ©2015 Links Players International. A 6-minute video accompanies today's study at <https://youtu.be/oybmnRrNgQQ>