

James Houston Prayer Course Discussion Questions

Session 2: “Centrality of Prayer”

- 1) Dr. Houston refers to research that shows when we excessively exercise the left hemisphere of our brain (the cognitive, the rational side of our consciousness) we experience the tyranny of repressing our emotional side. This prevents ecstatic bursts of creativity, emotions of joy, and inhibits feeling profoundly at peace. Reflect on events that have produced intense emotions in your life. How have you entered into an inner dialogue with these intense emotions?
- 2) He says prayer is what is comprehensive to becoming a Christian and that being a Christian is not enough. Until the end of our life we are still in the process of developing into the Christian we are intended to become. This involves the death of our self-centeredness and overcoming desires from the flesh by having our affections attached to the Holy Spirit. How would you describe and seek to overcome your own inner struggle with the self-centeredness that the Apostle Paul refers to as doing what he does not want to do (Romans 7:15-20)?
- 3) Dr. Houston warns that we should not think of prayer simply as a spiritual exercise that appeals to the left hemisphere of our brain. True prayer causes us to become more Christ-like by exercising the uniqueness of our identities through a relational dialogue with our heavenly Father who first loved us. It is a trusting relationship that provides freedom to be vulnerable and encourages emotional honesty and transparency. However, we Evangelicals tend to choose a quiet time where we enter into the inner chamber of our room and say “*don’t intrude into my inner life because the door is closed*”. Reflect and discuss how you may be shutting the door to your inner emotions with God.
- 4) Theophan the Recluse defines the prayerless person who does not dialogue with God as alone with his or her self-centeredness. The intangibility of prayer is a great difficulty for us because in today’s technological culture we rely so much on controlling what we see and what we say. Even with a friend we see the response to what we say in their facial expressions. The Anglican Common Book of Prayer is an attempt to safeguard corporate worship and bring more tangibility to our life of prayer. However the essential quality of prayer is that it is relational so that we can be vulnerable to personally dialogue with God as we are, rather than just mirror the prescribed prayers of others. Discuss ways in which you could be encouraged to pray with more personal realism and tangibility to your prayers.