

PERSPECTIVES ON PRAYER

Prayer catapults us onto the frontier of the spiritual life. It is original research in unexplored territory.--Richard Foster

The church has many organizers, but few agonizers; many who pay, but few who pray; many resters, but few wrestlers; many who are enterprising, but few who are interceding. People who are not praying are playing.

Two prerequisites of dynamic Christian living are vision and passion, and both of these are generated in the prayer closet. The ministry of preaching is open to a few. The ministry of praying is open to every child of God.



The concept of communicating with God, of talking directly and openly with Him just as we would talk with an intimate friend, is one of the great truths of Scripture.

Prayer is a phenomenal privilege, yet many people associate prayer with the word "boredom." It is a yawn word to them: "Well, I guess we'll have to pray" For others, the conception of prayer never gets beyond the level of "help" and "gimme." They resort to prayer when they want God to bail them out or fulfill their cravings.

The biblical portrait of prayer is far more dynamic than these misconceptions, and the more we learn about the principles and power of prayer, the more we will be motivated to cultivate this aspect of our relationship with God.

Prayer is the prelude to all effective ministry. It has been said that "Satan laughs at our toiling, mocks our wisdom, but trembles when he sees the weakest saint on his knees." The real spiritual battle is won on the field of prayer; ministry simply claims the territory that has been gained. When prayer is overlooked or appended as an afterthought to service, the power of God is often absent. It is dangerously easy to move away from dependence upon God and to slip into the trap of self-reliance.

WHAT IS PRAYER?

Simply defined, prayer is a dialogue between God and man. It is "an intimate conversation of the pious with God" (John Calvin). Prayer often involves

individual and group needs (Matthew 14:30; Daniel 9:3-19) and concerns (Habakkuk 1:1-4; 12-17). However, "True prayer is not asking in itself, but the relationship of friendship with God, in which asking and receiving is simply part of the outcome" (J. A. Hanne).

Because it is part of a relationship, prayer involves a dialogue, not merely a monologue. While God wants us to talk to Him about our problems, plans, and concerns, there are also times when we should be silent before Him so that we can be sensitive and receptive to His desires and direction. Prayerful meditation upon a text of Scripture is an especially helpful way to listen to God.

Prayer is a spiritual resource which triggers the supernatural. It is an effective weapon when unsheathed, but too often it remains in the scabbard. Prayer and action are complimentary, not contradictory, and it is wise to overlap them as much as possible. Christian service is most effective when prayer not only precedes it but also flows together with it.

The gift of open communication with God and immediate access to Him is one of the great benefits of the salvation Jesus purchased for us. An infinite and holy God could never commune with sinful and rebellious creatures. It is the goodness, the grace, and the love of God, most clearly seen in the person and work of Christ, that brought all who have trusted in Him into a position they could never hope to earn.

*Since then we have a great high priest who has passed through the heavens, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold fast our confession. For we do not have a high priest who cannot sympathize with our weaknesses, but one who has been tempted in all things as we are, yet without sin. **Let us therefore draw near** with confidence to the throne of grace, that we may receive mercy and may find grace to help in time of need (Hebrews 2:14-16).*

*Since therefore, brethren, we have confidence to enter the holy place by the blood of Jesus, by a new and living way which He inaugurated for us through the veil, that is, His flesh, and since we have a great priest over the house of God, **let us draw near** with a sincere heart in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled clean from an evil conscience and our bodies washed with pure water. Let us hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering, for He who promised is faithful (Hebrews 10:19-23).*

Because of the grace that has been lavished upon us and the free access we have been given to the Father (Ephesians 2:18), we have the opportunity and the responsibility to "draw near" in all times of need. "If you then, being evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more shall your Father who is in heaven give what is good to those who ask Him!" (Matthew 7:11).

WHY SHOULD WE PRAY?

1. *Prayer enhances our fellowship and intimacy with God.* “I love the Lord, because he hears my voice and my supplications. Because He has inclined His ear to me, therefore I shall call upon Him as long as I live” (Psalm 116:1-2). “Thus says the Lord who made the earth, the Lord who formed it to establish it, the Lord is His name, ‘Call to Me, and I will answer you, and I will tell you great and mighty things, which you do not know’” (Jeremiah 33:2-3).

2. *The Scriptures command us to pray.* “Now He was telling them a parable to show that at all times they ought to pray and not to lose heart” (Luke 18:1). “With all prayer and petition pray at all times in the Spirit, and with this in view, be on the alert with all perseverance and petition for all the saints” (Ephesians 6:18). “Rejoice always; pray without ceasing; in everything give thanks; for this is God’s will for you in Christ Jesus” (1 Thessalonians 5:16-18). “I urge that entreaties and prayers, petitions and thanksgivings, be made on behalf of all men” (1 Timothy 2:1).

3. *When we pray, we follow the example of Christ and other great people in Scripture like Moses and Elijah.* “And in the early morning, while it was still dark, He arose and went out and departed to a lonely place, and was praying there” (Mark 1:35). “The people therefore cried out to Moses, and Moses prayed to the Lord, and the fire died out” (Numbers 11:2). “Then it came about at the time of the offering of the evening sacrifice, that Elijah the prophet came near and said, ‘O Lord, the God of Abraham, Isaac and Israel, today let it be known that You are God in Israel, and that I am Your servant, and that I have done all these things at Your word. Answer me, O Lord, answer me, that this people may know that You, O Lord, are God, and that You have turned their heart back again’” (1 Kings 18:36-37). “The effective prayer of a righteous man can accomplish much” (James 5:16; cf. 5:17-18).

4. *Prayer appropriates God's power for our lives.* In prayer, God allows us to participate with Him in the accomplishment of His purposes and demonstration of His power. “I am the vine, you are the branches; he who abides in Me, and I in him, he bears much fruit; for apart from Me you can do nothing” (John 15:5). “And when they had prayed, the place where they had gathered together was shaken, and they were all filled with the Holy Spirit, and began to speak the word of God with boldness” (Acts 4:31; cf. Ephesians 3:16; Colossians 4:2-4).

5. *We receive special help from God when we pray.* “Let us therefore draw near with confidence to the throne of grace, that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need” (Hebrews 4:16).

6. *Prayer makes a genuine difference.* God uses it to change people and shape history (Luke 11:9-10; James 5:16-18). “When I pray, coincidences happen; when I don't, they don't” (William Temple).

7. *Prayer develops our understanding and knowledge of God* (Psalm 37:3-6; 63:1-8; Ephesians 1:16-19). In it we acknowledge our dependence upon Him for all our spiritual, emotional, intellectual, and physical needs so that we continue to trust Him for everything. “In prayer, real prayer, we begin to think God's thoughts after Him: to desire the things He desires, to love the things He loves” (Richard Foster). “Prayer – secret, fervent, believing prayer – lies at the root of all personal godliness” (William Carey).

8. *Our prayers and God's answers give us joy and peace in our hearts* (John 16:23-24; Philippians 4:6-7). Our problems may not disappear, but in prayer we gain a new perspective on our problems along with the peace and patience to stand firm.

9. *Prayer helps us understand and accomplish God's purposes for our lives.* This was what Paul desired for the Colossians: “we have not ceased to pray for you and to ask that you be filled with the knowledge of His will in all spiritual wisdom and understanding, so that you may walk in a manner worthy of the Lord, to please Him in all respects, bearing fruit in every good work and increasing in the knowledge of God; strengthened with all power, according to His glorious might, for the attaining of all steadfastness and patience” (Colossians 1:9-11). “Spiritual power is not the power of prayer, but the power of God realized in action through a man in the attitude of prayer” (J. A. Hanne).

10. *Prayer changes our attitudes and desires* (2 Corinthians 12:7-9). In prayer we acknowledge the greatness of God's character and our desire to become more conformed to His character. We also acknowledge that in His wisdom He works all the things that happen in our lives together for our good (Romans 8:28). “Prayer keeps us trusting God for everything, opens the way for the Holy Spirit to transform us into the image of Jesus, and enables God to touch the lives of others whom we meet” (David Watson).

HOW DID JESUS PRAY?

Prayer was an indispensable part of Jesus' life and ministry on earth. He never got too busy to talk with His Father. This attitude of complete dependency and constant communication was the key to His fulfillment of everything He came to accomplish.

As He taught His disciples, Jesus provided a model for prayer which was recorded in two of the Gospels (Matthew 6:9-13 and Luke 11:1-4). He told His disciples to pray "in this way" (Matthew 6:9a), and a number of valuable principles can be gleaned from this model prayer:

"Our Father"

Accentuate God's Priority—Our prayers should concern God's interests first and our interests second. Compare Matthew 6:9-10 with Matthew 6:11-13.

Address God as Father—We can address our prayers directly to the Father because of the personal relationship with Him that was made available to us through the work of Christ. We have become sons and daughters of the king through faith in His Son (John 1:12; 14:6; Galatians 3:26; Hebrews 10:19-22).

"Who Art in Heaven"

Affirm God's Supremacy—While it is true that we are in God's family, it is also true that our God is the sovereign, infinite Creator who is gloriously enthroned in heaven.

"Hallowed Be Thy Name"

Acclaim God as Holy and Righteous—To hallow means to honor, exalt, or glorify. Our concern in prayer must not only be the what, why, and how, but especially the *who*. Our prayers should include praise for God in terms of who He is and what He has done (Psalm 34:1-3; Isaiah 40:12-26; 43:1-21). We are called to fear, reverence, glorify, and magnify His holy name (John 17:6,11,12).

"Thy Kingdom Come"

Acknowledge God's Right to Rule—God's kingdom is the sphere over which He rules, including His purposes for the world in general and the body of Christ in particular. We are to pray that God will bring about His rule of righteousness and justice on the earth, with Jesus Christ as the ruler (2 Samuel 7:10-16; Luke 18:7-8). When we pray for the coming of the kingdom, we are also praying for the coming of the King (Revelation 22:20).

"Thy Will Be Done, on Earth
as It Is in Heaven"

Assent to God's Will—We should pray that God's will be accomplished on earth in the same way as it is by the angelic host of heaven (Psalm 103:19-21). On the personal level, this means that we are making ourselves available for God to accomplish His will through us as Jesus did during His earthly life (Matthew 26:39).

"Give Us This Day Our Daily Bread"

Ask for God's Provision—In prayer we acknowledge that everything we have is a gift from God (James 1:17), as we turn to Him for the supply of our daily needs. God has promised to provide our basic needs (Philippians 4:19), but not necessarily our wants.

"And Forgive Us Our Debts"

Admit the Need for God's Forgiveness—Our needs are not only physical but spiritual. While it is true that all of our sins were forgiven when we received Christ as our Savior (Ephesians 1:7; Colossians 2:13; Hebrews 10:14-18), we did not become perfect in our practice. When we sin, we must acknowledge it to God who will forgive and cleanse us from all unrighteousness (1 John 1:9).

"As We also Have Forgiven Our Debtors"

Accept God's Mandate to Forgive Others—Having experienced God's forgiveness, we are obligated to have a forgiving spirit toward others. We do not merit God's forgiveness by forgiving others; we mirror it (Matthew 18:21-35; Mark 11:25; Ephesians 4:32; Colossians 3:13).

"And Do Not Lead Us into Temptation,"

Adhere to God in the Midst of Adversity—God does not *tempt* anyone to sin (James 1:13) but He does *test* the quality of our faith to stimulate us to grow in our relationship with Him (Genesis 22:1; Romans 5:3-5; James 1:2-4). God is willing and able to deliver us from every temptation as we turn to Him (Luke 22:40; 1 Corinthians 10:13).

“But Deliver Us From Evil”

Actively Stand with God Against the Evil One—We are to stand firm in the spiritual warfare by exercising our resources in Christ (Ephesians 6:10-18) and praying that God will deliver us from the wiles of the adversary (1 Peter 5:8-9). In the life of our Lord, prayer was not so much something He did as it was a relationship He maintained. It was the complete involvement of His mind, will, and emotions with His Father.

WHAT ARE THE ELEMENTS OF PRAYER?

Last month, we derived a number of prayer principles by looking at the Lord's prayer. This model prayer given by Jesus to His disciples also illustrates a number of the key elements or aspects of prayer.

In my *Handbook to Prayer: Praying Scripture Back to God*, I used a daily format of eight types of prayer that can be derived from our Lord's definitive prayer: adoration, confession, renewal, petition, intercession, affirmation, thanksgiving, and a closing prayer.

"Father in heaven, hallowed be Your name" – The prayer principles of *adoration* (praise for who God is) and *thanksgiving* (praise for what He has done).

"Your kingdom come; Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven" – The principle of *affirmation*, that is, agreeing with God's will and submitting to it.

"Give us our daily bread" – The principle of supplication, in which we make requests both for ourselves (*petition*) and for others (*intercession*).

"And forgive us our debts as we also have forgiven our debtors" – The principle of *confession* in view of our need for forgiveness of sins.

"And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from the evil one" – The necessity of *renewal* as we face the temptations of the world, the flesh, and the devil.

"For Yours is the kingdom and the power and the glory forever" – A *closing prayer* that honors the Lord and completes our thoughts.

Adoration

This crucial element of prayer is often overlooked or underdeveloped. Adoration involves praise and worship (the acknowledgment of God's "worthship" or worthiness to be adored). In this form of prayer, we devotedly honor, exalt, esteem, bless, and magnify the name of the Lord as we reflect upon His goodness, grace, holiness, mercy, love, might, power, and dominion (Revelation 4:11; 5:12-13). In praise we rejoice in God, align ourselves in obedience to Him, and express all that we have discovered Him to be.

Confession

In this form of prayer, we acknowledge our sins and thank God for His forgiveness and cleansing (Psalm 32; 51; 1 John 1:9). This requires a sensitivity to the Holy Spirit's work of showing us sins which must be dealt with in our lives so that we can continue to walk in the light and enjoy an unimpeded relationship with Him. We should prayerfully examine our lives frequently to be sure that we are not harboring unconfessed sins.

Renewal

It is critical that we consistently renew our minds with biblical truth in order to maintain a clear focus on who God is, who and whose we are, and God's purpose for our few decades on this planet. In prayers of renewal, we ask for the blessing of growth in intimacy and righteousness and appeal to God's grace to make this happen.

Petition

Prayers of supplication are requests that involve our needs (petition) and those of others (intercession). In our petitions, we lift up our own physical, psychological, and spiritual needs (2 Corinthians 12:7-10; Philippians 4:6-7). Petition should include our appropriation of God's gifts and resources so that we will fulfill His desire to work in and through us.

Intercession

We should pray for the physical, psychological, and spiritual needs of those who know Christ (Ephesians 1:15-19; 3:14-19; Philippians 1:4, 9-11; 3 John 2). For those who do not know the Savior, we should pray with a concerned heart (Romans 10:1) for God to send laborers into the harvest (Matthew 9:38), for open doors to witness, for clarity in the communication of the gospel (Colossians 4:3-4), and for these people to find eternal life by trusting in Christ (1 Timothy 2:1-4).

Affirmation

Prayers of affirmation take biblical truths and affirm them by acknowledging them back to God. This is another way to renew the mind, and it helps us embrace the truth, regardless of feelings we may have to the contrary. Many passages from Scripture can be turned into affirmations simply by personalizing them and agreeing with them.

Thanksgiving

In this form of prayer, repeatedly emphasized by Paul (e.g., Colossians 3:15-17; 1 Thessalonians 5:18), we gratefully acknowledge what God has done, is doing, and will continue to do in our lives on every level. Thanksgiving should be a regular ingredient in our prayers because it causes us to reflect upon and remember the history of God's work in our lives, and this in turn gives us confidence in the way He will continue to work as well as a conscious sense of dependency upon Him (Psalm 107).

Closing Prayer

A closing prayer is like a coda at the end of a musical composition. It can be a brief word of adoration or thanksgiving that affirms our love for the One who loved us first.

PRINCIPLES FOR SUPPLICATION

In our intercessory prayer for others and petitionary prayer for ourselves, there are several biblical principles that we should strive to apply to make our supplications more effective. Here are ten:

1. *Ask* (Matthew 7:7-8; Philippians 4:6; James 4:2).
2. *Ask in the will of God* (James 4:13-17; 1 John 5:14).
3. *Ask in faith* (Mark 11:22-24; James 1:6-7; 1 John 5:15).
4. *Ask specifically* (Mark 10:51; Luke 6:12-13; 2 Corinthians 12:8).
5. *Ask with thanksgiving* (Philippians 1:3-4; Colossians 1:3-4, 11-12; Hebrews 13:15).
6. *Ask in the Spirit* (Romans 8:26-27; Ephesians 6:18; Jude 20).
7. *Ask in fellowship* (John 15:7; James 5:16; 1 John 3:21-22).
8. *Ask frequently* (1 Chronicles 16:11; Luke 18:1; Colossians 4:2; 1 Thessalonians 5:17).
9. *Ask with others* (Matthew 18:19-20; Romans 15:30).
10. *Ask in Jesus' name* (John 14:13-14; 16:24; Ephesians 3:11-12; Hebrews 10:19-22).

As with Jesus, prayer should be our method of getting things done. We must learn to depend more on our prayers and less on externals (people, circumstances, and things). "And all things you ask in prayer, believing, you shall receive" (Matt. 21:22). "The prayer that God answers is the prayer that is to God the Father, that is on the ground of the atoning blood of God the Son, and that is under the direction and in the power of God the Holy Spirit" (R. A. Torrey).

We should also recognize the importance of corporate supplication: "Again I say to you, that if two of you agree on earth about anything that they may ask, it shall be done for them by My Father who is in heaven" (Matthew 18:19). There is a different spiritual dynamic when two or more agree in prayer. When you pray with others, make an effort to listen actively and stand united with them before the throne of God.

WHAT ABOUT UNANSWERED PRAYER?

Our God hears and answers prayers, but His answer is not always "yes" (even when it is, the timing and circumstances of His positive answers are often different from what we expect). There are times when God's answer will be "wait" because His timing is not the same as ours and because He desires to produce the spiritual fruit of patience and self-control in us. Our faith needs to be long as well as strong.

There are other times when God's answer will be "no."

When this happens, the reason may simply be that God's plan is different from ours. Or it may be that God is testing our faith (consider Abraham, Joseph, David, and other biblical personalities). After praying three times for the removal of his "thorn in the flesh," Paul got a negative answer from God. This caused him to realize that God's power is perfected in weakness (2 Corinthians 12:8-9) and drove him to greater dependency on the person of God. When the answer is "no" we may later discover the reason. On other occasions, the reason may not be revealed to us this side of eternity.

How do we respond to a negative answer? First, we should examine ourselves to be sure that we have not fallen prey to one or more of the hindrances to answered prayer that will be discussed in next month's *Reflections*. A mid-course correction may be in order. Second, if we are still unable to discern the problem, we must be content to rest in God's loving character and greater wisdom.

Hindrances to Answered Prayer

The Scriptures describe and illustrate a number of hindrances to answered prayer. Here are ten:

1. *Wrong motives*—“You ask and do not receive, because you ask with wrong motives, so that you may spend it on your pleasures” (James 4:3). Selfish indulgence (Matthew 20:20-22; Luke 12:13-15) is a common hindrance to answered prayer. See 1 Corinthians 10:31 for a proper motive.

2. *Unconfessed sin*—“If I regard wickedness in my heart, the Lord will not hear” (Psalm 66:18). “But your iniquities have made a separation between you and your God, and your sins have hidden His face from you, so that He does not hear” (Isaiah 59:2; cf. Proverbs 28:9).

3. *An unforgiving Spirit*—“And whenever you stand praying, forgive, if you have anything against anyone; so that your Father also who is in heaven may forgive you your transgressions” (Mark 11:25). An attitude of self-righteous condemnation of others will hinder our prayers (see Matthew 6:14-15; 18:21-25; Ephesians 4:32; Colossians 3:13).

4. *Trying to impress others*—“And when you pray, you are not to be as the hypocrites; for they love to stand and pray in the synagogues and on the street corners, in order to be seen by men. Truly I say to you, they have their reward in full” (Matthew 6:5). When praying with others, there is always a danger of being more concerned with what they think of our prayers than being concerned with the One to whom our prayers are directed.

5. *Lack of Faith*—“But let him ask in faith without any doubting, for the one who doubts is like the surf of the sea driven and tossed by the wind. For let not that man expect that he will receive anything from the Lord” (James 1:6-7). Instead, our attitude is to be one of expectant belief: “Therefore I say to you, all things for which you pray and ask, believe that you have received them, and they shall be granted you” (Mark 11:24).

6. *Disobedience to God*—A failure to keep His commandments will interfere with our prayers. “Beloved, if our heart does not condemn us, we have confidence before God; and whatever we ask we receive from Him, because we keep His commandments and do the things that are pleasing in His sight” (1 John 3:21-22; cf. John 14:21). See Isaiah 1:15-17.

7. *Stinginess in giving*—“He who shuts his ear to the cry of the poor will also cry himself and not be answered” (Proverbs 21:13; cf. Luke 6:38; 1 John 3:17-20).

8. *Improper treatment of mate*—“You husbands likewise, live with your wives in an understanding way, as with a weaker vessel, since she is a woman; and grant her honor as a fellow heir of the grace of life, so that your prayers may not be hindered” (1 Peter 3:7).

9. *Idolatry*—Anything that we revere more than God (e.g., career, material possessions, personal plans) is an idol, and idolatry hampers effective prayer. “Son of man, these men have set up their idols in their hearts, and have put right before their faces the stumbling block of their iniquity. Should I be consulted by them at all?” (Ezekiel 14:3).

10. *Not abiding in Christ*—An improper relationship with God means that our aspirations, attitudes, and actions will not be aligned with Him. “If you abide in Me, and My words abide in you, ask whatever you wish, and it shall be done for you” (John 15:7).

UNDESIRABLE PRAYER HABITS

1. *Predictability*—Some Christians suffer from the disease of prayer platitudes. We can slip into the sloppy habit of using canned phrases and endless clichés that have lost their meaning.

2. *Generality*—Our prayers are sometimes too broad or vague. If we don't know what we are asking for, we won't recognize an answer if we get one.

3. *Dishonesty*—There is a temptation to masquerade in God's presence, hoping to cover up the things we are afraid He will see. But this is like wearing a tie while naked.

4. *Smallness*—When we minimize our risks and hedge our bets in prayer, we confuse mediocrity with safety.

5. *Repetition*—Sometimes prayers are laced with words that are excessively repeated: “Father . . . Father . . . Father,” or “just . . . just . . . just,” or “you know . . . you know . . . you know.”

Try to avoid these and other undesirable habits by periodically examining your own private and public prayers.

DESIRABLE PRAYER HABITS

Choose the best time. Select a particular time of the day, and dedicate it only to personal prayer. For most of us, the morning is best, because we have been refreshed by the previous night's rest and we are not yet absorbed in the demands of the day. This is often the time we can most consistently keep, and during morning prayer we can dedicate the day to the Lord. It is extremely wise to bring Him into our decision-making process by thinking through and planning the day's activities in prayer. "If God is not first in our thoughts and efforts in the morning, he will be in the last place the remainder of the day" (E. M. Bounds).

If possible, it is even better to schedule two or three regular prayer breaks during the day to relax briefly, release burdens of stress and anxiety, and enjoy spiritual communion.

Be consistent. Regard your prayer time as a daily appointment you have made with God and respect it as such. If the discipline of regular time with God is not a matter of the highest priority, your spiritual life will suffer, and this will ultimately affect every other aspect of your life. Set your heart to pursue the person, knowledge, and ways of God by spending regular time with Him.

Set a minimum time for daily prayer. Try to be realistic—don't attempt too much at first or your prayer life will become mechanical and discouraging. Start with a few minutes and gradually build from there. Faithfulness on this level will lead to an increased appetite and you will actually look forward to the times you spend with God. "In prayer, quality is always better than quantity" (Robert Coleman).

Nevertheless, quality should not become a substitute for quantity. "Surely the experience of all good men confirms the proposition that without a due measure of private devotions the soul will grow lean" (William Wilberforce). If we want to know and thus love God more, it will take time:

"Our devotions are not measured by the clock, but time is of their essence. . . . Calmness, grasp, strength, are never the companions of hurry. . . . It is true that Bible prayers in word and print are short, but the praying men of the Bible were with God through many a sweet and holy wrestling hour. They won by few words but long waiting. . . . Spiritual work is taxing work, and men are loath to do it. Praying, true praying, costs an outlay of serious attention and of time, which flesh and blood do not relish. Few persons sons are made of such strong fiber that they will make a costly outlay when surface work will pass as well in

the market. We can habituate ourselves to our beggarly praying until it looks well to us, at least it keeps up a decent form and quiets conscience--the deadliest of opiates!" (E. M. Bounds).

Plan special times of prayer during the year. You may want to consider setting aside one or more special times (a morning or evening or a whole day) for a personal or small group prayer retreat. This can be especially meaningful when done in the context of planning ahead for the next several months or when a critical decision must be made.

Make prayer a part of your relationships with people. Personal prayer is crucial, but it must not crowd out corporate prayer. Prayer should be a part of the home (husband and wife, parents with children) and part of Christian friendships. Great benefit can be derived from setting up a prayer partnership with another person, a prayer cell with a few people, or a prayer fellowship with several people.

Choose the best place. Select a place where there will be a minimum of interruptions and distractions. If possible, pray away from your phone and your desk. When the weather and your schedule permit, you may want to try praying during a walk.

Focus on the person of God. Prepare your heart and mind for prayer by releasing all stresses and concerns and giving them to the Lord. It is a good practice to read or meditate upon a passage of Scripture and then to concentrate your attention on the presence of Christ in your life. Rest in His presence, "casting all your anxiety upon Him, because He cares for you" (1 Peter 5:7). Review the good news of His love and redemptive work on your behalf and remind yourself of who you have become in Christ. Reflect upon some aspect of the person and character of God and praise Him for it. Make this very personal. "Prayer becomes dull, if not meaningless, when we lose sight of the greatness of God, or forget his countless gifts. As soon as we take anyone for granted, our relationship with that person begins to crumble" (David Watson).

Come before Him in humility. You are in the unmediated presence of the holy God who is like a blazing light and a consuming fire, before whom all things are manifest. Judge yourself to be sure that you are approaching Him in honesty and openness, with no barriers of unconfessed sin, because He hates sin and cover-ups. Sometimes we get too casual before the One who spoke the hundreds of billions of galaxies into existence.

Come expectantly to the throne. Our Father is the King, and we are in His presence. The significance of prayer is not what we are asking, but who we are

talking to. Come in simplicity and trust like a child to a father. Expect the supernatural—ask Him for something only He could do (“is anything too difficult for the Lord?” Genesis 18:14) and watch what happens.

Strive for a balanced diet. Our prayers should incorporate all the elements of confession, adoration, supplication (intercession and petition), and thanksgiving. We are usually short on adoration and thanksgiving.

Pray at all times in the Spirit. “We do not know how to pray as we should, but the Spirit Himself intercedes for us with groanings too deep for words” (Romans 8:26). Our prayers should be initiated and energized by the Holy Spirit who “intercedes for the saints according to the will of God” (Romans 8:27). We are in a spiritual warfare, and we can only engage a spiritual enemy in the strength of God's Spirit. See Ephesians 6:18 and Jude 20.

Do not do all the talking. Have times of silence before the Lord so that you can be sensitive to the promptings of His Spirit. Be responsive to Him by confessing any areas of exposed sin, interceding for others, praying for wisdom, and submitting to His desires.

Practice the presence of God. Helmut Thielicke noted that “prayer is no longer the active soil of our life, our home, the air we breathe.” When ministry becomes a substitute for prayer, it becomes man-centered and ineffective. We should desire not only to have one or more times that are formally dedicated to prayer during the day, but also to be conscious of the presence of God throughout the day. In this way, each task is rendered in His name and done in conscious dependence upon Him. Another desirable habit we should seek to cultivate is to pray for others as we see them and talk with them.

This can radically affect our attitudes and behavior. A third beneficial habit is to begin to associate our work with prayer. “It is not prayer in addition to work, but prayer simultaneous with work. We precede, enfold, and follow all our work with prayer. Prayer and action become wedded” (Richard Foster).

PRAYER CHECKLIST

Use the following checklist to evaluate your prayer life and to make mid-course corrections:

A. Content

___ I confess my sins consistently and keep short accounts with God.

___ I often praise and adore God in my prayers and reflect upon who He is and what He has done.

___ I often intercede for the physical, psychological, and spiritual needs of others and petition God with my own needs and concerns.

___ I thank God daily for what He has done for me and others.

B. Quality

___ I am persistent in my prayers.

___ I pray in submission to God's will.

___ I pray with faith in the fact that God can and will answer my prayers.

___ I examine my motives to weed out greed and selfishness.

___ I come before God with a sincere heart and a clear conscience.

___ I pray about specific needs.

___ I pray in dependence upon the Holy Spirit and seek to be sensitive to His promptings.

C. Quantity

___ I have at least one special time that is set aside for prayer each day.

___ I seek to practice the presence of God by maintaining a prayerful attitude in the midst of my activities.

___ My prayer life is more consistent now than it was in the past.

___ I pray with my family on a regular basis.



The prayers we live on our feet are just as important as those we say on our knees.

The tragedy of our day is not unanswered prayer but unoffered prayer.

A problem not worth praying about is not worth worrying about.

Men may spurn our appeals, reject our message, oppose our arguments, despise our persons, but they are helpless against our prayers. – J. Sidlow Baxter

The Christian on his knees sees more than the philosopher on tiptoe. – Dwight L. Moody

Keep praying, but be thankful that God's answers are wiser than your prayers! – William Culbertson

Prayer is the slender nerve that moves the muscle of Omnipotence. – J. Edwin Hartill

Prayer is a powerful thing, for God has bound and tied Himself thereto. None can believe how powerful prayer is, and what it is able to effect, but those who have learned it by experience. – Martin Luther

Prayer is not an argument with God to persuade Him to move things our way, but an exercise by which we are enabled by His Spirit to move ourselves His way. – Leonard Ravenhill

He who has learned to pray has learned the greatest secret of a holy and happy life. – William Law

Prayer is not overcoming God's reluctance: it is laying hold of His highest willingness. – Richard C. Trench

There is not in the world a kind of life more sweet and delightful than that of a continual conversation with God. – Brother Lawrence