

# Prayer Part 1

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## **PRAYER:**

*“Poverty-stricken as the church is today in many things, she is most stricken in the place of prayer. We have many organizers, but few agonizers; many players and payers, but few prayers; many singers, but few clingers; lots of pastors, few wrestlers; many fears, few tears; much fashion, little passion; many interferers, few intercessors; many writers, but few fighters. Failing here, we fail everywhere. We have lost the historical faith of our fathers, and have substituted the hysterical faith of our fellows.”*  
quoted by David Jeremiah

### PRAYER EXPOSES OUR HEARTS - (what our prayers tend to reveal about us)

1. Prayer reveals what is going on inside us spiritually.
2. Prayer reveals our personal theology – what we believe about God, ourself, and the bigger picture of the church as local community and our part in God’s Kingdom at large.
3. Prayer reveals how we see life – it displays our values... the things that matter most to us... our priorities. It is understood that authenticity in prayer is foundational... God wants us to be real with Him and with each other.
4. Prayer reveals our spiritual health & maturity – where we are in terms of our spiritual growth, with God.
5. Our prayers reveal what we think prayer is all about... is God nothing more than our ‘genie in a bottle’ or are we pressing into Him to radically transform everything about us.

### PRAYER AWARENESS EXERCISE

The next time you have the opportunity to pray with a group or partner... notice what they are saying. What does their prayer reveal about them? Stand with them before God and try to hear things from His perspective.

GENERAL CONCEPTS OF PRAYER ... WHAT IS IT? – Prayer is a mosaic – often we each have different approaches to prayer and even different prayer experiences. The key is seek God through the Spirit with the prayer means that resonates best for you. In discussing descriptions of prayer, the following were class responses at Western Seminary:

1. It is keeping company with God.
2. It is an aligning ourselves with God’s point of view.
3. Intentional prayer centers our spiritual being on Him.
4. Engaging God brings us balance – we are in the world but live for His Kingdom.
5. It is dialoging with God... it is not merely a monologue.
6. It is wasting time with God.
7. It is conversation with God.
8. It involves the interaction of our soul with God.
9. It is a deliberate raising of our mind to the heart of God.

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10. It results in creating space where God can act in us and through us.
11. It is a subversive act that calls the doubting & agnostic world into accountability.
12. It is connecting with the Spirit that is indwelling us and is closer than any friend or lover can be... we don't have to shout or raise our prayers past some great gulf or chasm... God's immediacy and eminency are made potent in prayer.

## **A. Why should WE PRAY?**

- It is not as if God is going to be surprised by what we think or ask.
- God will not be stumped or say "I didn't see that coming." He won't be alarmed by our straightforwardness or honesty... He welcomed the complaints of His people in Scripture.
- He knows us better than we know ourselves... and He longs for the opportunity that intimacy allows where He can reveal Himself to us in meaningful ways.
- Though God likes it, prayer is not for God's benefit... it is for our benefit.
- It is the conscious act of taking our mind/heart and placing it in God's Hands... knowing He is steadfast and loyal, abounding in Grace and desiring to bless and comfort.
- If the 'fear of God' is the beginning of wisdom, than the 'comfort of being with God' is the relational and emotional connection with His heart.
- *"Prayer is the only omnipotence that God has granted to man, and the only thing that lies beyond the power of prayer is that which lies beyond the power of God."*

R.A. Torrey

## **I. RESPONDING TO LIFE:**

In the midst of whatever stress or concern, whatever need or question, however we encounter life... prayer is deliberately inviting God into our situation.

A) Common Prayer – consider the examples in the Sermon on the Mount in Mathew – most people pray in a way where prayer gets reduced into some very basic things, they usually don't go for a radical change of heart or mind. There is nothing inherently wrong with these prayers, but there is a higher calling of prayer we need to be aware of and subscribe to.

Prayer most often falls into these basic categories:

1. **PERFUNCTORY PRAYER** – THESE ARE THE AUTOMATIC OR 'UNTHINKING' TYPES OF PRAYER... SUCH AS SAYING GRACE AT MEALS
2. **REACTIVE PRAYER** – THESE ARE PRAYERS IN RESPONSE TO LIFE SITUATIONS AS GOD PROMPTS US –
  - a. **PROBLEMS** - WHETHER DISASTERS, ILLNESS, ETC.
  - b. **FEAR** – WHETHER WE FIND OURSELVES IN A SITUATION OR CONDITIONS THAT FORCE US TO TURN IN RELIANCE TO GOD.
  - c. **GRATITUDE** – WHEN WE SENSE THE PRESENCE OR PLEASURE OF GOD IN OUR DAILY RHYTHM.
  - d. **GRACE** – WHEN WE KNOW FRESH EVIDENCE OF GOD'S LOVE AND CARE FOR ME AND OTHERS.

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3. PREVENTATIVE PRAYER – MOST PEOPLE ASSUME LIFE WILL GO WELL FOR THEM, THUS THEY ASK FOR PROTECTION OR MERCIES TO AID THEM GET THROUGH EVENTS OR SITUATIONS WHERE THEY FEEL SOMEWHAT VULNERABLE OR AT RISK.
  - a. TRAVEL MERCIES
  - b. SURGERY MERCY
  - c. GUIDANCE FOR UNKNOWNNS SUCH AS MEETINGS ABOUT WHICH WE ARE ILL AT EASE
4. UTILITARIAN PRAYER – WHERE WE ASK GOD TO SOLVE OUR PROBLEMS & BRING ABOUT SUCCESS FOR OUR PLANS...
  - a. THIS IS MORE ABOUT OUR FOCUSING ABOUT HOW WE WANT TO GET THINGS DONE...
  - b. INSTEAD WE SHOULD BE DELIBERATELY COMMITTED TO COMING INTO ALIGNMENT WITH GOD’S PLAN AND INTENTIONS, ABOUT WHAT HE WANTS TO DO.
5. THERAPEUTIC PRAYER – WHERE WE PRAY TO GET STUFF OFF OUR CHEST AND INTO GOD’S HANDS.
  - a. CONFESSION
  - b. SUPPLICATION

B) Uncommon Prayer – this involves taking our story and deliberately placing it into the context of God’s bigger story... it is seeking to see things through God’s perspective. These are the transformational moments when we get past our self interest, deliberately press into God, and purposefully set ourselves in line with His purpose.

The Bible provides many examples of prayer... some are prayer templates... or examples of uncommon prayer:

1. MOSES – THE MOUNTAINTOP AND THE TENT OF MEETING
2. DANIEL – PRAYED IN THE OPEN WINDOW FACING JERUSALEM
3. DAVID – THE PSALMS ARE EXAMPLES OF STREAMING PRAYER
  - a. Ps 51 – DAVID’S CONFESSION AFTER NATHAN CONFRONTS HIS SIN – CROSS REFERENCE 2 SAM 11:1-27; 12:1-23
  - b. Ps 22 – GOD AS OUR PERSONAL SHEPHERD WRITTEN BY A SHEPHERD.
4. JESUS –
  - a. SERMON ON THE MOUNT – MATTHEW 5:3-7:27 IS ONE LONG SERMON PRECEDED BY FASTING AND PRAYER
  - b. HIGH PRIESTLY PRAYER – JOHN 17:1-26 – AS JESUS KNEW HE WAS LEAVING HE PRAYED EARNESTLY FOR HIS DISCIPLES.
5. PAUL –
  - a. EPHESIANS 3:14-21 – INTERCESSORY PRAYER FOR THE HIGH CALLING OF DISCIPLESHIP AND THE UNITY OF THE FAITH.

THESE ALSO DEMONSTRATE HOW WE SHOULD RESPOND TO GOD AND HOW TO INVITE HIM INTO OUR EVERYDAY LIFE SITUATIONS

## II. RELATING WITH GOD

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1. Scripture [especially the Psalms] give clear example of how to relate with God... prayer is not about getting things done, it is about our walk together with God.
  - a. Praise and complaint are offered together without conflict... God welcomes both.
  - b. Fear and deliverance are expressed in hope of a loving God who desires to bless.
  - c. Calling on God's mercy and His desire to hear and to act on His peoples behalf according to His timing.
2. The "Tent of Meeting" in Ex 33:7-11 provides an interesting example... the story of it is placed into an existing story almost as an interlude. There is a break in the bigger story where this is inserted.
  - a. The tent of meeting was deliberately outside the camp – and at a significant distance. It would seem God had made a deliberate attempt at sequestering Moses from the ongoing issues involved in the camp.
  - b. Life and Ministry will consume you if you allow it to – you need to make time to take time with God for renewal and refreshment.
  - c. Sequestering with God is the antidote for daily trials and troubles.
  - d. Most ministers' struggle with their prayer life – not so much in time spent, but rather in intimacy developed.
  - e. It is important to regularly reboot your prayer life – and you will likely find that the biggest errors in your ministry and life that you would like to have a do-over on involve your prayer life.
  - f. A more intimate approach to prayer is to bring your life as you know it and just share it with God... asking Him to search you and reveal His Heart to you.
  - g. Avoid the tendency to try to clean things up before you come to Him... the notion that "God can't hear your prayers if you have unconfessed sin" is a lie. If He couldn't hear you He couldn't forgive you. Come as you are and look expectantly for God to welcome you. The indwelling Spirit has already paved the way... we just need to respond in faith believing.

### III. REIGNING WITH GOD

1. Prayer is preparation for reigning with God. In that exalted state we will willingly and expectantly do God's bidding with His principles written on our hearts and minds. Prayer gets us properly aligned with God so He is free to work in us and through us.
2. Most of what we accept as "normal prayer" tends to look at life on earth... but God has a bigger picture in mind, including teaching us about spiritual power.
  - a. Rom 8:17, 23
  - b. 1 Pet 2:9
  - c. 1 Cor 6:2-3
  - d. Mat 5:1-12; 19:28; 20:20-23
3. Prayer has a radical affect spiritually:
  - a. Bringing light into the dark areas around us.
  - b. Liberating the captives.
  - c. Setting Angels to work.

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## **B. How should we PRAY?**

### **I. PRAY AS A PERSONAL ROUTINE**

1. Yancey – following Jesus' example of prayer... prayer was an identifying mark of His ministry... especially at important times:
  - a. Mat 14:23
  - b. Luke 5:16; 6:12; 9:28; 11:1
2. Jesus example demonstrated prayer as a daily ritual, also as an important strategic plan for action/decision making, and for maintaining relational intimacy.

### **II. PRAY AS A SPIRITUAL DISCIPLINE**

1. "Devote yourselves to Prayer" Col. 4:2
2. We are invited to take prayer beyond the routine place of ritual, to a place as a spiritual master. *Prayer is "the most personal thing that any of us do, the most human act in which we can engage"* P.T. Forsyth
3. Prayer is deliberately entering into the spiritual realm where we can directly engage God. God is eminently close [Presence within... indwelling] and distant other [Spirit... heavenly]. Prayer allows us intimate audience with the King.

### **III. TYPES OF PRAYER AS SPIRITUAL DISCIPLINES:**

#### **1. BREATH PRAYER – OR "BREATHING PRAYER"**

- Explanation: prayer of the heart that seeks to link rhythmic breathing with spiritual contemplation.
- Expression: this is NOT a new age type of thing. This is more like connecting deep sighs of longing with spiritual purpose. The result is to still the mind and cause deep relaxation. The "Jesus prayer" and "son of David have mercy on me" or "God of Grace show grace to me" are examples of this type of prayer.

#### **2. CENTERING PRAYER –**

- Explanation: the result of a desire to just remain in God's Presence and to focus less on me and more on Him. This quiets my mind and stimulates the receptiveness of my heart.
- Expression: this is deliberately entering into God by shutting down everything else. It is focused on being satisfied in God's presence... without any demands or specific expectations. This is 'hanging out with God'.

#### **3. CONTEMPLATIVE PRAYER –**

- Explanation: Prayer with no specific pre-set agenda – this is just a meeting with God.

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- Expression: form of prayer that emphasizes an open attitude before God. It involves conversation, listening, and connecting. This is less about our talking and more about our listening, where we come willing to wait on God and we ask what He has for me now/this moment... paying attention to what He would say or prompt our hearts.

## 4. MEDITATIVE PRAYER –

- Explanation: Prayer that has a deliberate purpose of seeking God through Scripture.
- Expressions: This involves meditative reflection on a portion or passage of Scripture asking God to reveal His heart. It is prayerful reading and reflecting – it will often find you asking God:
  - What are You saying here Lord?
  - What does this mean for me?
  - How would you apply this to my life?

## 5. REGULAR-HOUR PRAYER –

- Explanation: The establishing of regular and consistent prayer patterns of attending to God. This involves intentional strategic prayer. As a church practice, this gained popularity in the early 300's as a means to good and meaningful prayer in a corporate setting. It is still practiced in many monasteries and retreat houses. These may often be prepared in advance for reciting. It is typically personal expressed in a corporate setting.
- Expressions:
  1. "Lauds" – or wake up prayer. Done 1<sup>st</sup> thing upon awaking.
  2. "Prime" – or after breakfast prayer before starting work.
  3. "Terce" – or mid-morning break for prayer.
  4. "Sext" – or noon prayer of commitment.
  5. "None" – or middle afternoon prayer.
  6. "Vespers" – or end of working day prayer intent on stilling the mind and contemplating God.
  7. "Compline" – or bedtime prayer intent of promoting trust at your most vulnerable time of day.
  8. "Nocturnes" – or prayer in the middle of the night when you wake up.By the time of the Didache only 3 of these prayer times were routinely employed.

## 6. LITURGICAL PRAYER –

- Explanation: published prayers that draw upon more formal written prayers of the scriptures and of past saints.

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- Expression: an example is to take prayers of the scriptures – like “create in me a clean heart oh Lord” and repeat them often in a personalized fashion. Examples include 2000 Years of Prayer and The Book of Common Prayer.

## 7. LINKED-DISCIPLINE PRAYER –

- Explanation: prayer types may be linked to facilitate more focused prayer or for engaging in a longer more expansive time of prayer.
- Expression: begin with breathing or centering prayer to prepare your mind and heart for a longer more intense prayer experience. After centering, enter into a meditative or contemplative prayer period, and then take a break and enter into the other. The combination of centering and meditative, then centering and contemplative can yield wonderful experiences of revelation and illumination. Breathing and centering may also be employed with regular-hour and liturgical prayer sessions.

(Trivia: there are around 650 examples of prayers in the Bible)

## **C. Reflections on Philip Yancey’s Book – Prayer: Does it Make a Difference?**

### I. WHAT IS THE AUTHOR’S MAIN POINT?

1. The God who has revealed Himself in history desires relational intimacy with humanity. In the context of relational intimacy, prayer is as natural as breathing. In the Kingdom of God, prayer is the coin of the realm. We do not need to raise ourselves or our thoughts to God to connect with Him, as His indwelling Spirit already intercedes for us in words and ways we cannot understand or speak. [p193]
2. Prayer is an active partnership with God: where we come into greater intimacy with Him, align ourselves with His will and purposes, and “one of the most important purposes of prayer may be to let ourselves be loved by God.” [p 44]
3. Aligning ourselves with God’s will and purpose should manifest itself with a passion for evangelism... the idea that millions of lost souls would burn in hell must necessarily motivate believers. In this context, CS Lewis offers “when people reject God, God in effect says, ‘thy will be done [from the Great Divorce].’ At the end of time no one will be able to stand before God and say ‘you were unfair.’ However history settles out, it will settle on the side of justice tempered by mercy.” [p 39-40]

### II. What is the author’s response to the following questions?

1. Why should I pray? Because it is natural and necessary to do so.

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- All people pray to something... it is an inherent need of humanity to reach out beyond ourself to the eternal. Having been created in God's Image (general revelation) we know of the general existence of God. Having been made a child of God through Christ, we know of the personal nature of God (specific revelation). [p 192]
  - "The main purpose of prayer is not to make life easier, nor to gain magical powers, but to know God. I need God [personally and relationally] more than anything I might get from God." [p 56]
2. How should I pray? In the way most natural to you as God has revealed Himself to you.
- "Prayer is intimate, personal, and relational contact with God. It is keeping company with God." [p 62]
  - "The main requirement of prayer is honesty." [p 185]
  - "Conversation can be prayer, reading scripture can be prayer. [p 314]
  - Prayer is an attitude of the soul, not an action. [315]
  - Prayer is less technique, and more of a relational interaction between beings. [p 319]
3. What do I do with God's silence? Persevere in faith believing God hears and will respond.
- Press on in faith asking for fresh revelation and insight into any obstacles present in me that may be preventing my perception of God's presence. [p 202]
  - The essence of any request is that it may or may not be granted. God promises to hear and respond, we must trust that He has our best interest in mind. [p 234]
  - The "name it and claim it" mindset is not consistent with how God has worked throughout Scripture. We must wait upon God, and trust in His will, His provision, and His timing. [p237]
4. Why should I persevere in prayer?
- God wants us to develop persistence – "God does not twist arms. God views my persistence as a sign of genuine desire for change, which is the one prerequisite for spiritual growth." [p151]
  - "In persistent prayer, my own desires and plans gradually harmonize with God's." It is less about getting what we want, and more about become who we should be. [p 153]
  - "The goal is to spend time with God, not to follow a legalist procedure." [p 181]
5. Why should I practice intercession?
- "The demon possessed never asked Jesus for a cure; they were incapable of it. Instead, other people brought them to Jesus." [p 312]
  - Intercession is standing in the gap on behalf of others who need God's help, whether they know it or not.
  - Intercession may be general, but is more powerful when specific... when we know the person or people and their personal needs.
6. Jesus Prayer Pattern – p 78-79
- Jesus prayers showed a remarkable lack of concern about His own needs.
  - When alone, Jesus relied on prayer as a kind of spiritual recharging.
  - Jesus prayers intensified around key events – His baptism, choosing of His disciples, transfiguration, upper room preparation, crucifixion.



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7. Regarding the miraculous –
  - “If God can influence the course of events... then a God who is willing to cure colds and provide parking spaces, but is not willing to prevent Auschwitz and Hiroshima is morally repugnant. [p 74]
  - God is not a magician who rearranges life to fit our whims. God has established a natural order which He sometimes sets aside for miracles. [p 255]
8. Other thoughts on prayer:
  - The Romans prayed as a good luck charm, not really expecting too much. The Greeks derided prayer as foolishness. The Jews despite their tragic history contended that God ruled earth, listened to prayers, and would someday respond. [p 80]
  - In strange and mysterious ways, prayer incorporates the unknown and the unpredictable in the outworking of God’s grace. [p 83]
  - Prayer is cooperation with God – a consent that opens the way for grace to work. [p 103]
  - Stages of Prayer:
    - Simple childlike requests.
    - Disciplined prayer of intercession – prayer warriors.
    - Meditative communion – keeping company with God.
    - Spiritual warfare where we enter the spiritual realm as Knights and Ladies in the service of the Kingdom of God.
  - Paradox of prayer – God is unchanging (consistent, dependable), yet He is also responsive (open and flexible) to consider issues His people bring to Him. [p 131]
  - Like sex – prayer centers more on relationship than technique. [p 159]
  - During the US Civil War – both the North and the South claimed to have God on their side. Lincoln gently cautioned against people’s conviction to inquire whether they were on God’s side. [p 227]
  - What should I pray for? Tell God whatever is on your mind. [p 267]
  - Life is not a meaningless sequence of actions but an arena in which to live out the will of another world – the Kingdom of Heaven. Prayer is a state of being as much as an act – a fact that gets easily forgotten when we confine it to one or two isolated instances a day. [p 299]