

Prayer Part 2

If you ask people how their prayer life is, you will usually get a confused or perhaps a somewhat negative response. Most people don't know what a prayer life could be or should be. The study of prayer is useful to better understand the practice of prayer.

A. QUESTION ...What do you believe are the top five reasons why believers do *not* pray?

1. Pace of life interferes with a prayer life – The problem is at least twofold:
 - a. It is a lack of specific priorities – we don't know the value of prayer and hence don't understand the power of prayer.
 - b. Being busy – life is confounded by incessant demands for attention – from work, to play, for family activity, personal entertainment, etc. God knew that we need to slow down and relate – first with Him and also with one another. Being busy kills intimacy.
2. It's boring – The problem is we have a low ideal of prayer.
 - a. Prayer is much more than merely talking at God or even talking to God.
 - b. It is also more than talking with God.
 - c. Prayer is a means of transformation where I not only enter into communion with God, but my mind and heart are becoming aligned with God leading to personal transformation.
3. Not certain as to how important it is – the problem is a lack of urgency.
 - a. Slowing down and meeting with God is one of the most important activities we can engage with.
 - b. Instead of spending our first fruits of the day with God, we offer Him crumbs at the end of the day. God will accept what we give Him... but there comes a time when He demands more from us and of us.
4. Nobody sees us do it... it is an invisible spiritual activity.
 - a. We get caught up with attempting to be the good son or daughter... we want to be seen as spiritual or at least godly rather than pleasing God.
 - b. God who sees in private rewards those who seek Him – Mat 6:5-15.
5. Don't know how to pray adequately – feels like I'm casting bread on the water rather than connecting with God.
 - a. Few churches engage in discipleship training where we learn to pray effectively.
 - b. Like much of what happens in group study, we learn by observing and what we observe is well chosen words and powerful images, not seeking the Heart of God.
6. My personal shame and misunderstood view of God keeps me from the practice.
 - a. When we know we have sin in our lives and remain in that sin, coming to God seems hypocritical... we think we need to clean ourselves up before God will hear us. Nothing could be more untrue.
 - b. God longs for us to come to Him... and when we come to Him with our sin and failures, He is happy to forgive.
 - c. Prayer in this matter is one of the great assets we have against sin... we should pray when we consider the prospect of sinning to ask for spiritual strength to withstand the temptation, and pray immediately when we fail... and ask for the strength to stand firm and not sin in the future.
7. Relational indifference – fear of intimacy and vulnerability.

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- a. Some have a distorted view of God and cannot conceive of Him loving us in our flawed and imperfect condition.
- b. Some of us have trust and relational issues because we have been betrayed and damaged by past relational betrayals.
- c. God is different – He is always True, He is always kind, He is always loving and accepting. He just wants us to come to Him and remain with Him just as we are... and then He completes the work of Grace He began in us [Phil 1:6].

B. PRAYER AS A STRATEGIC ACTION:

1. The problem – most books and approaches to prayer speak of methodology, and don't get you excited about God Himself. Methodology won't get you pumped up and inspired.
2. The solution – understanding how we should pray:
 - a. As a personal routine for relating with God.
 - b. As a necessary means of responding to life.
 - c. As a means of learning how to reign with God.
3. The example – Professor Steve relates his experience in being an instrument expert on the unimpressive Mohawk turbo-prop recon-plane during the Viet Nam war – the Mohawk was singularly unimpressive... it was ugly, wasn't fast, and had no weaponry. But it gained a reputation as the most feared plane in the jungle – because it scouted out where enemy activity was massing and called in the big guns – artillery or Phantom fighter jets that cleared the area.
4. Prayer is like calling in the reinforcements... it is engaging the Heavenly Host through the power of God.

C. REFLECTION ON THE BOOK – THE SOUL OF PRAYER BY P.T. FORSYTH

1. What is the author's main point?
 - a. Has to do with becoming a lover of Love, rather than merely an object of Grace. We tend to approach God for what He can do or already has done for us... not out of sheer delight to be with Him.
 - b. In writing his book, Forsythe was speaking to a generation that had concluded that God was irrelevant.
 - c. He also was speaking into the empty recesses of the church – "Our churches are filled with the nicest & kindest people... but people that have never known the despair of guilt or the breathless wonder of forgiveness, much less the greatness of God..
2. What one quote best captures the emphasis of each chapter?
 - a. *"The Inwardness of Prayer"* p17 "In God's eyes the great object of prayer is the opening or restoring of free communion with Himself in a kingdom of Christ, a life communion which may even, amid our duty and service, become as unconscious as the beating of our heart."
 - b. *"The Naturalness of Prayer"* p46 "Prayer (if we let Christ teach us of it) is mightiest in the mightiest. It is the ether around the throne of the Most High.... Its power answers to the omnipotence of grace. And those who feel they owe everything to God's grace need have no difficulty about the range of prayer... they may pray for everything."
 - c. *"The Moral Reactions of Prayer"* p52 "What genius does in the natural world, prayer does in the spiritual. Nothing can give us so much power and vision. It opens a fountain

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perpetual and luminous at the center of our personality, where we are sustained because we are created anew and not simply refreshed.”

- d. *“The Timeliness of Prayer” p63* “Our communion with God is Christ rose, and it abides, in a crisis which shook not the earth only, but also heaven, in a tragedy and victory more vast, awful, and pregnant than the greatest war in history could be.”
- e. *“The Ceaselessness of Prayer” p68* The whole Christian life insofar as it is lived from the cross and by the cross is rationally an extravagance. For the cross is the paradox of all things; and the action of the Spirit is the greatest miracle in the world; and yet it is the principle of the world.”
- f. *“The Vicariousness of Prayer” p83* “This was what bore upon the Savior’s own soul, and darkened His very agony into eclipse. That He, who knew Himself to be the salvation of His own people, should by His very love, become their doom. And here we watch and suffer with Him, however sleepily.”
- g. *“The Insistency of Prayer” p103* “So when God yields to prayer in the name of Christ, to the prayer of faith and love, He yields to Himself who inspired it, as He swore by Himself since none was greater. Christian prayer is the Spirit praying in us; it is prayer in the solidarity of the Kingdom. It is a continuation of Christ’s prayer, which in Gethsemane was a wrestle with God, God dealing with God – as the true atonement must be. And when God yields it is not to an outside influence He yields, but to Himself.”

C. SPIRITUAL DISCIPLINES OF PRAYER AS A SPIRITUAL LEADER

1. “Strategic Prayer” – this is prayer partnering with the Spirit to advance the Kingdom of God:

- a. Is prayer that is proactive rather than reactive... it is prayerfully forwarding God’s agenda in me, in others, in my community, etc.
 - i. Pray so things will happen in me and that God’s ministry moves forward.
 - ii. This is identifying with God’s interests above my own.
 - iii. It is trying to catch up with what the Spirit is already doing and prayerfully advancing His cause.
 - iv. It is deliberately coming alongside God.
- b. Is praying spiritual character into others... praying God’s dreams into others lives.
 - i. It is seeing in others what they don’t see in themselves, and dreaming with them what God alone can accomplish.
 - ii. It is akin to what Jesus saw in Peter that would make him the rock of the church.
 - iii. It is “substantive and focused encouragement”.
- c. Is engaging in spiritual battle...
 - i. It recognizes that the conflict is not merely a human battle... the conflict began in the heavenly places and plays out in the material world.
 - ii. It is the preemptive strike rather than the punitive response. If you are in step with God and His Spirit, you will see the world and your environment differently, and God will provide a means for you to engage people to advance His cause.
 - iii. It is actively engaging God’s resources and inviting them into the conflict. Elisha saw God’s provision in 2 Kings 6 and Jesus knew it was available in Mat 26:53.
- d. Intercessory prayer is praying on behalf of others in ways they can’t pray for themselves.

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- i.* The demon possessed could not pray for themselves but relied on others to bring them to Jesus.
 - ii.* The blind could not find their way to Jesus and relied on others to guide them.
- e.* STRATEGIC PRAYER CONCEPT #1
 - i.* Christian Ministry is inherently a spiritual ministry, and experiencing the spiritual realm requires spiritual means. There is power released when we confidently enter into the spiritual discipline of prayer – this is different than the garden variety prayer of listing our perceived needs or complaints.
 - ii.* Priority #1 – our work in ministry is to encourage people to encounter God and experience firsthand His Goodness, Love, and Grace. Only by a firsthand spiritual experience will people experience transformation where their lives are changed. This is spiritual formation.
 - iii.* In this work there is no substitute for prayer and God’s Word. The original elders affirmed in Acts 6:2 the primacy of the ministry of the Word, and their actions demonstrated their dependence on prayer. The word conforms the mind, and prayer conforms the heart.
- f.* STRATEGIC PRAYER CONCEPT #2
 - i.* Spiritual leadership ministry requires prayer... it is the “Sinquon” [“for without... which not”= meaning no replacement]. Developing a vibrant spiritual life is necessary for spiritual service to the Body of Christ.
 - ii.* If it is not accomplished through prayer, then it is primarily supported by you and your own efforts... and you will eventually fail.
 - 1. God has to be engaged in the center of ministry in prayer for transformation and spiritual growth to occur – first in you and second in others.
 - 2. Oswald Chambers observed – to say that prayer changes things is not as close to the truth as saying prayer changes me and then God changes things through me. God has established that prayer on the basis of redemption changes the way a person looks at things. Prayer is less a matter of changing things externally and more of working miracles in a person’s inner nature... which then changes things externally.
 - iii.* The test of whether it is God’s ministry or your’s is twofold:
 - 1. How much you pray – it is more about your qualitative prayer life and not just your quantitative prayer life – though the two are interactive.
 - 2. What you pray about – most ministry goes toward supporting the organization [institution] of the church instead of the organism [Body] of the Church. Missional context is proven in your prayer life by what you pray about.
- g.* STRATEGIC PRAYER CONCEPT #3
 - i.* Praying as a spiritual leader requires a different perspective... it is a leader’s [shepherd’s] perspective. This is not CEO type leadership, rather it is walking with people and encouraging their self-God discovery.

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- ii.* That is praying as a shepherd... as if looking through God's eyes and making Him known to those who you walk with.
 - iii.* Shepherds walk with the sheep... they guide them and support them.
 - iv.* Discipling is all about replicating Christian maturity in others because shepherds are also leaders called to train others for their work in ministry. Quantitative growth must be accompanied by qualitative growth – anyone can draw a crowd with great music and fancy speech, but that is not building up the Body for their work of ministry.
- h.* STRATEGIC PRAYER CONCEPT #4
- i.* It is possible to change people through prayer alone. We tend to discount the power of the supernatural when we engage the Spirit in intercession on behalf of others.
 - ii.* We can go through all the 'Word' and 'speaking' training, but without the supernatural prayer emphasis it will not be the success we think it will be, or that God wants it to be... presuming He has called you to that ministry.
 - iii.* Partnering with God is a radical proposition! This is the true nature of the call to ministry.

2. PRAYER TEMPLATE #1 Daniel 9:1-19

- a.* OBSERVATIONS: Demonstration on how to pray for others as a spiritual leader.
- b.* CONCEPTS:
 - i.* "I observed the number of years revealed to Jeremiah..." 9:2 Daniel was studying the writings of the Prophet Jeremiah, when he saw the time for the exile to end. → I must identify with others to pray effectively as an intercessory. Daniel understood that we are all fallen & broken people.
 - ii.* The result of Daniel's observation was to give attention to God... to seek Him in prayer – with supplications, fasting, and humility [sackcloth & ashes]. 9:3 →The ultimate goal is to keep focused on God... on His purpose & His glory.
 - iii.* In prayer, Daniel identified personally with God's people who had sinned and failed [9:5] and who had ignored God's warnings through His prophet's preaching [9:6]. Daniel agreed that God's judgment resulting in the exile of God's people was the rightful result of their unrighteousness [9:7-12]. The key here is to recognize the times and what God is doing... align yourself with His perspective and His priorities. The key is to seek God's goal in ministry and calling... not merely doing stuff in His name.
 - iv.* God's calamity continued as a result of Israel's lack of repentance and their failure to return to the truth [9:13-14]. → The key here for leaders is to pray from God's heart... as His representative to His people. This can only happen when we commit to identifying completely with Him.
 - v.* Intercession – as people are rightly judged [9:15-16], as to a servant purposefully engaged [9:17], prayer is not for temporary relief but for God's glory [9:18-19]. →The proper result of identifying with God and His people is to confess the sins

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of others as one who is also guilty in complete dependence on God's Grace and love.

- vi. God's response – Daniel placed himself in a spiritually dependent state in prayer before God... and God supernaturally answered [9:20-22]. Daniel deliberately placed himself in a situation and meditative state conducive to hearing God's response... like hitchhiking for the Spirit on the Supernatural highway.
- c. APPLICATIONS: Here is a great Biblical leader at the point of crisis... knowing what went wrong and where God is going, he sees the justice of God vindicated in His actions and then deliberately places himself in God's story. This is not a public prayer – this is a personal and private prayer. This is how you pray for redemption for those who should know better but are lost.
 - i. Realize your own failings and address your own failures. This needs to be done 1st and often... always begin by looking at yourself, examine your thoughts and motives in light of God's Word... look for revelation [insight] and illumination [application] as Daniel did.
 - ii. View others from beyond the surface... we all have junk in our life, there is no one who doesn't have a bunch of problems. Leaders need to be seen as real people struggling in a fallen world and dealing with the sin that is common to all humanity. We need to be vulnerable enough to be real, but not so real that we place an unnecessary emphasis on sin.
 - iii. Avoid self-serving prayers of the Pharisees – “thank you that I'm not like them...”[Luke 18:11] this is missing the mark... big time! Too much ministry tends to place the leader on the pedestal rather than God. Check your motives and listen to your words – just because you say the right things, doesn't mean you're truly honoring God in spiritual dependence.
 - iv. Daniel heard from God in a Supernatural fashion by doing the things necessary to remain receptive to God. God doesn't always respond in such a wonderful manner, but unless we are in the state of receptivity and are open to God's Spirit connecting with us, we will likely never hear Him. It is questionable that some claim to hear from God all the time... God doesn't always show up in a spectacular manner... this may happen 1-2% of the time in our walk with God. However the Spirit indwelling is clearly open to lead and guide us on a more regular basis – say 15-20% of the time. The balance being left for us to decide based on the transformation God has already worked in us through our mind and heart and our determination to follow Him.

3. PRAYER TEMPLATE #2 Col. 1:9-14

- a. OBSERVATIONS: Another demonstration of how to pray as spiritual leaders for a specific group that is both personally known and engaged with a leader.
- b. CONCEPTS:
 - i. This prayer is understood from point of understanding that Paul was unceasing in his prayers and commitment to this church. Paul prayed:
 - 1. For a specific action vs9 – for Knowledge, spiritual wisdom & understanding.

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2. For a specific purpose vs10 – that they would walk in a worthy manner in the knowledge of God’s will.
3. For a specific result vs10-12 – that they would bear fruit, be strengthened in power and joy, and evidenced in thanksgiving.
4. With a specific frame of reference vs13-14 – remembering what God has already done for us... having rescued us from darkness, transferred us to the Kingdom of Light where we have redemption and forgiveness.
5. This is a proactive prayer for a church community doing well – Paul is not reacting to their specific problems, but rather rejoicing and urging them onward in their collective growth and maturity.

c. APPLICATIONS:

- i. Pray for spiritual maturity. You need to have a vision of what it looks like to properly apply it to another life.
- ii. To be bold enough to properly assess people in your ministry – to understand where they are spiritually and what they can reasonably do.
- iii. What does God desire to do in another’s life? What would it take to help move them to the next level? This requires the leader to know the person intimately and understand what maturity and spiritual growth looks like. The goal is not the same for each person – the challenge is to have a picture of what maturity is and allow God to shape each person into what God has for them personally.
- iv. Leaders pray for ministry and people from a different perspective. Your walk with God has to be such that people see in you what you don’t see in yourself, and then you dream with them what God could be in them and through them. This is a mystery that is born in and through the Spirit.
- v. Pray this for yourself as well as for others.

4. PRAYER TEMPLATE #3 Eph. 3:14-21

a. OBSERVATIONS:

- i. The preceding verses speak of Paul’s troubles which he gladly accepts on their behalf. The suffering servant is the New Testament model for leadership that Jesus initiated with which Paul accepts gladly.
- ii. The preceding verses speak to conflict emerging throughout the church in the region, to which Paul stresses the primacy of unity in faith as presented in the gospel Paul has preached.
- iii. Paul initiates his prayer of intercession in the context of the unity in the Kingdom of God – both in Heaven and on earth. His specific focus in his prayer is to strengthen their faith through God’s Spirit alive and acting in human hearts. Paul’s emphasis is focused on the innerman, not the outerman.
- iv. The expected result of his intercession is the liberation of the riches we experience in God’s Glory – this is power available now in His Spirit.
- v. The end result is not merely in the here and now – but rather it includes the future generations until eternity comes.

b. CONCEPTS:

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- i. When you go to prayer before God... order Big! Anticipate God that will act. Anticipate great things in His people. Have confidence that God can do this. God is praying in faith for a future that hasn't yet arrived, but one he can catch a glimpse of.
 - ii. The proper focus is on core issues in prayer. Paul has the mind of Christ and His heart as well... he is seeing in others what they cannot see in themselves. This is encouragement. He is praying for others to personally experience the fullness of Grace and Truth.
 - iii. When you pray, you should always pray in confidence in the light of the unseen activity of the Spirit – this is done in faith. Most of what God does you won't see... you may never see. However, the reality is in the heart, which when ignited by the Spirit will change over time.
 - iv. Pray in light of what you know to be true. God gives us a hope and a vision of where we are now in the greater hope of what will come. Pray for the realized present and the revelation of a hoped for future.
 - v. Pray beyond what you know that can do – that which only God can do. This is praying big – it is getting caught up in what the Spirit is doing and hopes to accomplish in His people.
- c. APPLICATIONS:
- i. Look beyond the obvious – pay attention to the subtleties. Encourage others to go there as well... vision is like a cold, you can only catch it from someone who has it. Small visions may be safer things that we know we can deliver. The point is to catch up with God and encourage what only He can deliver. Dream big.
 - ii. Note that you are deliberately partnering with God. We are warned in our earthly partnerships not to be unequally yoked... and this is good advice. However, we must realize that when we partner with God, He is the One who is unequally yoked. We pray out of our dependence upon Him.
 - iii. Cultivate a passion for God and a love for others – a sincere concern and hope will shape how you do ministry for others. All of Jesus' ministry hinges on two components:
 - 1. The Great Commandment – love the Lord your God with all your strength, all your heart, and all your mind... and love others as you love yourself.
 - 2. The Great Commission – go into all the world preaching the Gospel and teaching them to be obedient... this is evangelism and discipleship – the two necessarily go together.