

UPGRADING YOUR PRAYER LIFE

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CORRECT THEOLOGY OF PRAYER

It's been said that, "Good theology (godly truth) leads to good doxology (godly praise)." In other words, correct understanding of God leads to praise of God. This truth applies to prayer. **It's through correct theology of prayer that we grow in prayer life.**

It may seem impractical to pray. Some questions that might demotivate us from praying include, "Why pray when God knows everything?" And "If God is omniscient, why does He need reminders about what we need and what we want?"

To answer these questions, let's proceed by first addressing these **two foundational questions on prayer as this would provide clarity to why we need to pray:**

- **Who is God?**
- **What is the purpose of praying to God?**



Ann Spangler helps to answer these questions in *Praying the Names of God*:

Who is God?

- Our Creator God & Heavenly Father
- Our Provider - *Yahweh Yireh* (Jehovah Jireh, The LORD who Provides)
- *Yahweh* (yah-WEH) occurs 6,800+ times in Old Testament

The English word "provision" is two Latin words "to see beforehand."

Praying to *Yahweh Yireh* (Jehovah Jireh) is engaging with God who "sees" a situation beforehand and who is able to "provide" for our needs.

WHAT IS THE PURPOSE OF PRAYING TO GOD?

The following quote by an Unknown Christian from the book, *The Kneeling Christian*, simply defines prayer and provides an explanation to why God wants us to pray:

“Prayer is simply 'the turning of the soul to God.'”

In everything we do in our spiritual disciplines, it is to turn our soul (all of our faculties) to God. To put it plainly, **it is to relate properly with God—to place Him as God and to place ourselves as His creation, to claim Him as our Heavenly Father and to locate ourselves as His beloved child.**

Unless we have this **relational understanding of prayer**, prayer might become a religious activity without engagement of the heart. As love is moving towards someone, so is prayer. It is moving towards God who is always moving towards us.

Richard Foster has authored two helpful books on prayer--one titled *Celebration of Discipline* and another titled *Prayer*. One of the nuggets of wisdom on prayer is the following quote by Foster:

“

To pray is to change. Prayer is the central avenue God uses to transform us. If we are unwilling to change, we will abandon prayer as a noticeable characteristic of our lives. The more we pray, the more we come to the heartbeat of God. Prayer starts the communication process between ourselves and God. All the options of life fall before us. At that point we will either forsake our prayer life and cease to grow, or we will pursue our prayer life and let Him change us. **If prayer is to transform us in the character of God, practical things such as carving out time and changing priorities become a must like in any relationship.** Imagine a couple who is dating but not making the time to have a meal together, converse, hang out to get to know each other, etc. A relationship like that is not going to go well. ~ *Celebration of Discipline*

PROPER POSTURE BEFORE GOD - “THE JESUS PRAYER”

Having the right attitude or correct posture towards someone whom we are engaging with progresses the relationship. This is very true in relating with God in our prayer. **We come to God in prayer as sinners who are in need of God’s mercy.** The following prayer, which is referred as “The Jesus Prayer,” prepares our hearts and reminds us of who God is and who we are as we approach Him:

“Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God, have mercy on me, a sinner.”

“The Jesus Prayer” is traditionally known to be derived from Luke 18:10-14:



Luke 18:10-14 (ESV)

“Two men went up into the temple to pray, one a Pharisee and the other a tax collector. The Pharisee, standing by himself, prayed thus: ‘God, I thank you that I am not like other men, extortioners, unjust, adulterers, or even like this tax collector. I fast twice a week; I give tithes of all that I get.’ But the tax collector, standing far off, would not even lift up his eyes to heaven, but beat his breast, saying, ‘**God, be merciful to me, a sinner!**’ I tell you, this man went down to his house justified, rather than the other. For everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, but the one who humbles himself will be exalted.”

When our hearts feel distant from God or overwhelmed by negative emotions, starting prayer with “Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God, have mercy on me, a sinner” **engages our heart with God and helps us remember our need for God.** Repeating this short prayer by focusing on different words in this prayer can open up our hearts to God to bring our fears, burdens, or doubts to God.

SCRIPTURE BASED PRAYER

The best way to not wander off in prayer and to deepen our prayer is to pray through Scripture.

D.A. Carson affirms this in his book *A Call To Spiritual Reformation: Priorities from Paul and His Prayers*:

“

One of the foundational steps in knowing God [...] is prayer— spiritual, persistent, biblically minded prayer. [...]

But you can do many things to stamp out daydreaming, to stifle reveries. **One of the most useful things is to vocalize your prayers.** [...] Another thing you can do is pray over the Scriptures.

E. M. Bounds, the author of 9 books on the subject of prayer, testifies to the same principle: **“The word of God is the food by which prayer is nourished and made strong.”**

Sometimes we face unnecessary disappointment with prayers that discourage us from praying because we are not praying Biblically.

George Muller, a spiritual hero and prayer warrior from the 1800s, took care of over 10,000 orphans and established over 100 schools in England during his lifespan. All the finances were funded by his faith in God through prayers.

Here’s a description of George Muller’s prayer life based on God’s Word:

“

With absolute confidence and childlike simplicity, he believed every Word that God had spoken. He eagerly returned to God’s Word several times each day as though he was in constant communication with heaven, receiving fresh letters of instruction and precious promises from his heavenly father. [Intro to *Autobiography of George Muller*]

HUMILITY & HELPLESSNESS

One reason why it may feel unnatural to pray is that we are naturally not humble. We are not born humble, and it is a posture that needs to be developed over the years as we submit to God. One gauge to assess humility is in how we respond to helplessness.

Let's do a short self-assessment: When you face a "helpless" situation, what is your gut reaction?

- React with strong negative emotions (i.e., get angry)
- Ignore it
- Avoid it
- Distract yourself
- Work hard to gain a semblance of control



One of the most feared or dreaded emotions is that sense of helplessness or that sense of losing control and there is nothing we can do to put things back into their original place.

Helplessness is a God-given opportunity to develop our relationship with God through humble prayers of acknowledging our helpless condition and our need for God. Our prayer life grows by struggling through prayers through a difficult situation or a challenge we face.

Ole Hallesby captures this in his book *Prayer*:

“

We are moved to pray every time the Spirit of God...emphasizes anew to us our helplessness, and we realize how impotent we are by nature to believe, to love, to hope, to serve, to sacrifice, to suffer, to read the Bible, to pray and to struggle against our sinful desires.
[...]

Helplessness united with faith produces prayer.

OUR NEED FOR GOD'S DELIVERANCE

Experiencing recurring sin or not being able to break out of an enslaving sin habit discourages us or breeds cynicism towards prayers. We can waste a lot of time in guilt and shame or in self-pity.

But this is what the Scripture promises:



1 Corinthians 10:13 (ESV)

No temptation has overtaken you that is not common to man. God is faithful, and he will not let you be tempted beyond your ability, but with the temptation he will also provide the way of escape, that you may be able to endure it.

Daily we are in a spiritual warfare. One of Satan's schemes is to make Christians ineffective. Satan delights to lie to us that our prayers don't matter and that we are wasting our time praying. We need to be aware of Satan's schemes (2 Cor. 2:11).

We also need to have a ready arsenal of defense in place so that when the temptation comes, we know what to do. **One arsenal is to have a written prayer ready and read that prayer audibly to God and receive the power from God in that moment to say no to a temptation we might be facing.**

Jesus modeled for us to pray in the Lord's prayer that we are to ask God to "deliver us from evil."



Matthew 6:13 (ESV)

And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil.

This is a promise that we can claim personally to experience God's deliverance. We need to learn to be sensitive to the ups and downs of our own emotional cycle, and be aware when we are most vulnerable to a temptation or relapse into a past sin issue, which we thought that we had overcome.

Let's take a moment to lift up a prayer to God, committing ourselves to grow in our prayer life and embracing God's vision to become His prayer warrior to advance His Kingdom.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

Short List of Prayer Book Recommendations:

Prayer: Experiencing Awe and Intimacy with God by Timothy Keller

A Diary of Private Prayer by John Baillie

Face to Face: Praying the Scriptures for Intimate Worship by Ken Boa

The Autobiography of George Muller

31 Days of Praise, 31 Days of Power, etc. by Ruth Myers

The Complete Works of E. M. Bounds on Prayer by E. M. Bounds

Celebration of Discipline by Richard Foster

The Battle Plan for Prayer by Stephen Kendrick & Alex Kendrick