**Prayer Workshop**

**Craig D. Lounsbrough, M.Div., LPC**

**Introduction**

A Collection of Thoughts to Shape Our Time

What Prayer Is and What It Isn’t

* Prayer as living out our faith in the real world, not as some ascetic exercise carried out in some mystical nether world.
* Prayer as a natural connection, not an academic pursuit.
* Prayer as the rawness of the soul connecting with the goodness of God.
* Prayer as discovering what we were built for, instead of questioning if we should have been built at all.
* Prayer as the activity which before all other activities, movements, people’s and nations will bend if we just bend our knees.
* Prayer not as a lifestyle that we learn, but as the life that we were born to live.
* Prayer not as a formula that we concoct, but an intimacy that we develop.
* Prayer not as the last resort, but as the first step that will never leave us facing a last resort.
* Prayer not as the thing that we squeeze into our day, but the thing that squeezes everything that would kill us out of our day.
* Prayer not as a discipline, but as a manifestation of our love for our God.
* Prayer as the choice to invade the impossible, not live out our lives hampered by the probable.

A Handful of Notable Quotes:

“I pray because I can't help myself. I pray because I'm helpless. I pray because the need flows out of me all the time, waking and sleeping. It doesn't change God. It changes me.”

* C.S. Lewis

“We must remember that the shortest distance between our problems and their solutions is the distance between our knees and the floor.”

* Charles Stanley

“I have so much to do that I shall spend the first three hours in prayer.”

* Martin Luther

“The prayer we know as “The Lord’s Prayer” came from the Lord Jesus in direct response to His disciples’ request: “Lord, teach us to pray.” It has always fascinated me that they never asked Jesus to teach them to preach. They never asked Him to teach them to give or to witness. Perhaps, like us, the disciples were often at a loss when it came to communicating with the Almighty.”

* David Jeremiah

“Long as they live should Christians pray, for only while they pray they live.”

* Dwight L. Moody

“Prayer is invading the impossible.”

* Jack Hayford

“"Is prayer your steering wheel or your spare tire?"

* Corrie ten Boom

“Praying without *ceasing*…”

*adialeíptōs* (an adverb: a word or expression that modifies a verb, adjective, another adverb, determiner, clause, preposition or sentence) – properly, nothing left between, i.e. without any *unnecessary interval* (time-gap).

* Apostle Paul

“Father, if you are willing, take this cup from me; yet not my will, but yours be done.”

* Jesus Christ

**A Collection of My Quotes to Shape Your Understanding of How Craig Views Prayer and the Focus of Our Time:**

“Prayer penetrates the underside of heaven and sends the full force of an invisible realm hurdling against the adversaries that are too naïve to understand what’s about to descend upon them.”

“I am convinced beyond words to convey that prayer is infinitely more than the mindless ranting of some poor, delusional soul talking to some imaginary friend in some imaginary place. Oh, to the contrary. Prayer is the manifest pleading of a soul worn raw that, by the simple act of prayer, unleashes untold forces that we can’t imagine that surge in a descent so massive and so inconceivably powerful that the ground of everything before them shakes. And in this descent lives are changed beyond recognition, nations are transformed beyond comprehension, and history is brought to its knees in the face of a God who says “be healed.” That, my friend, is nothing of a delusional soul or imaginary friend or any other such nonsense.”

“How do I tell you what prayer is? It is everything that I need every time I kneel in the practice of it. It shakes the infinite alive and sets its armies afoot in defense of me. It will never run aground or find itself drowning in the waters of the adversity that I bring to it. Nothing it faces is insurmountable, for to think that such an adversary exists is to run a fool’s errand. It will shield me in its advance, it will beckon me to anticipate the miracles that it is about to wield, and in the midst of it all it calms me as it whispers, “Be still and know that I am God.” And because of these reasons and a million more, I find prayer the single greatest place that I could ever imagine being.”

“I don’t fight battles by penning words or crafting syntax designed to bring people to tears by liberating their hearts or calling out their souls. Nor do I fight them by sitting with untold thousands and granting them counsel in the darkness of their darkest hours. No. Rather, I fight them prone on my knees in morning’s darkness before the sun has roused a wounded world awake to feel its pain yet again. I fight them throughout the day as I “pray without ceasing” because troubles befall us without ceasing. I fight them by praying for the impossible in lives devastated beyond redemption, for rogue nations that spread destruction as though destroying life was the answer to life, for the weak who stand teetering precariously on some emotional or relational or financial abyss, and for an impossible number of situations that everyone else has deemed as impossible. I fight in prayer. And despite the massive weaponry available to mankind, I am utterly convinced that a single man on his knees in humble petition before God exceeds the armament of all the world’s nations combined. This is what I believe. And therefore, this is how I fight.”

“Prayer is where I trade the rhetoric of men the for the promises of God. It is where I petition perfection instead of count on those who somehow survived an election. It is to accept the incomprehensible invitation of God to have this weak voice of mine thunder down the halls of heaven and roll up to the throne of the God of all eternity so that as small as I am, I might have an audience with this “King of kings.” It is where my fatigue becomes a stage upon which God can unveil His strength in stunning fashion, and where my fear is obliterated by His courage. Prayer is where I rise above this tangled world and find myself enveloped by a world that I visit today but will live in tomorrow. Prayer is utterly indispensable to this cringing existence, for unless I rise above it I will be consumed by the darkness of it. Prayer is this and does this and will always be this.”

**The Impact and Benefit of Prayer on Our Everyday Lives**

**Getting Real**

**Psychological Benefits of Prayer**

**Julia Hogan, LCPC**

**Overall Benefits of Prayer**

“According to the [University of Maryland Medical Center](http://www.umm.edu/health/medical/altmed/treatment/spirituality), individuals who reported having strong religious beliefs were found to report lower levels of anxiety and depression, have lower blood pressure, have a better immune system, and heal faster from surgery.”

**Prayer Increases Self Control**

“When you pray the Our Father and say, ‘Lead us not into temptation,’ you are identifying just one of the psychological benefits of prayer. It turns out that research has found that prayer can help increase your self-control. [Scientific American](https://www.scientificamerican.com/article/scientists-find-one-source-of-prayers-power/) cited a study where participants were asked to pray for five minutes before being asked to suppress an emotion and concentrate on a task (not an easy task by any means). Those who prayed were better able to suppress their emotions and concentrate on the task at hand than those who did not pray before.”

**Prayer Regulates Emotions**

“Prayer can also help you better regulate your emotions, especially negative emotions. For example, [one study](http://www.apa.org/monitor/2011/06/prayer.aspx) found that saying a prayer when angry can help to reduce your feelings of anger. Why does this help you better regulate your emotions? The researchers theorize that prayer can help you reflect on your experiences and change how you think and feel about an event. Often when you’re stressed, you’re more likely to be irritable or quick to react negatively to situations. Being stressed primes you to be more likely to react negatively. So the next time someone says something unkind to you, pause, take a deep breath, and say a sincere prayer instead. Taking a God-centered and prayerful approach to the situation will most likely help you react in a more positive and charitable way.”

**Prayer Reduces Anxiety and Depression**

“Researchers have also found that individuals who report having strong religious beliefs experience less of an anxious response and feel calmer, according to the [American Psychological Association](http://www.apa.org/monitor/2010/12/believe.aspx). Further, research has found that people with strong religious beliefs are less prone to anxiety and depression. While this doesn’t mean that having a strong prayer life will prevent anxiety and depression, it does mean that it can serve as a protective factor.”

**Prayer Promotes a Calm Mind**

“The American Psychological Association [cites research](http://www.apa.org/monitor/2010/12/believe.aspx) that shows that contemplative spiritual practices increase your ability to pay attention and quiet the areas of the brain that focus on the self. This could mean that prayer can help you better focus on calming yourself when anxious. This is a great way to incorporate your faith into research-proven stress-management techniques.”

**Reducing Financial Strain**

A study of more than 800 older people found that faith and attendance at religious services offset the emotional toll of financial strain. Researchers at the University of Michigan found that prayer increases gratitude which, in turn, reduces the negative impact of financial difficulties. Source: The International Journal for the Psychology of Religion.

**Recovering From the Loss of a Loved One**

Researchers at the University of Michigan found that among 1,723 people age 60 and older, those who believed in a good afterlife were less likely to develop high blood pressure after the death of a loved one. Thus, they were in better health. Source: Journals of Gerontology.

**Enhancing Satisfaction**

Helping others through one’s religious activities increases satisfaction and improves one’s outlook on life, according to a study of more than 2,000 church members located in various parts of the United States. Giving help brought about greater benefits than receiving help. Source: Psychosomatic Medicine.

**Improving Mood and Outlook**

Numerous studies have found a strong connection between deeply held religious beliefs and less likelihood and incidence of depression. For example, a study of more than 600 middle-age and older adults, by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, examined how both men and women experienced the influence of religious beliefs that protected them against symptoms of depression. Researchers found that these were some of the protective experiences: “I feel God’s presence,” and “I feel comfort in my religion or spirituality.” Benefits were comparable for both men and women.  Source: Journal of Nervous and Mental Disease.

**Calming Anger**

Anger not only detracts from human relationships but is also associated with increased health risks, because it puts our stress reaction into overdrive, can raise blood pressure, and if frequent or chronic, can damage the brain. Studies at Ohio State University have found that praying for the well-being of the person with whom one is angry, or even praying for someone else, calms anger and fosters positive emotions and attitudes, such as compassion, that improve overall health. Source: Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin.

**Alleviating Panic Disorder**

Canadian researchers at the University of Saskatchewan looked at the impact of religion on 56 people suffering from panic disorder, characterized by repeated attacks of intense fear that something bad will occur when not expected. They found that those to whom religion was most important felt less stressed and experienced fewer symptoms of panic attacks. Source: Depression and Anxiety.

**Marital/Relational Benefits of Prayer**

**Mark Merrill**

**Praying Together Humbles You**

Praying about your concerns and struggles keeps you humble as you share with God and your spouse what things worry you and tempt you, or what you need to figure out. When you pray to God, you are not only talking and listening to Him but also recognizing that He knows all things and controls all things.

**Praying Teaches You to be Other-Focused**

Spending time talking and praying together about issues and concerns helps you see life and the troubles of your spouse in a better light. Praying helps you focus on your spouse and others, too.

**Praying Together Encourages Vulnerability and Grace**

Prayers of confession or for asking God for help against a temptation allows you to be vulnerable with each other, and to show forgiveness and grace towards each other. It may feel counter-intuitive, but that vulnerability can also strengthen the love and affection you feel for one another.

**Praying Together Increases Trust and Intimacy with Your Spouse**

Intimacy is built on trust, and trust is built on how we respond to being vulnerable with each other. Praying together helps you show and receive trust that strengthens the bonds of intimacy in your relationship.

**Praying Together Strengthens the Bond of the Marriage/Relationship**

Prayer is also a way to seek God’s wisdom together. As you pray and come to agreements on matters, that discipline then builds unity and strength in the marriage. [And prayer is also where you can fight for your marriage together](http://www.markmerrill.com/why-you-should-fight-your-most-important-battle-on-your-knees) when the difficult days come.

**Praying Together Helps Your Spouse Know Your Struggles and Needs Better**

Praying together about your struggles and worries also helps you both know how to better pray for each other throughout the week because you get to know each other better. And prayer provides insight on how to help and love each other better, too.

**Prayer Changes People**

I really like the quote about prayer from an actor playing C.S. Lewis in the movie Shadowlands: “I pray because I can’t help myself. I pray because I’m helpless. I pray because the need flows out of me all the time, waking and sleeping. It doesn’t change God, it changes me.”

**Praying Together Reminds You that God is the Sole Source of Life, Truth, Love, and Hope**

When you pray together, you are focusing your minds, hearts, and marriage on God. You are making your marriage God-centered. You are sharing with Him your deepest needs and desires, hopes and dreams…together.

**Health Benefits of Prayer**

**The Mind Health Report**

**Living a Longer Life**

Numerous studies have found that people who are religious are likely to live a longer life. For example, an analysis of 42 studies with a total of more than 125,000 people found that in addition to private prayer, attending religious services, and being involved in other church activities predicted a longer and healthier lifespan.

**Coping Better with Breast Cancer**

Praying in an online support group helped breast cancer patients experience less stress, have lower levels of negative emotions, and experience greater well-being, according to a study of 97 patients at the University of Wisconsin-Madison Center of Excellence in Cancer Communications Research. In addition, belief in an afterlife reduced fear of death. Source: PsychoOncology.

**Reducing Genetic Risk for Depression**

Adults with the highest risk of depression, due to a family history of the condition, are one-tenth as likely to suffer from depression if religion is important in their lives and they frequently attend religious services, according to a study at Columbia University. Those who are religious and at lower risk of depression are at least one-fourth as likely to develop depression as their non-religious peers. Numerous other studies show that prayer and other religious practices reduce or alleviate depression, with or without genetic risk. Source: The American Journal of Psychiatry.

**Improving Recovery from Heart Surgery**

People who pray with a positive, hopeful attitude as an ongoing part of their lives prior to undergoing heart surgery, experience less depression and anxiety afterwards, both in the short and long term, according to studies at the University of Washington Health Sciences and the University of Pittsburgh. However, those who pray only after surgery or take a negative view do not experience the same benefits. Another study, at the University of Michigan, tracked 151 patients for a year and found that private prayer significantly improved mood and overall state of being. Source: The Gerontologist.

**Improving Outlook Among Prostate Cancer Patients**

A study of 367 prostate cancer patients at Memorial Sloan-Kettering Cancer Center in New York found that those whose religion gave them a sense of meaning and peace were less likely to experience depression and coped more effectively with their condition. This impact of religious beliefs and practice was not changed by age, marital status, or the stage of disease. Source: Annals of Behavioral Medicine.

**Enhancing Recovery from Brain Injury** Researchers at Wayne State University, in Detroit, Mich., looked at the impact of religion on 88 people who had suffered traumatic brain injury, examining their function up to 20 years after the injury. Those who felt the strongest connection to a higher power were least distressed, most satisfied with their lives, and experienced better recovery. Source: Rehabilitation Psychology.

**Reducing Impact of Chronic Pain**

Researchers in Belgium studied 202 people with chronic pain and found that those who prayed with a positive attitude were less affected by pain in their daily lives. Although on a physical level, the degree of pain did not appear to change, patients who prayed were better able to manage it and had a more positive outlook on life. Source: Journal of Behavioral Medicine.

**Reducing Risk for Diabetes**

Complications In a group of 556 people with diabetes, researchers at the Medical University of South Carolina found that those who attended religious services, at least occasionally, were less likely to have chronic internal inflammation (measured as C-reactive protein). Inflammation indicates increased risk for heart disease and complications of diabetes. Source: Diabetes Care.

**Lowering Men’s Risk for Fatal Heart Disease**

Researchers at the Harvard School of Public Health tracked the health of more than 28,000 men between the ages of 42 and 77 for 10 years. Those who lacked close friends or a social network and did not attend religious services had significantly increased risk of death from heart disease. Source: American Journal of Epidemiology.

**Lowering Blood Pressure**

A number of studies have shown a correlation between religious beliefs and practice and lower blood pressure. For example, researchers at Duke University tracked nearly 4,000 people age 65 and older and found 40 percent less risk of elevated blood pressure among those who prayed or studied the Bible daily and attended religious services at least once a week. Another study of nearly 15,000 American adults showed that regular attendance at religious services was associated with lower blood pressure. Source: International Journal of Psychiatry in Medicine.

**Shortening Hospital Stays for Heart Surgery**

People with stronger religious beliefs who had heart surgery had fewer complications and, as a result, shorter hospital stays, according to a study of 142 patients by The State University of New Jersey. Prior to their surgery, religious patients were more optimistic and less angry and hostile than those who did not have a strong faith. How often patients prayed or attended church services did not influence complications after surgery.  Source: Health Psychology.

**Reducing the Odds of Smoking**

Multiple studies have shown that religious people of all ages are less likely to smoke. One study also looked at the influence of religion on a genetic predisposition to smoke among 315 sets of twins and more than 1,000 pairs of other siblings. Even where there is a genetic risk to take up the habit, researchers at the University of Colorado found that three aspects of religion — personal beliefs, participation in organized religious activities, and being affiliated with a congregation — reduced the influence of genes and lowered the odds of a person starting to smoke. Source: Nicotine & Tobacco Research.

**Reducing Cancer Treatment Side Effects**

In Germany, researchers explored the effect of religious beliefs on side effects of radiation therapy among 105 patients with head and neck cancer. Based on questionnaires about patients’ religious convictions, they classified them as “believers” and “non-believers.” The study found thatas a rule, “believers” felt better before, during, and after the treatment, experiencing fewer adverse effects from the disease and the radiation. Source: Strahlentherapie and Onkologie.

**Slowing Progression of Alzheimer’s Disease**

In a Canadian treatment center, researchers evaluated the effect of religion among 70 people with Alzheimer’s disease. They found that those who placed a high importance on their religious beliefs and private prayer experienced a significantly slower progression of the disease. The researchers were not able to identify how this worked but observed that private religious practice improved mental function to a marked degree. Attending religious services did not seem to slow down progression of the disease. Source: Neurology.

**Improving Immune Function**

People who regularly attend religious services more than once per week have an immune system that functions more effectively, boosting their resistance to viruses and other infections and protecting against damage to cells, according to a study at the University of Iowa. Researchers looked at more than 500 people. They concluded that this was one of the mechanisms that contribute to a longer life among religious people. Source: Health Psychology.

**Prayer – The Frequency and Priority**

**The Average American Day**

**United States Bureau of Labor and Statistics**

“Various surveys have been conducted on the matter of how time is used, and the most comprehensive one is the yearly Bureau of Labor Statistics data, on the [amount of time Americans spend on various activities](https://www.bls.gov/tus/):

* Sleeping: 8 hours 48 minutes
* Personal care activities: 47 minutes
* Eating and drinking: 1 hour 11 minutes
* Housework: 33 minutes
* Food preparation and cleaning up afterwards: 36 minutes
* Caring for the lawn and garden: 11 minutes
* Managing the household: 8 minutes
* Other Household activities: 21 minutes
* Buying consumer goods:21 minutes
* Time spent on care services: 5 minutes
* Other goods and services: 17 minutes
* Childcare: 24 minutes
* Helping other household members: 7 minutes
* Helping and caring for non-household members: 11 minutes
* Working: 3 hours and 14 minutes
* Work-related activities: 22 minutes
* Educational activities: 29 minutes
* Socialization and communication: 39 minutes
* Watching television: 2 hours 46 minutes
* Sports, exercising and recreation: 17 minutes
* Other leisure and sport activities: 1 hour and 32 minutes
* Telephone calls, emails and regular mail: 9 minutes
* Other activities: 32 minutes”
* ***Religious/Spiritual Activities – 9 Minutes***
  + ***Preaching Today***
  + [***https://www.preachingtoday.com***](https://www.preachingtoday.com)
* ***Prayer – Average Christian – 1 Minute/Pastors – 5 Minutes***
  + ***Barna Research Group***
  + ***https://www.barna.com***

**The Three Levels of Prayer**

**“The Joshua Code”**

**Reverend O.S. Hawkins**

**The Level of Presenting a Petition – Matthew 7:7**

“Ask, and it will be given to you”

“In the language of the New Testament, the verbs *ask, seek,* and *find* are in their present active imperative form. This simply means that the subject is performing the action, the action is ongoing, and it is a command, not an option. On this first level of prayer, intercessors ask and have the promise of God that they will ‘receive.’ When you know God’s will in a matter, you can ask and have the confidence that you will receive.”

**The Level of Pressing a Petition – Matthew 7:7**

“Seek and you will find”

“This is a higher level of prayer than that of simply presenting your petition before God. This is the prayer we pray when we do not know the will of God in a matter, and we seek until we find it. We are to keep on seeking with an intensity that goes far beyond the level of simply presenting our petitions.”

**The Level of Persisting with a Petition – Matthew 7:7**

“Knock and it will be opened to you”

“When we reach this higher level of prayer, it becomes readily apparent who is really serious and who is not. To keep on knocking requires tremendous perseverance (Luke 11:5-18). We pray on this higher level of prayer when we know the will of God in a matter, yet the door remains closed. We keep on knocking. We never give up because we hold to God’s promise: ‘It *will* be opened to you.’”

**The Intentional Nature of Prayer – Matthew 7:7**

*Ask, seek,* and *find* are in their present active imperative form. This means:

* the subject is performing the action
* the action is ongoing
* it is a command, not an option.

**The Promise – Matthew 7:7**

* … It will be given
* … You will find
* … It will be opened

**Living Our Lives in a Coma**

How aware are we of both ourselves and the world that we live in? Do we really stop long enough to analyze what’s happening within us and around us? Is there a sense where we live our lives in a coma? Are we just not present?

The world is too difficult. The challenges are too overwhelming. Hope is a distant idea rather than an intimate reality. Our lives are too busy or they’re not, so we fill them with meaningless tasks to create busyness. However it happens, how often are we in a coma? And because we are, we don’t pray as astutely informed people lifting up our concerns with precision, relevance, and focus?

How/where do we live our lives in a coma?:

* Our spiritual lives?
* Our marriages?
* Our families?
* Our sense of self?
* Our career aspirations?
* Our dreams?
* Our friendships?
* Our sense of calling and purpose?
* Our ethics?
* Our morals?
* Our values?
* Our concern for our fellowman?
* Our passion to make a difference?
* Our concern for ourselves?
* Our jobs?
* Our relationship with our kids?
* Our finances?
* Our responsibility to those who live around us?
* Our passion for life?
* Our passion for anything?

Where are the places where we’re in a coma?

Have we been in a coma for so long that we didn’t even realize that we were in a coma?

Where are the places where we need to wake-up, and wake-up now?

Where are the places where we need to shake ourselves awake?

*Because these are the places where prayer is probably needed the most.*

*These are the places where prayer needs to begin.*

*Like Ann, these are the places where we look at ourselves, pull people close to us around us, and say, “Please pray for me.”*

**Application:**

1. **Take a moment and pray for an awakening in these areas of your life.**
2. **Choose three people to pray for:**

* A Church Staff Member
* A Family Member
* Someone You Don’t Know

**Looking at Examples of Prayer in the New Testament**

Gilbert W. Stafford

“Theology for Disciples”

Warner Press

**Prayer as An Overflowing Fountain**

Prayer is an overflowing fountain of praise, adoration, and thanksgiving to God. This kind of prayer erupts without hesitation from the soul. One does not have to make oneself do it, for it comes as naturally as breathing.

***Example:*** (Luke 1:29–55) Mary, the mother of Jesus, offered this during her visit with Elizabeth. Mary offers a prayer of jubilation – the [Magnificat](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Magnificat), about the mighty deeds of God.

**Prayer as Disciplined Communion**

Prayer is disciplined communion with God. It was commonplace in Jesus' day for rabbis and other religious leaders to teach their followers how to organize their prayers and to give instructions about their content. These so-called "Index Prayers," served as outlines for what were considered to be well-rounded prayers.

***Example:*** (Matt. 6:9–13 and Luke 11:2–4) Jesus gives his disciples the Lord's Prayer.

**Prayer as The Flow of Divine Energy**

Prayer is the flow of divine energy to the needs of others. We see this mainly in the life of Jesus who was able to speak words of healing to the sick and distressed, then bringing to them strength and wholeness. We can also be prayer channels through which the divine energy flows to the needs of others.

***Example:*** (Acts 9) Peter goes to the town of Joppa where a disciple named Tabitha – her Aramaic name, Dorcas being her Greek name – had died. When he arrived on the scene, he put all of the mourners out of the room whereupon he "knelt down and prayed. He turned to her and said, '[Tabitha](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Aramaic_of_Jesus#Tabitha_.28.CE.A4.CE.B1.CE.B2.CE.B5.CE.B9.CE.B8.CE.B1.29), get up.' Then she opened her eyes, and seeing Peter, she sat up. He gave her his hand and helped her up. Then calling the saints and widows, he showed her to be alive." Peter at prayer became a channel through which divine life flowed into the body of Tabitha, raising her from death.

**Prayer as The Struggle Of The Soul**

Prayer is the struggle of the soul in relation to God. In fact, sometimes the struggle is so great that we cannot sort it out well enough even to put the struggle into words. Prayer at those times is simply the wordless anguish of the soul in the presence of God, as in [Romans](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Epistle_to_the_Romans) 8:26–27: Likewise the Spirit helps us in our weakness; for we do not know how to pray as we ought, but that very Spirit intercedes with [sighs](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sigh) too deep for words. And God, who searches the heart, knows what is the mind of the Spirit, because the Spirit intercedes for the saints according to the will of God.

***Example:*** (Matt. 26:36–46) Jesus was deeply grieved because He knew that He was going to be crucified. He was struggling with it.

**Prayer as The Mind Seeking God's Mind**

Prayer is the human mind seeking the mind of God. Even though God will give heavenly wisdom to us "generously and ungrudgingly," in order to have it, we must "ask in faith."

***Example:*** (James 1:5–8) "If any of you is lacking in wisdom, ask God, who gives to all generously and ungrudgingly, and it will be given you. But ask in faith, never doubting, for the one who doubts is like a wave of the sea, driven and tossed by the wind; for the doubter, being double-minded and unstable in every way, must not expect to receive anything from the Lord."

**Prayer as Intercession**

Prayer is intercession to God on behalf of others. In a general sense, to intercede is to put ourselves in the place of others and to plead their case before one who can help them. In intercessory prayer, therefore, appeal is made to God who can make a difference for the good.

***Example:*** (James 5:13–16) The sick were instructed to call for the elders of the church to anoint them with oil in the name of the Lord and to pray the prayer of faith on their behalf.

**Prayer as Petition To God**

Prayer is petition to God for our own needs. Petitionary prayer which is truly Christian asks God for that which we are convinced is in accordance with the divine will. It is generous in spirit in that personal needs are prayed about in conjunction with concern for the well-being of others.

***Example:*** (Matt. 7:11) Jesus says, "If you then, who are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father in heaven give good things to those who ask him."

***Example:*** (John 14:13–14) Jesus says, "I will do whatever you ask in my name, so that the Father may be glorified in the Son. If in my name you ask me for anything, I will do it."

**Prayer as Watchful Communion with The Lord**

Prayer is watchful communion with the Lord, which communion keeps us from yielding to temptation. To watch and pray is work; we need to do more than simply have noble spiritual intentions about not yielding to temptation. To be sure, Peter, on the night of Jesus' arrest, expressed noble intentions about not deserting him, but the problem was that neither he nor the others were watching and praying. They were too weary to be spiritually vigilant.

***Example:*** (1 Thess. 5:16–24) "Rejoice always, pray without ceasing give thanks in all circumstances; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you. Do not quench the Spirit. Do not despise the words of prophets, but test everything; hold fast to what is good; abstain from every form of evil. May the God of peace himself sanctify you entirely; and may your spirit and soul and body be kept sound and blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. The one who calls you is faithful, and he will do this."

**Observations About Jesus and Prayer**

The Master

* ***Jesus prayed for others****.* In Matthew 19:13-14, He placed His hands on the little children and prayed for them. He also prayed in John 17:9, “I pray for them.” His example of prayer underscores the need for intercessory prayer.
* ***Jesus prayed with others.*** “Jesus took Peter, John and James with Him and went up onto a mountain to pray” (Luke 9:28). Jesus knew the value of praying with others.
* ***Jesus prayed alone.*** “But Jesus often withdrew to lonely places and prayed” (Luke 5:16). As much as Jesus understood the value of praying with and for others, He also understood the need to pray alone.
* ***Jesus prayed regularly.*** “Jesus often withdrew to lonely places and prayed.” The word “often” indicates that Jesus prayed regularly. He prayed regularly and naturally. It was integrated into every aspect of His life.
* ***Jesus prayed in nature.*** What better place to commune with our Creator than among the wonders of nature? Luke 6:12 says, “One of those days Jesus went out to a mountainside to pray.” He could have gone to a synagogue to pray. But there were times when Jesus decided to pray in nature. God’s world is full of wonders to draw us closer to Him.
* ***Jesus prayed short and long prayers*.** The Lord’s Prayer, full of wisdom, is short and can be easily memorized. But Jesus also dedicated long periods of time to prayer. “Jesus spent the night praying to God” (Luke 6:12).
* ***Jesus taught persistence in prayer.*** “Then Jesus told His disciples a parable to show them that they should always pray and not give up” (Luke 18:1). The parable Jesus shared is not meant to depict a pestering disciple who finally bugs God enough that He chooses to respond, but about persistence in prayer and waiting on God and His timing.
* ***Jesus knew that not all His prayers would be answered as expected*.** This is a difficult prayer lesson to learn, but the fact of the matter is that not all our prayers are answered in ways we expect. Even Jesus knew this hard lesson as He cried out to God the Father from Gethsemane, “Yet not as I will, but as You will” (Matthew 26:36-44).

**Prayer – The Importance of Our Attitude**

Story of Sally, Camp Marengo and Prayer

* ***No One Is So Lost That They Can’t be Found***
* ***It’s Not That God Doesn’t Show Up, It’s That We Don’t Show Up***
* ***No Situation is Impossible***
* ***Of Course the Odds Are Against Us, But They’re Not Against God***
* ***Surrender, Surrender, Surrender***
* ***It Can Be Different…It Can!***
* ***The Choices of Others Do Not Need to Be Our Lot in Life***
* ***Prayer is Part of Cultivating Who God Designed Us To Be, and Eliminating What He Did Not***
* ***Prayer Never Stops at Just Changing Us***
* ***Finally, Are We Seeking Out the Places Where the Hurting Are Praying?***

**What Prayer is Not**

Agendas and Approaches That Undermine and Destroy a Vibrant Prayer Life

* ***The Cosmic Vending Machine.*** Viewing God as a resource that dispenses whatever we ask for. Faith is the currency that maximizes the vending machine dispensing the product that we are asking for. If the product is not dispensed we assume that the machine is broken, rather than understanding that the dispensing of the product may not be in our best interest. In this model we have taken prayer as this rote action rather than action that arises out of relationship.
* ***The Laundry List.*** Our needs, agendas, desires, wishes, hopes, dreams, etc.

are put into list form. The format for prayer becomes a repeated recitation of this list until items are checked off or other items are added. Prayer becomes a form of ‘one-stop-shopping’ that is designed to acquire what we want.

* ***A Spiritual Panic Attack.*** Prayer is related to a current crisis. We have come to prayer in response to an emergency or some life event that is catastrophic at some level. We are in crisis. Our lives are in jeopardy or there has been a painful turn of events that has collapsed our world in some form and sent us reeling. Once the event has passed, the urgency for prayer is reduced.
* ***Manipulation.*** We come to prayer with the intent of having our desires fulfilled rather than exploring through prayer what our desires should be. These prayers are agenda driven and are done to achieve our particular goals rather than join God In His goals.
* ***Bargaining.*** This type of prayer is where the individual attempts to strike a bargain with God. There are promises of some kind of improved behavior, or the abandonment of old behaviors, or assurances of a greater devotion to prayer, or a fuller commitment to family, or the giving of money or some other resource. The intent is to wrangle and deliver a sales pitch that will draw God into some sort of agreement.
* ***Biblical Coercion.*** This type of prayer takes the authority and principles outlined in scripture and twists them to suit the agenda of the individual. This is an effort to press God to service on our behalf based on the promises He has given us in scripture. In essence, we are backing God into a corner using His own words against Him when we have manipulated and skewed those words beyond their real purpose and intent.
* ***Unprayed Prayers.*** Prayers that we have not prayed. Those things that we have withheld from God because we don’t believe that He will answer, or we fear that the task might be too big for Him, or we feel that the issue is not all that important or we are not that important. These are things that we have withheld for any number of reasons that can diminish the whole of our prayer life.
* ***A Means to An End.*** As noted in the examples above, prayer is not a means to an end. It is an intimate, dynamic and perpetual relational encounter with God within which that relationship grows. It is a time with the Creator of the universe and the Savior of your soul design to enhance intimacy and connection to Him. It is walking with God in deep communion and growing fellowship. It is a means to intentionally build that relationship and grow both in union with God and as the individual that He created you to be.
* ***Testing of God.*** Many times our prayers are a test of God. Is He real? If He is, does He love me enough to follow-through? Does He care enough to give me what I ‘think’ I need? Will He take the time to listen to ‘little-old-me?’ Am I important enough for God to turn aside from all of His obligations and sit with me? Is this all truly real and can I stake my life on it?

**Obstacles to Prayer**

Many obstacles are things that we have not given sufficient attention to or presume as somehow normal or appropriate. They represent a less than attentive understanding as to how God has called us to live out our lives.

* ***Sin.*** An intentional living outside of the will of God that places us at odds with who God created us to be. Sin is described as “anything that separates us from God.” If we are engaging in such behaviors, we come to prayer separated from the God to Whom we are praying.
* ***Self-Centered Agendas.*** We tend to live out our lives based on our agendas and our perception of what is in our best interest. Therefore, we do not come to prayer seeking God’s direction, will, insights and perspective. Rather, we come with a prepared agenda where we wrangle with God in order to achieve these agendas or obtain the resources to achieve them.
* ***Distractions.*** Prayer becomes the thing that we squeeze into the many demands in our lives. It is something that sits somewhere on the rather extensive checklist that outlines our obligations and duties. We intend to give it space and time, but it often falls prey to the many other demands that press prayer off of our calendar.
* ***Our Perspective of Prayer.*** Often, we have developed an understanding of prayer as something that has value, but something that can be missed without extensive consequence to our lives. We don’t see it as interacting with the God of the universe as an integral part of growing in relationship with Him and profoundly living out our lives. It is more a prescribed duty that (if fulfilled) is optimal. But should time not permit, there is little lost.
* ***Shiny Object and Squirrels.*** There are many things that vie for our attention, and we give many of those things our attention. Most of those things are not imperative to life and living, although we grant them that status. It is often assumed that if something demands our attention it is because ignoring it will have dire consequences, when in fact it is likely that any consequences will be marginal to non-existent.
* ***Lack of Faith.*** We are lacking in faith. Therefore, we assume that if we are to progress in life and achieve whatever we need to achieve, we will be the one’s doing most of the work. Prayer becomes supplementary as we assume that if these things are to come to pass in our lives, it is our efforts, our wisdom, our strategies and our resources that will bring them to pass. Prayer helps, but it becomes secondary to our efforts.
* ***Unmet Expectations.***  We come to prayer with expectations regarding the outcome of our prayers or what we wish to obtain or feel. If those outcomes are not met in light of the greater outcomes that God has for us, we feel that prayer is ineffectual or irrelevant.
* ***A Jaded Heart.*** God has not answered our prayers in the way that we wanted, or in the time frame that we wanted, or maybe He didn’t answer them at all (which is an answer, but not the one that we hoped for). We have found God disappointing, demanding, a less than generous God, and one that crushes our desires despite how passionately we bring them to Him. Therefore, we either refuse to pray any longer, or we do so in such a limited fashion that there is no room to build that relationship with God (as we don’t trust or assume that we will have to largely fend for ourselves).
* ***The Lure of the World.***  Is our priority really the world around us? And is prayer some supplemental thing that we do out of guilt, or a sense of obligation, or to cover the holes that we might have left in our efforts to tidy up our lives, or to ensure that our efforts are pushed through to our satisfaction? Is prayer that safety net that we keep in place just in case the world fails us, or we fail ourselves? Is prayer that supplemental insurance policy that we hold onto ‘just in case?’

**Habits of Prayer**

**Obstacles That Hinder Effective Prayer**

**By John Kincaid**

**Peace in Believing Ministries**

The Bible lists sinful attitudes which hinder our prayers, such as trying to pray:  
  
When you *don’t know God* through Christ. John 14:6  
  
When you *haven’t repented*, and still cherish your sin. Psa.66:18-19; Prov.28:9; Isa.1:15  
  
For show, when you are *trying to impress* others.  
Matt.6:5  
  
*Repetitive, empty words* instead of heartfelt requests.  
Matt.6:7-8  
  
Without ever asking God, *neglecting to actually pray*.  
James 4:2  
  
With *impure motives*, selfish, driven by lust for pleasure.  
James 4:3  
  
While *mistreating*your spouse or loved ones. 1 Pet.3:7  
  
While *ignoring the poor*, the needs of the others.  
Prov.21:13  
  
While *refusing to forgive*; bitterness, holding a grudge.  
Mark 11:25-26  
  
*Without faith*, doubting, not trusting that God is able.  
James 1:6-8; Mark 11:24

**Habits of Prayer**

**Keys to Effective Prayer**

**By John Kincaid**

**Peace in Believing Ministries**

God is willing, able, and pleased to bless His children.  
Matt.7:11; Rom.8:32; 2 Cor.9:8  
  
We can overcome obstacles that hinder prayers by following God’s instructions. Pray…   
  
By *asking, seeking, knocking* persistently. Matt.7:7-8  
  
*With faith*.  
Believe God’s promises to provide for us. Mark 11:24  
  
*Privately*, in secret where only God can hear you. Matt.6:6  
  
*According to God’s will*;  
desire the things that God wants. 1 John 5:14  
  
*In Jesus’ name*. John 14:13-14  
  
In *agreement with other believers*, to avoid selfish prayers. Matt.18:19-20  
  
*While fasting*, to depend on God and avoid all distractions. Acts 14:23  
  
While *walking in obedience*, living to please Him.  
1 John 3:21-22  
  
While *abiding in Christ* and His Word, remain in Him. John 15:7  
  
While *delighting yourself in the Lord*, satisfied in Him only. Psa.37:4

**Habits of Prayer**

**Why Continue Praying?**

**By John Kincaid**

**Peace in Believing Ministries**

Persistent prayer doesn’t mean we try to twist God’s arm. It means we are deeply concerned, burdened, and cannot rest until we get God’s answer.  
  
Robert Law put it this way:  
“Prayer is not about getting our will done in heaven;  
it is getting God’s will done on earth.”  
  
Pray for God to give you endurance to keep on praying for His will to be done.  
   
Daniel (9:3-19) prayed a great prayer of intercession for God’s people.  
  
Daniel (9:2-3) realized God planned to keep Israel in  
captivity for 70 years, then release them.  
  
Then Daniel did a strange thing: he prayed that God  
would do what God planned to do.  
  
But if God intends to do (or wants us to have)  
something, why should we bother to pray?  
  
Daniel showed us a powerful principle of prayer;  
all believers should follow his example.

It’s a waste of time to pray for things that God has forbidden. It’s never right to pray for things that God has already said are wrong.  
  
But God commands us to pray for everything else.  
   
God knows the future; He knows the plans He has for us.  
Jer.29:11-13  
  
1 John 5:14-15 God hears and answers prayers according to His will.  
  
Yet God still expects us to pray over His plan, day by day.  
Why? For what purpose?  
   
Prayer is not about trying to persuade God to change His mind. God’s will is perfect.  
  
Why would we want God to change the perfect plan that He has in mind for us?  
  
Instead, we need to conform. Prayer is not about asking God to bend toward my desires.  
   
I ask God to reveal His will for me.  
I ask Him to help me obey, to adjust my life to His will.  
  
I challenge you: ask God to reveal His will for you.  
Follow Him; bend your desires toward His.  
  
When we pray, and God answers “Yes”,  
it isn’t God who changes – it’s us.

**What Prayer Is**

**Relationship**

Psychiatrist Gerald May stated:

“After twenty years of listening to the yearnings of people’s hearts, I am convinced that human beings have an inborn desire for God. Whether we are consciously religious or not, this desire is our deepest longing and most precious treasure.”

R. S. Thomas put it a bit differently:

“Prayers like gravel flung at sky’s window, hoping to attract the loved one’s attention…”

The Apostle Paul wrote:

“For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weakness, but we have one who has been tempted in every way, just as we are — yet was without sin. Let us then approach the throne of grace with confidence, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help us in our time of need” (Hebrews 4:15-16).

The two main words used for prayer in the Bible are translated “petition” or “supplication.” However, they have a far greater depth in their original language.

* ***Hebrew “palal”*** – bow down/worship; discern (listen); speak to authority.
* ***Greek “proseuchomai”*** – turn toward/draw near/meet with (which implies a face-to-face encounter); desire/express (emotions are involved).

Based on these definitions, this kind of prayer incorporates these facets:

* Respect and adoration.
* A giving of oneself over to God.
* To listen (which implies hearing of the voice of God as a priority over focusing on our agendas).
* Having confidence that we are heard.
* A partnership that involves an intimate engagement of Creator and created instead of some sort of sterile transaction.
* A longing for connection which supersedes any agenda.
* An exposure of and expression of the deepest, more vulnerable emotions.
* An intimacy that will always result in our good even if the answer to prayer doesn’t appear good.

**The Lord’s Prayer**

The Master’s Model

***1. "Our Father"*** - Our focus in prayer is on ‘our’ Father. Prayer is an intentional intimacy with the most significant Person in our existence both today, tomorrow, and throughout the whole of eternity. Jesus begins by acknowledging the nature, importance, power, and priority of this relationship. His prayer is prefaced by first placing it in the context of intimate relationship.

But in stating “our,” He acknowledges the corporate nature of this relationship. This is a relationship that we share with billions of others. This is a family, a body made up of those who have passed, those who live today, and those yet to come. This family will persist into eternity. We pray as individuals intertwined in a massive community of others who share this privilege.

***2. "Who art in heaven"*** – This positions the Person who we are addressing. This describes God’s address and attributes to Him the power of that place. There is a superiority to this relationship that is unparalleled by any other relationship. This is not a horizontal relationship with someone who is burdened with the same limitations that we are burdened with, and who struggles with the same issues that we struggle with in the same way that we do. Rather, this is a one-of-a-kind vertical relationship with Someone who has perfectly experienced everything that we have experienced, but who brings no limitations to dealing with those things. Therefore, we can bring to this God everything that beats everyone else and know that He is not held hostage to anything.

Additionally, prayer is a direct line to God. There is no mediator who we must navigate and work through. There are no channels through which we have to wade or permissions that must be granted. God is as close as the first word that we utter.

***3. "Hallowed be your name"*** - We have this opportunity for intimacy with this God, but we need to understand the majesty of this God. He is above all. He is supreme. He alone controls the whole of the universe. We are granted access to the throne that is exalted above every throne. This creates a respect as we approach prayer. This respect can help us in keeping our prayers balanced, appropriate, in line with scripture, honest, transparent, and void of personal agendas. It is in reverence, humble submission, but complete trust that we approach God.

This also keeps this relationship from devolving into many of the things that “prayer is not” as was discussed previously. It is understanding Who we kneel in front of and what the capabilities of this God truly are.

***4. "Your kingdom come, your will be done"*** - We are asking for His kingdom to come in all of its spiritual qualities of love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, gentleness, faithfulness and self-control. We are asking God to impart those qualities in our lives, our families, our businesses, our communities, our nation, and our globe. These attributes embody all of the things that our world needs. These are the things that we are desperate for. And God’s kingdom embodies them in absolute perfection.

We ask God to extend His kingdom by bringing Christ’s salvation to every nation and every person. The nature of His kingdom is such that it breaks down all of the barriers that disallow God’s will from seizing the heart and mind of each person, of every society, every situation…everything. His kingdom helps us understand our position as workers in the spiritual harvest field rather than being merely maintenance minded or not engaging at all.

***5. "Give us this day our daily bread"*** – We tend to focus on the spiritual in prayer. However, we can trust God for our physical as well as spiritual provisions in our daily prayers. His resources are without limits. He is not working with a limited inventory as “every animal of the forest is mine, and the cattle on a thousand hills.” (Psalm 50:10). God’s provisions are eternal, endless, and always sitting at the ready.

Therefore, God’s provisions cover every aspect of our lives. There is not an area within which God cannot provide. There is nothing that we can bring to Him that lays outside of the resources at His disposal. There is no hopeless situation. No question that cannot be answered. No need that cannot be met. Whether that is what we need for this minute, this day, this week, this month, this year, or for the rest of our lives. God’s provision is entirely comprehensive from the smallest of needs to the largest.

***6. "Forgive our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us."*** – One of the greatest barriers to effective prayer is a lack of forgiveness. We carry within us transgressions, thoughts, biases, prejudices and many other things that create a steadfast barrier between ourselves and God. Therefore, we must purge ourselves of these lesser things so that this communication with God is not impeded, blocked or altogether destroyed. We must be pointed honest with what we are carrying into prayer so that we can eject it out of our prayer.

We must also forgive others. To hold something against someone suggests that we do not possess the faith to believe that God will deliver justice in that situation. It’s stating that we don’t believe that God will do what needs to be done, therefore we have to consequence the individual ourselves by holding their offense over their heads and perpetually beating them up with it. That is not an attitude conducive to prayer.

***7. "Lead us not into temptation"*** - Each of us has a tendency to sin. That’s the fallenness of our nature. Without God’s help, we will self-destruct by eventually giving into the passions of our sinful nature. They will wear us down over time, show up in situations that make us vulnerable to them, reshape themselves in order to present as increasingly appealing, make us question if they are really all that bad, or find whatever vulnerabilities that we might have in order to take full advantage of our weaknesses. Succumbing to these temptations undermines our relationship with God will diminish our prayers every time we give in.

***8. "Deliver us from evil"*** – As Paul says, we battle not against flesh and blood, but against the forces of darkness. Without God’s intervention we are all vulnerable to destruction by the devil, demons, fallen people, and a fallen world. We must look to God to keep us aware of indiscrete words, gossip, backbiting, anger, jealousy, discontent, rage, revenge, lust, envy, lying, deceiving, and apathy. These are the things that tend to creep unnoticed into our lives, occupying ever-increasing spaces and places within us. Over time, they began to occupy places in our lives with ever-increasing strength until we find ourselves held hostage to them. Therefore, we need to pray for an enhanced awareness of these things in order to keep them out of our lives, and to pray for their removal if we have granted them entrance.

***9. "For You Alone Own the Kingdom and the Power and the Glory Forever."***- All things are from God. For by the Lord all things exist and were created. He is the sole source of every breath, every resource, and every good thing. And because all things stem from Him, God deserves all the praise, honor and glory. We are His people and the sheep of His pasture; an exclusive and total relationship. All the means for accomplishing His will are done through His power, His kingdom and His glorious purposes. The rule of God is the goal of our prayer. We will not worry over what individual God uses for His purposes. Instead, we will look to Christ and His kingdom despite the stormy seas around us, the clouds above us, or the lack of solid ground beneath us. Our ultimate reward comes from God not from any office, position or human award or accolade despite how powerful or persuasive. The pray ends with this solemn yet glorious affirmation.

**Practical Application of Prayer**

**Praying Beyond Ourselves**

Daring Prayer - Taking on the Impossible

“You do not have because you do not ask God.”

* James 4:2 (NIV)
* ***To Pray Within My Limitations is Just Talking***
* ***To Pray Without Risk is Just Talking***
* ***To Pray When the Challenge is Bigger Than Us It to Believe That God Still Slays Giants and That He Uses Us to Do It***
* ***To Pray and Leave the Outcome to God is the Surrender Without Which Prayer Becomes Our Agenda***
* ***To Think that We Are Not the Ones to Pray is to Miss What May Never Come Again***
* ***To Wish It Were Not Us Is to Believe that God Made a Mistake***
* ***To Believe that Prayer Can Raise Others Out of Their Despair is Part of Being Raised Out of Ours***
* ***To Pray Realizing That What We Ask for We Can’t Do, Which is Why God is Waiting for Us to Ask Him to Do It***
* ***To Know that We Don’t Need to Know Everything that We’re Praying About for It to Be Effective***
* ***That Prayer is Not the Last Resort, But the First Course of Action***

**A Practical Outline of Prayer**

By Marilee Pierce Dunker

World Vision

Here are eight keys that have helped me develop a more powerful and effective prayer life. I hope they will encourage you to make 2021 a year of prayer.

**1. Know to Whom You Are Speaking.**

Prayer is a conversation with God, and every conversation begins by addressing the person to whom you are speaking by name. Jesus begins with “Our Father in heaven.” He focuses on a distinct person — the Heavenly Father with whom he has a personal relationship. We share the same right to call God “Father,” and there are times when we need to talk with our Abba Father, Daddy God. But God is three distinct persons in One: the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit.

I find it helpful in my prayer times to focus on which of the Holy Trinity I need to talk to. Often I talk to Jesus, the friend who is closer than a brother and the Savior of my soul. Other times I cry out to the Holy Spirit, who fills and empowers me to do the tasks Father God has called me to do. Having a distinct sense of who I am speaking to helps me formulate what I want to say and how I want to say it.

**2. Thank Him.**

A heartfelt thank you is always a great conversation starter. Like any parent, God loves to see that we have grateful hearts. But more importantly, as we take the time to praise God for all He has done in the past — the answered prayers, the impossible situations overcome, the healings and grace — our faith to believe for even greater answers to prayer grows stronger and more confident. Praise opens the gates of heaven and should always be part of our alone time with God.

**3. Ask for God’s Will.**

The Lord’s Prayer is not the only place where Jesus role-modeled a heart of obedience and submission to the will of God over his own desires and needs. In the Garden of Gethsemane, only hours before Jesus’ crucifixion, he would once again pray, “not my will, but yours be done.” In a world where right and wrong are frequently confused and the future is so uncertain, it can be hard to know how to pray or what to ask for when difficult circumstances arise. But the one thing we can know with absolute certainty is that God’s plan for those who love him is good, and the safest place we can be is in the center of his divine will.

**4. Say What You Need.**

In Jesus’ time, bread was a staple — one of the most basic needs of life — and he did not hesitate to ask God to provide it. But we often hesitate to bother God with the little things we need, thinking he shouldn’t be bothered. And when the big problems come, we try everything we can to solve the problem before we think to pray. The Bible says, “You do not have because you do not ask God.” So never hesitate to ask God for what you need in 2021. Your Father in heaven delights to give you good gifts.

**5. Ask for Forgiveness.**

James 5:16 reminds us that if we want our prayers to be heard, our hearts need to be right with God and with one another. If you feel your prayers are bouncing off the ceiling, take some time to check your heart.

**6. Pray with a Friend.**

There is power in agreement when we pray in Jesus’ name.  When I have an urgent need to take before the throne of God, I will often call a friend to pray with me.  If you don’t already have one, make finding a trusted prayer partner one of your goals in 2021.

**7. Pray the Word.**

My mother was a spiritual prayer warrior, and much that I know about prayer I learned from her. I loved to listen to her pray because for every need or situation, she would claim a scripture of promise. “The Word of God has power and is our great spiritual weapon,” Mama would say. “Pray the Word, Marilee. Pray the Word.”

Jesus did the same when he was tempted by Satan in the wilderness (see Luke 4:1-12). He was the Son of God, but he did not use his divine authority. Instead, he used the authority of the Scriptures.

**8. Memorize Scripture.**

The most important key to a vibrant prayer life is to understand our spiritual authority in Christ as explained in the Scriptures. The only way to do that is to become intimately familiar with the Bible. Even a few minutes a day in the Word of God will add strength and authority to your prayers in 2021.

**Additional Suggestions**

My Own Personal Strategies

**Have a Designated Place to Pray**

Find that place in your house or apartment that becomes the place where you meet God. When you do this, this place takes on an aura or a sense that this is where you encounter God. This feeling that this is the place where you meet God can enhance your prayer time.

**Have a Designated Time to Pray**

While we are to pray throughout the day, find one time that is exclusively your time with God. While mornings tend to be busy for most people, try to find a time at the beginning of your day as you are more rested during that time, and your time with God sets the tone for the day.

**Track Scriptures In Your Bible As God Gives Them To You**

Have a Bible where you can track scriptures that God brings to you, or ones that you discover throughout the day, or ones that a friend gives you. Mark them in your Bible, place the date by them, and mark the page with a sticky note.

**Have Some Accompanying Material**

Have something that you read daily or possibly weekly as part of your prayer time. This could be a pamphlet, a regular devotional, a newsletter, an article that you found of value, a chapter in a book, etc. Have these to refer to as part of your time with God.

**Your State of Mind**

Realize that some days you might come to prayer very focused. Other days, you might be more scattered. Some days you might have a strong sense of what you want to pray about, and at other times you may not. Simply bring who you are at that moment. It’s not so much what you showed up with, as it is that you showed up.

**To End Your Day**

Have some Bible reading at the end of your day to round out your day. This could be a devotional, or part of reading through a particular book of the Bible, a “One Year Bible,” or referencing a scripture that you read during your time in the morning.

**Concluding Thoughts**

"To be a Christian without prayer is no more possible than to be alive without breathing."

* Martin Luther

“Prayers outlive the lives of those who uttered them; outlive a generation, outlive an age, outlive a world.”

* E.M Bounds

“Prayer is the soul’s traffic with Heaven; God comes down to us by His Spirit, and we go up to Him by prayer.”

* Thomas Watson

“History is silent about revivals that did not begin with prayer.”

* Edwin Orr

“The great people of the earth today are the people who pray, (not) those who talk about prayer.”

* S.D. Gordon

“Rejoice always, pray continually, give thanks in all circumstances; for this is God’s will for you in Christ Jesus.”

- 1 Thessalonians 5:16-18 (NIV) - The Apostle Paul

“My prayer is not for them alone. I pray also for those who will believe in me through their message, that all of them may be one, Father, just as you are in me and I am in you.  May they also be in us so that the world may believe that you have sent me. I have given them the glory that you gave me, that they may be one as we are one—I in them and you in me—so that they may be brought to complete unity. Then the world will know that you sent me and have loved them even as you have loved me.”

* John 17:20-23 (NIV) – Jesus Christ

**Conclusion**

“It is my prayer that ‘prayer’ becomes a central feature in your life. Life can difficult. It can come at us in ways entirely unexpected, and it can do so with absolutely no remorse. We can watch spouses walk away, standby as careers vanish in an instant, helplessly watch our children destroy their lives, wrestle with unrelenting addictions, fall deep into the throes of depression, be relentlessly haunted by trauma, witness the betrayal of friends, hate who we are, hate who we are becoming, and so much more. Life can be hard. Very hard. Extremely hard.

But prayer is the empowerment in the midst of our impoverishment. It is the hope when all other supposed ‘hopes’ fail us (as they will). It is the living lifeline to our God. It is the most under-used asset in our arsenal. It is power beyond our understanding and deliverance beyond our abilities. If we've been foolish enough to underestimate the power of prayer, then we've probably been naive enough to overestimate the power of everything else. Therefore, from this point forward may we take it upon ourselves to pray as we never have before, so that we might change our world as never before.”

Craig D. Lounsbrough, M.Div., LPC

www.craiglpc.com