

How to Be More Effective in Your Prayer Life



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How is your prayer life? Is it all it should be? Is there room for improvement? Here are some helpful fools to help you be more effective in your prayer life,

All Scripture quotations were taken from the King James Version except as noted.

If you have been in God's church very long, you have heard many sermons on prayer. There is a *reason* for that. As a Christian, earnest, heartfelt, continuous prayer is one of the *hardest* things you will ever do! It is difficult because it is *spiritual*, and the carnal fleshly mind is the enemy of God (Romans 8:7).

It is very easy to make people feel "guilty" about failure in prayer because we all fall short. That is not the purpose of this article. Here, we want to give you some tangible *tools* to assist you in your prayer life. Nowhere in the Gospels do we read where Jesus instructed His disciples how to *preach* well—how to project, gesticulate, or prepare a sermon—but He went into much detail as to how to *pray* well, how to be humble and obedient, and what to pray for.

Most Americans profess to believe in prayer. Comparatively few follow through, as they know they should. During a recent survey of over 17,000 people in a major evangelical denomination, it was found that those interviewed prayed an average of five minutes a day. Of 2,000 pastors and wives who were interviewed, it was disclosed that they averaged only seven minutes of prayer a day. We can assume that these people were above average in their interest in prayer.

It is a demonstrable fact that *kneeology* will do far more good than all this world's *theology*. It is said that the army of God advances on its knees. As Christian soldiers, we should all be "prayer warriors," not "prayer paupers." If we go out into spiritual battle on only five minutes of prayer a day, we are like a soldier going into battle with only a slingshot. It is true that Satan hinders prayer, but prayer also hinders Satan. Deception is his only armor. God's Word penetrates that armor and exposes him. Satan must indeed tremble when he sees the weakest Bible-believing and Bible-obeying Christian on his knees because he knows the potential of answered prayer. It is the gateway to his demise. He will do everything in his power to prevent you from praying effectively. It is sometimes overlooked that the final article of a Christian's armor is prayer. "*Praying always with all prayer and supplication in the Spirit, and watching thereunto with all perseverance and supplication for all saints*" (Ephesians 6:18).

Prayer is not a "gadget" we use when nothing else works. Prayer is the Father's invitation to visit Him. Prayer should come *before* anything else, not as an afterthought. Prayer is the lubricant in the machinery of life. Jesus recognized there would be times when men would not really *quite* believe that their prayers would be answered, and as a result He gave much instruction and encouragement in prayer. He often repeated in one form or another that we are to "have faith in God" (Mark 11:22), and that "all things are possible with God" (Mark 10:27).

Communicating With God

God communicates to us through His Word, the Bible. We communicate to God through prayer. It is always God's *will* for us to *pray*. Prayer is not an option; it is a *command!* Prayer

provides power, poise, peace, and purpose. The more we pray, the more God-conscious we become. A rich prayer life is mandatory if we are to grow in the grace and knowledge of God. We will not enter into the Kingdom of God without it. It is just that important. Years ago, Dale Carnegie wrote a best seller, *How To Win Friends and Influence People*. To know how to befriend God and influence Him is far more important than knowing how to speak to man.

God also wrote a best seller. It is called *the Holy Bible*. In it, He says...

“Continue in prayer, and watch in the same with thanksgiving” (Colossians 4:2),

“Pray without ceasing” (1 Thessalonians 5:17).

“... men ought always to pray, and not to faint” (Luke 18:1).

“... Continuing instant [diligent] in prayer” (Romans 12:12).

“... without ceasing I have remembrance of thee in my prayers night and day” (2 Timothy 1:3)

“Be careful for nothing; but in every thing by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known unto God” (Philippians 4:6).

“But the end of all things is at hand: be ye therefore sober, and watch unto prayer” (1 Peter 4:7).

Prayer says, “I can’t... but I know One who can!” Prayer says, “I trust you, Lord, to guide, protect, and provide for me.” Nothing lies outside the reach of prayer except that which is outside the will of God (Matthew 6:10). Consider: the praying Christian who moves God can move anything God moves!

Why We Do Not Pray

There are many reasons we do not pray as we ought. A major reason is doubt—just plain lack of faith, or disbelief. We don’t think prayer really works, or at least not in, our case. If we truly *expect* results and look forward to the answer, we will be more enthused about our prayer life. Instead, we pray small prayers to a small god, limiting our requests and thus limit what God will do for us. Christ said in Matthew 9:29, “According to your faith be it unto you.” We need to pray *big* prayers to an Almighty God. “So then faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the Word of God” (Romans 10: 17). Prayer does not cause faith to work, but faith causes prayer to work. Living faith is acting on God’s Word *now*. Faith is the hand that takes what God offers; it is the spiritual organ of receiving the promises of God. To some, prayer is dull, dreary, irksome and “no fun.” It is hard work and just something to endure “because.” A lot of the trouble about prayer would disappear if we only realized that we go to pray, not because we love prayer, but because we love God.

Another reason we do not pray as we ought is indifference. We often do not pray until a small problem has grown large, perhaps out of control. Instead of placing our problems in God's hands, we habitually hope they will all "just work themselves out" somehow. How much better to have God involved! Often our priorities are out of balance and other things and other people seem more important to us. When we become more focused on the things of this world than upon the promises of God, God is easily crowded out. Whenever we place other things ahead of God, He looks upon this as the sin of idolatry. He says, "But seek ye *first* the kingdom of God, and His righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you" (Matthew 6:33). Do not expect thousand dollar answers to ten-cent prayers.

Some want to face their trials and work out their problems for themselves, excluding God completely. At the other extreme, others want to pray only and do nothing else. Some treat God as though He is a "genie in a jug," bound to serve their every wish. We need to be balanced. A wise man once said that we ought to *pray* as if the answer resides only in God, but to *work* as though the answer resides only in us. Working together with faith, the answers will come.

And finally, *sin* may be blocking us from access to God. Sin creates barriers. Sin separates us from God, and from one another. Ultimately, "the wages of sin is death" (Romans 6:23). We cannot live wrong and pray right. We cannot despise our brethren and love God. Only when sin is dealt with can reconciliation and godly fellowship take place. Sin does not just "disappear." It has to be removed. Repentance comes from God (2 Timothy 2:25), and forgiveness is His gift. Watch how you live. Watch how you speak. Watch how you think and what you see and what you hear (Psalm 101:3; 141:3; 139:23; Isaiah 55:7). God does.

Seven Tools for a More Effective Prayer Life

Here are seven simple tools to help you become more effective in your prayer life.

Tool #1: Planning is Necessary

Be warned! If you are too busy to pray, you are *too busy!* Being too busy to pray is your cue—your flashing red warning light—that you need to *take* time to *make* time to pray!

Jesus, our example, made arrangements for a place and a time when He could be alone and free from distractions (Mark 1:35; 6:45-46; Luke 5:16; 6:12; 9:18).

The main reason many do not have a significant prayer life is not because they don't *want* to, but that they don't *PLAN* to. If you take an extended vacation, for example, you do not just suddenly say, "Hey, let's go on vacation *today!*" You make detailed plans and arrangements. When you wish to marry the love of your life you do not say on the spur of the moment, "Let's go get married after lunch." After much thought, cooperation, and coordination you

make preparations, plans, and arrangements. Likewise, you seldom *FIND* time to pray; you must *MAKE* time! The opposite of a plan is disorder and confusion, sometimes called a *rut*. God is not the author of randomness or confusion. Make prayer a habit, not an occasion. Remember that our prayers cannot be *answered* unless they are first *prayed*. And they cannot be effectively prayed unless we plan to pray and pray our plan.

Tool #2: Develop a PRAYER NOTEBOOK

Along with our own prayers, we in God's church receive many prayer requests from others. If we do not *write down* prayer requests we will probably soon forget them. A pocket-sized personal prayer notebook is a handy tool for jotting down scriptures, thoughts, and prayer requests. Such a personal prayer notebook reminds us that we are not alone, but part of a team, and helps us to get out of the "gimme" mode. Is *everyone* in your congregation written down in your personal notebook? Properly used, your personal prayer notebook will soon become a source of *inspiration* and will help build your faith as you browse back though it from time to time and see when and how many prayers were answered. In some cases, you may wish to jot down the date prayer was first enjoined about a matter, followed by the date and how the prayer was answered. Over a period of time, this notebook may become the second most important book next to your Bible. Don't overlook this simple, but very effective, prayer-aid!

Tool #3: Adjust Your ENVIRONMENT to Facilitate Your Prayers

Are we as excited about prayer as we are all other areas of our lives? Let's face it: sometimes we just don't *feel* very spiritual. We don't always *feel* like praying, even though we know we should. This often leads to feelings of "guilt" and spiritual depression and ultimately even to withdrawal. Without a steady diet of prayer, we become spiritually malnourished, just as we would if we were to abstain from physical food for a long period of time. We are by nature physical, emotional creatures. We *know* what we should do, but just have a difficult time making ourselves *do* what we know we should do. In other words, sometimes we need to get ourselves "in the mood." There are times when we need to "grab ourselves by the collar," so to speak, and *make* ourselves pray.

When we want to set the mood for a romantic evening, for example, we might darken the room, light a candle or two, prepare a beverage, and put on some soft music. Likewise, as a suggestion, before you pray, review your personal prayer notebook, read a few Psalms, sing several *hymns*, or listen to a music tape to help get you "jump started," Strive to make your prayer time a pleasure instead of a chore. Before we pray, we should recall who and what God is because it matters what kind of God we pray to. It is often helpful to envision yourself coming before the very throne of the God of the universe (Revelation 4:2-6) in fear

and trembling and consider what a privilege and honor it is to be able to petition Him there. When we *fast* and pray, we are telling ourselves we mean business! Do whatever it takes, but DO it.

Tool #4: Use VARIETY in Your Prayers

It is easy for prayer to become routine. Routines soon become boring. Boredom leads to avoidance. We need to make our prayers *interesting*, both to God and to ourselves. If something is interesting, we invest time and effort in it. Just as we do not use the same words over and over when talking to a friend, neither should we become locked in to stiff, repetitive verbiage when talking to God. God loves variety. Variety sparks up our interest and diminishes drudgery. It is very difficult to separate our attitude from our posture. We see many Bible examples of people being in different positions while praying: standing, sitting, kneeling, walking, and yes, even while lying down (Psalm 63:6). There is no “best way” to pray for everyone. Find what works best for you.

Notice that we never see a Bible example of Jesus ever praying silently—He always prayed *aloud*. Praying aloud makes you, the *pray-er*, put your thoughts and feelings into tangible words—just as you would do in talking to your closest friend. If, for some reason, your environment prohibits your praying aloud, try sub-vocalizing your prayer as Hannah did in 1 Samuel 1:13. Praying aloud makes prayer personal. We should never feel “embarrassed” if someone knows we are praying. Some have even *written* their prayers to God to help them formulate their thoughts. A “prayer diary,” like your personal prayer notebook, can become a valuable source of inspiration in years to come.

Tool ##5: Find a QUIET PLACE to Pray

The world is full of distractions, including work, traffic, radio, television, children, mates, pets, and chores, not to mention recreational activities. Some have become so conditioned to raucous noise and distractions that they cannot stand silence! We need to find a quiet, undisturbed place to pray. The secret to prayer is prayer in secret. “But thou, when thou prayest, enter into thy closet, and when thou hast shut thy door, pray to thy Father which is in secret; and thy Father which seeth in secret shall reward thee openly” (Matthew 6:6). The meaning of this is that there should be some place where we may be in secret—where we may be *alone* with God, not just when driving our car or doing our job. Private devotions are mandatory. This is certainly not meant to prohibit prayer in public assemblies. The Lord himself prayed “in the mountain alone” (Matthew 14:23), in the night alone (Luke 6:12), as well as in public in the presence of His disciples. We have records of many prayers offered by the apostles in public assemblies. “Thy closet” may mean any private place. Peter’s “closet” was on the housetop (Acts 10:9). Jesus often rose up “a great while before day” to be alone

and often went into a solitary place to pray. A grove, a mountain, and a garden frequently furnished such a quiet place for Jesus. Where is *your* quiet place, and when do you go there?

Tool #6: Pray SPONTANEOUSLY as the Spirit Moves You

From time to time, we all have that little tingle, feeling, or nudge that we ought to pray about a matter. Always respond to and obey every *impulse* to pray* Make it a personal rule. This is a form of being “instant in prayer” (Romans 12:12). Such heartfelt desires may well be the nudging of God’s Holy Spirit working in you. It is important that we do not quench the Spirit (1 Thessalonians 5:19). When we repeatedly push aside such urges of the Holy Spirit to pray about a matter, we become more and more callous and eventually even resistant to its direction. Praying spontaneously as a matter comes to mind will “soften” you spiritually and make you more and more aware of your incessant need for prayer and draw you closer to God. While it is good to shoot quick “arrow prayers” up to God on the spot throughout the day, they should never *substitute* for heartfelt “quiet time” prayers as mentioned above. If it is not convenient to pray “on the spot,” jot it down in your personal prayer notebook, as mentioned above, and get back to it as soon as you can. Remember to pray for others as you would have others pray for you.

Tool #7: Use a PRAYER OUTLINE to Help You Concentrate

We are cautioned, “But when ye pray, use *not* vain repetitions, as the heathen do: for they think that they shall be heard for their much speaking” (Matthew 6:7), What is commonly called “the Lord’s Prayer” in Matthew six is meant to be a model, not a recitation. We are not to just repeat the outline repetitiously as though it were a mantra or a magic talisman. This example was a pattern around which His disciples were to shape their own approaches to God, not the prayer itself. The construction of the Lord’s Prayer is a prayer *outline of categories* of things to pray about.

God’s Promises

The Bible makes many promises concerning prayer. Answers are promised to those who put thought, energy, and faith into their prayers, not to those who mouth vain, monotonous, empty words. Jesus said, “Ask, and it shall be given you; seek, and ye shall find; knock, and it shall be opened unto you” (Matthew 7:7). “And all things, whatsoever ye shall ask in prayer, believing, ye shall receive” (Matthew 21:22). “Therefore I say unto you, What things soever ye desire, when ye pray, believe that ye receive them, and ye shall have them” (Mark 11:24). “If ye abide in Me, and My words abide in you, ye shall ask what ye will, and it shall be done unto you” (John 15:7). “But without faith it is impossible to please Him: for he that

cometh to God must believe that He is, and that He is a rewarder of them that diligently seek Him" (Hebrews 11:6). "And this is the confidence that we have in Him, that, if we ask any thing according to His will, He heareth us: And if we know that He hear us, whatsoever we ask, we know that we have the petitions that we desired of Him" (1 John 5:14-15). Are *your* prayers dynamic, faith-filled, and expectant?

God *wants* to answer our prayers. He is more willing to answer than we are to ask (Matthew 6:8; Luke 11: 11-13), His promises are sweeping, but conditional. The promises of prayer are only for those who please God and upon those whom He will have mercy (James 1:5-7). God says, "The sacrifice of the wicked is an abomination to the LORD: but the prayer of the upright is his delight" (Proverbs 15:8). "... but to *this* man will I look, even to him that is poor and of a contrite spirit, and trembleth at My Word" (Isaiah 66:2). "He that turneth away his ear from hearing the law, even his prayer shall be abomination" (Proverbs 28:9).

God is more than willing to answer prayers that are according to His will, but it is only through studying His Word that we come to really know and obey God's will. We honor God by accepting what He says (belief) and committing our daily lives to Him (action). "Even so faith, if it hath not works, is dead, being alone" (James 2:17). "And He said to them all, 'If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross daily, and follow Me'" (Luke 9:23). God's promise is that if we will pray as He has taught us and live as He commands, we will see Him work marvelous things in our lives, "And whatsoever we ask, we receive of Him [*why?*] because we *keep* His commandments [all *ten* of them], and *do* those things that are pleasing in His sight" (1 John 3:22).

This booklet was written to provide you with several useful "tools" to help you pray more effectively. We pray that you will implement them into your everyday prayer life and draw ever closer to Him that called you.

A Few Inspiring Prayer References

2 Chronicles 7:14 James 5:17-18

Psalm 34:15, 17 1 Peter 3:12

Psalm 66:17-19

Psalm 91:15-16

Psalm 145:18-19

Matthew 6:6

Matthew 7:7-8

Matthew 21:22

John 14:13-14

1 Timothy 2:8

Daily Prayer Outline

Following is a suggested daily prayer outline for your personal use. You may wish to personalize it and copy it into your personal prayer notebook and peruse it as you pray for a "thought stimulator." If you do, you may well be surprised to find yourself praying for hours instead of minutes. May God bless you as you effectively communicate with Him.

OPEN by addressing God, the Father

I. **Praise God**

- A. His name
- B. His greatness
- C. His plan

II. **Pray for God's Kingdom to come**

- A. Discuss this world's ills
- B. Discuss need for God's intervention
 - 1. Pray for God's ministers (by name)
 - a. For God's guidance
 - b. For spiritual strength and courage
 - c. For God's inspiration
 - 1) In decisions
 - 2) In writing
 - 3) In speaking
 - 4) In making the telecasts
 - 5) Protection
 - 6) Health and Longevity
 - 2. Pray for God's work
 - a. Reach more people (Matthew 28:19-20)
 - b. The work's income and expenses
 - c. More people to be called and to respond

III. **Pray for God's will, guidance, blessing, and direction for**

- A. The work
- B. Your life
- C. Your family (by name)
- D. Your enemies (by name)
- E. Other members (by name)
- F. Peace within and peace without
- G. Pray that you will be able to be a good example in all things

IV. **Pray for daily physical needs**

- A. Give thanks for your many blessings (by name)

- B. Ask for protection
- C. Ask for increased income
- D. Ask for good health
- E. Ask God to bless your mate
- F. Ask God to bless your family
- G. Ask blessing for other members
- H. Pray for the sick and afflicted (by name)

V. Pray for daily spiritual needs

- A. More of God's Spirit
- B. Ability to handle stress, tests, and trials
- C. Inspiration and guidance in personal Bible study and prayer
- D. Correction with mercy and encouragement
- E. Spiritual needs of other members

VI. Pray for spiritual growth

- A. Help to build God-like mind and character
- B. Ask for more wisdom, knowledge, and understanding
- C. Ask for tactfulness and discretion in dealing with others
- D. Ask for more of the fruits of the spirit:
 - 1. Love in all its many manifestations
 - 2. JOY
 - 3. Peace
 - 4. Longsuffering patience
 - 5. Gentleness
 - 6. Goodness
 - 7. Faith and trust
 - 8. Meekness and humility
 - 9. Temperance, balance, self-control
- E. Ask for forgiveness of your sins (be specific in naming them)
- F. Ask for help to forgive others
- G. Ask for other members to grow spiritually
- H. Ask for God's church to grow in grace and knowledge

VII. Pray for spiritual protection

- A. Ask for God's church to grow in grace and protection from Satan's society and its influences
- B. Ask for the right attitude
- C. Ask for God's viewpoint
- D. Ask for God to show you your weaknesses and sins and to help you overcome them
- E. Ask God to protect other members from Satan's influences

VIII. Praise God

- A. Thanks for Christ's sacrifice

- B. Thanks for mercy and forgiveness
- C. Thanks for your calling
- D. Thanks for your brethren in the faith
- E. Thanks for all the blessings God has given
- F. Thank God for being God and for all He is doing

CLOSE with Christ's name and amen

About the Church of God International

This literature is published by the Church of God International, based in Tyler, Texas. Incorporated in 1978, the CGI has ministers and congregations scattered throughout the United States and Canada. We also have churches in Jamaica, the Philippines, and Australia.

The CGI's mission is to preach the gospel of Jesus Christ throughout the world (Matthew 28:19). We are blessed with four basic tools to accomplish this:

1. Personal and local church evangelism.
2. Television and radio broadcasting.
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