

THINK

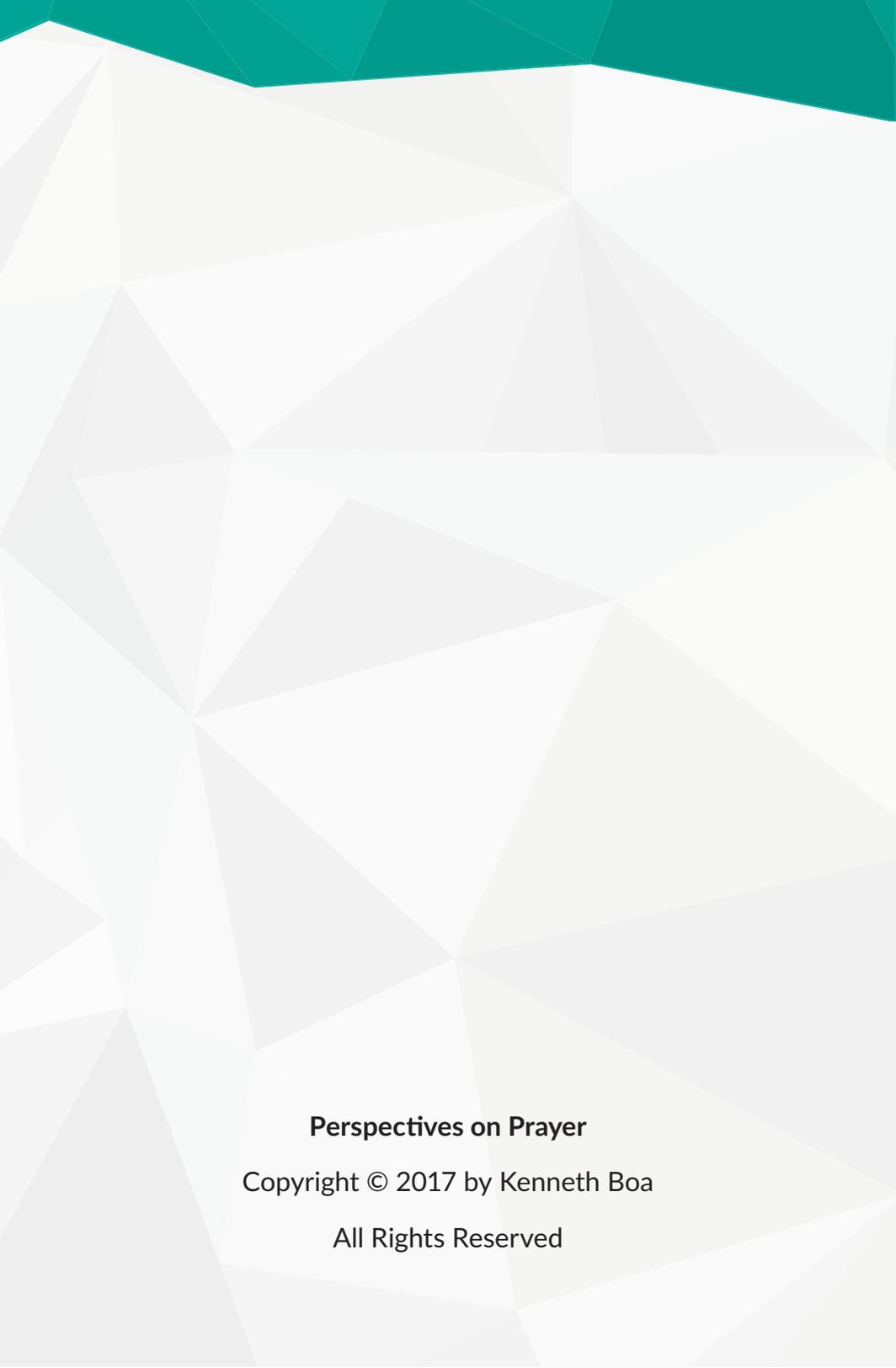
ON

THESE

THINGS

Perspectives on Prayer

DR. KEN BOA



Perspectives on Prayer

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**“And pray in the Spirit
on all occasions with all kinds
of prayers and requests.”
(Ephesians 6:18 NIV)**

PERSPECTIVES ON PRAYER

Just as the key to quality relationships with other people is time spent in communication, so the key to a growing relationship with God is time invested in listening to his Word and speaking directly with him in prayer. Most of us want to pray more than we actually do, but we often find that our prayers are sporadic and unsatisfying. We become frustrated by the hit-or-miss approaches to both prayer and listening to his Word.

For some, time in prayer and the Word can seem shallow or even boring. For others, prayer never gets beyond the level of “help” and “gimme.” They resort to prayer when they want God to bail them out or fulfill their cravings. It is no surprise, then, that most believers spend a minimal amount of time in either prayer or listening to the Word and fail to develop intimacy with the One for whom they were created.

The concepts of listening to God’s Word and communicating with him, of talking directly and openly with him in prayer, just as we would talk with an intimate friend, are among the great truths of spiritual life and Scripture. The biblical portrait of prayer is far more dynamic than many of us might think. The more we learn about the principles and power of prayer, the more we will be motivated to cultivate this aspect of our relationship with God.



My prayer is that this booklet will help you make prayer a more enhancing experience by providing you with answers to some basic questions about prayer:

What is prayer?

Why should we pray?

How did Jesus pray?

What are the elements of prayer?

What if prayer is not answered?

This booklet also will provide you with guidance on how we should pray, such as principles for supplications (petition and intercession), hindrances to answered prayer, desirable and undesirable prayer habits, and a prayer checklist to evaluate your prayer life.

WHAT IS PRAYER?

Simply defined, prayer is a dialogue between God and his people. John Calvin defined prayer as “an intimate conversation of the pious with God.” Prayer often involves individual and group needs and concerns; however, as J. A. Hanne observes, “true prayer is not asking in itself, but the relationship of friendship with God, in which asking and receiving is simply part of the outcome.”

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(J. A. Hanne)

Because it is part of a relationship, prayer involves a dialogue, not merely a monologue. Although God wants us to talk to him about our problems, plans, and concerns, there are also times when we should be silent before him and rest in him so we can be sensitive and receptive to his desires and direction. Prayerful meditation on a text of Scripture is an especially helpful way to listen to God.

Prayer also is a powerful spiritual resource that triggers the supernatural. An effective weapon when unsheathed, prayer too often remains in the scabbard. Prayer is the prelude to all effective ministry. It has been said that “Satan laughs at our toiling, mocks our wisdom, but trembles when he sees the weakest saint on his knees.” The real spiritual battle is won on the field of prayer; ministry simply claims the territory that has been gained.

This gift of open communication with God and immediate access to him through prayer is one of the great benefits of the salvation Jesus purchased for us. An infinite and holy God could never commune with sinful and rebellious creatures. It is the goodness, the grace, and the love of God, most clearly seen in the person and work of Jesus Christ, that brings all who trust in him into a position we could never hope to earn. Because of this grace and the free access we have been given to the Father (Ephesians 2:18), we have the opportunity and the responsibility to “draw near” in all times of need.

**“Therefore let us draw near with confidence to the throne of grace, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need.”
(Hebrews 4:16)**

WHY SHOULD WE PRAY?

The Scriptures describe a number of reasons why we should pray. The following groups these reasons into a set of 10.

1. PRAYER ENHANCES OUR FELLOWSHIP AND INTIMACY WITH GOD.

“I love the Lord, because He hears my voice and my supplications. Because He has inclined His ear to me, therefore I shall call upon Him as long as I live.” *Psalm 116:1-2*

“Thus says the Lord who made the earth, the Lord who formed it to establish it, the Lord is His name, ‘Call to Me and I will answer you, and I will tell you great and mighty things, which you do not know.’” *Jeremiah 33:2-3*

2. THE SCRIPTURES COMMAND US TO PRAY.

“Now He was telling them a parable to show that at all times they ought to pray and not to lose heart.” *Luke 18:1*

“With all prayer and petition pray at all times in the Spirit, and with this in view, be on the alert with all perseverance and petition for all the saints.” *Ephesians 6:18*

“Rejoice always; pray without ceasing; in everything give thanks; for this is God’s will for you in Christ Jesus.” *1 Thessalonians 5:16–18*

“I urge that entreaties and prayers, petitions and thanksgivings, be made on behalf of all men.”
1 Timothy 2:1

3. WHEN WE PRAY, WE FOLLOW THE EXAMPLE OF JESUS CHRIST.

“In the early morning, while it was still dark, Jesus got up, left the house, and went away to a secluded place, and was praying there.” *Mark 1:35*

“The people therefore cried out to Moses and Moses prayed to the Lord, and the fire died out.”
Numbers 11:2

“At the time of the offering of the evening sacrifice, Elijah the prophet came near and said, ‘O Lord, the God of Abraham, Isaac and Israel, today let it be known that You are God in Israel, and that I am Your servant and I have done all these things at Your word. Answer me, O Lord, answer me, that this people may know that You, O Lord, are God, and that You have turned their heart back again.’” *1 Kings 18:36–37*

“The effective prayer of a righteous man can accomplish much.” *James 5:16b (see also 5:17–18)*

4. PRAYER APPROPRIATES GOD’S POWER.

In prayer, God allows us to participate with him in the accomplishment of his purposes and demonstration of his power.

“I am the vine, you are the branches; he who abides in Me and I in him, he bears much fruit, for apart from Me you can do nothing.” *John 15:5*

“And when they had prayed, the place where they had gathered together was shaken, and they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak the word of God with boldness.” *Acts 4:31 (see also Ephesians 3:16 and Colossians 4:2–4)*

“... that He would grant you, according to the riches of His glory, to be strengthened with power through His Spirit in the inner man.”

Ephesians 3:16

5. WE RECEIVE SPECIAL HELP FROM GOD WHEN WE PRAY.

“Therefore let us draw near with confidence to the throne of grace, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need.” *Hebrews 4:16*

6. PRAYER MAKES A GENUINE DIFFERENCE.

God uses prayer to change people and shape history.

“For everyone who asks, receives; and he who seeks, finds; and to him who knocks, it will be opened.” *Luke 11:10*

“... pray for one another so that you may be healed. The effective prayer of a righteous man can accomplish much. Elijah was a man with a nature like ours, and he prayed earnestly that it would not rain, and it did not rain on the earth for three years and six months. Then he prayed again, and the sky poured rain and the earth produced its fruit.” *James 5:16b-18*

**“When I pray,
coincidences
happen;
when I don’t,
they don’t.”**

(William Temple)

7. PRAYER DEVELOPS OUR UNDERSTANDING AND KNOWLEDGE OF GOD.

In prayer we acknowledge our dependence on God for all our spiritual, emotional, intellectual, and physical needs so that we continue to trust him for everything.

“Trust in the Lord, and do good; dwell in the land and befriend faithfulness. Delight yourself in the Lord, and he will give you the desires of your heart. Commit your way to the Lord; trust in him, and he will act. He will bring forth your righteousness as the light, and your justice as the noonday.” *Psalms 37:3-6 (See also Psalm 63:1-8 and Ephesians 1:16-19)*

**“In prayer, real
prayer, we begin
to think God’s
thoughts after
him: to desire
the things he
desires, to love
the things he
loves, to will the
things he wills.”**
(Richard Foster)

8. OUR PRAYERS AND GOD'S ANSWERS GIVE US PEACE AND JOY.

Our problems may not disappear, but in prayer we gain a new perspective on our problems along with the peace and patience to stand firm.

“Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. And the peace of God, which surpasses all comprehension, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.”

Philippians 4:6-7

“In that day you will not question Me about anything.

Truly, truly, I say to you, if you ask the Father for anything in My name, He will give it to you. Until now you have asked for nothing in My name; ask and you will receive, so that your joy may be made full.” *John 16:23-24*

“Prayer—
secret, fervent,
believing
prayer—lies
at the root of
all personal
godliness.”

(William Carey)

9. PRAYER HELPS US UNDERSTAND AND ACCOMPLISH GOD'S PURPOSES FOR OUR LIVES.

This was what Paul desired for the Colossians:

“We have not ceased to pray for you and to ask that you be filled with the knowledge of His will in all spiritual wisdom and understanding, so that

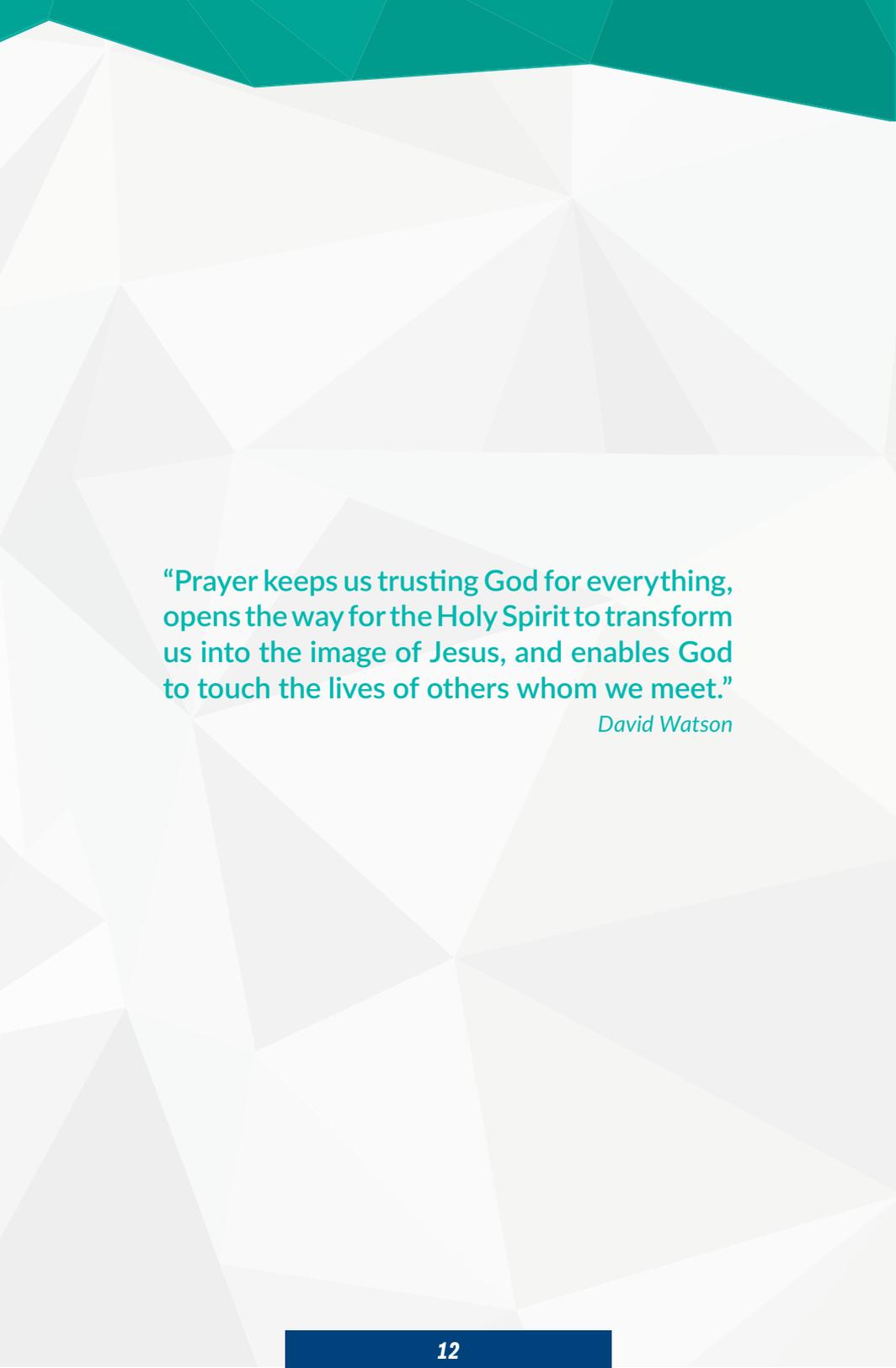
you will walk in a manner worthy of the Lord, to please Him in all respects, bearing fruit in every good work and increasing in the knowledge of God; strengthened with all power, according to His glorious might, for the attaining of all steadfastness and patience.” *Colossians 1:9-11*

10. PRAYER CHANGES OUR ATTITUDES AND DESIRES.

In prayer, we acknowledge the greatness of God’s character and our desire to become more conformed to his character. We also acknowledge that, in his wisdom, he works all the things that happen in our lives together for our good (Romans 8:28).

“Because of the surpassing greatness of the revelations, for this reason, to keep me from exalting myself, there was given me a thorn in the flesh, a messenger of Satan to torment me—to keep me from exalting myself! Concerning this I implored the Lord three times that it might leave me. And He has said to me, ‘My grace is sufficient for you, for power is perfected in weakness.’ Most gladly, therefore, I will rather boast about my weaknesses, so that the power of Christ may dwell in me.” *2 Corinthians 12:7-9*

“Spiritual power is not the power of prayer, but the power of God realized in action through a man in the attitude of prayer.”
(J. A. Hanne)



**“Prayer keeps us trusting God for everything,
opens the way for the Holy Spirit to transform
us into the image of Jesus, and enables God
to touch the lives of others whom we meet.”**

David Watson

HOW DID JESUS PRAY?

Prayer was an indispensable part of Jesus' life and ministry on earth. He was never too busy to talk with his Father. This attitude of complete dependency and constant communication was the key to his fulfillment of everything he came to accomplish. Adopting an attitude of complete dependency and constant communication with God through prayer is also our key to fulfilling everything in God's plan for us.

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As he taught his disciples, Jesus provided a model for prayer, which was recorded in two of the Gospels (Matthew and Luke). He told his disciples to pray “in this way” (Matthew 6:9). The following notes a number of valuable principles that can be gleaned from this model prayer found in Matthew 6:9–13 and Luke 11:1–4.

OUR FATHER

ACCENTUATE GOD'S PRIORITY. Our prayers should concern God's interests first and our interests second. Compare Matthew 6:9–10 with Matthew 6:11–13.

ADDRESS GOD AS FATHER. We can address our prayers directly to the Father because of the personal relationship with him that was made available to us through the work of Christ. We have become sons and daughters of the King through faith in his Son (John 1:12; 14:6; Galatians 3:26; Hebrews 10:19–22).

WHO ART IN HEAVEN

AFFIRM GOD'S SUPREMACY. While it is true that we are in God's family, it is also true that our God is the sovereign, infinite Creator who is gloriously enthroned in heaven.

HALLOWED BE THY NAME

ACCLAIM GOD AS HOLY AND RIGHTEOUS. To hallow means to honor, exalt, or glorify. Our concern in prayer must not only be the *what*, *why*, and *how*, but especially the *who*. Our prayers should include praise for God in terms of who he is and what he has done (Psalm 34:1–3; Isaiah 40:12–26; 43:1–21). We are called to fear, reverence, glorify, and magnify his holy name (John 17:6, 11–12).

“I will bless the
LORD at all times;
his praise shall
continually be in
my mouth. ...
O magnify
the LORD with
me, and let us
exalt His name
together.”
(Psalm 34:1, 3)

THY KINGDOM COME

ACKNOWLEDGE GOD'S RIGHT TO RULE. God's kingdom is the sphere over which he rules, including his purposes for the world in general and the body of Christ in particular. We are to pray that God will bring about his rule of righteousness and justice on the earth, with Jesus Christ as the ruler (2 Samuel 7:10-16; Luke 18:7-8). When we pray for the coming of the kingdom, we are also praying for the coming of the King (Revelation 22:20).

THY WILL BE DONE, ON EARTH AS IT IS IN HEAVEN

ASSENT TO GOD'S WILL. We should pray for God's will to be accomplished on earth in the same way as it is by the angelic host of heaven (Psalm 103:19-21). On the personal level, this means that we are making ourselves available for God to accomplish his will through us as Jesus did during his earthly life (Matthew 26:39).

“... yet, not
as I will,
but as
You will.”

(Matthew 26:39)

GIVE US THIS DAY OUR DAILY BREAD

ASK FOR GOD'S PROVISION. In prayer we acknowledge that everything we have is a gift from God (James 1:17), as we turn to him for the supply of our daily needs. God has promised to provide our basic needs (Philippians 4:19), but not necessarily our wants.

AND FORGIVE US OUR DEBTS

ADMIT THE NEED FOR GOD'S FORGIVENESS. Our needs are not only physical but spiritual. While it is true that all of our sins were forgiven when we received Christ as our Savior (Ephesians 1:7; Colossians 2:13; Hebrews 10:14–18), we did not become perfect in our practice. When we sin, we must acknowledge it to God, who will forgive and cleanse us from all unrighteousness (1 John 1:9).

AS WE ALSO HAVE FORGIVEN OUR DEBTORS

ACCEPT GOD'S MANDATE TO FORGIVE OTHERS. Having experienced God's forgiveness, we are obligated to have a forgiving spirit toward others. We do not merit God's forgiveness by forgiving others; we mirror it (Matthew 18:21–35; Mark 11:25; Ephesians 4:32; Colossians 3:13).

“In Him we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of His grace”
(Ephesians 1:7)

AND DO NOT LEAD US INTO TEMPTATION

ADHERE TO GOD IN THE MIDST OF ADVERSITY. God does not tempt anyone to sin (James 1:13), but he does test the quality of our faith to stimulate us to grow in our relationship with him (Genesis 22:1; Romans 5:3–5; James 1:2–4). God is willing and able to deliver us from every temptation as we turn to him (Luke 22:40; 1 Corinthians 10:13).

BUT DELIVER US FROM EVIL

ACTIVELY STAND WITH GOD AGAINST THE EVIL ONE. We are to stand firm in spiritual warfare by exercising our resources in Christ (Ephesians 6:10–18) and praying that God will deliver us from the wiles of the adversary (1 Peter 5:8–9). In the life of our Lord, prayer was not so much something he did as it was a relationship he maintained. It was the complete involvement of his mind, will, and emotions with his Father.

“Therefore, take up the full armor of God, so that you will be able to resist in the evil day, and having done everything, to stand firm. Stand firm therefore, having girded your loins with truth, and having put on the breastplate of righteousness, and having shod your feet with the preparation of the gospel of peace; in addition to all, taking up the shield of faith with which you will be able to extinguish all the flaming arrows of the evil one. And take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God. With all prayer and petition, pray at all times in the Spirit, and with this in view, be on the alert with all perseverance and petition ...”

(Ephesians 6:13–18)

WHAT ARE THE ELEMENTS OF PRAYER?

We have seen how a number of prayer principles can be derived from the Lord's Prayer. This model prayer given by Jesus to his disciples, and through his disciples to us, also illustrates a number of the key elements or aspects of prayer. In my *Handbook to Prayer: Praying Scripture Back to God*, I used a daily format of eight types of prayer that can be derived from our Lord's definitive prayer. The following is a detailed look at these eight types of prayer.

ADORATION AND THANKSGIVING

"OUR FATHER WHO IS IN HEAVEN, HALLOWED BE YOUR NAME." *Matthew 6:9*

Prayers of adoration (praise for who God is) and thanksgiving (praise for what he has done) are often overlooked or underdeveloped. Adoration involves praise and worship; that is, the acknowledgment of God's "worth-ship"

"Worthy is the Lamb that was slain to receive power and riches and wisdom and might and honor and glory and blessing."

(Revelation 5:12)

or worthiness to be adored. In this form of prayer, we devotedly honor, exalt, esteem, bless, and magnify the name of the Lord as we reflect on his goodness, grace, holiness, mercy, love, might, power, and dominion (Revelation 4:11; 5:12–13). In praise, we rejoice in God, align ourselves in obedience to him, and express all that we have discovered him to be.

In prayers of thanksgiving, repeatedly emphasized by Paul in his letters (see Colossians 3:15–17 and 1 Thessalonians 5:18), we gratefully acknowledge what God has done, is doing, and will continue to do in our lives on every level. Thanksgiving should be a regular ingredient

**“In everything
give thanks;
for this is
God’s will
for you in
Christ Jesus.”**

**(1 Thessalonians
5:18)**

in our prayers, because it causes us to reflect on and remember the history of God’s work in our lives. This in turn gives us confidence in the way he will continue to work as well as a conscious sense of dependency on him (Psalm 107).

AFFIRMATION

“YOUR KINGDOM COME. YOUR WILL BE DONE, ON EARTH AS IT IS IN HEAVEN.” *Matthew 6:10*

Prayers of affirmation (agreeing with God’s will and submitting to it) take biblical truths and affirm them by acknowledging them back to God. This is another way to renew the mind, and it helps us embrace the truth,

regardless of feelings we may have to the contrary. Many passages from Scripture can be turned into affirmations simply by personalizing them and agreeing with them.

SUPPLICATION

“GIVE US THIS DAY OUR DAILY BREAD.” *Matthew 6:11*

Prayers of supplication are requests that involve our needs (petition) and those of others (intercession). As we lift up our own physical, psychological, and spiritual needs in our petitions (2 Corinthians 12:7–10; Philippians 4:6–7), we should include our appropriation of God’s gifts and resources so that we will fulfill his desire to work in and through us.

**“... in everything
by prayer and
supplication with
thanksgiving let
your requests be
made known
to God.”
(Philippians 4:6)**

We also pray for the physical, psychological, and spiritual needs of those who know Christ (Ephesians 1:15–19; 3:14–19; Philippians 1:4, 9–11; 3 John 2). For those who do not know the Savior, we should pray with a concerned heart (Romans 10:1) for God to send laborers into the harvest (Matthew 9:38), for open doors to witness, for clarity in the communication of the gospel (Colossians 4:3–4), and for these people to find eternal life by trusting in Christ (1 Timothy 2:1–4).

CONFESSION

“AND FORGIVE US OUR DEBTS, AS WE ALSO HAVE FORGIVEN OUR DEBTORS.”

Matthew 6:12

In prayers of confession, we acknowledge our sins and our need for forgiveness of those sins. We also thank God for his forgiveness and cleansing (Psalm 32; 51; 1 John 1:9). This requires a sensitivity to the Holy Spirit’s work of showing us sins that must be dealt with in our lives so that we can continue to walk in the light and enjoy an unimpeded relationship with God. We should prayerfully examine our lives frequently to be sure that we are not harboring unconfessed sins.

“If we confess our sins, He is faithful and righteous to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.”
(1 John 1:9)

RENEWAL

“AND DO NOT LEAD US INTO TEMPTATION, BUT DELIVER US FROM EVIL.” *Matthew 6:13a*

The necessity of renewal as we face the temptations of the world, the flesh, and the devil is critical. We should consistently renew our minds with biblical truth in order to maintain a clear focus on who God is, who and whose we are, and God’s purpose for our few decades on this planet. In prayers of renewal, we ask for the blessing of growth in intimacy and righteousness and appeal to God’s grace to make this happen.

A CLOSING PRAYER

“FOR YOURS IS THE KINGDOM AND THE POWER AND THE GLORY FOREVER. AMEN.” *Matthew 6:13b*

A closing prayer honors the Lord and completes our thoughts. A closing prayer is like a coda at the end of a musical composition. It can be a brief word of adoration or thanksgiving that affirms our love for the One who loved us first.

PRINCIPLES FOR SUPPLICATION

In our intercessory prayer for others and petitionary prayer for ourselves, we should strive to apply several biblical principles to make our supplications more effective. The common theme among the 10 biblical principles below is to **ask**.

1. ASK

Matthew 7:7-8; Philippians 4:6; James 4:2

2. ASK IN THE WILL OF GOD

James 4:13-17; 1 John 5:14

3. ASK IN FAITH

1 John 5:15; James 1:6-7; Mark 11:22-24

4. ASK SPECIFICALLY

Mark 10:51; Luke 6:12-13; 2 Corinthians 12:8

5. ASK WITH THANKSGIVING

Hebrews 13:15; Philippians 1:3-4; Colossians 1:3-4, 11-12

6. ASK IN THE SPIRIT

Romans 8:26-27; Ephesians 6:18; Jude 20

7. ASK IN FELLOWSHIP

John 15:7; James 5:16; 1 John 3:21-22

8. ASK FREQUENTLY

1 Chronicles 16:11; Colossians 4:2; 1 Thessalonians 5:17; Luke 18:1

9. ASK WITH OTHERS

Matthew 18:19-20; Romans 15:30

10. ASK IN JESUS' NAME

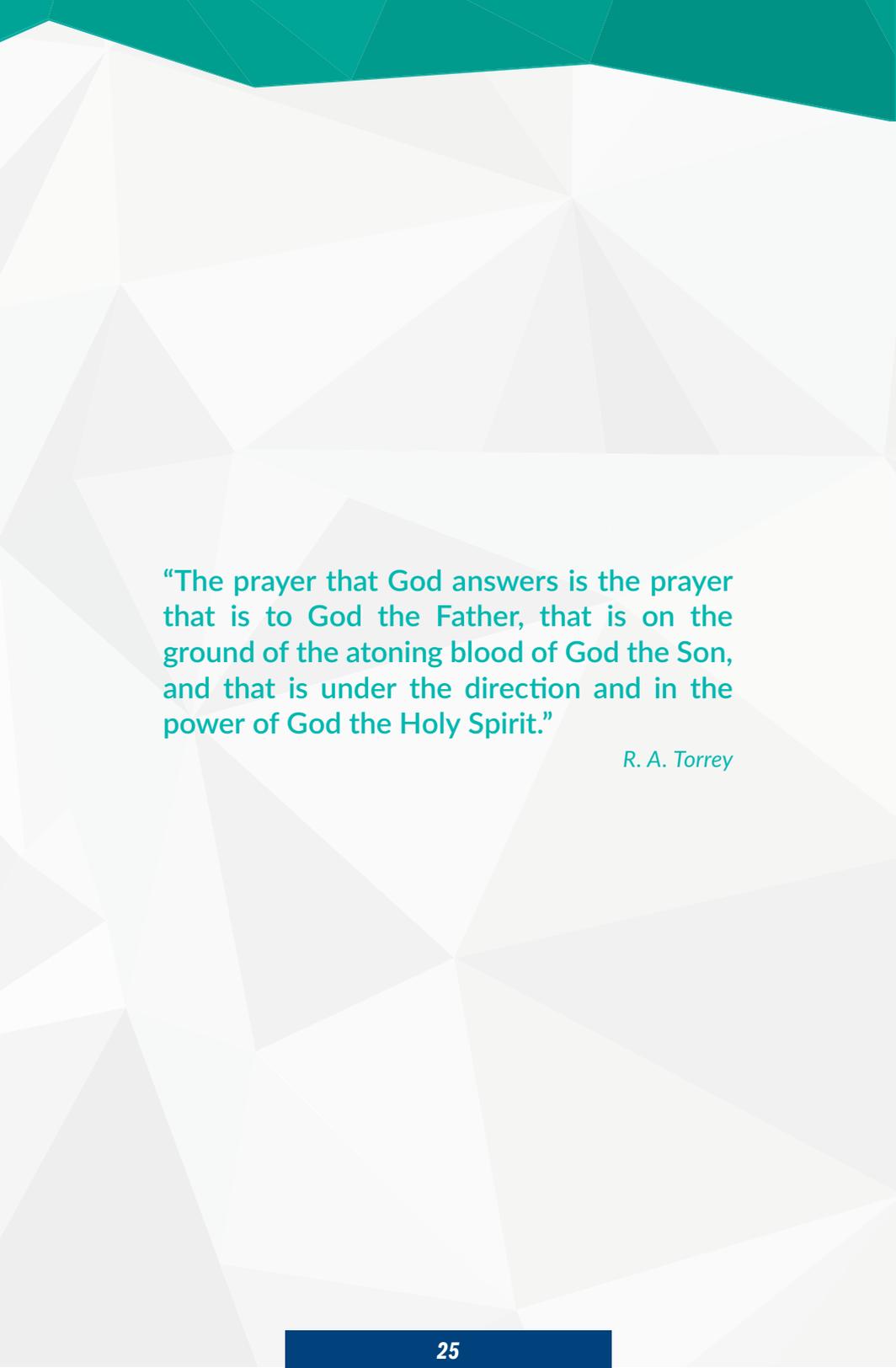
John 14:13-14; 16:24; Ephesians 3:11-12; Hebrews 10:19-22

As it was with Jesus, prayer should be our method of getting things done. We must learn to depend more on our prayers and less on externals, such as people, circumstances, and things.

“And all things you ask in prayer, believing, you will receive.” *Matthew 21:22*

We also should recognize the importance of corporate supplication. There is a different spiritual dynamic when two or more agree in prayer. When you pray with others, make an effort to listen actively and stand united with them before the throne of God.

“Again I say to you, that if two of you agree on earth about anything that they may ask, it shall be done for them by My Father who is in heaven. For where two or three have gathered in My name, I am there in their midst.” *Matthew 18:19-20*



“The prayer that God answers is the prayer that is to God the Father, that is on the ground of the atoning blood of God the Son, and that is under the direction and in the power of God the Holy Spirit.”

R. A. Torrey

WHAT IF PRAYER IS NOT ANSWERED?

Our God hears and answers prayers, but his answer is not always “yes.” Even when it is, the timing and circumstances of his positive answers are often different from what we expect. There are times when God’s answer will be “wait,” because his timing is not the same as ours and because he desires to produce the spiritual fruit of patience and self-control in us. Our faith needs to be long as well as strong.

There are other times when God’s answer will be “no.” When this happens, the reason may simply be that God’s plan is different from ours. It also may be that God is testing our faith; consider, for example, Abraham, Joseph, and David. Or consider Paul, who, after praying three times for the removal of his “thorn in the flesh,” received a negative answer from God. This caused him to realize that God’s power is perfected in weakness (2 Corinthians 12:8–9) and drove him to greater dependency on the person of God. When the answer is “no,” we may later discover the reason. On other occasions, the reason may not be revealed to us on this side of eternity.



How do we respond to a negative answer? First, we should examine ourselves to be sure that we have not fallen prey to one or more of the hindrances to answered prayer (see the next section); a mid-course correction may be in order. Second, if we are unable to discern a problem, then we must be content to rest in God's loving character and greater wisdom.

HINDRANCES TO ANSWERED PRAYER

The Scriptures describe and illustrate a number of hindrances to answered prayer. Here are 10.

1. WRONG MOTIVES

Selfish indulgence (James 4:3; Matthew 20:20-22; Luke 12:13-15) is a common hindrance to answered prayer. An example of a proper motive may be found in 1 Corinthians 10:31: "Whether, then, you eat or drink or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God."

**"You ask and do not receive, because you ask with wrong motives, so that you may spend it on your pleasures."
(James 4:3)**

2. UNCONFESSED SIN

"If I regard wickedness in my heart, the Lord will not hear." *Psalms 66:18*

"But your iniquities have made a separation between you and your God, and your sins have hidden His face from you so that He does not hear." *Isaiah 59:2 (see also Proverbs 28:9)*

3. AN UNFORGIVING SPIRIT

“Whenever you stand praying, forgive, if you have anything against anyone, so that your Father who is in heaven will also forgive you your transgressions.” *Mark 11:25*

**“As the Lord
forgave you, so
also should you.”
(Colossians
3:13b)**

An attitude of self-righteous condemnation of others will hinder our prayers (see also Matthew 6:14-15; 18:21-25; Ephesians 4:32; Colossians 3:13).

4. TRYING TO IMPRESS OTHERS

“When you pray, you are not to be like the hypocrites; for they love to stand and pray in the synagogues and on the street corners so that they may be seen by men. Truly I say to you, they have their reward in full.” *Matthew 6:5*

When praying with others, there is always a danger of being more concerned with what they think of our prayers than being concerned with the One to whom our prayers are directed.

5. LACK OF FAITH

Our attitude in prayer should be one of expectant belief.

“But he must ask in faith without any doubting, for the one who doubts is like the surf of the sea, driven and tossed by the wind. For that man ought not to expect that he will receive anything from the Lord.” *James 1:6-7*

“Therefore I say to you, all things for which you pray and ask, believe that you have received them, and they will be granted you.” *Mark 11:24*

6. DISOBEDIENCE TO GOD

A failure to keep God’s commandments will interfere with our prayers (see also John 14:21 and Isaiah 1:15–17).

“Beloved, if our heart does not condemn us, we have confidence before God; and whatever we ask we receive from Him, because we keep His commandments and do the things that are pleasing in His sight.” *1 John 3:21–22*

7. STINGINESS IN GIVING

“He who shuts his ear to the cry of the poor will also cry himself and not be answered.”

Proverbs 21:13

See also Luke 6:38 and 1 John 3:17–20.

“But whoever has the world’s goods, and sees his brother in need and closes his heart against him, how does the love of God abide in him?”

(1 John 3:17)

8. IMPROPER TREATMENT OF SPOUSE

“You husbands in the same way, live with your wives in an understanding way, as with someone weaker, since she is a woman; and show her honor as a fellow heir of the grace of life, so that your prayers will not be hindered.” *1 Peter 3:7*

9. IDOLATRY

Anything that we revere more than God—such as career, material possessions, or personal plans—is an idol, and idolatry hampers effective prayer.

“Son of man, these men have set up their idols in their hearts and have put right before their faces the stumbling block of their iniquity. Should I be consulted by them at all?” *Ezekiel 14:3*

10. NOT ABIDING IN CHRIST

An improper relationship with God means that our aspirations, attitudes, and actions will not be aligned with his.

“If you abide in Me, and My words abide in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be done for you.” *John 15:7*

UNDESIRABLE PRAYER HABITS

The following are some common undesirable prayer habits that we should try to avoid. Periodically examine your own private and public prayers for these and other undesirable habits.

PREDICTABILITY

Some believers suffer from the disease of prayer platitudes. We can slip into the sloppy habit of using canned phrases and endless clichés that have lost their meaning.

GENERALITY

Our prayers are sometimes too broad or vague. If we do not know what we are asking for, we will not recognize an answer if we get one.

DISHONESTY

There is a temptation to masquerade in God's presence, hoping to cover up the things we are afraid he will see. But this is like wearing a tie while naked.

SMALLNESS

When we minimize our risks and hedge our bets in prayer, we confuse mediocrity with safety.

REPETITION

Sometimes prayers are laced with words that are excessively repeated: “Father ... Father ... Father,” or “just ... just ... just,” or “you know ... you know ... you know.”

DESIRABLE PRAYER HABITS

Here are some desirable prayer habits that will help enhance your prayer experience.

CHOOSE THE BEST TIME

Select a particular time of the day, and dedicate it only to personal prayer. For most of us, the morning is best, because we have been refreshed by the previous night's rest and we are not yet absorbed in the demands of the day. This is often the time we can most consistently keep, and during morning prayer we can dedicate the day to the Lord. An

“If God is not first in our thoughts and efforts in the morning, he will be in the last place the remainder of the day.”

(E. M. Bounds)

extremely wise habit is to bring him into our decision-making process by thinking through and planning the day's activities in prayer. Even better, try to schedule two or three regular prayer breaks during the day to relax briefly, release burdens of stress and anxiety, and enjoy spiritual communion.

CHOOSE THE BEST PLACE

Select a place where there will be a minimum of interruptions and distractions. If possible, pray away from your phone and your desk. When the weather and your schedule permit, you may want to try praying during a walk.

BE CONSISTENT

Regard your prayer time as a daily appointment you have made with God and respect it as such. If the discipline of regular time with God is not a matter of the highest priority, your spiritual life will suffer, and this will ultimately affect every other aspect of your life. Set your heart to pursue the person, knowledge, and ways of God by spending regular time with him.

“But you, when you pray, go into your inner room, close your door and pray to your Father who is in secret, and your Father who sees what is done in secret will reward you.”

(Matthew 6:6)

SET A MINIMUM TIME FOR DAILY PRAYER

If we want to know and thus love God more, it will take time. Try to be realistic. Do not attempt too much at first or your prayer life will become mechanical and discouraging. Start with a few minutes and gradually build from there. Faithfulness on this level will lead to an increased appetite, and you will actually look forward to the times you spend with God.

“In prayer, quality is always better than quantity.”

Robert Coleman

“Surely the experience of all good men confirms the proposition that without a due measure of private devotions the soul will grow lean.”

William Wilberforce

“Our devotions are not measured by the clock, but time is of their essence. ... Calmness, grasp, strength, are never the companions of hurry. ... It is true that Bible prayers in word and print are short, but the praying men of the Bible were with God through many a sweet and holy wrestling hour. They won by few words but long waiting.”

E. M. Bounds

PLAN SPECIAL TIMES OF PRAYER DURING THE YEAR

Consider setting aside one or more special times, such as a morning or evening or a whole day, for a personal or small group prayer retreat. This can be especially meaningful when done in the context of planning ahead for the next several months or when a critical decision must be made.

MAKE PRAYER PART OF YOUR RELATIONSHIPS WITH PEOPLE

Personal prayer is crucial, but it must not crowd out corporate prayer. Prayer should be a part of the home and family (husband and wife, parents with children) and part of Christian friendships. Great benefit can be derived from setting up a prayer partnership with

another person, a prayer cell with a few people, or a prayer fellowship with several people.

MAKE PRAYER PART OF YOUR CHRISTIAN SERVICE

Prayer and action are complementary, not contradictory, and it is wise to overlap them as much as possible. Christian service is most effective when prayer not only precedes it but also flows together with it. When prayer is overlooked or appended as an afterthought to service, the power of God is often absent. It is dangerously easy to move away from dependence on God and slip into the trap of self-reliance.

“It is dangerously easy to move away from dependence on God and slip into the trap of self-reliance.”

FOCUS ON THE PERSON OF GOD

Prepare your heart and mind for prayer by releasing all stresses and concerns and giving them to the Lord. A good practice is to read or meditate on a passage of Scripture and then concentrate your attention on the presence of Christ in your life. Rest in his presence, “casting all your anxiety on Him, because He cares for you” (1 Peter 5:7).

Review the good news of his love and redemptive work on your behalf, and remind yourself of who you have become in Christ. Reflect on some aspect of the person and character of God and praise him for it. Make this reflection very personal.

“Prayer becomes dull, if not meaningless, when we lose sight of the greatness of God, or forget his countless gifts. As soon as we take anyone for granted, our relationship with that person begins to crumble.”

David Watson

COME BEFORE HIM IN HUMILITY

You are in the unmediated presence of the holy God, who is like a blazing light and a consuming fire, before whom all things are manifest. Judge yourself to be sure that you are approaching him in honesty and openness, with no barriers of unconfessed sin, because he hates sin and cover-ups. Sometimes we get too casual before the One who spoke the hundreds of billions of galaxies into existence.

COME EXPECTANTLY TO THE THRONE

Our Father is the King, and we are in his presence. The significance of prayer is not what we are asking, but to whom we are talking. Come in simplicity and trust like a child to a father. Expect the supernatural. Ask him for something only he could do, and watch what happens.

**“Is anything
too difficult
for the Lord?”
(Genesis 18:14)**

STRIVE FOR BALANCE

Our prayers should incorporate all the elements of confession, adoration, supplication (intercession and petition), and thanksgiving. We are usually short on adoration and thanksgiving.

PRAY AT ALL TIMES IN THE SPIRIT

Our prayers should be initiated and energized by the Holy Spirit who “intercedes for the saints according to the will of God” (Romans 8:27; see also 8:26). We are in spiritual warfare, and we can only engage a spiritual enemy in the strength of God’s Spirit. See Ephesians 6:18 and Jude 1:20.

“We do not know how to pray as we should, but the Spirit Himself intercedes for us with groanings too deep for words.”
(Romans 8:26)

DO NOT DO ALL THE TALKING

Have times of silence before the Lord so you can be sensitive to the promptings of his Spirit. Be responsive to him by confessing any areas of exposed sin, interceding for others, praying for wisdom, and submitting to his desires.

PRACTICE THE PRESENCE OF GOD

Helmut Thielicke noted that “prayer is no longer the active soil of our life, our home, the air we breathe.” When ministry becomes a substitute for prayer, it



becomes man-centered and ineffective. We should desire not only to have one or more times that are formally dedicated to prayer during the day, but also to be conscious of the presence of God throughout the day. In this way, each task is rendered in his name and done in conscious dependence on him.

Another desirable habit is to pray for others as we see them and talk with them. Look for Christ in every person you meet. These habits can radically affect our attitudes and behavior.

Also, begin to associate work with prayer:

“It is not prayer in addition to work, but prayer simultaneous with work. We precede, enfold, and follow all our work with prayer. Prayer and action become wedded.”

Richard Foster

“The prayers we live on our feet are just as important as those we say on our knees.”

“The tragedy of our day is not unanswered prayer but unoffered prayer.”

“A problem not worth praying about is not worth worrying about.”

“Men may spurn our appeals, reject our message, oppose our arguments, despise our persons, but they are helpless against our prayers.” *J. Sidlow Baxter*

“The Christian on his knees sees more than the philosopher on tiptoe.” *Dwight L. Moody*

“Keep praying, but be thankful that God’s answers are wiser than your prayers!” *William Culbertson*

“Prayer is the slender nerve that moves the muscle of Omnipotence.” *J. Edwin Hartill*

“Prayer catapults us onto the frontier of the spiritual life. It is original research in unexplored territory.” *Richard Foster*

“There is not in the world a kind of life more sweet and delightful than that of a continual conversation with God.” *Brother Lawrence*

PRAYER CHECKLIST

Use the following checklist to evaluate your prayer life and to make mid-course corrections as needed.

A. CONTENT

- I confess my sins consistently and keep short accounts with God.
- I often praise and adore God in my prayers and reflect on who he is and what he has done.
- I often intercede for the physical, psychological, and spiritual needs of others and petition God with my own needs and concerns.
- I thank God daily for what he has done for me and others.

B. QUALITY

- I am persistent in my prayers.
- I pray in submission to God's will.

- I pray with faith in the fact that God can and will answer my prayers.
- I examine my motives to weed out greed and selfishness.
- I come before God with a sincere heart and a clear conscience.
- I pray about specific needs.
- I pray in dependence on the Holy Spirit and seek to be sensitive to his promptings.

C. QUANTITY

- I have at least one special time that is set aside for prayer each day.
- I seek to practice the presence of God by maintaining a prayerful attitude in the midst of my activities.
- My prayer life is more consistent now than it was in the past.
- I pray with my family on a regular basis.



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