

■ DIGGING IN...

HOW TO OVERCOME PRAYERLESSNESS

By Pastor Chuck Smith

God is the Creator of the universe. "All things were made by Him; and without Him was not any thing made that was made" (John 1:3). The One who has created this vast universe has given you an invitation to come, talk, and fellowship with Him. He has invited you to enter into His presence to share any problems or needs you might have. Yet, so many times we ignore this invitation.

You may say, "I just don't have time to pray." Do you have time to watch television? We have time to do the things we really want to do. Therefore, God must assume that we really don't want to fellowship with Him. And that's a correct assumption.

Our flesh rebels against prayer because it's an exercise of the spirit. That is why I get so tired as soon as I start to pray. I say, "I'm too sleepy, Lord." My flesh is rebelling against the spiritual exercise of prayer. The spirit and flesh are always warring against each other. Whenever I enter into spiritual exercise, my flesh rebels against it. I find any excuse possible. "I'm too upset to pray" or "I'm too weak to pray."

Jesus said, "You have not chosen me, but I have chosen you, and ordained you, that you should go and bring forth fruit, and that your fruit should remain: that whatsoever you shall ask of the Father in my name, He may give it you" - John 15:16

God wants to give you many things, but He will not give them until you pray. By prayer you're actually opening the door to let God do the things He wants to do. I believe we have seen only a small fraction of what God has wanted to do - because of our lack of prayer.

CAUSES OF PRAYERLESSNESS

If you examine yourself, you'll find a variety of reasons for the lack of prayer in your life. The first cause is the lack of time. Also, it is extremely difficult to find an undisturbed place to pray. It's getting harder and harder to find a quiet place to be alone with the Lord. This world is becoming more congested and overcrowded, and Satan does everything he can to interrupt any quiet times you may have with the Lord.

For instance, you may go for a week without one telephone call. But, if you get lonesome and want the telephone to ring, just kneel down and pray. It may be a wrong number, but you can be sure the telephone is going to ring, or someone will be at the front door, or one of the children will come in crying. So many disturbances make it difficult to pray.

Another hindrance to prayer is the tendency to let your mind wander. You begin to pray about certain things. Quite soon your mind has taken you surfing - the waves are great, that next set looks like a beauty - oops, "Sorry, Lord!" Your mind has taken a little side journey.

Another problem which causes a lack of prayer is drowsiness. We live under such pressure most of the time that any free moment is a moment to rest. For instance, if you kneel down beside your bed and put your head in your arms and start to pray - that's a real good position to sleep! You soon doze off in the middle of a prayer!

SOLUTIONS

What can we do to overcome our problem of prayerlessness? I have a few practical suggestions. As far as time is concerned, we must discipline ourselves and take time for prayer. You'll never find time to pray. You must make time. Life is made up of priorities. Since you can never do all that you want to do, you must always sacrifice the less important things for the more important ones. Prayer is the most important activity you could ever engage in.

Secondly, find a place that is undisturbed. Many times I go for a walk or take a drive to get alone with the Lord. I also wake up much earlier than the rest of my family. To keep my mind from wandering, I usually vocalize my prayers. It's true that God knows what's in my heart, but when I try to pray out of my heart my mind often wanders. For a moment I'm thinking, "Lord, take care of this. Thank you for that" and pretty soon I'm surfing again! But when I vocalize my prayer, I have to think about what I'm saying.

I've found that it's best for me to pray while sitting in a chair or walking. Sometimes I even walk back and forth in a room. Other times I go for a walk in a field or in the yard. Some of my most fruitful and blessed prayer times have been during walks.

When I pray I talk to God just like I talk to my closest friend. I don't use any fancy tones or get wild and yell. God knows the real me. I don't need a "prayer tone." I tell Him all my problems, doubts, and questions. I try to be as honest with Him as I can. I might as well because He knows if I'm not! If I try to gloss over something, the only one who's getting fooled is me. God isn't fooled. I may say, "Lord, you know I don't really have the depth of love for this fellow that I should have." This is an attempt to hide the truth and make me look not as bad as I am. I might as well tell Him the truth. "God, I hate him. I can't stand him. I'd like to punch him in the nose every time I see him!" Be honest, and then repent!

Also, I talk to God in a conversational way. This means that I must listen, too. After all, God wants to talk back to me. I find such joy and blessings as I come into this communion and fellowship with the One who created me.

May God forgive us our sin of prayerlessness. May God help us to pray fervently. And may we see the mighty work of God accomplished in this desperate world through our prayerfulness. ■

FOUNDATIONS OF FAITH: LESSON #4 - The Power of Prayer

"There is no force in nature that is equal to the power of prayer." - C.H. Spurgeon

As a Christian, your spiritual life and growth depends a great deal on prayer. Your life will flourish or decay according to how much or how little you pray, if you pray with pleasure or from duty, and if you pray according to the Word or according to your own inclination. During this study we will learn what prayer is, and we will also learn the various types of prayer for daily Christian living, in order to live a complete and fulfilled life in Jesus Christ.

"Pray without ceasing, in everything give thanks; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you." - 1 Thes 5:17-18

What is Prayer?

What do you think that prayer is? _____

Prayer is simply a line of communication between God and man. If you desire to establish and continue a relationship with someone, it is necessary to communicate with them. Without communication there is no relationship. Our relationship with God carries this same principle. In order to establish and enhance our relationship with God, it is important to talk **and listen** to God.

How should we Pray?

Prayer is talking to God in a manner which would be natural to you. God does not intend for you to speak to Him in the King James language, "Oh Father, Thou hast blessed Thine Servant immeasurably more that I can comprehend . . ." "God is more concerned with your heart and in what you say, not how you say it or what position your body is in!"

Jesus gave His disciples an outline on how we are to Pray. See Matthew 6:5-13 (also Luke 11:1-4)

Let's look at this prayer more closely:

#1 - WORSHIP "Our Father in Heaven, hallowed be Your name" (v9)

When we pray we must recognize who we are addressing. When approaching God in prayer, it is essential to understand that through Jesus, we are God's children. Just as a little child would run into his daddy's outstretched arms without fear of rejection, so too with us as God's children. This however, always needs to be balanced with the reality that God is **holy**. Our confidence in approaching God only comes through Christ's shed blood on the cross on our behalf and not according to our good deeds.

Read Hebrews 10:19. By what right can we boldly enter into God's Holiest? _____

Read Ephesians 2:8-9. According to these two verses, our salvation was a _____ of God.

Why can't we get to heaven by our own works? _____

Example of Prayer of Worship

"Lord, I love you, and I want to thank You for sending Your Son, Jesus Christ, to die on the cross for me. God, You are far above all creation. You are Holy, righteous, fair and good. I worship You because you are worthy of my praise, honor and admiration. Without what you have done for me, I would be eternally lost forever. You alone are my salvation!"

#2 - SUBMISSION & INTERCESSION "Your kingdom will come. Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven" (v10)

God has a perfect plan for your life, therefore, your prayers should always be that God's will is done in your life. Prayer is not bending God's will toward ours, but our will toward His. Prayer was designed so that we could get in touch with God's will and program for our lives.

Read 1 John 5:14-15

What confidence do we have by conforming to God's will for us through prayer? _____

We also see in this verse (Matthew 6:10), that as Jesus interceded on behalf of others, so that the Father's will would be done on earth, so should we. This list of others in our lives should not only include family and friends, but also church (Pastors, workers, congregation), government, as well as those who do not yet have a personal relationship with Jesus Christ.

Read James 5:16. What does this verse say we should do for one another? _____

Example of a Prayer of Submission and intercession—

“Dear Jesus, please show me how I might live more fully for You. Give me the wisdom to know what is Your will for my life. Please give me a heart that loves and reaches out to _____. I know that I cannot force him/her to become a believer, but I know that through Your Holy Spirit, you can break down the spiritual barriers that keep him/her from You, and give him/her spiritual eyes that he/she might see who You really are and fall on his knees and worship You today.”

#3 - PROVISION & PETITION “Give us this day our daily bread” (v11)

Jesus uses the word “daily” here. We need to seek Him through our prayers each and everyday. Not only for our physical food, but more importantly, our spiritual.

What would happen to you if you only ate one meal per week regularly? _____

It is the same principle with spiritual food. What would happen to you spiritually if you only read and prayed once a week on Sundays?

Read John 6:48. What is Jesus to us? _____

More important than physical food, is the spiritual life and nourishment that the Lord Jesus gives to us. We need to earnestly desire more of Him in our lives, nourishing and growing us spiritually so that we can serve Him more everyday.

Read Philippians 4:19. How will God do the things spoken of in Matthew 6:33? _____

Example of a Prayer of Provision & Petition—

Heavenly Father, thank You for all that you have provided me with: my faith, my life, my family, my husband/wife, shelter, daily food - Lord, You have blessed me with so much, and I am so thankful. I pray dear Lord that You would continue to provide me with the things which are needed and necessary to fulfill all that You would have me to do. Help me to realize that I need Your Son Jesus, more and more in my life, more important than anything else, because it is His life that gives me life.

#4 - FORGIVENESS “And forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors” (v12)

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

Even though as Christians we possess the righteousness of God in Christ (2 Cor 5:21), we must understand that we still sin. God wants to forgive us of all our sins, however, it is very important that we also forgive those who have sinned against us. Our refusal to forgive indicates that we are not truly submitting to the Lordship of Christ in our lives.

Read Matthew 6:14-15. What did Jesus say concerning the forgiveness of others? _____

Holding back your forgiveness toward others will ultimately hold back your intimacy with God.

Example of Prayer of Forgiveness—

Heavenly Father, please forgive me for _____. I pray not only that You would forgive me, but that You would also cleanse me and purify my heart. And Lord, I pray that You would give me the strength to forgive my brother/sister who has _____ against me. I desire a pure relationship with You and I know that I have no right to hold a grudge against him especially when You have forgiven me of so much. Thank you Lord for Your power to forgive me and your strength in my life which enable me to forgive my brother. I love you Lord.

#5 - DEPENDENCE & DELIVERANCE “And do not lead us into temptation, but deliver us from the evil one” (v13)

“Be careful, be on you guard; because your adversary the devil walks about like a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour.” - 1 Peter 5:8

Beware of the wiles of the enemy....He is out to destroy you!

Read James 1:13-14. When are we tempted? _____

Pray often that the Lord would give you the discernment to see the tricks of the enemy against your life, and that He would supply you with strength to flee when you are tempted.

Read 1 Corinthians 10:13. What does God give us during temptation? _____

Is there one temptation known to man which a Christian is powerless to overcome? _____

What temptation in your life seems over-powering? _____

Read Ephesians 6:10-18. How are we to prepare ourselves to stand against the enemy? _____

After we have put on the full armor which God supplies to all believers, what does verse 18 tell us to do? _____

“Submit to God. Resist the Devil and he will flee from you. Draw near to God and He will draw near to you.” - James 4:7-8a

According to this scripture above, what must we do even before we are called to resist the devil? _____

Example of Prayer of Dependence & Deliverance—

Dear Jesus, I know that the enemy would love to destroy the work that You have begun in my life. It is for this reason that I petition You to give me the strength and that You would prepare me for the battles I face daily. With You I can do all things, but without you I am helpless.

#6- WORSHIP “For Yours is the kingdom and the power and the glory forever” (v 13)

Knowing that we have already covered worship, it is still very important to see how Jesus concludes His model prayer. It is worth noting that the “bookends” to prayer involve worshipping God. Therefore, according to Jesus, we should end our prayers the way they began - with worship.

#7- AMEN (v 13)

The word *Amen* comes from the Hebrew word for “true” or “faithful”. It can also be translated “so be it”. When we use this word to end our prayers, it is our way of saying that we believe the Lord will answer our prayers.

If we are diligent to use this model prayer of Jesus as an outline to our very own prayers, we can be confident that we are praying in accordance with the will of God. This outline can also help us as Christians to stay focused during our prayer time as well as direct us in the things we can pray for and about, even when it seems there is nothing really to pray for.

“Christian, pray much, pray continually, pray without ceasing. When you have no desire to pray, go and pray. Go as one who has nothing to bring to the Father, and set yourself before Him in faith in His love. Coming in that manner to the Father and abiding before Him is already a prayer He understands. Be assured that coming before God in prayer always brings a blessing. The Father not only hears – He sees in secret, and He will reward openly.” – Andrew Murray