

Helps for Establishing a Prayer Life

Lk 11:1-13 ... This important passage on prayer reveals how the Bible joins together 2 very important elements, when it comes to sustaining a meaningful prayer life:

- (1) **CONTENT** – what we pray about and set our attention on in prayer
- (2) **CONTINUATION** (or persevering) – how do we continue to pursue God in prayer

Lk 18:1 "And he told them a parable to the effect that they ought always to pray and not lose heart."

This passage, which is followed by a parable that illustrates the need for continuing in persevering prayer, states clearly that those who attempt to enter into the realm of prayer will at some point be confronted by the temptation to lose heart in continuing. If that's been your experience, then you are a Biblical Christian! Welcome to the intercessor's club.

"...those indwelt by the Holy Spirit really want to pray. And yet, while they believe in prayer and want to pray and can't imagine ever totally abandoning prayer, when they do pray it's frustrating. Their hearts are often cold, their minds can't stay focused on prayer, and frankly, prayer is often boring." Don Whitney, "Praying with the Psalmist"

"There are tricks that we can use; different tricks help different people. If you find that your thoughts wander when you are praying silently, pray aloud. If you find that once the day gets going you can never find time to pray, get up earlier and pray before you do anything else. If you find that your thoughts and words simply won't come together, write out the petition that you are seeking to get into focus and use your own written prayer to present the matter to God. You may find that keeping a journal in which you record the prayers that you've been looking to God to answer is a great help. Take note of whatever distracts you from prayer and try to avoid it. These are just commonsense tools of help. They will not make hanging on in prayer easy; but they may help to make it possible." J.I. Packer and Carolyn Nystrom, "Praying", p. 228

The following suggestions are offered as "helps" in your pursuit of establishing a significant and meaningful personal prayer life.

Develop a Prayer Schedule

Selecting certain things to pray for on certain days will enable you to create some boundaries that allow for more meaningful focus and waiting on God. Sometimes when we try to "pray for everything every time we pray" we end up creating a prayer exchange that doesn't allow us to "feel" the burden of God or to wait on Him in our times of intercession in order to receive direction and faith and fervency about the things we are praying for. There are times that we need to press in and "pray until we've prayed" about something/someone, but if we have a long checklist of items to get to in our prayer closet, we end up often being in a hurry to get to the end of our list.

I have found it very helpful to use a model or a template that has something different in it for each day of the week. You can custom make this for yourself and either put it on a set of cards or keep it in a prayer journal. This will also help you to remember and plan to pray for things that are truly important, but perhaps don't come to mind as readily. See the "prayer card" insert for a sample.

Use a Prayer Model

When the disciples asked Jesus to teach them to pray, he gave them a bit of a "script" to follow. I don't at all think He meant this to become a rote prayer that only consisted of these particular words, but rather a model of the types of things that one should pray about. Remembering that prayer involves a variety of expressions including praise, thanksgiving, petition, silence, intercession, etc., the prayer that Jesus outlined in Matt 6:9-13 and Lk 11:2-4 helps to take us into these various realms. Consider how this prayer creates a venue for our prayer time:

- **"Our Father"** ... begin by considering God as our Father, consider the privilege of this relationship, the security and promise it holds for us in coming to Him, the Covenant of Grace that has made us His children, the inheritance that is ours because we are His children, etc. This greatly informs our attitude, our faith, our confidence, our praise, our thankfulness, etc.
- **"in heaven"** ... this reality brings to me much needed perspective as I pray— God is in heaven with an eternal and sovereign perspective on my life and its surroundings, and I am on earth with a very limited perspective; I am coming to one who has a severe advantage and position over the circumstance for which I am about to pray...

- ***"Hallowed by your name"*** ... this thought helps to posture me in humility before the God who is Holy, Holy, Holy! By this thought I am drawn into the great purpose for why all things exist—to declare the holiness and glory of God into all of creation. If I've lost sight of this, then there's no way I can pray accurately about my need or circumstances. When Moses prayed for Israel it was God's holy name that he was concerned about (Ex 32:11-12). When Daniel prayed for God to restore Israel from captivity, it was God's holy name that drove his concerns (Dan 9:16-19)
- ***"Your kingdom come, Your will be done"*** ... this thought helps me to take up a larger concern than just my personal need or understanding. In prayer we are called to represent God's interest for His kingdom upon the earth. I'm reminded that I'm an ambassador for His kingdom and my chief interest in all things, people, and events is to see His kingdom to be established. That's what I'm ultimately asking for in each circumstance. I begin to consider what God's kingdom is like, and what God wants, that He has revealed in His Word or that I may sense by the Holy Spirit.
- Etc.

Pray the Scriptures

See the notes and CD message by Donald Whitney—"Praying with the Psalmist" available at the bookstore.

Prepare to Pray

Something that eventually becomes a "prayer killer" is our lack of intentionality. We approach our times of prayer with a practice of "spontaneous disorganization". We may be misled in thinking that being led by the Spirit in our prayer times means that we should not make any preparation to guide us in what we will say. Charles Spurgeon's message, "Order and Argument in Prayer" encourages the one praying to "fill his mouth with arguments", and takes a lesson from the many prayers in Scripture that show the man of prayer approaching the throne of grace as though he were an attorney who had prepared his argument in advance and was there to plead his case as to why the king should decide in his favor.

"First, it is necessary that our suit be ordered before God. There is a vulgar notion that prayer is a very easy thing, a kind of common business that may be done in any way, without care or effort. ...The ancient saints were accustomed to ordering their cause before God. For example, a petitioner coming into court does not come there to state his case on the spur of the moment. Certainly not. He enters into the audience chamber with his suit well prepared. Moreover, he has learned how he ought to behave himself in the presence of the great one to whom he is appealing. In times of peril and distress we may fly to God just as we are, as the dove enters the cleft of the rock even though her plumes are ruffled; however, in ordinary times we should not come with an unprepared spirit, even as a child does not come to his father in the morning until he has washed his face." Charles Spurgeon, "Order and Argument in Prayer"

It is small adjustments like these that bring content and strength to our prayer times, thus helping us to continue and persevere in this most important activity.

From Jesus teaching and example of prayer, we can focus on 4 aspects that will go a long way in helping us to develop a significant prayer life that avoids the ruts.

- (1) Give attention to the content of your prayer life
- (2) Give attention to whether you are continuing/persevering
- (3) Don't be satisfied to pray without fervency!
- (4) Establish a regular time and place for prayer—don't leave it to chance!

Recommended Reading:

"The Hour that Changes the World" (A Practical Plan for Personal Prayer), by Dick Eastman
"The Ministry of Intercession" by Andrew Murray
"Spurgeon on Prayer and Spiritual Warfare" by Charles Spurgeon
"The Secret Key to Heaven" (The Vital Importance of Private Prayer), by Thomas Brooks
"A Call to Spiritual Reformation" (Priorities from Paul and His Prayers), by D.A. Carson

SAMPLE DAILY PRAYING CARDS (SCHEDULES FOR PERSONAL PRAYER)

Monday

Personal Prayer Targets

- A Personal Growth Area in Family Ministry & Activity: (as a Husband/wife)
- A Personal Growth Area in Character (Humility)

Monday Prayer Focus:

> *Personal Issues of Growth*

- Study of Scripture
- Times of prayer
- Roles & Responsibilities
- Pending Decisions
- Patterns/habits

***Family Member to Pray For:**

***Friend/Co-worker to Pray For:**

***Cov. Group Member to pray for:**

Miscellaneous Prayer Needs

- Health Needs
- Those Overtaken in Sin

Wednesday

Personal Prayer Targets

- A Personal Growth Area in Family Ministry & Activity: (Active Encouragement)
- A Personal Growth Area in Character (Serving others)

Tuesday

Personal Prayer Targets

- A Personal Growth Area in Family Ministry & Activity: (Parental Care & Wisdom)
- A Personal Growth Area in Church Ministry and Outreach (Spiritual Gift)

Tuesday Prayer Focus:

> *Family*

- Salvation
- Spiritual Growth
- Good relationships in family
- Good friendships
- Education/school
- Spiritual Protection & Physical Health
- Upcoming Events & Activities

***Family Member to Pray For:**

***Friend/Co-worker to Pray For:**

***Cov. Group Member to pray for:**

Miscellaneous Prayer Needs

Wednesday Prayer Focus:

> *Calling & Responsibilities*

- Personal Integrity
- Working as unto the Lord
- Business/work issues
- Government leaders & policies

***Family Member to Pray For:**

***Friend/Co-worker to Pray For:**

***Cov. Group Member to pray for:**

Miscellaneous Prayer Needs

Thursday

Personal Prayer Targets

- A Personal Growth Area in Family Ministry & Activity: (Study of Word)
- A Personal Growth Area in Fruit of Spirit (love, joy, peace, patience, etc.)

Thursday Prayer Focus: Local Church

> **Leadership Team** (*Spiritual Disciplines, Spiritual Protection, Health, Finances, Marriages, Anointing, Character Issues, Vision & Direction*)

- Pastoral Team & Staff
- Covenant Group Leaders
- Future Leaders

> *Various Ministries*

- Prayer Force, Cov Groups, Worship Team, Youth, Children's, Pivot, Women's, Men's, ALPHA & BETA,
- Upcoming Events & Activities

***Family Member to Pray For:**

***Friend/Co-worker to Pray For:**

***Cov. Group Member to pray for:**

Miscellaneous Prayer Needs

Saturday

Personal Prayer Targets

- A Personal Growth Area in Family Ministry & Activity: (Communication)
- A Personal Growth Area in Character (Eagerness, Godly ambitions)

Saturday Prayer Focus:

> **Sunday Services**

- People Gathered
- Spirit Empowered Ministry
- Gifts of the Spirit
- Ministry Times

Friday

Personal Prayer Targets

- A Personal Growth Area in Family Ministry & Activity: (Consistency & Vision for Family Activities & Relations)
- A Personal Growth Area in Ministry (Serving in the church; evangelism)

Friday Prayer Focus: Gospel Advance

> **Outside Ministries**

- Sovereign Grace Ministries
- Rancho 3M
- Next Generation
- Tuknow
- Alpha

> **Various People Needs in Church**

***Family Member to Pray For:**

***Friend/Co-worker to Pray For:**

***Cov. Group Member to pray for:**

Miscellaneous Prayer Needs

- Worship that is Worthy of God
- The preaching and receiving of the Word

> **Various People Needs in Church**

***Family Member to Pray For:**

***Friend/Co-worker to Pray For:**

***Cov. Group Member to pray for:**

Miscellaneous Prayer Needs