

BUILDING A STRONG PRAYER LIFE

A **MANNAHOUSE** RESOURCE



INTRODUCTION

I once heard a Christian man make a comment about that old gospel hymn entitled, "Sweet Hour of Prayer". He claimed that every time he sang that song in church, he experienced great conviction in his heart because his prayer life was so weak. This man was speaking for many believers who are frustrated with their prayer life, or convicted about their lack of commitment to prayer. For far too many Christians, a strong prayer life is more a frustrated hope than it is a present reality.

Each Christian can and should have a strong, consistent prayer life, characterized by frequent and enjoyable interaction with God. Building your prayer life requires understanding why you are praying, knowing the conditions that make for effective prayer, and having the willingness to develop a disciplined prayer time.

The purpose of this booklet is to provide the understanding and inspiration necessary for the development of a strong prayer life.

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WHAT IS PRAYER?

Simply defined, prayer is enjoying communication, interaction, and fellowship with God. When the Lord called us into His eternal family, He called us into a relationship with Himself. A Christian life without prayer is like a marriage without communication: you have the bond but lack the intimacy. Prayer allows us to develop a close relationship with our Creator. God desires intimate fellowship with us and has made this possible through the indwelling Holy Spirit. **Prayer, alone, can develop the sensitivity of our spirit to His and produce the interaction and communion which He desires to have with us.** Prayer is not the mystery it appears to be. It must not be viewed as a mechanical exercise that automatically brings the expected results. It is a relationship with an omnipotent and sovereign God who is Spirit (Jn. 4:24), and therefore involves different elements of communion and approach than we are used to on a purely human level of communication.

THREE REASONS FOR PRAYER

The Bible gives us clear insight concerning those conditions that are necessary for effective interaction with God. These will be examined in this booklet. Following are three main reasons why prayer is essential for every believer:

1. Prayer Creates Fellowship - Relationships are built by quality time together. Prayer alone with God creates special fellowship together. Jesus frequently got alone with God to pray (Matt. 14:23).

2. Prayer Renews Us Spiritually - Prayer refreshes us in the presence and glory of God (Ps 16:11). We come under the influence of His Spirit in a more concentrated way. Our spirit and soul are renewed as God ministers to us in our areas of personal need.

3. Prayer Makes Us Co-Laborers With God - Before the fall, mankind was given the rule over this present world (Gen. 1:28). Jesus Christ, as the Second Adam, has reclaimed this authority (Mt. 28:18). Through prayer, we share in the burdens and concerns of Christ and become co-laborers with God during this present age to see His redemptive will accomplished in the earth (1 Cor. 3:9).

WHAT IS PRAYER?

“And it came to pass, as He was praying in a certain place, when He ceased, that one of His disciples said to Him, Lord, teach us to pray.” (Lk. 11:1) — **By watching the life and miracles of Jesus Christ, the disciples had come to the conclusion that His personal strength and divine power were connected with His prayer life.** Desiring more than an ordinary, mundane existence, they too wanted the secrets of prayer.

There is no more qualified teacher than Jesus. He manifested the model prayer life. He understood prayer, knew how to pray, and got results through His prayers. His faith in prayer was clearly expressed when He spoke to God saying, *“And I know that You always hear Me”* (Jn. 11 :42). **Christ is our teacher!** Even after examining the biblical conditions and principles of prayer, we must rely upon the Lord to teach us how to pray. There are guidelines, but there is no single, rigid format to follow for every prayer situation. Prayer is interaction with God; therefore, He must be the teacher.

CONDITIONS FOR EFFECTIVE PRAYER

I. HOLINESS AND PRAYER

“Who may ascend into the hill of the Lord? Or who may stand in His holy place? He who has clean hands and a pure heart.” (Ps. 24:3,4)

In the above scripture, David reveals a vital truth concerning prayer and righteousness. **God hears the prayer of those who approach Him with clean hands and a pure heart.** The opposite is also true. Isaiah 59:2 reveals that sin will cause God to turn a deaf ear to our cry. Many people would like the privilege of power in prayer without cleaning up their personal life. However, God only hears the voice of those who walk uprightly before Him.

For clarification, we must remember that our righteousness is first and foremost found in Christ (Rom. 4:5). In ourselves, we are never worthy to come before God. Jesus Christ has made this privilege possible. But from this imputed righteousness must spring forth a life of sincere dedication to pleasing the Lord and doing His will. **Deliberate and unrepented sin will hinder and destroy our prayer life.**

II. PRAYING IN THE WILL OF GOD

*“Now this is the confidence that we have in Him, that if we ask anything **ACCORDING TO HIS WILL, He hears us.** And if we know that He hears us, whatever we ask, we know that we have the petitions we have asked of Him.”* (1 Jn. 5:14,15)

Christians commonly pray the prayer of hope rather than the prayer of confidence. Too often it’s “Lord, if it’s your will” instead of “Lord, I believe it’s your will”. The above scripture assures us that we can have confidence that we are praying in the will of God and that those prayers will get results. The big question then is, “How can I know that I am praying in the will of God?” **First, God has revealed many specific instructions, commandments, and principles of His will in the Bible.** Becoming thoroughly familiar with the Word of God will give us confidence that our prayers are according to His will. **Secondly, we should seek for a sense of faith and spiritual witness regarding our requests.**

Many of our common requests concerning family life, work, and spiritual direction are acceptable and good, and yet not necessarily God's specific will. We should ask God for a sense of confirmation concerning His will in these matters. **There are also areas where God's specific will may not be disclosed to us, no matter how much thought, prayer, and consideration we give it.** For example James warns us against our confidence about future circumstances when he says, "*you do not know what will happen tomorrow.*" (James 4: 14) However, lack of specifics should not restrict us from at least praying generally within His will.

Another important consideration is that prayer for other people must take into account the free will of man. We may pray in God's will for someone, but their willingness to respond will ultimately determine the outcome. As we pray, confidence may come more easily with some requests than with others. Maturity in a knowledge of the Word and in our experience in prayer will bring a greater assurance that we are praying in the will of God.

III. THE MISDIRECTED PRAYER

“YOU ASK AND DO NOT RECEIVE, because, YOU ASK AMISS, *that you may spend it on your pleasures.”* (James 4:3)

In the above scripture, James calls attention to one of the primary reasons for unanswered prayer. **He reproves the believer for making requests that spring from their own selfish desires rather than the will of God.** Many are guilty of approaching God like a naive little child who approaches Santa Claus. They ask for money, reputation, or things without the regard for the motive behind their request. Our prayers should reflect an understanding of the kind of father God really is. The superiority of His wisdom and love in Fatherhood is established in a number of scriptures (Heb. 12:7-10; Lk. 11:13). We see the kind of blessing God gives His children in James 1: 17; *“Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above.”*

God has an appointed destiny for each of us. We are each given gifts and talents to be used in some area of service. We are also being *“conformed to the image of His son.”* (Rom. 8:29) God will not grant requests that will hurt us or frustrate and undermine His design for our lives.

IV. PRAYING IN THE NAME OF JESUS

“ . . . I go to my Father. **And whatever you ask IN MY NAME, that I will do, that the Father may be glorified in the Son.**” (Jn. 14:12, 13)

Power in prayer is only possible by coming to God in the name of Jesus. Prayers are uttered every day all over this earth by members of different religious groups all to no avail because they are not given in Jesus' name. Only those things asked in His name will be answered. There is more to using this name than attaching it to the end of whatever we have prayed. A name represents a person and what he stands for. **Using the name of a king means you are representing his honor, power, and kingdom.** It also implies a surrender of interest to him whom you represent. When you come in another's name, you come representing his concern and burden. **Using the name of Jesus effectively depends on our relationship to the name.** Our prayers, requests, and petitions must express His character, nature, and will if they are to have authority. In making requests, our hearts must be aligned with Christ's purpose “*that the Father may be glorified in the Son.*” (Jn. 14:13) When these conditions prevail, the promise is “*whatever you ask in My name, that I will do.*” (Jn. 14: 13)

V. PRAYING IN FAITH

“So Jesus answered and said to them, *Have faith in God. Therefore I say to you, whatever things you ask when you pray, BELIEVE that you receive them, and you will have them.*” (Mk. 11:22, 24)

The primary lesson of building faith is to “Have faith in God.” (Mk. 11 :22) He is “*the author and finisher of our faith.*” (Heb. 12:2) Faith for God’s working is a by-product of building a relationship of confidence and trust in Him. The power to believe a promise is dependent on faith in the one who promised. “*He who comes to God must believe that He is, and that He is a rewarder of those who diligently seek Him.*” (Heb. 11:6)

The power to believe we have received our requests is related to knowing we have heard from God in the matter of our prayer. This comes from conditioning our prayer on His word and His spiritual witness. Abraham had heard from God and was therefore “*fully convinced that what He had promised He was also able to perform.*” (Rom. 4:21) Once we have assurance, we can wait for the fulfillment with confident expectation knowing that faith is “*the evidence of things not seen.*” (Heb. 11:1)

VI. THE FERVENT PRAYER

“The EFFECTIVE, FERVENT, PRAYER of a righteous man avails much.”

(James 5: 16)

We have here another key to power in prayer. It is not the shallow, ritualized, monotoned prayer that moves the hand of God. **It is, rather, the earnest, aggressive, fervent prayer of a righteous person that accomplishes much.** Fervency in prayer is an outgrowth of strong desire. Strong desire linked with praying in the will of God reflects a participation in the intercessory burden of Christ. It indicates a genuine concern for the success of His redemptive work in the earth. **When our hearts are intent upon receiving the requests we pray for, there will be a fervency in our prayer.**

Fervent prayer in the will of God requires that our prayer be definite. The Spirit of God will lead us into specific requests rather than vague, generalized petitions.

VII. PERSISTENCE IN PRAYER

"I say to you, though he will not rise and give to him because he is his friend, yet because of his persistence he will rise and give him as many as he needs." (Lk. 11:8)

The above verse declares the essential point Jesus wanted to communicate in the parable of the friend who came in need of bread at midnight. Though the master of the house would not rise and meet the need strictly because of their friendship, he would do so because of the petitioner's persistence. **The message is clear: be persistent in prayer!** God does not always answer immediately.

This element of prayer is somewhat of a mystery. Why does God tarry? A number of possible reasons can be given: it may not be His intended timing; He may have to alter circumstances in order to meet the need in the best way; He may have things He wants to work in our lives before He answers; or there may be other reasons. **The important point for us is to remain persistent in prayer for those things we believe are the will of God.**

VIII. PRAYING IN THE HOLY SPIRIT

“But you, beloved, building yourselves up on your most holy faith,
PRAYING IN THE HOLY SPIRIT.” (Jude 20; see also 1 Cor. 14:2, 14)

“For we do not know what we should pray for as we ought, but the Spirit Himself makes intercession for us with groanings which cannot be uttered.”
(Rom. 8:26)

The Spirit of God within us is to be the source and inspiration behind all of our prayers. Most of the time we pray in our understanding, making specific requests according to a sense of the will of God. However, during our prayer time we may sense a burden for something or someone and be unsure even how to pray. This is when we should yield to the direct intercession of the Holy Spirit. **This intercession can come in a couple of forms.** First, we may use our prayer language (i.e, speaking in tongues) to express the burden we feel in the Spirit. Secondly, during times of deep, heartfelt intercession there may even come groanings and vocal expressions born of the Spirit, arising from a sense of burden, that do not use either a heavenly or earthly language medium.

IX. PRAYER AND FASTING

"I say to you, if you have faith as a mustard seed, you will say to this mountain, move from here to there, and it will move; and nothing will be impossible for you. However, this kind does not go out except by prayer and fasting." (Mt. 17:20, 21) **Fasting is the practice of deliberately abstaining from food for the purpose of adding power to our prayers and stimulating spiritual growth.** In the above scripture, Jesus exalts prayer and fasting as being directly related to releasing faith.

Following are some reasons why fasting can add power to our spiritual life and our prayers:

- 1. Fasting Subordinates the Body** - Through fasting a man can subordinate his body to his spirit.
- 2. Fasting Brings Spiritual Keeness** - Through fasting we will receive a greater sense of spiritual perception that can help us in knowing how to pray.
- 3. Fasting Is an Act of Intercession** - Fasting is a further demonstration of our burden and concern to see that God's will will be done.

TWO ENEMIES OF PRAYER

I. SATAN

“For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against principalities and powers, against the rulers of darkness of this age.” (Eph. 6:12)

Prayer is our ultimate weapon of our spiritual warfare. It lines our mind and will up with God’s, and directs His power toward His purposes. Because of this, Satan fears prayer and will do anything in his power to keep us from it. Satan often uses the following tactics to hinder prayer:

- 1. Discouragement** - When we are discouraged we usually turn inward toward ourselves rather than upward to God.
- 2. Condemnation** - As “the accuser of our brethren” (Rev. 12: 10), he uses condemnation to turn us away from the “throne of grace” (Heb. 4: 16).
- 3. Deception** - Satan can appear as an “angel of light” (2 Cor.11: 14), tempting us with thoughts, ideas, or revelations that are at variance with the Word of God.
- 4. Hindering** - In Daniel 10 we see that Satan, through warfare and circumstances, can slow God’s response to our prayer.

II. THE FLESH

“Watch and pray, lest you enter into temptation. The spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak.” (Matt. 26:41)

There is probably no activity that the flesh will resist more than prayer.

We can always find time to eat, time to work, and time to have fun, but it seems so difficult to find time to pray. We mentally acknowledge its value and importance and respond with a hearty “amen” when the pastor exhorts us to maintain a prayer life, yet time and time again we shirk this most essential element of our spiritual life with excuses such as “I’m too tired” or “I’m so busy” or “God knows my need already.” Jesus pinpointed the culprit behind these excuses when He said, “*The spirit is . . . willing, but the flesh is weak.*” (Matt. 26:41) It is the nature of our flesh to be uncommitted to prayer.

We must counter this tendency by challenging these excuses and building a disciplined prayer life.

ELEMENTS OF YOUR PRAYER TIME

We will now examine the main elements constituting our time of prayer. Each of the elements we will study should be a part of our prayer life. They should, however, be incorporated in a flexible manner, thus allowing the Spirit of God to lead us during our prayer time.

I. PRAISE AND THANKSGIVING

“Enter into His gates with thanksgiving, and into His courts with praise.” (Ps.100:4) **It is a good practice to begin prayer with praise and thanksgiving.** Both of these expressions cause our heart to focus on the goodness of God. **Through thanksgiving, we rejoice in the many gifts of God on our behalf.** By giving Him thanks for what He has done, we not only show our appreciation, but we also cultivate a grateful spirit within us. **Through praise, we set our attention upon God as the giver of all blessings.** As our hearts consider His greatness and our mouths declare His praise, He descends upon us with a sweet sense of His presence (Ps. 22:3). The presence of God is an essential element of a fulfilling prayer time.

II. WORSHIP AND ADORATION

“Oh, worship the Lord in the beauty of holiness! Tremble before Him, all the earth.” (Ps. 96:9)

Worship and adoration are different from praise in the sense of awe and quiet reverence that settles upon us at the revelation of God.

Often, it is the presence of God that descends upon us through our praise that gives way to a deeper awareness of His nearness and His majesty.

The psalmist in the above scripture appears overwhelmed by his experience of the beauty of God’s holiness. This revelation inspires him to a sense of both fear and adoration.

We experience God in different ways and degrees at different times.
We should include worship and adoration, though, as a frequent part of our prayer life.

III. PERSONAL EXAMINATION

“Create in me a clean heart, O God; and renew a right spirit within me”
(Ps. 51: 10, K.J.V.).

Prayer is a time for personal examination and change. During our daily activities and responsibilities, our lives are barraged by a variety of circumstances, people, and influences. All of these have an accumulative impact and influence upon our thoughts, attitudes, and motives. Though we should guard our hearts continually, prayer is a special time when we can place ourselves before God for a wholesome spiritual examination.

Often, we do not realize what has affected us until we stand in the presence of God. **As we examine ourselves, we can discover things as accumulated bitterness, unforgiveness, bad attitudes or motives, greed, lust, etc.**

Our lives are the temple of the Holy Spirit (1 Cor. 6: 19) and therefore must be kept clean and free from those things. **After praise and worship, the next order of prayer should be personal examination, repentance for any sin, and commitment to change.**

IV. PETITIONS AND SUPPLICATIONS

“Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer AND SUPPLICATION, with thanksgiving, let your requests be known to God” (Phil. 4:6).

Generally speaking, a petition involves asking God for personal needs. A supplication can be defined as a stronger, more urgent form of petitioning. Webster defines supplication as “to petition earnestly”.

We all have many needs and desires that are related to our personal lives. These can range anywhere from practical needs for health and employment, to spiritual needs of growth, strength, and development. Our personal needs will also include those closely involved in our lives such as loved ones and family members. **Prayer on behalf of those personal needs should be a daily part of life.** In the above scripture, we are exhorted not to be anxious for these concerns but rather to make them known unto God. If we do this, the promise is that *“the peace of God . . . will guard your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus.”* (Phil. 4:7)

V. INTERCESSION

“Therefore I exhort first of all that supplications, prayers, INTERCESSIONS, and giving of thanks be made for all men” (1 Tim. 2:1).

Intercessory prayer is the type of prayer that involves God’s blessing on behalf of others. It is prayer that is born out of a divine burden and concern for another’s spiritual well being. **Intercession for others should be a basic burden of our prayer life because, as Christians, we are commanded to love one another.** Prayer for others is one of the best ways we can show our love for them. Through intercession, we participate in that special ministry of Jesus Christ who “*ever lives to make intercession*” for us (Heb. 7:25). The life of Christ was an act of intercession before God. Today, He sits on the right hand of the throne of God, interceding and intervening on our behalf.

Intercession can be made in varying degrees of intensity, depending upon the need and the burden. During these times of prayer, we should be sensitive to the leading of the Spirit in how to pray. As we are attentive, we will witness the answers to our prayers through God’s intervention in the lives that those we prayed for.

VI. HEARING FROM GOD

“Then you shall call, and the Lord will answer; you shall cry, and He will say ‘HERE I AM.’” (Isa. 58:9)

Prayer is meant to be a two-way communication with God. Many have not learned to discern when God is speaking to them. We must realize that “*God is Spirit*” (Jn. 4:24), and His form of communication with us is spiritual. He may speak to us in a variety of ways, including prophecy, circumstances, His Word, counsel, vision, etc. However, when we are alone in prayer, His most common means is to use “*the witness of the Spirit*” (Rom. 8:16).

During prayer, the Holy Spirit will often give us an inner witness or indication of God’s mind and will. This witness is an inner sense of peace, faith, or affirmation concerning the thoughts and direction God is wanting to communicate to us. The opposite is also true. He will use conviction or a loss of peace and faith when we are considering something out of His will. **Every Christian should seek to build a sensitivity to the Holy Spirit in prayer so that he might hear from God.**

CREATING A PRAYER HABIT

“But I discipline my body and bring it into subjection, lest, when I have preached to others, I myself should become disqualified.” (1 Cor. 9:27)

Many Christians have a serious problem regarding prayer. All seem to pray, but many have no consistent, disciplined time that they spend in prayer. It is imperative that we develop a habit of prayer. **A habit is an established practice, tendency, or manner of behavior that is acquired through frequent repetition.** Developing a prayer habit will require a conviction of its value and a commitment to make it happen. It is not easy, but it is worth it! **The following are some things to consider for building a strong prayer life:**

1. Time – We must make time! Prayer must be a priority. The early morning is usually the most suitable time for prayer, before the demands and distractions of the day begin.

2. Place - Prayer requires concentration, sensitivity, and freedom to express ourselves. Jesus told us to enter our closets when we pray (Matt. 6:6, K.J.V.), meaning that we should find a place free of distractions where we can be alone with God.

3. How Long? - Each individual must determine the length of their prayer time, considering their maturity and circumstances. It is recommended that a set length of time be established and adhered to. This will prevent the flesh from whittling away at your commitment.

4. Prayer List - Using the list of prayer needs will help you cover the necessary areas and give your prayer time substance and direction.

5. Avoid Compromise - We must not become so legalistic that unavoidable intrusions into our prayer discipline ruin our day. However, we must maintain uncompromising in our commitment to prayer, refusing to give into excuses and distractions.

CONCLUSION

This booklet is intended as an introduction to building a strong prayer life. In it, we have briefly examined some of the necessary elements in prayer in order to give understanding and provide inspiration regarding this essential dimension and spiritual discipline in the Christian life.

Prayer is a vast topic because it involves the most potent of activities – communication with God. The secret of praying is found in praying. **No amount of written material, no matter however great the revelation, can replace what we receive through simply spending time with God ourselves.** Christ, in the school of prayer, is the real teacher!

Following is some recommended literature for those Christians desiring further study and prayer: ***The Hour That Changes the World***, by Dick Eastman; ***With Christ in the School of Prayer***, by Andrew Murray; ***Change the World School of Prayer***, by Dick Eastman

We also recommend that you read the Mannahouse counseling booklet entitled, “Your Bible and You”. For a brief overview of the main points of this booklet, please re-read the boldly printed words on each page.



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SCAN FOR SUNDAY
SERVICE TIMES

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