

Five Attitudes and Misconceptions that **HINDER** Effective Praying



[Janet Bengan](#)

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All Scriptures are quoted from The King James Version

INTRODUCTION

It is my belief that every sincere child of God loves to have an effective prayer life in the real sense of the word. They would love to talk to God and hear Him talk to them; they would love to see their prayers answered and they would love to mature in their Christian walk as a result of an effective and consistent prayer life.

The importance of prayer in the life of the Christian cannot be overemphasized. A lot of our problems such as overt sin and a lifeless Christianity can be traced to a neglect of our fellowship with the Lord or difficulties in developing an effective prayer life.

The purpose of this write-up is not to talk about the different kinds of prayer. I simply want to emphasize the fact that prayer which can and should be an enjoyable and a rewarding experience, when approached with misunderstandings and wrong attitudes, can turn into a fruitless, frustrating, burdensome and boring experience.

The Christian whose problem is not laziness, neglect of fellowship with God, or distractions, but who doesn't find prayer fulfilling will find in these pages reason to see prayer from a different perspective and it's my prayer that they would get to enjoy spending time with the heavenly Father and seeing the fruits of that fellowship in every area of their lives.

Chapter One

Misconceptions about the Purpose of Prayer

The simplest definition of prayer is talking with God. According to Vine's Expository Dictionary of Biblical Words (1985) the Greek word, **Proseuchomai**, rendered prayer in the Synoptic Gospels (Matthew, Mark and Luke), the Acts of the Apostles and some of Paul's letters as well as in Hebrews and Jude, is always used of prayer as directed to God. Other words translated prayer in our English versions can mean a wish, a desire or a vow.

Misconceptions and wrong attitudes towards prayers usually arise from ignorance about the purpose of prayer. When one comes to understand why we need to pray, wrong attitudes and beliefs begin to give way.

Wrong purposes for praying

1. To fulfill a biblical commandment (see explanation in chapter two)
2. To twist God's hand

Prayer is not a tool to get God to do what He is not inclined to do. James 4:3 says if a request is amiss, it will not be granted which means there are some requests that God will not honor even though He has called the Christian to ask and receive (Matthew 7:7, Mark 11:24).

We need to persevere in prayer and not lose heart until we see the answer but at the same time it is necessary to know if we are in the will of God in our asking in that particular situation or not. Persevering in prayer or refusing to let go until God grants our demand when we have not ascertained His will in the matter is to believe that our prayer can cause God to do what He is not willing to do. It's having more faith in our faith, our prayers and in our praying than the word of God. In God's word, we understand His will, and where He has clearly revealed His will in a specific area, we can be patient and not give up until we see the desired result but where the word of God has prohibitions, our prayers cannot twist His hand.

Disillusionment is bound to set in if one believes that their prayers can get whatever they believe for and desire to have. This has caused some to believe God is unfaithful and that the word is not true.

What is the purpose of prayer? Why are we commanded to pray?

1. **To fellowship with God**

Psalm 27:8: When thou saidst, Seek ye my face; my heart said unto thee, Thy face, Lord, will I seek.

The Lord Jesus spent a lot of time alone with the Father. It would be absurd to think He did that just because the Father *demanded* it. In the early morning or after the day's activities of preaching, teaching and healing the sick, He would isolate Himself to pray, sometimes throughout the night. He knew He *needed* to have time with His Father and to refresh. Jesus was God but also human. He needed that strengthening that only comes from spending time with the Father. Christianity is relationship, and that relationship is kept fresh by consistent fellowship. The primary purpose of prayer is to have fellowship with our Father in heaven. Here, we might not need to make requests; just worship or visit with the Lord.

It is important to highlight that fellowship is not coming into the presence of the Lord and talking until we are through, then we leave. We can just sit and enjoy being with the Lord, saying nothing and yet that is fellowship.

So we are commanded to pray because it is necessary for our relationship with the Lord and for our spiritual wellbeing.

2. To stay alert in the spirit

Colossians 4:2

Continue in prayer, and watch in the same with thanksgiving;

Luke 21:36

Watch ye therefore, and pray always, that ye may be accounted worthy to escape all these things that shall come to pass, and to stand before the Son of man.

See also Ephesians 6:18

Prayer and watchfulness or being alert go together. Alertness that comes through prayerfulness allows the spirit man to dominate over the flesh. This helps us to be able to effectively resist temptations.

Matthew 26:41

Watch and pray, that ye enter not into temptation: the spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak.

It is an undisputed saying that overt gross sin is a sign of a neglected closet.

Being alert also carries with it the impression of being in tune with God. There are things God communicates or wants to communicate with our spirits, but if we are too much out in the flesh, never having time to be spiritual, we can miss out on what God intends to reveal. We don't have to always consult another Christian we consider spiritual to know what God has for us. We don't have to go great lengths to meet a prophet to know the will of God for us. God can speak through others to us, but that is not the norm. In the New Testament era, the Lord Jesus has opened access to the presence of the Father to all. Every child of God can and should learn to hear God for themselves. He wants fellowship with each of His children.

3. **To make our requests known unto God**

Philippians 4:6-7

6 Be careful for nothing; but in every thing by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known unto God. 7 And the peace of God, which passeth all understanding, shall keep your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus.

Also see Matthew 7:7, Luke 18:1

The Lord knows our requests even before we ask Him, yet He wants us to exercise our faith in asking. One purpose of prayer is to make demands on our relationship with Him through asking and receiving.

To ponder on

1. Am I satisfied with my prayer experience? Why?

Chapter Two

Wrong Attitude: Making prayer a mere formality

A prayerless life is an abnormality for a Christian. Prayer, even constant prayer, is a biblical command.

1 Thessalonians 5:17

Pray without ceasing.

Luke 18:1

And he spake a parable unto them to this end, **that men ought always to pray,** and not to faint;

If the Christian is expected to be prayerful, there is need to see prayer as a necessity for a successful Christian walk.

Praying simply because you want to obey a biblical command becomes a wrong attitude when the obedience is done without regard to the purpose of the command and without expectation of the answer.

With the encouragement to prayerfulness and denunciation of a prayerless life, there is a flip side temptation to engage in the activity just to fulfill the obligation, and not necessarily because of love for it or for its benefits.

When prayer is seen as a duty to be fulfilled simply for the sake of it, without the conscious expectation of benefits, it has turned into a mere formality. This can be manifest whether in individual or group prayers. Words are heaped up to heaven without attention to what is being said; and they are as quickly forgotten as they are spoken. The conscience is salved, but the benefits are not reaped.

Earnest praying

Earnest praying is that which focuses on the desired result and which expectantly waits to see the manifestation of God's faithfulness to His word. Like Elijah's prayer (James 5:17-18) it gets rewarded. But for the individual Christian or group that takes prayer as a formality, a scheduled routine that one just goes through, there is always the absence of earnest praying and because of that answers are usually not expected.

When the bible gives the command and encouragement to pray, it doesn't expect a mechanical response. Let's look at the parable in Luke chapter 18.

Luke 18:1-8

And he spake a parable unto them to this end, that **men ought always to pray, and not to faint**; 2 Saying, There was in a city a judge, which feared not God, neither regarded man: 3 And there was a widow in that city; and she came unto him, saying, Avenge me of mine adversary. 4 And he would not for a while: but afterward he said within himself, Though I fear not God, nor regard man; 5 Yet because this widow troubleth me, I will avenge her, lest by her continual coming she weary me. 6 And the Lord said, Hear what the unjust judge saith. 7 And shall not God avenge his own elect, which cry day and night unto him, though he bear long with them? 8 I tell you that he will avenge them speedily. Nevertheless when the Son of man cometh, shall he find faith on the earth?

First, it is important to note here that the Lord is not saying this is how our heavenly Father is, and that until we **pester** Him, He won't listen to us. The Lord makes a contrast (verses 6, 7) between a good unrighteous man and a loving righteous God. The lesson of this parable is that results from earnest praying are a motivation to pray. The Lord is not just saying 'Pray', He's actually saying '**Pray to get results; pray because you know God will listen and answer**'. The widow's petition to the judge was an earnest plea not mere words: it needed and looked forward to the answer, and that was the reason its request was granted.

Imagine the widow coming before the judge and saying 'vindicate me against my adversary', and before he could get to understand what her petition was all about, she would be gone, feeling satisfied for having fulfilled a daily obligation. That kind of petitioning will never see its demands granted because it doesn't show proof of its sincerity and need.

For prayer to be earnest, the answers must be expected. Even if it is a 'no', it is necessary that we pray until we get a response from God's side. What must people sometimes consider as a 'no' to prayer is a fainting, resulting from looking at and believing more in circumstances than the word of God. Some answers to prayer only come from patient expectation, which is an indispensable part of earnest praying. If we are quick to judge our circumstances as an answer to prayer, we may miss out of some of the answers to our prayers.

If Elijah had concluded the first, second...sixth time that God was giving him a 'no' answer, he would not have proceeded to pray the seventh time. That would have aborted the 'yes' answer before it manifested.

Is it necessary to actually pray about it?

There is another manifestation of formality in prayer, which is closely linked to a lack of earnestness, but clearly different and subtle. The Christian prays given the circumstances he is facing, but after prayer he worries and tries to come up with the solution on his own as he would have done even without praying. The need may be specific and sincere but the Christian will not wait for God to grant the answer nor will he wait to hear what He would say about the situation.

God tells us He knows our requests even before we utter them. That means He also knows our hearts, He knows whether we have faith enough to wait for an answer from Him or we are just going through the motions, mere formality, all the while figuring out what to do ourselves even without His assistance.

Burdensome

Prayer was never meant to be an obligation. Obligatory praying is a burdensome activity. The body naturally hates prayer and the hatred is increased with formality praying, and even if out of legalistic motivations the body is made to submit, the activity is joyless and strenuous. Making prayer a formality, a duty to be performed simply to obey a biblical command, is one of the reasons for prayerlessness because the place of prayer becomes less appealing.

To Ponder On

1. Do I feel guilty when I am prayerless, when I miss my scheduled prayer time or don't attend church prayer meeting? If yes, why?
2. Do I pay attention to what I say in prayer? Am I conscious, after prayer, of any requests I might have made to God, expecting the answer to come?
3. Do unanswered prayers bother me? Do answers surprise me?
4. Do I worry even after making my requests known to God? If yes, why?

Chapter Three

Wrong Attitude: Time consciousness during prayer

This is a great hindrance to effective communication with God because focus is more on the time rather than on praying. Immediately the clock strikes or the alarm rings, or we feel like the time spent is enough for the day, it's over with. That is indicative of a faulty relationship or ignorance about the purpose of prayer.

You get distracted

I used an alarm as a discipline for my body so I could spend longer times than what my body wanted to endure, but along the way I stopped because of the above reason. I became more conscious of the time and I would check the phone to see how far I still had to go, and I would feel relieved when the sound finally came. I had to reason out that five minutes of conscious fellowship with God is better than an hour of being distracted and wishing the alarm should ring. My flesh could feel good after the ordeal but I doubt if the spiritual impact was there and most importantly if God is glorified with that kind of divided attention or praying in order to keep a rule and please the conscience.

I do encourage the spending of ample time with the Lord, not only to ask Him for things, but just fellowshiping [praise, worship, just visiting, or seeking Him for specific direction and guidance when needed], but it won't benefit if the activity is one with a time consciousness factor. This is important because sometimes, maybe in groups or individually, people are challenged to pray for a certain length of time daily or to improve on their prayer life. While that is good –it not only benefits spiritually, it also helps weaken the pull of carnality – it must be emphasized that the length of time is not as important and should not become the focus.

A better option is to come before God with a willing heart or a desire to spend time with Him, and just do it! Not taking account of how long you've been there. Usually what happens is that you can end up spending more time that way than with the alarm, and enjoying it too!

You limit God

Another setback with being time conscious in prayer, apart from a distracted mind, is that the attitude limits God. Prayer is a two-way communication, so if you set your alarm to whatever number of minutes or hours and just chant until the alarm rings and you get up and leave, you may miss out on hearing from God's side.

Sometimes your spirit may still be longing for the fellowship to continue but if you are time conscious, or you stay in prayer just long enough to register for the day, you can greatly miss out on the opportunity of having a wonderful time with the Lord.

It's burdensome

The clock seems to tick twice or more times slower during that moment. Five minutes would seem like half an hour! And that consequently transforms into a hatred for the hour of prayer.

Psalm 27:8

When thou saidst, Seek ye my face; my heart said unto thee, Thy face, Lord, will I seek.

God enjoys the time we spend with Him; He wants us to seek his face. Our bodies may love to do something else, but we can let the heart (the spirit man) take the upper hand and respond with delight to God's invitation, "**Thy face, Lord, will I seek**", not putting limits on how much time we are willing to give Him. Sooner or later, the body would be trained to let go of its constant resistance and submit during the hour of prayer.

To ponder on

1. Do I feel guilty for not praying a certain length of time per day?
2. Is lengthy praying correct? Important? How?

Chapter Four

Wrong Attitude: seeking an emotional experience

Prayer can be emotionally satisfying but that experience is not guaranteed. Prayer is an activity done in faith. We believe that God, who is invisible, hears us and that He answers, that He can talk back to us regardless of how we feel.

Emotions are unreliable. They depend on environment and circumstances.

The presence or absence of emotional sensation is not an indication of the presence or absence of God. As with praise and worship in church, we can mistake the emotional satisfaction derived from wonderful melodies and sound accompaniment for the move of the Spirit, and we sometimes would feel like “the Spirit is not moving” when the music or song doesn’t move our emotions. And as relates to personal prayer, if we seek an emotional satisfaction, an emotional experience, we will feel as not having prayed well if we don’t feel good about the prayer.

There are times that happy feelings just escape us: times of grief, sickness, loss of a job etc. If we only enjoy prayer or do pray when it feels good, these moments of being emotionally down will prevent us from coming to the presence of God.

Prayer is not primarily for our enjoyment

Prayer [including praise and worship] is not primarily about us, though we do get to enjoy being a part of it. This enjoyment should come in the form of joy and refreshment as a result of being in the presence of God, not as some tingling or funny sensation which gives us a false satisfaction.

There are many assurances from the word of God that those who seek Him find Him, that those who call He will answer, that he rewards the diligent seeker. All these benefits can only be experienced as a result of our trust in the faithfulness of Him who has promised. How we feel during and after prayer is inconsequential if we believe the promises of God. If we ask amiss, it doesn’t matter how good we feel about the prayer, the request will not be granted.

Prayer is not meant to give us an emotional encounter with God. It can be laborious trying to get an emotional high during prayer.

As an aside: It is my opinion that when we dwell much in the carnal realm, with the many distractions that abound around us, and then we come to the presence of God, there is always that tendency to want to contact Him through the emotions. Because our minds are

distracted and can't easily be brought to pay attention, we long for an emotion that will convince us that God is close by and that we are connected with Him. But if we will cultivate the habit of dwelling in the presence of the Lord throughout the day as we go about our activities, if we will not let ungodliness fill our minds and get our attention, during the moments we set aside to be alone with the Lord it won't be hard to get the fellowship going.

To Ponder On

1. Am I bothered if I don't feel emotionally satisfied during and after praying?
2. What can I do to help my faith if I still have fear, worry or doubts after praying?
3. What attitudes can I adopt in my day-to-day activities that will make my personal time with the Lord less laborious or boring?

Chapter Five

Misconception: There are special hours of the day in which to pray

As a young and immature believer, I was taught that a Christian should not let the Muslim call to prayer precede their morning prayers because the Muslim would collect the blessings God releases for the day and the Christian's prayer after that is useless. God alone knows how that mentality hindered me because I couldn't always keep to the time, then I would not pray because of guilt and I would feel condemned.

I have heard people talk about midnight, 2:00 a.m. etc. and the impression is that prayers at certain hours are most powerful.

God lives in eternity

In scripture there is no special hour when God answers prayers. Time is for our sake, not God's. It is better to pray and spend time with the Lord in the morning because we are starting a new day and the best way to start is with God. But what hour exactly of the morning is the right one? Does God release blessings against each day that anyone irrespective of what they worship can collect?

The remedy for this misconception would come back again to the purpose of prayer, the purpose of spending time with God in the morning or whatever time we choose to do so.

The reason some hours like the early morning hours are better for meditation are because our bodies have rested in the night and our minds more attentive. During the day we may be busy, and in the evenings we may be tired. Thus the morning hours seem perfect, but yet there is no specific hour that we have to make a rule out of. Some people work jobs in the night and they have free time during the day and for them that is the best time to spend with the Lord.

What about demonic activity?

I have questions here too and would readily admit I don't have some of the answers. Teaching about true spiritual warfare would be needed to clarify the extremes often indulged in this area, which this write-up doesn't intend to do. We can safely follow the examples of the Lord and the early apostles in dealing with demonic activity. They cast out **[known, not imagined]** evil spirits they came in contact with **when they came in contact with**. Believing that they are special hours to randomly cast and bind **[imaginary]** evil spirits does not find precedence in the word of God.

Are there special hours that demons, witches and wizards are most active, and that Christians must pray only during those hours to sabotage the plans of wickedness? What if you don't know what the devil is up to at a certain hour? This is an area I am still learning and I'm reluctant to boldly say some of my opinions but one thing is clear: devil and demon consciousness has caused many Christians to devote a large part of their prayer life to addressing evil spirits. **We are to pray to God, the Father, not to Satan and his demons.**

In order to say I am not merely coming against an established popular teaching and practice, let me admit that I prayed such prayers for many years. But true and tangible change and victory came from knowing my identity in Christ and the victory He won for me on Calvary over the powers of darkness.

As a Christian you don't need to know the devil's plans if you know who you are and are living in obedience to God and being led by the Spirit. If the devil shows up, deal with him, but don't go looking for him or believing he's omnipresent or nurture imaginations of what he's up to at certain moments. The Lord Jesus didn't; the apostles didn't; we shouldn't. We are called not to be ignorant of the devil's DEVICES, not his **itinerary**.

It's better to be Christ-conscious than satan-conscious; better to be in tune with God than with the devil; better to know who we are in Christ and what authority we have over the devil than fearing and rendering to the devil attributes and authority he doesn't have.

To ponder on

1. Does praying at a particular time of day have an effect on my prayers; does it give better results? How?

Conclusion

Prayer –whatever kind –can be effective: fruitful and rewarding. A Christian should be prayerful, but it is as important to have the right attitude and beliefs about prayer as the necessity for prayer compels us to pray.

True biblical prayer is that which is directed to God in faith with an expectation of His response in the provision of the answer.

Knowledge of the Word of God, through which you understand the will of God, is paramount if you are to avoid praying amiss or devoting your prayer life to things you shouldn't be praying about.

The best way to measure your prayer life is in the results you get from praying.

Are you truly born-again?

Becoming a Christian is much more than joining a church. Christianity and going to church are not synonymous. A regular church-going person can end up in hell. You must be born-again. You must acknowledge that you are a sinner, incapable of saving yourself. Even if you are a nice person, your righteousness is filthy before God. If man could save himself through good works, Jesus wouldn't have come. You must turn away from your sin by accepting the sacrifice of God's only Son, Jesus Christ, on the cross of Calvary for your sins. The Bible says in John 3:16-18:

For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever **believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life**. 17 For God sent not his Son into the world to condemn the world; **but that the world through him might be saved**. 18 He that believeth on him is not condemned: **but he that believeth not is condemned already**, because he hath not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God.

To believe in Jesus is more than having historical facts about him. You must put your trust in his sacrifice for salvation. He was crucified for the sin of the world, he died and was buried. God raised him on the third day. All what Jesus went through was to provide man salvation and justification before God.

Romans 10:9-10

9 That if thou shalt confess with thy mouth the Lord Jesus, and shalt believe in thine heart that God hath raised him from the dead, thou shalt be saved. 10 For with the heart man believeth unto righteousness; and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation.

If you've never genuinely made Jesus your Savior, why not do it today? Why not do it now? Cry out to him now!