

**What's the Problem?**

- **What is the most pressing concern in the Church today?**
  - Some responses:
    - Sexual Purity
    - Abortion
    - Financial integrity and generosity (greed and mammon worship)
    - Evangelism and Church planting
      - Yes, it's needed, but have we examined the fruit of our evangelism?
      - How many confess Christ, but their lives testify against it?
    - Disciplined biblical thinking
      - How are we going to train a generation of Christians without teaching them the Scriptures
      - Needed, but certainly not enough. It's possible to be very biblically informed and yet spiritually cold.
  - All of these things are good examples, but these are merely symptoms of a bigger issue. The thing we need most is a deeper knowledge of God. Carson writes:
 

“When it comes to knowing God, we are a culture of the spiritually stunted. So much of our religion is packaged to address our felt needs - and these are almost uniformly anchored in our pursuit of our own happiness and fulfillment. God simply becomes the Great Being who, potentially at least, meets our needs and fulfills our aspirations. We think rather little of what he like, what he expects of us, what he seeks in us. We are not captured by his holiness and his love; his thoughts and his words capture too little of our imagination, too little of our discourse, too few of our priorities.”
- In the biblical view, knowing God better brings a massive improvement in the other areas of concern - purity, integrity, evangelistic effectiveness, study of scripture, worship, etc.
  - **How do all of these things we listed relate to the question of how well we know God?**
    - Seeking these things without seeking to know God better is like seeking the benefits of a wife without desiring to know her.
    - One of the foundational steps, and evident fruits, of knowing God more is “spiritual, persistent, biblically minded prayer.”
- Decline in personal and corporate prayer has been an ongoing dilemma. We don't have to look much beyond ourselves to notice this, but the studies and statistics play this out as well. For example, Carson cites:
  - A at a major North American seminary, 50 students were closely examined for an overseas ministry during the summer. During the interview process, only 3 out of the 50 were able to testify to regular quiet times, times of reading the Scriptures, of devoting themselves to prayer.
- He asks:
  - Where is our delight in praying? Where is our sense that we are meeting with the living God, interceding before the throne of grace? Why is this so?
  - Why does it seem as if we are better at organizing, administering, fellowshiping, and articulating, than we are at agonizing, interceding, fasting, worshipping, and adoring?
- J.I. Packer says: “I believe that prayer is the measure of the man, spiritually, in a way that

nothing else is, so that how we pray is as important a question as we can ever face.”

### **What do we do?**

The purpose of this study reexamine the foundations, to allow God’s word to shape and reform our prayer life. The method used is to think through some of the specific prayers of the apostle Paul and attempt to align our prayer habits with his. Since it is the Holy Spirit who will ultimately reform us and bring renewal to our prayer lives, we must consistently pause to ask that He will take the biblical and faithful parts of our study and apply them to our lives in a permanent way.

**The purpose of this study is to encourage biblical praying, but it is possible to pray without any real knowledge of the living God. How is this so? Is there a kind of prayer that should be avoided? What kind?**

Advice from more mature Christians

1. Much praying is not done because we do not plan to pray.
  - You cannot drift yourself into a disciplined prayer life. You will not grow in prayer without self-consciously setting aside time to do nothing but pray.
  - This practice of having set times for prayer ensures that you are actually acting on your desire to pray.
2. Adopt practical ways to impede mental drift.
  - **Anyone experience mental drift when praying? What’s this like?**
  - **What are some options for addressing mental drift?**
    - **Pray out loud** (move your lips)
    - **Pray over the scripture** - that is, tie your praying to your Bible reading. Go slowly and meditatively through the passage and use the truths and applications of the text to guide your prayers, or use the examples of prayer in Scripture as templates to formulate your prayers for yourselves and others.
    - **Pray through worship sections of a good hymnal**
    - **The Lord’s Prayer template** - structure your petitions around each section of the Lord’s prayer
    - **Journaling** - writing out your prayers and reflections
      - Forces you to slow down
      - Fosters self-examination
      - Ensures articulation of your prayers and spiritual direction
3. At various periods in your life, develop, if possible, a prayer-partner relationship.
  - Married couples make a perfect partner for prayer. Other possibilities would be close friends or spiritual mentors, someone in your life group who you can

periodically get together with to pray.

- Sustained times of prayer are difficult to maintain in the midst of a hectic life - for example, having pre-school age children around the house makes it extremely difficult and we all go through various seasons like this.
- If you don't know much about praying, consider seeking out someone more mature and begin a prayer-partnership.

4. Choose models - but choose them well.

- Carefully and thoughtfully listen to the prayers of others, but not to copy everything you hear. Carson writes: "Some people use an informal and chatty style in prayer that reflects their own personality and perhaps the context in which they were converted; others intone their prayers before God with genuine erudition coupled with solemn formality, deploying vocabulary and forms of English considered idiomatic 350 years ago. Neither extreme is an intrinsically good model; both might be good models, but not because of relatively external habits, and certainly not because of merely cultural or personal idiosyncrasy. When we find good models, we will study their content and urgency, but we will not ape their idiom." (28)

- **Has anyone learned from or had experience with good models of prayer, either in terms of content or just persistence and faithfulness in doing it?**
- **What are some positive and negative things you have learned about praying by listening to others pray?**

5. Develop a system for your prayer lists.

- You can't consistently pray for a variety of people or concerns without coming up with some kind of system of prayer list to keep track of them.

- **Does anyone have a list system that has worked well for them over the years?**

- Published lists can be beneficial - an example of this is Operation World, which takes you country by country around the world in a year with a focus on prayer concerns specific to that country.
- Personal lists
  - Extension of journaling, keeping track of requests and answered prayers, relevant scriptures.
  - Example: J Herbert Kane - A folder containing:
    - 1<sup>st</sup> sheet containing all of the close people in your life - fairly static with the specific needs changing.
    - 2<sup>nd</sup> sheet containing short and intermediate range concerns - these

entries change fairly regularly.

- 3<sup>rd</sup> list - co-workers and subordinates who you take responsibility for
- Remainder - communications that include items that should be prayed for

6. Mingle praise, confession, and intercession; but when you intercede, try to tie as many requests as possible to Scripture.

- Two extremes:
  - The first judges it inappropriate to ask God for things. He is sovereign and does what he wills, it is our response to worship and submit to his will. This extreme is fatalistic, and has more in line with Islam than biblical Christianity.
  - The second extreme is to view petitionary prayer as everything, where things don't happen because we're not praying - if someone is not saved or healed, then it's because someone was neglecting to pray. This extreme risks treating prayer like magical incantations.
- Carson writes: "We must remember that the Bible simultaneously pictures God as utterly sovereign, and as a prayer-hearing and prayer-answering God. Unless we perceive this, and learn how to act on these simultaneous truths, not only will our views of God be distorted, but our praying is likely to wobble back and forth between a resigned fatalism that asks for nothing and badgering desperation that exhibits little real trust." (31)
- Just like the relationship between a father and a son, our relationship with our heavenly Father must find a balance of asking for things, and of maintaining a relationship - worship, adoration, thanksgiving. Additionally, we must seek to pray according to his will.
- Because of our propensity to self-centeredness, we must attempt as much as possible to tie our requests to Scripture - thinking through what it is, based on Scripture, that God wants us to ask for. This is challenging, and we must trust that the Holy Spirit will lead us in praying according to God's will, even when we don't know the right Scriptures, but we should endeavor to know and to pray according to scripture as much as we can.
- **What do Christian preachers and teachers mean when they encourage us to "meditate prayerfully on the Word of God?"**
- **Does anyone have any experience with this?**

8. If you are in any form of Spiritual leadership, work at your public prayers.

- This might instinctively sound like bad advice - certainly, our prayers are to the Father and should not be focused on the hearers, but there is precedent for taking this into consideration.
- John 11:41-42 - this is a prayer of Jesus that is shaped in part by his awareness of what his human hearers need to hear.
- Carson writes: "The point is that although public prayer is addressed to God, it is addressed to God while others are overhearing it. Of course, if the one who is praying is more concerned to impress these human hearers than to pray to God, then rank hypocrisy takes over. That is why Jesus so roundly condemns much of the public praying of his day and insists on the primacy of private prayer...But that does not mean there is no place at all for public prayer. Rather, it means that public prayer ought to be the overflow of ones private praying. And then, judging by the example of Jesus at the tomb of Lazarus, there is ample reason to reflect on just what my prayer, rightly directed to God, is saying to the people who hear me." (34)
- Public praying is both a responsibility and a privilege. You have the opportunity to model prayer for others and praying in a form that edifies those praying with you.

9. Pray until you pray.

**What do you think this might mean?**

- This is a Puritan saying meaning that "Christians should pray long enough and honestly enough, at a single session, to get past the feeling of formalism and unreality that attends not a little praying." (36)
- Carson describes it in this way: "If we "pray until we pray," eventually we come to delight in God's presence, to rest in his love, to cherish his will. Even in dark or agonized praying, we somehow know we are doing business with God. In short, we discover a little of what Jude means when he exhorts his readers to "pray in the Holy Spirit" (Jude 20) - which presumably means it is treacherously possible to pray *not* in the Spirit." (36)
- He exhorts us to not be "like nasty little boys who ring front door bells and run away before anyone answers." (37)

**Final Caveat**

It's important to be clear that the list we've covered is not a set of rules that all "good prayers" must follow. Prayer is, first and foremost, communication and exercise of a personal relationship with the living God and his Son Jesus Christ. These ideas and this material, is a way of suggesting some things to try - ultimately we must learn by doing what is right for us.

**What are some practical ways in which you will commit yourself to improve your prayer life in the next few months?**