

## How Can I Transform My Prayer Life? (Part I)

**Jeremiah 10:23**: (NASB) *I know, O LORD, that a man's way is not in himself, nor is it in a man who walks to direct his steps.*



Prayer is an incalculably awesome privilege and yet it is massively misunderstood. Prayer can easily become a ritual, an almost automatic activity like brushing our teeth. We know we need to do it because we know it's really good for us. So, we do it at what we think are the appropriate times and in the appropriate ways. Prayer can also become a time of wishful thinking, a time when we essentially tell God how our lives could and should look. It can also become a complaining session, a finger-pointing session and even a pity party. Wait, let's take a breath! Prayer is the opportunity and privilege to talk to the God of all things through His son Jesus. If we are going to use this amazing tool, we want to be absolutely clear as to how and why it works!

In Part I of this two-part series, we will talk about the basics of a transformed prayer life:

- Whose prayers does God answer?
- What does it mean when God says no?
- Should we ever stop praying?
- What does a really “good” prayer look like?

In Part II, we will talk about the MANY practical questions we may have when trying to keep our prayer lives vital.

This is an important subject because we don't want to look back over our lives and find out our prayers were not heard. Even if we are praying earnestly, are we praying appropriately? Let's see if we can figure that out according to Scripture.

### *Principles of Proper Prayer:*

We must check ourselves against scriptural principles to see if we are working at being in line with God's direction.

Does God answer everybody's prayers? You would think He would listen to the prayers of the righteous, but don't the sinners need Him more? Does it have to do with the attitude of the sinner being either repentant or defiant?

It has to do with the attitude of *anyone* praying, being either repentant or defiant! As sinners, we need God to answer our prayers. Those who are “righteous” need Him as well. There is this incredible need no matter where we stand. The question is, how are we approaching that need?

Let's begin with some scriptures that describe what God has declared are His

### LISTENING AND RESPONDING QUALIFICATIONS



**God is with the contrite of heart ("contrite" means to feel remorse):**

**Isaiah 57:15:** (NASB) *For thus says the high and exalted One Who lives forever, whose name is holy, I dwell on a high and holy place, and also with the contrite and lowly of spirit in order to revive the spirit of the lowly and to revive the heart of the contrite.*

*I dwell on a high and holy place - God Almighty dwells in this high and holy place, but He also dwells with the contrite and lowly of spirit. What a beautiful picture for us.*



Sometimes we feel paralyzed by guilt or our unworthiness. How do we pray then?

This is an important question – we need to address that paralysis appropriately. At this point, we want to remember that God is there. If we are lowly and contrite, chances are He is waiting for us in that experience.

Question  
for Part II  
Episode 1295



**God delights in and loves those who pursue righteousness:**

**Proverbs 15:7-9:** (NASB) *<sup>7</sup>The lips of the wise spread knowledge, but the hearts of fools are not so. <sup>8</sup>The sacrifice of the wicked is an abomination to the LORD, but the prayer of the upright is His delight. <sup>9</sup>The way of the wicked is an abomination to the LORD, but He loves one who pursues righteousness.*

In Scripture, righteousness is not merely being "good"; it is being "godly good"! It goes beyond just being a nice human being. God loves those who pursue righteousness through pursuing godliness. What draws Him is our pursuit of righteousness, of seeking to understand Him and wanting to be more in line with Him.

**Those who are righteous know God directs their way:**

**Jeremiah 10:23-24:** (NASB) *<sup>23</sup>I know, O LORD, that a man's way is not in himself, nor is it in a man who walks to direct his steps. <sup>24</sup>Correct me, O LORD, but with justice; not with Your anger, or You will bring me to nothing.*

We cannot direct our own way. This is part of being lowly and contrite in heart.

A man's way comes from God. If we are truly seeking God, we realize He is the one in control – and we want Him to be! This is the way we want to approach prayer.

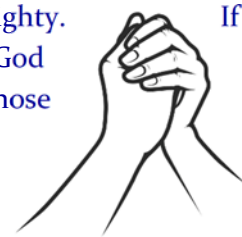


**God hears those who are righteous:**

**Proverbs 15:28-29:** (NASB) *<sup>28</sup>The heart of the righteous ponders how to answer, but the mouth of the wicked pours out evil things. <sup>29</sup>The LORD is far from the wicked, but He hears the prayer of the righteous.*

You can't beg God to heal you and stay loyal to what's killing you.

That is absolutely true! God *hears the prayer of the righteous, but the LORD is far from the wicked*. If we are doing evil things and praying, we need to wake up! We are just wasting our time because we are not living a life that is in pursuit of God Almighty. If we have not been righteous - if we have been off the right path - will God hear our prayers? It depends on what we are seeking. God listens to those who seek Him and are sincerely repentant of their unrighteousness.








Let's look at the next principle of prayer.



### God responds to those who sincerely seek Him:

**James 4:6-10:** (NASB) *<sup>6</sup>But He gives a greater grace. Therefore it says, God is opposed to the proud, but gives grace to the humble. <sup>7</sup>Submit therefore to God. Resist the devil and he will flee from you. <sup>8</sup>Draw near to God and He will draw near to you. Cleanse your hands, you sinners; and purify your hearts, you double-minded. <sup>9</sup>Be miserable and mourn and weep; let your laughter be turned into mourning and your joy to gloom. <sup>10</sup>Humble yourselves in the presence of the Lord, and He will exalt you.*

There is a lot in these scriptures. The point is to reframe ourselves as we go before the heavenly Father. We must remove our desire to have the outcome be our way, and be humble so we can receive prayer. We ask in prayer, and we should, but prayer is also about receiving. What are we looking to receive?

-  GOD'S WILL
-  GOD'S WAY
-  GOD'S SPIRIT
-  GOD'S JUSTICE
-  GOD'S WISDOM



What about righteous people who are sincerely seeking God, but who are not Christian? For example, what about a very faithful Jewish person? Is God listening and responding to their prayers?



Undoubtedly, because they are praying to God, the Creator of all things, in the way they know how to pray, with the righteousness they have been given. God has great respect for that. We know, especially from Romans 11, that the Jewish nation is being restored to God's favor in a very big way. The future blessing of the world will come through Israel. Those Jewish individuals who are looking to reach God in great sincerity through the Law and their traditions - of course He hears them.



### God is patient with us, even in our broken attempts to reach Him:

**Psalms 86:1-7**: (NASB) *<sup>1</sup>Incline Your ear, O LORD, and answer me; For I am afflicted and needy. <sup>2</sup>Preserve my soul, for I am a godly man; O You my God, save Your servant who trusts in You. <sup>3</sup>Be gracious to me, O Lord, For to You I cry all day long. <sup>4</sup>Make glad the soul of Your servant, for to You, O Lord, I lift up my soul. <sup>5</sup>For You, Lord, are good, and ready to forgive, and abundant in lovingkindness to all who call upon You. <sup>6</sup>Give ear, O LORD, to my prayer; and give heed to the voice of my supplications! <sup>7</sup>In the day of my trouble I shall call upon You, for You will answer me.*

God waits for us to come back to Him, just like the prodigal son in **Luke 15:11-32**.

**Psalms 86:1-7** is about putting ourselves in our proper place before the greatness of God. We need to work at doing this in an appropriate way - not by trying to crush ourselves - that's not what God is looking for. He is looking for us to be genuinely and sincerely humble before Him. This humbleness puts us in a place where we can actually receive from Him. This is what David is talking about in this psalm. It is a beautiful example of God's patience, even when our broken attempts have a hard time reaching out to Him.

We are not to crush ourselves, but we are to "get over" ourselves!



### God will not continue drawing us if we do not continue to pursue Him:

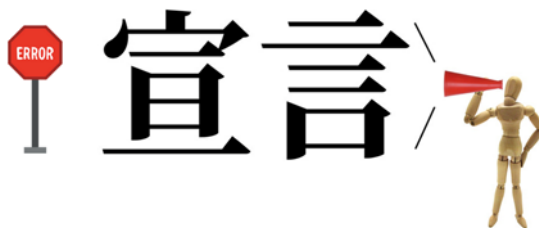
**Proverbs 28:9**: (NASB) *He who turns away his ear from listening to the Law, even his prayer is an abomination.*

We have to fall in line with what God expects. God does not have to comply with OUR demands. We can tell Him what we want, but not HOW He should make that happen. If we are not compliant, He will stop drawing us.

What about those Christian faiths that say we should "decree and declare" to God in prayer so they can steer His providential overrulings the way they want them to go?

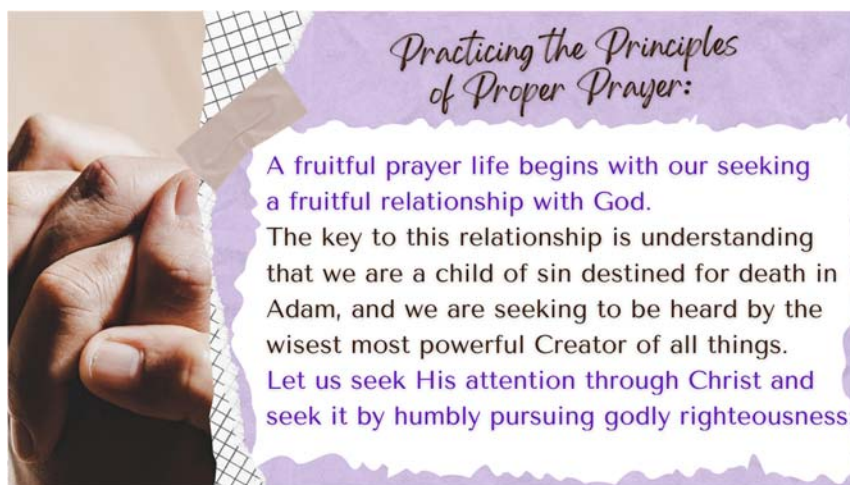
When we are desiring how to steer God's direction, we think we are God - telling Him how to serve US! This is not in any way, shape or form an appropriate prayer!

TO DECLARE IS TO STATE A FACT OUT LOUD.  
TO DECREE IS TO ISSUE AN AUTHORITATIVE COMMAND.  
SOME WILL SAY, RATHER THAN PETITIONING GOD FOR SOMETHING,  
WE HAVE BEEN GIVEN THE POWER TO DECREE IT WILL HAPPEN.



I had a small experience that has never left me. I was visiting with one of my clients from my business and was talking to him about spiritual things. At the end of my visit with him, he said, "Rick, can I pray for you?" And I thought, oh, this will be nice; thank you. He did a "decree and declare"-type prayer. "God, I command that the roadways be made clear so Brother Rick can be safe, and his journey be fruitful. I decree that this is what will happen!"

I was overwhelmed with angst and anxiety. We finished and I said, “Thank you.” I left his house, got in my car and just sat there. I put my head down and said, “Dear Lord, please, please, cancel everything You just heard. It was just not appropriate. I am so sorry; I had no idea it was coming.” It was overwhelming to me because it put me as the subject of God’s response to a demand, and it was just off. We have to be very careful not to participate in things like that.

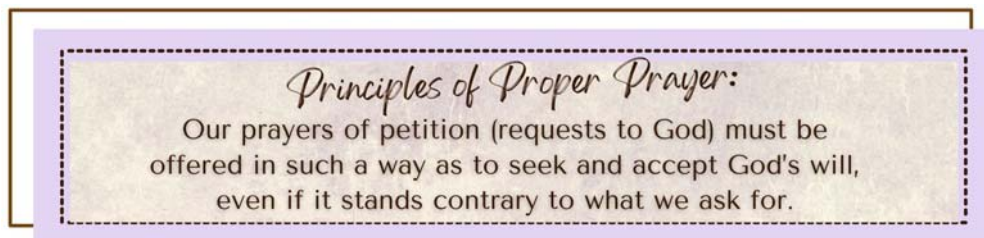


We must humbly and appropriately pursue His attention. God is great; we are not!

This is so simple and yet so difficult. Seek God, but do not make up your own rules as you go. Seek Him, His way, and we will find Him!

**The formula to draw closer to God has just been laid out.  
What happens when God says “no” to our prayers?**

If we truly want to transform our prayer life, we need to hear, consider and apply the power of no! We may think a “no” answer means that we prayed for the wrong thing. This may or may not be true. We may also think a “no” answer means we are heading in the wrong direction. This also may or may not be true. Why so non-committal? Because “no” can be a very big and positive response to help us see something much bigger.



What does it mean when God says “no”? Let’s look at three examples. These examples are all legitimate requests. None are frivolous.

## KING DAVID PRAYING FOR THE LIFE OF HIS CHILD AFTER HIS ADULTERY WITH BATHSHEBA:

1.

King David

**2 Samuel 12:13-16:** (NASB) <sup>13</sup>Then David said to Nathan, I have sinned against the LORD.

And Nathan said to David, The LORD also has taken away your sin; you shall not die. <sup>14</sup>However, because by this deed you have given occasion to the enemies of the LORD to blaspheme, the child also that is born to you shall surely die. <sup>15</sup>So Nathan went to his house. Then the LORD struck the child that Uriah's widow bore to David, so that he was very sick.

At first glance, this seems really unfair. Why should the child suffer for what David did? The child had no choice to be born. Of course, this reminds us of how all of us suffer for Adam's sin.



This is a valid point – it is not fair that this child suffers for a sin he had absolutely nothing to do with. Sin, no matter who commits it, always produces not only ripples of distress; it produces currents of disaster and death as well. This is an important life lesson.

<sup>16</sup>David therefore inquired of God for the child; and David fasted and went and lay all night on the ground.

David would not eat or rise from the ground; he stayed on the ground for seven days. On the seventh day, the child died and David suddenly stopped fasting, got up, washed and anointed himself and got back to living...WHAT?

### This was the response of those with him in the palace:

**2 Samuel 12:21-23:** (NASB) <sup>21</sup>Then his servants said to him, What is this thing that you have done? While the child was alive, you fasted and wept; but when the child died, you arose and ate food. <sup>22</sup>He said, While the child was still alive, I fasted and wept; for I said, Who knows, the LORD may be gracious to me, that the child may live. <sup>23</sup>But now he has died; why should I fast? Can I bring him back again? I will go to him, but he will not return to me.

David's response to this is actually healthy. In the midst of this tremendous tragedy, he prays with all his earnestness, "Please LORD, if it is possible, have Your mercy play out here." When David sees mercy is not appropriate because his actions must have a consequence, he gets up and says, "Okay, I will have to live with this. I am going to do what I am supposed to do in service to God." This must have been very difficult for him.

God said no. Why? Sin exacts unimaginable consequences, which for the sake of God's plan of eternal salvation for all must be remembered. We must not forget that the child will be resurrected in God's kingdom, which shows God's eternal mercy to His human family. The child's death is a tragedy – but it is temporary.

This is an important point in the larger picture. In the smaller, more immediate picture though, David had to live for the rest of his days with the tragic outcome of his own lust. This blunt lesson echoed throughout his life, and it echoes as well in the lives of all of us who hear of his experience – we feel that same thing.

Why did God choose not to save the child? One thought is that David had Bathsheba's husband Uriah murdered in order to have Bathsheba as his own, and he hid the fact she was pregnant by him. So, maybe it was to fulfill justice under the Law – a life for a life.

Nathan said in 2 Samuel 12:14: *...because by this deed you have given occasion to the enemies of the LORD to blaspheme...* indicating that this child being conceived out of wedlock to be heir to the throne of the Jewish nation would have been heresy. We see the consequences of justice in the Law and of Israel wanting a king despite God's warnings about these kinds of propensities in a king.

It may also have been allowed to show the king's court and the people the king himself was not exempt from God's consequences. The king was not above others in God's eyes.



There are many reasons for the events as they happened here. The child being resurrected is very important. As unfair as sin is, God's grace takes care of all of the lack of fairness for eternity. We are so thankful for that. God said no in this experience. It was a valid and valuable prayer, but God said no.



The Apostle Paul

## THE APOSTLE PAUL PRAYING FOR HIS "THORN IN THE FLESH" TO BE REMOVED:

**2. As Paul begins to recount this experience, he gives an important perspective for us to take note:**

2 Corinthians 12:7-10: (NASB) *Because of the surpassing greatness of the revelations, for this reason, to keep me from exalting myself, there was given me a thorn in the flesh, a messenger of Satan to torment me - to keep me from exalting myself!*

We are not told exactly what this *thorn in the flesh* was. The common explanation is that it was poor eyesight, but we just don't know. It must have been serious because he refers to it as a *torment* – that Greek word means “to strike with a fist, to treat with violence and insult.” Maybe we are not told because it wasn't relevant – it is his attitude after being told no that gives us the lesson. We can use this and fill in the blanks for our own perceived limitation.

Paul started out the verses saying, *Because of the surpassing greatness of the revelations* (the incredible revelations of truth God gave him to reveal to the early church), “I was given this very difficult thing to deal with throughout my life.” Paul understands that with great blessing and privilege comes great burdens and testing.

<sup>8</sup>Concerning this I implored the Lord three times that it might leave me. <sup>9</sup>And he has said to me, my grace is sufficient for you, for power is perfected in weakness. Most gladly, therefore, I will rather boast about my weaknesses, so that the power of Christ may dwell in me. <sup>10</sup>Therefore I am well content with weaknesses, with insults, with distresses, with persecutions, with difficulties, for Christ's sake; for when I am weak, then I am strong.



God said no. Paul's reaction was, “If this means the power of Christ dwells in me more completely, then bring it on!” This was a life-changing blessing!

The third time he asked, he was told no, and he never asked again. Do we know if Paul received an *audible* answer? Because it sure would be easier to know when to stop asking and take no for an answer if we could hear God or Jesus say it directly!



How do we talk with a spirit being when we can't physically hear the response?



There are a variety of ways to answer this. The key is the attitude of our prayer. It is our humility, contrite heart and the understanding that God is in control that enables us to find the scriptural principles we need for the answer. We “hear” the answer (not verbally) when we put our circumstance, challenge or trial in the context of these scriptural principles. This may not answer the question as directly as we would like, but it leaves us to do some interpreting, understanding and following God's will – not ours.

The answer was no! Why? *It drove Paul to find powerful advantage in disadvantage.* He would now be more firmly entrenched in the strength of Christ in him and release his own grip on handling his life. He would now understand that his life worked so much better when he took his own hands off and had the strength of Christ to guide him.

It was a good request by Paul to ask for his *thorn in the flesh* to be removed since he perceived it to make his ministry more difficult, but it was denied for his eternal benefit.

For Paul, “no” was the right answer in this case because it provided an even greater witness for the gospel. Can you imagine if he hadn't accepted this answer and tried to apply the power of the holy spirit he was given to heal himself? Or if he asked Peter to heal him? Paul made sure to keep his dependence and direction coming from above.

The key is that “no” is awesome! And “no” means NO! But it also means, “No, but watch what I do instead,” as we put our life into God's hands.

### JESUS PRAYING IN THE GARDEN OF GETHSEMANE BEFORE HE IS TAKEN TO BE CRUCIFIED:

3.

Jesus

After the Last Supper, Jesus and the apostles walked to the Garden of Gethsemane and he told them to sit while he went ahead - he took only Peter, James and John with him. Then he went a little further alone and prayed. He prayed in a similar way three times. After each time, he found the men sleeping instead of watching and praying like he had asked. Jesus was very sorrowful, praying with strong crying and tears ([Hebrews 5:7](#)).

**Matthew 26:38-46:** (NASB) <sup>38</sup>Then he said to them, my soul is deeply grieved, to the point of death; remain here and keep watch with me. <sup>39</sup>And he went a little beyond them, and fell on his face and prayed, saying, My Father, if it is possible, let this cup pass from me; yet not as I will, but as You will.

Let this cup pass from me – what was Jesus talking about? The Bible doesn't say. Some feel this might include the pain of knowing God's face would soon turn away from him, leaving him to go through this experience on his own. Or possibly, the uncertainty of whether or not he had done everything he was supposed to up to this point to fulfill his part in God's plan.

We think the cup Jesus wanted removed primarily included the pain of being falsely accused as a blasphemer, someone who insults and speaks against God. Jesus had always spoken out against evil as God's personal representative but would now have to be silent - while being accused of blasphemy - as the events of the night unfolded exactly as it had been prophesied in the Old Testament.

His silence would lead to not defending his Father. Jesus always defended His Father. This would have been overwhelming to him.

**Jesus himself was being pressed to the limit. His prayer powerfully included the clear condition of God's will reigning supreme:**

<sup>40</sup>And he came to the disciples and found them sleeping, and said to Peter, So, you men could not keep watch with me for one hour? <sup>41</sup>Keep watching and praying that you may not enter into temptation; the spirit is willing, but the flesh is weak. <sup>42</sup>He went away again a second time and prayed, saying, my Father, if this cannot pass away unless I drink it, Your will be done. <sup>43</sup>Again he came and found them sleeping, for their eyes were heavy.

Jesus didn't say, *Your will be done*, without first telling God what was on his heart. Jesus was a real person with real human emotions, and he had no problem expressing those to God - and we shouldn't either. He doesn't suppress his feelings, but he's not controlled by them. Jesus puts his feelings in their appropriate place. "Here's what's on my heart, but it is not my will that matters; only Your will that matters."



This is a beautiful picture of how we should pray and be able to express to our heavenly Father exactly how we are feeling, but then, *Nevertheless, not my will but Yours be done.*

The intensity of Jesus' experience increased as his friends were without strength (they had nothing left), and his time grew ever shorter.

### **YET, HE STILL HAILED GOD'S WILL AS SUPREME.**

By this time, Judas had already accepted 30 pieces of silver from the Jewish leaders in exchange for revealing Jesus' location. Jesus knew betrayal was on its way and time was really starting to compress. Important but painful events were about to happen.



*“And he left them again, and went away and prayed a third time, saying the same thing once more. <sup>45</sup>Then he came to the disciples and said to them, Are you still sleeping and resting? Behold, the hour is at hand and the Son of Man is being betrayed into the hands of sinners. <sup>46</sup>Get up, let us be going; behold, the one who betrays me is at hand!”*

Jesus heard the “no” answer from his Father. He hadn’t asked for something inappropriate, but as a perfect human being who had not sinned, he had to realize the full weight of sin in this experience. It meant not only having to NOT defend his Father but also to be forsaken as his Father turned away from him on the cross. He had to feel and bear it all willingly.

God said “no” to Jesus. Why? So that Jesus would endure the full and life-breaking weight of carrying the burden of sin once for all time and once for ALL mankind.

Both Jesus and the Apostle Paul asked three times to remove the trial or infirmity.

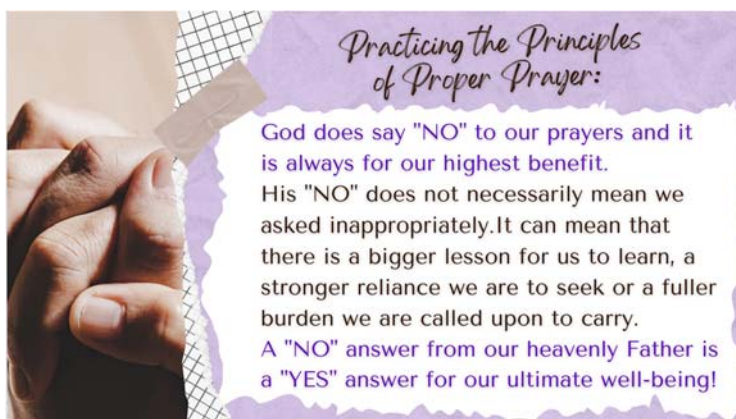


What's up with the number three?



The number three shows us the completion of an experience. Essentially, there is a beginning, a middle and a conclusion. Jesus prayed:

1. “This is my will, let me do Your will.”
2. “This is my will, let me do Your will.”
3. “This is my will, let me do Your will.” “My betrayer is here. I’m doing Your will.”



These are hard and sobering prayer lessons. Each and every prayer of ours needs to be offered with listening ears and obedient hearts!

**Prayer requires us to always seek godly righteousness and to have a listening attitude. Does God ever want us to stop praying?**

This sounds strange. Why would God ever want us to stop praying? The point we need to make here is that God always wants us to use every advantage and tool He has given us as fully as possible. Transforming our prayer life means we learn how to use the privilege of prayer in conjunction with whatever God's providence provides. Prayer is part of a much bigger picture.

**Before we begin this part of our conversation, let's state that we are in no way going to suggest that we cease praying:**

**1 Thessalonians 5:16-22:** (NASB) <sup>16</sup>Rejoice always; <sup>17</sup>pray without ceasing; <sup>18</sup>in everything give thanks; for this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus. <sup>19</sup>Do not quench the spirit; <sup>20</sup>do not despise prophetic utterances. <sup>21</sup>But examine everything carefully; hold fast to that which is good; <sup>22</sup>abstain from every form of evil.

Pray without ceasing, along with rejoicing always and giving thanks should be constant in our Christian lives. But they must not be a place to hide from taking action.

### *Principles of Proper Prayer:*

Let us be sure that our prayers, as sincere as they may be, are not diverting us from necessary actions or providing a covering for neglecting unrepented sins.

**Let's look at three lessons where God indicates prayer should not be continued. There are specific times in our lives that we should PUT OUR PRAYERS ON PAUSE – not turning them off, but holding off to see if something else is required.**



**1. Moses and the people are seemingly trapped by the Red Sea as Pharaoh's soldiers draw near:**

**Exodus 14:11-16:** (NASB) <sup>11</sup>Then they said to Moses, Is it because there were no graves in Egypt that you have taken us away to die in the wilderness? Why have you dealt with us in this way, bringing us out of Egypt? <sup>12</sup>Is this not the word that we spoke to you in Egypt, saying, Leave us alone that we may serve the Egyptians? For it would have been better for us to serve the Egyptians than to die in the wilderness.

These Israelites! They always had a complaint ready to go. *Is it because there were no graves in Egypt...* is really a snarky comment, since Egypt was called the “land of tombs” with a necropolis (cemetery) outside of every city.

There's a huge body of water in front of them and an angry army behind them. As happens often with us, their faith is overrun by overwhelming fear and desperation.

<sup>13</sup>But Moses said to the people, *Do not fear! Stand by and see the salvation of the LORD which He will accomplish for you today; for the Egyptians whom you have seen today, you will never see them again forever.* <sup>14</sup>The LORD will fight for you while you keep silent.

In other words, calm down! Moses had faith that deliverance was coming, even before God's answer to him. Moses' response was to have the people be silent. Whether they were to be silent in prayer or just be silent is hard to say.



**However, Moses likely prayed fervently as evidenced by God's response:**

<sup>15</sup>Then the LORD said to Moses, *Why are you crying out to Me? Tell the sons of Israel to go forward.* <sup>16</sup>As for you, *lift up your staff and stretch out your hand over the sea and divide it, and the sons of Israel shall go through the midst of the sea on dry land.*

Moses is praying to God and God says, *Why are you crying out to Me?* In other words, "You know I am delivering you, so do your work! Go about what you are supposed to do in order to lead."



Moses, *lift up your staff...stretch out your hand...divide the sea.* Do what I put into your hands to do. Praying is good, but action is what is needed right now.

We pray, but we also must act. Here is an example: If we have to get a job, we don't just pray for a job to fall into our lap. It requires action on our part. We might pray and pray, but what action steps did we take?

Prayer with appropriate action is the lesson. We need to act along with our prayers. We do not hide ourselves in prayer to avoid action. We pray to unleash action.



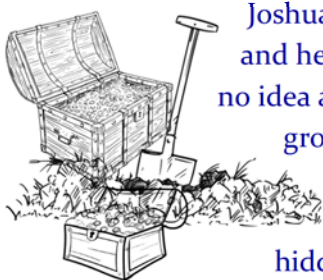
**2. Joshua and Israel had just been led to victory over the city of Jericho.**

**In that victory, they had all been instructed to not take ANY spoils for their own. All had obeyed except for one man.**

A man named Achan disobeyed, as if the LORD wouldn't notice, and hid for himself a beautiful Babylonian robe, 200 silver coins and a bar of gold weighing over a pound. He stole from the treasure set apart for the LORD.

**This led to a defeat in a battle against the small city of Ai. Joshua, in a response to that defeat, prayed fervently before God:**

**Joshua 7:6-8:** (NASB) *<sup>6</sup>Then Joshua tore his clothes and fell to the earth on his face before the ark of the LORD until the evening, both he and the elders of Israel; and they put dust on their heads. <sup>7</sup>Joshua said, Alas, O Lord GOD, why did You ever bring this people over the Jordan, only to deliver us into the hand of the Amorites, to destroy us? If only we had been willing to dwell beyond the Jordan! <sup>8</sup>O Lord, what can I say since Israel has turned their back before their enemies? (Meaning, running away from their enemies - this shouldn't be happening.)*



Joshua is in a reverent position - he tore his clothes, he put dust on his head and he is face down on the ground in front of the Ark of the Covenant. He has no idea about the hidden treasure, which incidentally, was hidden in the ground beneath Achan's tent. He buried the silver deeper than the rest of the treasure, so if someone had happened upon the first few items, they would think that was it. But there was a second level to this hidden illicit treasure. No wonder God was mad!

Think of the deviousness of this action! The nation, as a whole, was supposed to be in line with God's will. When the nation, as a whole, was not, there were consequences to the whole nation.

**Joshua's prayer of despair questioned why God led them to such a point. God clearly answered:**

**Joshua 7:10-12:** (NASB) *<sup>10</sup>So the LORD said to Joshua, Rise up! Why is it that you have fallen on your face? <sup>11</sup>Israel has sinned, and they have also transgressed My covenant which I commanded them. And they have even taken some of the things under the ban and have both stolen and deceived. Moreover, they have also put them among their own things. <sup>12</sup>Therefore the sons of Israel cannot stand before their enemies; they turn their backs before their enemies, for they have become accursed. I will not be with you anymore unless you destroy the things under the ban from your midst.*

There hadn't been complete compliance. One man's actions created massive consequences for the entire nation. Achan and his family were killed for disobedience. This was a heinous sin against God, and Joshua had to follow through with the appropriate punishment.

Joshua was praying and praying and God essentially says, "Okay, you are praying about this problem. Go fix it! Go take care of the sin that has been hidden. Go find it and take care of it appropriately."



**GOD'S RESPONSE AND LESSON:** Stop praying and find the root of the sin that brought you this defeat. I cannot guide you unless you wholeheartedly follow Me!

This is a lesson to us that we need to root out those sins we might be covering over. Praying more fervently will not help until we discover and get rid of those kinds of sins.

Prayer is appropriate. However, if we are praying and have a sin we know we are covering up, our prayer is a prayer of hypocrisy. That prayer will not be acknowledged. We should know better and fix it. We have to deal with the wrong in order to have God's blessing.

It is a prayer of hypocrisy because we do *know* better, but we are not *being* better. God sees through it. We should stop praying about such things and fix the problem. We are not saying to stop the attitude of prayer; we are saying to go root out the sin.



### 3. Jesus in the Sermon on the Mount shows us the importance of living our faith:

**Matthew 5:23-24:** (NASB) <sup>23</sup>Therefore if you are presenting your offering at the altar, and there remember that your brother has something against you, <sup>24</sup>leave your offering there before the altar and go; first be reconciled to your brother, and then come and present your offering.

The Pharisees were all about outward appearance. Here is a person coming to God, looking to all like they are doing the right things, regardless how much hatred or jealousy or whatever was happening in secret. Jesus taught differently, saying it was more important to have the heart right than to perform this outward act. In a practical sense, this can be difficult. When there are hurt or angry feelings between us, sometimes we want to stay mad or offended because it is easier to stew in it than to confront and untangle what happened. But if this blocks our access to God in any way, we have to figure it out.

The act of presenting an offering was a solemn and sober occasion for any Jewish person. To leave in the middle of this was to leave as you were reverently and prayerfully approaching God through your offering.



**JESUS' LESSON:** It is more important to live the high standards of brotherhood that God has put before us than to go about our sacrificial offerings to God with unresolved brotherly issues.

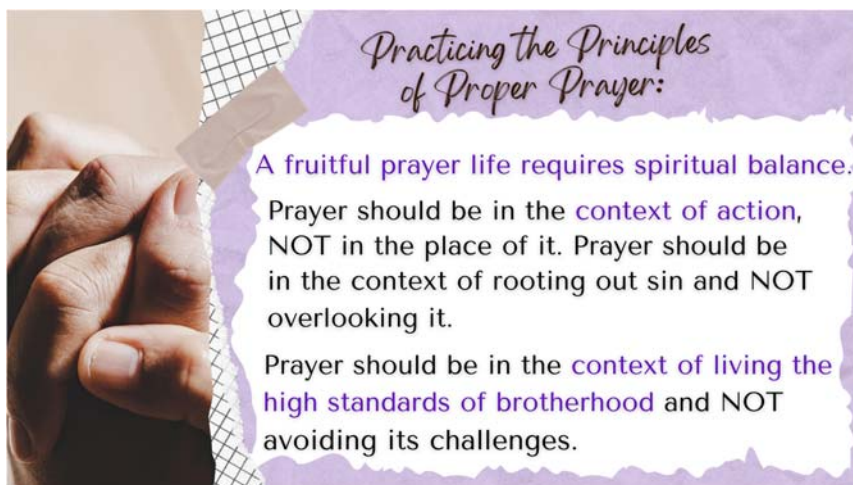
This offering costs us something – it has value and it is personal. We have to walk away from that offering in order to fix something else. First we are to right the wrong with our brother.

It takes an action to fix the disturbed relationship. It means we have to **PUT THAT PRAYER ON PAUSE** – but NOT lose the prayerful attitude – and do what we must to right things with our brethren.

We should continually pray on our way to make amends with that brother. We are just switching the personal focus of our prayer, pausing one focus but moving into a different one.



And it goes even deeper. Our heart and mind must be focused on making things right before God. We need to pause what we were offering and have that new prayer rising up to an even higher level because we were at a lower state due to our difficulty with someone. Now that we are fixing this, we ask the LORD for strength. Yes, we continue to pray always in these situations, even as we pursue actions to fix the problem.

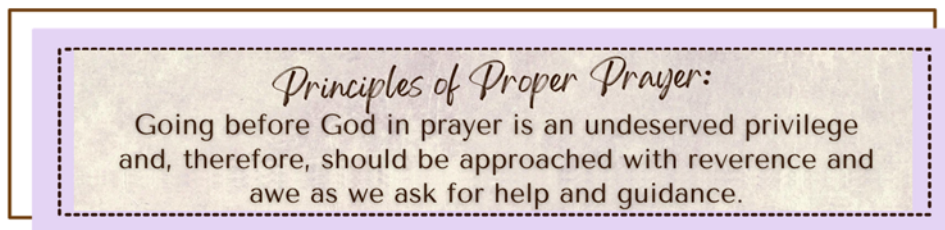


We need to keep prayer in the **CONTEXT OF SERVING GOD** in our overall Christian life.

**We have examined who God hears, what a “no” answer means and keeping prayer in context. What about how we should pray?**

Jesus gave us a literal model to follow when praying. This model is simple and to the point. It is not meant to be our default prayer, but it is meant to guide us. If we are seeking to transform our prayer lives, we want to be sure we understand and appreciate this model as an example of how the building blocks of prayer fit together.

The Lord’s Prayer gives us the basis for understanding how prayer works.





Why doesn't this model prayer include saying we are thankful?



1 Thessalonians 5:18 says, *In everything give thanks*, so it seems like the model prayer should have thankfulness right there! Well, it does. What is reverence?

What is being in awe of God? It is the gratefulness for His greatness. It is the attitude that makes gratefulness pour out of us. When we are reverent, gratitude has to follow. While gratitude is not specifically mentioned, the awe and reverence - expressions of thankfulness - are big in this prayer.

**Reverence and  
being  
in awe of God**



**Being grateful  
and thankful  
for His greatness**

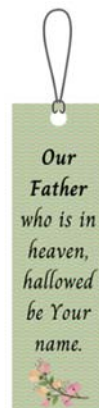
Matthew 6:9: (NASB) *Pray, then, in this way: Our Father who is in heaven, hallowed be Your name.*

To “hallow” means to honor as holy. Since God’s name is holy, we are to have reverence, love, respect and awe for Him. “Reverence” means having an attitude of deep respect. This is the attitude we are required to have when approaching God.



First on the list, Jesus is saying to **HAVE AN ATTITUDE OF DEEP RESPECT, RECOGNIZE THE PRIVILEGE OF PRAYER, AND THEN PRAY IN THIS WAY.** It is very simple, straightforward and reverential.

We started out by reading Isaiah 57:15 (NASB) where God revealed, *I dwell on a high and holy place, and also with the contrite and lowly of spirit...* There cannot be a bigger gap in the contrast. We should be in awe that God is so big and yet can dwell with us who are so small, in a very personal and individual way.



Question  
for Part II

Episode 1295

Sometimes that reverence can be too much to bear, and we pray with a measure of fear because of our reverence for God. This is another question we will be dealing with in Part II. Remember, God is God, God is love and God knows our fears and weaknesses. We can use these principles to be able to move forward in spite of our own fear.

Romans 8:15: (NRSV) *For you did not receive a spirit of slavery to fall back into fear, but you have received a spirit of adoption. When we cry, Abba! Father!*

*Abba! Father* is a very sensitive, childlike cry to a cherished father. Our privilege lies in the realization that God is VERY approachable—just like a “daddy” should be to his child. That child leaps into their arms because of the approachability.

**We want to have that same sense of closeness while keeping our reverence:**

Isaiah 64:8: (ASV) *But now, O Jehovah, Thou art our Father; we are the clay, and Thou our Potter; and we all are the work of Thy hand.*

With that approachability and connectivity of a child to their father, we look at the Isaiah 64 scripture and realize that privilege lies in the realization that God shapes us and our lives – we do not shape His will. *We are the clay, He is the Potter.* Let Him shape me as He will. Let me conform to the shape He wants for me.

Every prayer doesn't have to start out with *Our Father who is in heaven, hallowed be Your name*. These exact words are not required. But going before Him with an attitude of reverence is always required.

### Continuing with the Lord's Prayer:

**Matthew 6:10**: (NASB) *Your kingdom come. Your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven.*

Right now, God's will is not being done on earth. But Jesus said to pray for the kingdom, when God WILL be obeyed on earth as He now is in heaven. Many verses in the Bible describe this kingdom: it is the time when God will *wipe away every tear from their eyes; and there will no longer be any death...mourning, or crying, or pain*, Revelation 21:4.

God and Jesus will not get to that point overnight. There is a process.

2.

### PRAY FOR THE SYSTEMATIC UNFOLDING OF GOD'S PLAN.

**Prophetically we realize God's kingdom comes by replacing this world's kingdoms:**

**Daniel 2:44**: (NASB) *In the days of those kings the God of heaven will set up a kingdom which will never be destroyed, and that kingdom will not be left for another people; it will crush and put an end to all these kingdoms, but it will itself endure forever.*

But God's plan will unfold whether or not we pray for it – it's certainly not dependent on me, so what's the point? It shows our compliance with His plan. I am so in line with my heavenly Father that His will is my will. We put ourselves in a place of being completely in line no matter what the outcome is to us personally or those around us. Cheerful compliance is everything, even when it means difficult experiences.

One of the greatest accomplishments of prayer is creating compliance in our hearts and minds, in our actions, in our thoughts, in our feelings. Creating a compliant individual who wants to do God's will. This is why Jesus put these things in this order.

**Matthew 6:11**: (NASB) *Give us this day our daily bread.*

3.

### PETITION FOR BASIC NEEDS.

We began with the privilege of approaching the Almighty God and then praying for His will and His kingdom. These points show us His power and foresight. With this in mind, we can now pray for our needs. Notice it is not about what we want, but what we need.

How do we model our attitude of prayer? By putting God first, reverently following His will, and THEN bringing ourselves in by asking to bless our needs in our lives as He sees fit.

**Here was Jesus' answer to Satan during the temptations in the wilderness, showing the spiritual aspect of bread:**

**Matthew 4:4**: (NASB) *But he answered and said, It is written, Man shall not live on bread alone, but on every word that proceeds out of the mouth of God.*

**Our physical bread is described in the following verse:**

**1 Timothy 6:8**: (NASB) *If we have food and covering, with these we shall be content.*

We need food for our bodies AND for our hearts and minds. We can receive this special, spiritual food from the Word of God - the Bible. In John 6:35, Jesus said he was the *bread of life*, meaning his words and example are the spiritual food we are looking for.



**Is it wrong to pray for literal food if we can't feed our family?**



This is an appropriate prayer! But we still need to look for God's overruling and understanding. Like we said before, we would not pray for a job and then sit there and wait for it to come to us. We would do whatever it is we have to do or can do to work along the lines of fulfilling our part of the responsibility. Yes, it is an appropriate prayer, but not the absence of action. We pray as a motivation to appropriate action.

The Lord's Prayer is one of the most often-repeated prayers within Christianity, but when we just repeat it by rote, we miss what it is teaching us. It should be personal.

**Matthew 6:12**: (NASB) *And forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors.*

In other words, I will adopt a forgiving attitude because You, Father, have forgiven me.



**SEEK FORGIVENESS AS WE SEEK TO BE FORGIVING.**

**Debts**: Strong's Exhaustive Concordance #3783 *opheilema*; something owed, i.e. (figuratively) a due; morally, a fault

The Luke version of this prayer, Luke 11:4 (Weymouth) says, *and forgive us our sins, for we ourselves also forgive everyone who fails in his duty to us...* The meaning is the same as in the Matthew account. *Debts* has two shades of meaning - one towards debt and the other towards moral obligation, like a sin against us.

This is about something that is a part of us – not dollars and cents, but much bigger than that. NOTHING WORKS WITHOUT FORGIVENESS. We can forgive because we are forgiven. This is what Jesus is saying. Let's hold on to that and let that "having been forgiven" be the example for how we treat others.

**Ephesians 1:7:** (NASB) *In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of his grace.*



If we are forgiven, we have to live forgiven. This means we aren't going back and intentionally recommitting the sin, thinking if we just say some magic words we are forgiven again and again – that's living as a hypocrite. This is not a careless forgiveness.

God is not careless in His forgiveness. We can be careless with the application of His forgiveness. It is on us to be careful and reverent in dealing with all of these pieces.

**Matthew 18:21-22:** (NASB) <sup>21</sup>*Then Peter came and said to him, Lord, how often shall my brother sin against me and I forgive him? Up to seven times?* <sup>22</sup>*Jesus said to him, I do not say to you, up to seven times, but up to seventy times seven.*



If we're keeping count, we are missing the point. We have to have this attitude because that is how God treats us.

Consider this. When we go before the LORD, are we able to say we did everything perfectly in serving Him? Of course not. So, why should we demand that others serve us perfectly? This is a helpful reminder to not hold in negative feelings.

It comes down to the attitude we have when approaching our heavenly Father. We want to have the attitude of realizing what we have been given so we can learn to try and give the same. We are given so much, so we have to have a forgiving attitude towards others.

**Matthew 6:13:** (NASB) *And do not lead us into temptation, but deliver us from evil.* (Some translations say, *the evil one.*)

This seems contradictory, as **James 1:13** says *God tempts no one*. In **1 Corinthians 10:13**, Paul says God will not permit faithful Christians to have trials beyond their ability, and that He will direct the issue. Why would God *lead us into temptation*?

A careful look at the Greek words here help us to see this as follows: (a transliteration) "Do not allow us to enter into a testing situation. I know I need to be tried and I need to grow. I know trials are coming, but keep me from situations which are overwhelming to me, that would be too much for me." This is why it says *deliver us from the evil one* in some translations. The prayer is stating that we need to count on God in order to be able to stand firmly. It is a humble way to approach the Father. No, He is not leading us to bad things. He leads us through difficult things for the sake of our maturity.

5.

## SEEK GOD'S OVERRULING AND PROTECTION.

Prayer is not for the purpose of getting God's attention – it is for the purpose of focusing our attention on His overruling providence.

**God's providence most often comes in unexpected ways. Continually seek His guidance in our circumstances:**

**2 Peter 2:9:** (NASB) *Then the Lord knows how to rescue the godly from temptation, and to keep the unrighteous under punishment for the day of judgment.*

God CAN and WILL deliver us when we NEED delivering. Sometimes when He does not deliver us it is because we did not need it. Maybe we needed to work through that experience. Remember the Apostle Paul praying three times, but the answer was still, “no”? God said no because Paul needed to stay in the experience to realize the strength of Christ in him. Let's apply that principle to ourselves. When we pray, *deliver us from the evil one*, let's make sure we are growing in Christ the best we can.

God CAN and WILL deliver us when we NEED delivering.

**Romans 12:12:** (NASB) *Rejoicing in hope, persevering in tribulation, devoted to prayer.*

Notice how our hope and trials and prayer are all intertwined? Prayer changes our lives because it is intertwined with the other pieces. It is not something separate.

What does a good prayer look like? It is reverent; it is seeing God's will in the big things. It recognizes God's presence in our physical needs. It recognizes God's providence in our dealing with others. And recognizes God's presence in our personal trials.

Prayer is everywhere. An appropriate prayer needs us to rise up to it!



**So, how can I transform my prayer life?  
For Jonathan, Rick, Julie and Christian Questions...  
Think about it...!**

All quoted scriptures are from the 1995 version of NASB unless otherwise indicated.



## Next episode

**Join us next week on August 21, 2023**

Episode 1295: How Can I Transform My Prayer Life? (Part II)



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- **What happened in the Garden of Gethsemane?** <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mk7Ey0XDx0w>
- **What is reverence?** <https://m.youtube.com/watch?v=VSswUxxW5OS0>

# Study QUESTIONS

## Ep. 1294: How Can I Transform My Prayer Life? (Part I)

<https://christianquestions.com/doctrine/how-to-pray-part-i/>

See:



1. **God's Listening and Responding Qualifications:**
  - a. What startling and beautiful contrast exists in Isaiah 57:15?
  - b. What is the difference between being "good" and "pursuing" righteousness? (Proverbs 15:7-9)  
What does "*a man's way is not in himself*" mean? Explain Jeremiah 10:23-24.
  - c. What is required of us for God to "hear" our prayers? (Proverbs 15:28-29)
  - d. What do we need to eliminate when we petition our Lord? How do we reframe ourselves? (James 4:6-10)  
What are we looking to receive from prayer?
  - e. How can we be appropriately humble? What is our proper place before God? (Psalms 86:1-7)
  - f. What is the danger in demanding God comply with our wishes? (Proverbs 28:9)
2. **What are some of the reasons why God might say no to our prayers?**
  - a. *King David*: What was David's plea to God? Explain the situation. (2 Samuel 12:13-23)  
Was David's prayer valid? Why might God have chosen not to save the child?  
How do you think David felt when his first child with Bathsheba finally died?
  - b. *Apostle Paul*: What was Paul's petition to God? (2 Corinthians 12:7-10)  
What reaction does Paul have when God said "no" the third time?  
Was Paul's prayer valid? What was the result of this trial continuing in Paul's life?
  - c. *Jesus*: What was Jesus' cry to his Father? (Matthew 26:38-46; Hebrews 5:7)  
What might have been the "cup" Jesus asked to be removed?  
How was Jesus' prayer a beautiful example for us? Why did God say no to this valid request?
3. **Should we ever stop praying?**
  - a. *Moses and Israel*: What was the situation? (Exodus 14:11-16)  
What did God urge Moses (and Israel) to do?  
Have you ever hidden behind prayer when action was needed?
  - b. *Joshua and Achan*: What was the situation? (Joshua 7:6-12)  
What did the Lord direct in verses 10-12?  
What is the lesson for us?
  - c. *Jesus*: What did Jesus tell us about the outward vs the inward man? (Matthew 5:23-24)  
Are you struggling with an unresolved issue with someone in your fellowship?
4. **What does a really good prayer look like? What five steps does the Lord's Prayer contain? (Matthew 6:9-15)**
  - a. What should our approach to God be? (Romans 8:15, Isaiah 64:8)
  - b. Why is it necessary for us to pray for God's kingdom? What needs to happen for it to be set up? (Daniel 2:44)
  - c. How should we pray for our basic needs? (Matthew 4:4, 1 Timothy 6:8)
  - d. What enables and compels us to forgive those who have harmed us? (Luke 11:4, Ephesians 1:7, Matthew 18:21-22)
  - e. How does God deliver us from temptation and other evils? (1 Corinthians 10:13, 2 Peter 2:9, Romans 12:12)
5. **How will the substance of your prayers change from this study on prayer?**