

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

Jeremiah 10:23: (NASB1995) *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.*



In our last episode, we talked about many big-picture aspects of how humbling and amazing the privilege of prayer works. We learned that, as is usually the case with true Christian discipleship, there is much more to praying than talking to God about things and letting Him know what we need and want. Today we will focus on the details of our prayer life. We will look at many of those simple questions about the practicality of prayer.

Questions like, how do we fit prayer into busy lives? How do we pray when we are not feeling grateful for anything? How do we know if God is answering our prayers or if we are just making up answers?

recap
recap
of Part I

Transforming our prayer life requires us to have several biblical and fundamental truths in order regarding prayer. In Part I, we discussed several “Principles of Proper Prayer.”

Principles of Proper Prayer:

- We must check ourselves against scriptural principles to see if we are working at being in line for God's direction.
- Our prayers of petition must be offered in such a way as to seek and accept God's will, even if it stands contrary to what we ask for.
- 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.
- Going before God in prayer is an undeserved privilege and, therefore, should be approached with reverence and awe as we ask for help and guidance.

Let's go further and begin by asking those important and practical “how” and “why” questions about praying with another fundamental truth:

Principles of Proper Prayer:

Learn to transform how we sometimes pray into how we ought to pray: We have habits that are not the best for effective prayer.

A transformed prayer life is a mature prayer life, and this maturity does not just magically happen. It comes through thought, study, application and development. We have to grow up into a mature prayer life. Let's examine several aspects of everyday prayer and see how we can work on this growing-up process.

Sometimes we pray based on fanciful or wishful thinking.

But what ARE we allowed to pray for? It seems like two people pray for the same thing, and one request randomly comes true and the other doesn't - there's no apparent rhyme or reason, for example, as to whose house stands after a natural disaster. We know God isn't a magic genie granting our heart's desires, so which of those desires are appropriate to ask for?

James 4:1-3: (NASB1995) *¹What is the source of quarrels and conflicts among you? Is not the source your pleasures that wage war in your members? ²You lust and do not have; so you commit murder. You are envious and cannot obtain; so you fight and quarrel. You do not have because you do not ask. ³You ask and do not receive, because you ask with wrong motives, so that you may spend it on your pleasures.*

In other words, you do not have because you do not ask, but when you do ask, it wasn't the right question. What is too petty to bother God with? There must be millions of prayers a day going up to God to "Let me win the lottery so I can do really good things with the money." What's wrong with a prayer like that?

A lot of money can bring temptation.

Instead of that prayer, we might ask, "Dear Father, let me NOT win the lottery so I can learn to do good things with what You have already given me." It is all about perspective. God simply will not "hear" prayers that are just focused on us.

Instead of wishful thinking, let's work on learning to pray in faith.

James 5:15-16: (NASB1995) *¹⁵and the prayer offered in faith will restore the one who is sick, and the Lord will raise him up, and if he has committed sins, they will be forgiven him. ¹⁶Therefore, confess your sins to one another, and pray for one another so that you may be healed. The effective prayer of a righteous man can accomplish much.*

Confess your sins to one another – be vulnerable. This can be scary and difficult in a group of people. There is always a danger in having the mistakes we shared in confidence turn into gossip or judgment. *Wolves in sheep's clothing* can take advantage of our weaknesses. We must be surrounded by those we trust who live their lives with appropriateness and godliness when we are requesting prayers on our behalf.



If you are not in the right company, find a proper spiritual environment.

Instead of praying wishfully, pray in faith. In every prayer we want to grow in maturity – in the direction of true faith - and not just wishful thinking.





Sometimes as we pray and look for God's leadings, thoughts pop into our heads.

- How do we know which thoughts are our own and which thoughts are God's? These random thoughts seem sensible – is that God speaking to me? Is He answering prayer?
- If I follow through on those thoughts, am I doing God's will?

The following text is not about prayer, but it illustrates the process of the human mind. Jesus told a profound parable about a rich man whose wealth is increasing because his land is productive. He decides he will handle his increased wealth by building bigger barns to hold all of his crops. This may seem reasonable.

Luke 12:16-21: (NASB1995) ¹⁶And he told them a parable, saying, The land of a rich man was very productive. ¹⁷And he began reasoning to himself, saying, What shall I do, since I have no place to store my crops? ¹⁸Then he said, this is what I will do: I will tear down my barns and build larger ones, and there I will store all my grain and my goods. ¹⁹And I will say to my soul, Soul, you have many goods laid up for many years to come; take your ease, eat, drink and be merry. ²⁰But God said to him, you fool! This very night your soul is required of you; and now who will own what you have prepared? ²¹So is the man who stores up treasure for himself, and is not rich toward God.

Instead of trusting the thoughts in our head, we need to pause and consider if these thoughts are in line with God's word, holy principles and our living a life of selfless discipleship. Our focus should be on asking in humility and not telling God what we want His answer to be.

Luke 12:29-31: (NASB1995) ²⁹And do not seek what you will eat and what you will drink, and do not keep worrying. ³⁰For all these things the nations of the world eagerly seek; but your Father knows that you need these things. ³¹But seek His kingdom, and these things will be added to you.



In our prayer process, many thoughts and potential answers come into our heads. Are these based on God's word, His holy principles and my living selflessly as a disciple? These are good gateways for our thought process before we consider moving forward.

We need to question and re-question our own potential willfulness and stubbornness if we are seeking God's answers and not our own desires.

We are willful people – that's human nature in a sinful state. We should always question our motives when we are seeking God's will:

Psalms 32:8-10: (NASB1995) ⁸I will instruct you and teach you in the way which you should go;

I will counsel you with My eye upon you. ⁹Do not be as the horse or as the mule which have no understanding, whose trappings include bit and bridle to hold them in check, otherwise they will not come near to you. ¹⁰Many are the sorrows of the wicked, but he who trusts in the LORD, lovingkindness shall surround him.

God says, *I will instruct you and teach you in the way which you should go. Do not be as the horse or mule who need to have a bit in their mouth and a bridle so that they can be pushed and pulled in the direction they are to go.* When we want God's answers to our prayers to be what WE want them to be, we are looking at our personal preference versus God's providence.

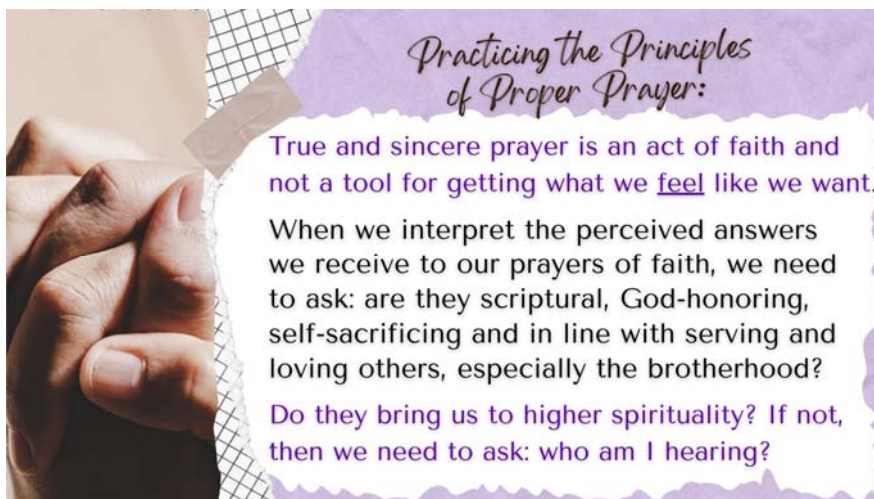


In the big scheme of things, do we want our personal preference to be the answer, or do we want God's eternal providence? It comes down to our preference versus God's will and His providence.

We can fabricate an answer inside our own mind, thoughts and heart that feels right. But if it is not based in godly principle, in selflessness, in God's holy word, then how can it be right in God's eyes? God's eyes are what count. When we think we have received answers to prayer, the first question we have to ask ourselves is whether our answer is in accordance with God's will.



I have had the great privilege to work with many individuals with all kinds of challenges in life. One of my biggest fears in those experiences is ME. I am afraid to get in the way of the Lord's words – that my words will come out rather than the Lord's words working through me. For me, it takes labor to make sure I am responding, not reacting, on a scriptural basis, a spiritual basis, a brotherhood basis, or a “lifting someone up” basis rather than me saying, “I can tell you a thing or two.”



Am I hearing me because it is really convenient to get what I want because I am answering? Or am I hearing my heavenly Father's providence unfold in a scripturally-sound, spiritually-mature way? We are just getting started and already we can see how easy it can be to customize our prayer life to be self-serving instead of God honoring!

Does how we present ourselves in prayer matter?

How about the role our feelings play? How should we pray regarding our future?

When looking to transform our prayer lives, we need to accept that everything matters, and no aspect of our prayers should be taken lightly. We need to continually remind ourselves that when we go to God through Jesus, we are not telling Him anything He doesn't know, but we are presenting ourselves before the God of ALL! When we go to Him through Christ, He already knows. We need to remember that as we go through these practicalities of our prayer life. What is our next potential challenge?

When we learn to pray as a child, we learn formulaic phrases that are helpful to teach us a pattern, but at some point these might keep us from building an actual relationship with God.



Sometimes we pray, making sure we hit all the right words or phrases that might make us look humble. To those hearing us, we openly acknowledge righteousness and appropriate desires. It's a little like putting on a mask.

Luke 18:9-12: (NASB1995) ⁹And he also told this parable to some people who trusted in themselves that they were righteous, and viewed others with contempt: ¹⁰Two men went up into the temple to pray, one a Pharisee and the other a tax collector. ¹¹The Pharisee stood and was praying this to himself: God, I thank you that I am not like other people: swindlers, unjust, adulterers, or even like this tax collector. ¹²I fast twice a week; I pay tithes of all that I get.

The Pharisee was basically using a checklist:

- ☒ I pay my tithes.
- ☒ I fast.
- ☒ I'm ritually working hard at fulfilling what You gave me to do.

This Pharisee believed in his own presentation of evidence, but his heart was wrong. We can modernize this idea, especially in the world of social media where it's reinforced that we have to look and act a certain way. Perception is everything. It has nothing to do with what's in our hearts or any kind of godly transformation. But it sure looks good!

Instead of wearing a mask, pray in sincere and genuine humility as we cling to righteousness and godliness.

Luke 18:13-14: (NASB1995) ¹³But the tax collector, standing some distance away, was even unwilling to lift up his eyes to heaven, but was beating his breast, saying, God, be merciful to me, the sinner!

Here's how Jesus responded:

¹⁴I tell you, this man went to his house justified rather than the other; for everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, but he who humbles himself will be exalted.



This is the opposite of looking good. The tax collector was all about being acceptable to God, so his prayer was acceptable. He was honest and vulnerable.

On the one hand, the Pharisee was looking for just the right words and the right presentation: “I thank God for my maturity,” versus the tax collector’s, “I am not worthy.” The best of us at the highest spirituality in our lives are still not worthy! We still have absolutely zero worthiness before God. Our ability to come before our Father is because we wear that robe of Christ’s righteousness. We go to God through Christ. This is what brings us the worthiness to approach God.

Christian maturity is not an exercise of comparison. It is not about the appropriateness of this, that or the other thing. It is about growing into the appropriate lifestyle, the appropriate actions, the appropriate thoughts and the appropriate heart.



Sometimes we pray based on passing thoughts or feelings that impulsively make us want something that isn’t well thought out.

Ecclesiastes 5:1-2: (NASB1995) *‘Guard your steps as you go to the house of God and draw near to listen rather than to offer the sacrifice of fools; for they do not know they are doing evil. ²Do not be hasty in word or impulsive in thought to bring up a matter in the presence of God...*

Am I giving the everyday meanderings
of my mind spiritual importance
beyond what is appropriate?



Our minds are very active. Most times it will bring us to the wrong direction or conclusion if left unchecked. However, does the admonition not to be impulsive conflict with how we are supposed to be *instant in prayer* or *constant in prayer*? There is a lot to think about when we think about thinking, and we then translate that to prayers before the Almighty!

While an impulsive thought may be a good way to begin prayer, let’s instead work towards praying with diligent focus and attention, knowing that God can and will work in our lives.

...For God is in heaven and you are on the earth; therefore let your words be few.

The wandering, active practice of our minds might be a good way to START prayer. However, let that active seeking bring us to a place of pausing, considering and slowing down – so that the racing of our humanity can begin to give space to listening to God’s perspective.





Prayer is not just about talking; it is about putting things before the LORD in a *selah* moment –pause and consider – to help put our thoughts in order. We do not want the racing of our own minds to be in the way of prayer. If that is how we start a prayer, wonderful, but see if we can guide it into something higher.

Let's observe and learn from the humble petitioning of one of God's faithful servants in the Old Testament.

Daniel was in Babylon for YEARS and prayed for the return of Israel to their home:

Daniel 9:17-19: (NASB1995) *¹⁷So now, our God, listen to the prayer of **Your** servant and to his supplications, and for **Your** sake, O Lord, let **Your** face shine on **Your** desolate sanctuary. ¹⁸O my God, incline **Your** ear and hear! Open **Your** eyes and see our desolations and the city which is called by **Your** name; for we are not presenting our supplications before You on account of any merits of our own, but on account of **Your** great compassion. ¹⁹O Lord, hear! O Lord, forgive! O Lord, listen and take action! For **Your** own sake, O my God, do not delay, because **Your** city and **Your** people are called by **Your** name.*



Daniel says *Your* twelve times in these two verses! Why? This is because it is about the will of God and about honoring God.

Daniel was assured by prophecy that Israel would be restored to their land. He knew their captivity would end. His prayer reflected his obedience to God's will and reverence for God's honor. His prayers had focus and purpose. Daniel asked God not to hesitate bringing these things to be, even though he knew these events would not happen for a long time. Why?

Fervent prayer like this - even when we know a situation is a long-term issue - is an expression of true reverence because we are putting our heart before God, laying out how we think it will be solved today – knowing full well it will not be – but saying, "LORD, do not hesitate because Your will is so important to me." That is reverence!

Racing thoughts could race us into reverent behavior. Daniel shows this by taking his racing thought and focusing it on God's will, His way and His providence. He calls upon the promise in God's prophecy and asks that He bring it to fruition as soon as He deems it possible. It is a beautiful way to transition what could have been a lot of meanderings, a lot of roundabout thinking, a lot of wishful answering of his own prayers to really paying attention to what God would guide him towards.

Sometimes we pray to inform God of our ideas and our direction in life, wanting His stamp of approval on what WE have deemed to be the perfect plan.

Setting goals and planning certainly are good things. We share such things with all of our close relationships. If we become too set in how we think things HAVE to go, we may fall apart when it turns out differently.



This is not a prayer, but it shows a principle for the way humanity thinks:

James 4:13-14: (NASB1995) ¹³Come now, you who say, Today or tomorrow we will go to such and such a city, and spend a year there and engage in business and make a profit. ¹⁴Yet you do not know what your life will be like tomorrow. You are just a vapor that appears for a little while and then vanishes away.

Instead of informing God what we are going to do, let's work on praying to place these things before Him and to ask for His direction.

James 4:15-17: (NASB1995) ¹⁵Instead, you ought to say, If the Lord wills, we will live and also do this or that. ¹⁶But as it is, you boast in your arrogance; all such boasting is evil. ¹⁷Therefore, to one who knows the right thing to do and does not do it, to him it is sin.

We can have what we think is a wonderful idea, and maybe it is, and maybe it is God's will. We can present it to the LORD like this is the answer, "Look at this!" And we can be very excited about it. However, let's make sure that we are not seeking God's stamp of approval; rather, His will, just in case – for whatever reason – our "perfect plan" is not! It may be a perfect human plan, but is it a perfect plan in God's providence?



Let's look to Jesus as our example in Luke 22:42. He was praying to have this cup removed from him in the garden before he was captured. This cup meant the shame of being accused as an enemy of God which would have been so difficult for him. How did he respond to this in his prayer? *Father, if You are willing, remove this cup from me; yet not my will, but Yours be done.* We need to be asking, waiting, and seeking for God's will as Jesus did.

It is good to bring our ideas to God. We are supposed to bring Him our ideas and say, "LORD, this makes a great deal of sense to me." Then we wait; we ask, we seek and wait more. How do we do this? With humility!

Humility in determining our future course is a critical aspect of our prayer life.

This is a good comparison of our ways to God's ways:

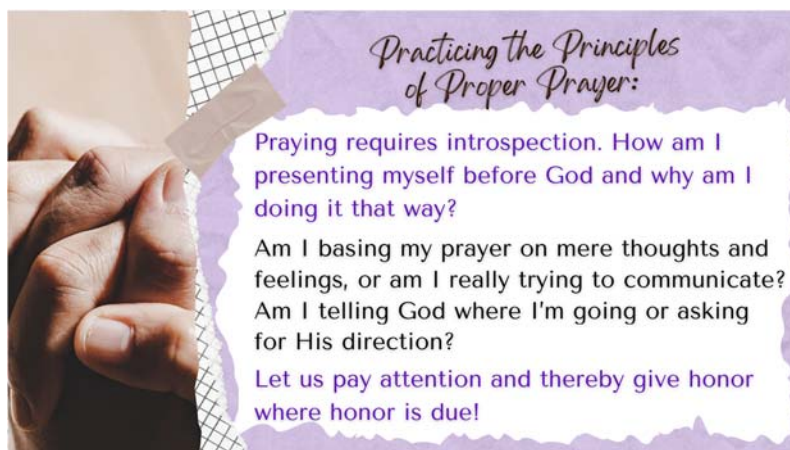
Isaiah 55:8-11: (NASB1995) ⁸For My thoughts are not your thoughts, nor are your ways My ways, declares the LORD. ⁹For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are My ways higher than your ways and My thoughts than your thoughts. ¹⁰For as the rain and the snow come down from heaven, and do not return there without watering the earth and making it bear and sprout, and furnishing seed to the sower and bread to the eater; ¹¹so will My word be which goes forth from My mouth; it will not return to Me empty, without accomplishing what I desire, and without succeeding in the matter for which I sent it.

Let's look at that last verse. Can we say this about our word? Will our word go forth out of our mouth to accomplish what we desire? NO! We can have wonderful ideas. We present them before the heavenly Father because His mind is so infinitely much greater than ours.

So, instead of informing Him of our ideas, we can put them before Him and then look for His providence. His providence may be just like we presented, it might be partially in line with our thoughts, or it could be exactly opposite! We should be accepting with whatever the answer is.



Our friend and CQ contributor Joanna recently said, “**Pray for me to see what the LORD wants me to do.**” What a beautiful prayer. In other words, “I’m looking but I do not have an answer. I’m looking to see what He wants me to see, not what I would rather see.”



Praying is not only about saying; it is also about hearing. We must have that open ear for God’s directives just like Jesus, *Yet not my will, but Yours be done.*

Prayer, even when we are offering it as we manage our daily lives, is always a time for reverence and godly perspective!

**How do we handle prayer when we just don’t feel grateful for anything?
And what about those times when we are afraid as we pray?**

Now we are beginning to focus on some of the deeper practical questions concerning prayer. As with every other question and concern about this privilege of communicating with our heavenly Father, we need to find sound scriptural principles and clear behavioral guidelines to help us through these challenges.

There may be times in our life where we are so thrown off course that we cannot even find God. These are dark, dark periods.



Sometimes we pray – “try” to pray – when we don’t have any idea what there is to be thankful for. We go through the motions, if we even do that much.

David understood this. Here is his sad prayer:

Psalms 13:1-4: (NASB1995) *‘How long, O LORD? Will You forget me forever? How long will You hide Your face from me? ²How long shall I take counsel in my soul, having sorrow in my heart all the day? How long will my enemy be exalted over me? ³Consider and answer me, O LORD my God; enlighten my eyes, or I will sleep the sleep of death, ⁴and my enemy will say, I have overcome him, and my adversaries will rejoice when I am shaken.*

Good! Keep praying and work towards focusing on gratitude and deep, sincere thankfulness, KNOWING God has our lives and experiences in His hands.



It is “good” that David continued praying even when he couldn’t think of anything to be thankful for. It is good to focus on prayer in these times – move it forward – move it higher – step-by-step, one step at a time.

Feelings cannot direct our faith unless we let them. When we let our feelings direct our faith, the end result is never greater faithfulness.

Faith produces trust which brings gratitude:

Psalms 13:5-6: (NASB1995) *⁵But I have trusted in Your lovingkindness; my heart shall rejoice in Your salvation. ⁶I will sing to the LORD, because He has dealt bountifully with me.*

We trust God’s way more than our own, as God’s way is best. When we are unsure, when we are desperate, let Him know and wait for His renewing strength.

Verses 1-4 are unbelievably sad. Yet, immediately after in verses 5-6, David’s heart rejoiced in salvation - *I will sing to the LORD!*

When we feel there is nothing to be grateful for, David gives us this example of just laying it before God. “*I will sleep the sleep of death if You do not do something, God.*” That’s how difficult and dark this time was for him. But the next verses - *I have trusted in Your lovingkindness* - shows David knows there is something bigger, higher and stronger. Even though he cannot get his arms around it, this is what he holds on to. He knows this is what faith does.

Feeling down-and-out does not mean that our prayers must reflect the same.

On the contrary, we are challenged to do the exact opposite by framing our prayers to our Abba Father:

Romans 8:12-16: (NLT) *¹²Therefore, dear brothers and sisters, you have no obligation to do what your sinful nature urges you to do. ¹³For if you live by its dictates, you will die. But if through the power of the spirit you put to death the deeds of your sinful nature, you will live. ¹⁴For all who are led by the spirit of God are children of God. ¹⁵So you have not received a spirit that makes you fearful slaves. Instead, you received God’s spirit when He adopted you as his own children. Now we call him, Abba, Father. ¹⁶For His spirit joins with our spirit to affirm that we are God’s children.*

Understanding the Father-child relationship is a powerful part of transforming our prayer lives. God’s spirit makes us adopted children. In God’s eyes, an adopted child is exactly like a natural child - there is no difference. *Now we call Him, Abba, Father (Daddy)* - there is a deeper connection, an intrinsic trust, in the concept of a “daddy.” Our prayers need to be focused on that kind of trust. When we do not feel like we have anything to be thankful for, we trust our Daddy is there.

Prayer is a time when the decision for gratitude to replace sad and aimless feelings can be made. Prayer is not just for pouring our hearts out, but is also for decision-making to say, “I feel this way, however, here is what I know. Father, help me hold onto what I know rather than what I feel.” We might have to say that a hundred times or more because it is hard to make the transference. If we continue to pray in such a way, we can finally learn how to lift our faith above our feelings of despair, just like David in Psalms 13:1-6.

Shhh



Sometimes we pray and hold back those things we don't want God to hear.

In psychology, this is called “cognitive dissonance,” meaning “the state of having inconsistent thoughts, beliefs or attitudes, especially as relating to behavioral decisions and attitude change.” In other words, we SAY one thing and DO another. We can pray beautifully and reverently about a whole lot of things, and still have that sin we have put into a tiny little box disguised to look like something else, buried deep inside our heart where God will never see it (or maybe He won't think to look).



Psalms 66:18: (NASB1995) *If I regard wickedness in my heart, the LORD will not hear;*

Instead of hiding things, let's work on praying with the assurance that God knows our hearts and minds already.



Psalms 66:19-20: (NASB1995) *¹⁹But certainly God has heard; He has given heed to the voice of my prayer. ²⁰Blessed be God, Who has not turned away my prayer nor His lovingkindness from me.*



David was a man after His own heart, but he committed a lot of sins.

He had a lot of troubles in his life, but he never lost sight of his Father. He is showing us all he did to keep his own mind before the Father. Even when we think we can hide it somewhere deep, we can't. We all know this intellectually, but we need to accept it within our hearts.

Prayer, even when we have no words, can be exactly what we need:

Romans 8:26-28: (NLT) *²⁶And the holy spirit helps us in our weakness. For example, we don't know what God wants us to pray for. But the holy spirit prays for us with groanings that cannot be expressed in words. ²⁷And the Father who knows all hearts knows what the spirit is saying, for the spirit pleads for us believers in harmony with God's own will. ²⁸And we know that God causes everything to work together for the good of those who love God and are called according to His purpose for them.*

Our complete confession to our Father can bring us complete assurance of His providence. Sometimes we don't know how to say it as we don't have the eloquence. We are just raw before the Father with whatever these difficult things are that we are holding back.

What is necessary in order to present our prayer with eloquence? We need to rehearse it. Eloquence comes from rehearsal; groaning comes from our heart. Which one does God want to hear? Does He want to hear the rehearsed prayer that sounds good or the one that expresses our honest pain and the suffering? God wants to hear from our heart.

This is why God's spirit helps us. It puts us before Him on that *throne of grace*. What an amazing privilege! Don't hold back; work on the assurance that He knows our hearts and minds and is willing to help us and work with us.



Sometimes we pray with a measure of fear because of our reverence for God.

The prophet Habakkuk really let God have it in the first chapter of Habakkuk:

Habakkuk 1:2-3: (NLT) ²How long, O LORD, must I call for help? But You do not listen! Violence is everywhere! I cry, but You do not come to save. ³Must I forever see these evil deeds? Why must I watch all this misery? Wherever I look, I see destruction and violence...

God politely sets him straight, but Habakkuk complains again:

Habakkuk 1:13-17: (NLT) ...¹³Will You wink at their treachery? Should You be silent while the wicked swallow up people more righteous than they? ¹⁴Are we only fish to be caught and killed? Are we only sea creatures that have no leader? ¹⁵Must we be strung up on their hooks and caught in their nets while they rejoice and celebrate? ¹⁶Then they will worship their nets and burn incense in front of them. These nets are the gods who have made us rich! they will claim. ¹⁷Will You let them get away with this forever? Will they succeed forever in their heartless conquests?

Habakkuk goes on and on, and then says:

Habakkuk 2:1: (NASB1995) *I will stand on my guard post and station myself on the rampart; and I will keep watch to see what He will speak to me, and how I may reply when I am reproved (reprimanded, a sharp disapproval or criticism).*

Habakkuk unburdened himself to God and then stood quietly to wait for the reproof he thought was coming.

If we are fearful out of reverence for God, good! Work on remembering that in His loftiness, as our Abba Father, He has made Himself accessible to us through Christ.

Habakkuk 2:2-3: (NASB1995) ²Then the LORD answered me and said, Record the vision and inscribe it on tablets, that the one who reads it may run. ³For the vision is yet for the appointed time; it hastens toward the goal and it will not fail. Though it tarries, wait for it; for it will certainly come, it will not delay.



Sometimes we hold back because we have this fear of the Almighty God. Habakkuk is a great example of how to handle this. "I'm going to march right up and let God have a piece of my mind!" It was okay to pray with this kind of passion because he poured out his heart. Habakkuk was clear with his frustration, lack of answers, and God's seeming lack of response to the situation.

Then, before God responds to him, he says he knows he will be reproved and will stand still to listen. This is the prayerful attitude of not just spilling out what is inside of us, but also receiving and accepting what is to come.

God's answer to him essentially is: "It is all in My hands. I've got it. My deliverance will come though it seems to take a long time, *wait for it; for it will certainly come, it will not delay*. I am Almighty God." We can have fear, maybe because we have gone overboard in our frustration, but the LORD understands. If it helps us to clear our hearts so we can receive what He has to tell us, by all means, speak what is on our hearts and minds.



Becca, one of our CQ volunteers, offered this practical comment: "I think sometimes we focus so much on the fact that God is the Almighty Father that it can feel almost inappropriate to talk to Him in a way we would a person. There is so much respect that sometimes I feel like that can be a hurdle to connection. When we can start to talk to God like we would a friend, that can help to build the closeness necessary to WANT to talk more frequently at intervals that aren't just compulsory and segmented, like at meals or before going to bed. God should be the center of our lives and praying is the way to more easily put Him there."

Becca explains why we can pray even through our fear and awe. This is only possible through Jesus, as none of us are worthy. It all comes down to the sacrifice of Jesus being there for us. Again, it is based in humility.

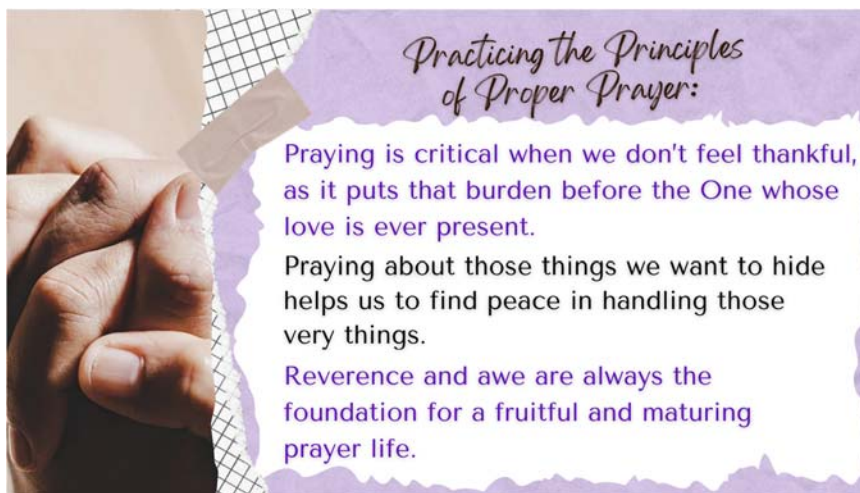
We want to fully submit to God in humility as our best defense against evil:

James 4:7-10: (NASB1995) ⁷Submit therefore to God. Resist the devil and he will flee from you. ⁸Draw near to God and He will draw near to you. Cleanse your hands (acknowledge your sin), you sinners; and purify your hearts, you double-minded. ⁹Be miserable and mourn and weep; let your laughter be turned into mourning and your joy to gloom. ¹⁰Humble yourselves in the presence of the Lord, and He will exalt you.

When we thoroughly revere someone so much higher than us, we don't assume to be able to give them guidance or direction. It is a privilege just to be in their presence. That is why the Apostle James says, *Be miserable and mourn and weep*. Is James saying take all the joy out of our lives? No – he is saying get down to the reality of our sinfulness. Bring it before the Lord. It is okay to be fearful in prayer, but we *pray anyway* – realizing that God is bigger than our fears because He is bigger than our problems.

Proverbs 9:10: (NASB1995) *The fear (reverence) of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom, and the knowledge of the Holy One is understanding.*

Reverence is always a key factor for transforming our prayer lives and lifting them higher.



We want our prayer life to mature day-by-day as we learn how develop it further so that it can actually change the way we live. Our prayers can have amazing power if we use them to help us work through our times of despair and hiding. God is always there!

**We have looked at many practical suggestions for transforming how we pray.
But what do we do when we shy away from prayer altogether?**

Shying away from prayer is an extremely important challenge and requires specific attention. Sometimes shying away from prayer can be a result of anxiety or depression. We think, what's the use? Other times we might be inclined to shy away out of a sense of guilt or discouragement. In every case, we want to face this challenge in faith!



Sometimes we don't pray because we feel paralyzed by our current state of anxiety or sinfulness. We know we are unworthy.

Let's look at how David described this feeling of anxiety and unworthiness:

Psalms 32:3-4: (NASB1995) ³*When I kept silent about my sin, my body wasted away through my groaning all day long. ⁴For day and night Your hand was heavy upon me; my vitality was drained away as with the fever heat of summer. Selah* (pause and consider).

The problem with not praying because we have sinned, of course, is that it becomes a vicious cycle. We don't want to pray because we are in a sinful situation and think we have no business approaching the throne, even though the Bible calls it a *throne of grace*. Without a healthy prayer life, it is easier to keep shrinking back further into sin. Doubts come pouring in. When David was silent, he was eaten up by his silence.





Instead of being paralyzed and holding back, let's work on praying anyway. Tell God the things we choose to hide so He can carry them!

Psalms 32:1-2: (NASB1995) *¹How blessed is he whose transgression is forgiven, whose sin is covered! ²How blessed is the man to whom the LORD does not impute iniquity, and in whose spirit there is no deceit!*

We read **Psalms 32:3-4** before we read verses 1-2. In verses 3-4, David is being eaten up by the sin because in his current state of anxiety or sinfulness, he just couldn't pray. This psalm was written after this experience, so David introduces it (verses 1-2) with - *How blessed is he whose transgression is forgiven*. Then he speaks of how bad off he was when he wasn't praying (verses 3-4).

He now is building on the power of release, of taking that which has kept him from praying and pouring it upon the heavenly Father so He can carry it:

Psalms 32:5-7: (NASB1995) *⁵I acknowledged my sin to You, and my iniquity I did not hide; I said, I will confess my transgressions to the LORD; and You forgave the guilt of my sin. Selah. ⁶Therefore, let everyone who is godly pray to You in a time when You may be found; surely in a flood of great waters they will not reach him. ⁷You are my hiding place; You preserve me from trouble; You surround me with songs of deliverance. Selah.*

God is bigger than our circumstances. God is bigger than our sins. God is bigger than our thoughts. God is bigger than what happens to us or within us. God is bigger than all of it. We just need to be able to say, "I am drowning on my own. I can't do it," just like David in this psalm. David reaches up, reaches out and finds the grace he needs to help. Again, for us Christians, we may have this state of anxiety or sinfulness where we feel we cannot pray. We need to then use our advocate. Jesus stands FOR us as we pray to God. He opens the door so the Father can carry these things for us. Be encouraged, not discouraged, when the trials of life are that heavy.



GOD



**ADVOCATE
CHRISTIAN**



An advocate is someone who sits with you on your side and pleads your case before a judge.

Sometimes we don't pray because we are so preoccupied with the cares of life.

We all have so much going on. Do we ever go through a whole day – or maybe even longer – and think, *Huh, I forgot to pray*. Is prayer just one more thing to check off on our "to do" list?

Matthew 6:25: (NASB1995) *For this reason I say to you, do not be worried about your life, as to what you will eat or what you will drink; nor for your body, as to what you will put on. Is not life more than food, and the body more than clothing?*



Instead of not praying, let's work on praying without ceasing. Pray with words, thoughts and short phrases as our day demands our focused attention.

1 Thessalonians 5:16-22: (NASB1995) ¹⁶Rejoice always; ¹⁷pray without ceasing; ¹⁸in everything give thanks; for this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus. ¹⁹Do not quench the spirit; ²⁰do not despise prophetic utterances. ²¹But examine everything carefully; hold fast to that which is good; ²²abstain from every form of evil.

The cares of life are big, and they just grow bigger. We are supposed to grow in Christ. To be a disciple of Jesus is to walk in his footsteps and become more Christlike. The burden of growing in Christ is heavy enough. Why would we also decide to carry the weight of what God said He would carry?



It's like we are given a backpack that just fits. It is heavy and we are working on our balance, but we say, "Oh wait – I need to take these extra things." No, you don't! God said He would hold them. "No, no, I can handle them. I'm going to take them." We get so busy with life and we are carrying all these extra burdens, and God is saying, "Excuse me – those are the ones you already gave to Me." We reply, "Oh no, no, I've got it." We get so busy that we carry around what we have already given to Him. We can't let the cares of our life overwhelm us.

Psalms 4:4-5: (NASB1995) ⁴Tremble, and do not sin; meditate in your heart upon your bed, and be still. Selah. ⁵Offer the sacrifices of righteousness, and trust in the LORD.



Only praying before sleeping is not the best. Many of us lay down after a long day and fall asleep mid-prayer. It does make for some nice dreams, but we want to give God our best in all things. That includes our full attention whenever we possibly can.

That can be hard to do because life is busy and every moment has something drawing our attention. That does not mean we do not pray before we go to sleep, but it should not be the only time we pray.

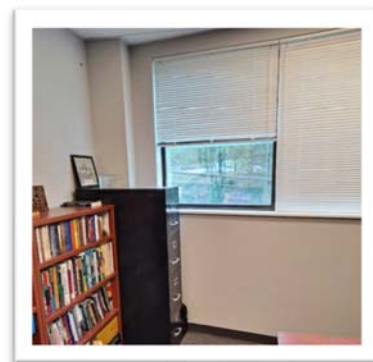
Psalms 103:1-5: (NASB1995) ¹Bless the LORD, O my soul, and all that is within me, bless His holy name. ²Bless the LORD, O my soul, and forget none of His benefits; ³Who pardons all your iniquities, Who heals all your diseases; ⁴Who redeems your life from the pit, Who crowns you with lovingkindness and compassion; ⁵Who satisfies your years with good things, so that your youth is renewed like the eagle.

This is such an encouraging verse because it pours out God's goodness in our lives.



I run a business. We do the Christian Questions podcast. I am a minister in our church, and it is a very, very busy life. There are lots and lots of things that always crowd my mind. It is easy for me to forget to pray. So, in my business world, in my daily life, I have established this little pattern that up until doing the preparation for this podcast, I had never really told anybody about, but I call it "the window."

There is a set of windows in my office for my business. Periodically during the day, several times a day, I get up from my desk when I am starting to get frustrated with things, I walk around and then go to the window. And whenever I go to the window (there are trees and sky I can see), that is my moment to just stop and put my frustration before the Lord. Sometimes, it just helps me to take a breath. Sometimes it helps me to change gears. I was working on X, Y, and Z and now I have to work on something entirely different. “Lord, help me change my focus.”



Sometimes it helps me to take myself out of the way. The window is this little place for me to go during the day as many times as I need to, to ask, “Help me stay on track, Lord, help me do Your will. Just help me see what You want me to see, do what You want me to do in the way You want me to do it.”

Then I usually smile and walk back to my desk and get back to work. The beauty of that is it is a private thing. Of course, now I’ve told you all. But it is a private thing. During the day, if somebody comes in or out of the office, they just think I’m looking out the window and I am having this prayer time with my heavenly Father through Christ. It helps me not to be overwhelmed by the busyness of my days.



Sometimes we don’t pray because we see ourselves as overwhelmingly unworthy.

This is different than being in a willfully sinful state. Issues like depression and PTSD can give us an untrue and unhealthy perception of ourselves and our place before God. It’s like getting stuck in the groove of a record (“vinyl” as the kids say now) and we can’t move forward.

Having a mental challenge like depression or PTSD is about the wiring of our brain. It is not a sin, and there is nothing sinful about seeking necessary professional help.

While these next few scriptures ARE about sin, we want to look at the principle this particular psalm teaches, as the sentiment described might feel similar, and the remedy provided is the same:

Psalms 51:3-4: (NASB1995) ³*For I know my transgressions, and my sin is ever before me.* ⁴*Against You, You only, I have sinned and done what is evil in Your sight, so that You are justified when You speak and blameless when You judge.*

Instead of not praying, DO pray because we ARE overwhelmingly unworthy and need to place that unworthiness into the capable and forgiving hands of our Father!

I know my transgressions, and my sin is ever before me... remember, the mental challenges we are discussing are not sins; they are about the wiring in our brains.



We can change the words to: *Lord, I know my depressive tendencies and my anxiety are ever before me.* We can do this because in this state, we are doing the exact same thing as David – he is constantly reminded of his sins, and we are struggling with our debilitating anxiety. We put those difficulties before God and pray because we are not worthy. We pray because we do not know how to control these thoughts. We pray because the problem is too big.

Learning to live faithfully and righteously after sin enables our prayers to be heard. Once we recognize the sin, our prayers are very important.

What do we look for?



Seek forgiveness:

Psalm 51:1: (NASB1995) *Be gracious to me, O God, according to Your lovingkindness; according to the greatness of Your compassion blot out my transgressions.*

Seek forgiveness? But we just said with depression or PTSD we are not responsible for this. The answer is no, you are not responsible. What do we seek forgiveness for in these cases? We seek forgiveness for giving the condition too much attention and not trying to bring it over to the Father. “Father, I know You can handle this. I know You are bigger than my depression. I know you are bigger than my PTSD or my anxiety. Please forgive me for not always remembering that.” After we say that 30 or 40 or 50 or 60 times, we help ourselves transition to that forgiven perspective of, “I know it is bigger than me, but I know it is not bigger than You.”



Seek to be cleansed:

Psalms 51:7-9: (NASB1995) *⁷Purify me with hyssop, and I shall be clean; wash me, and I shall be whiter than snow. ⁸Make me to hear joy and gladness, let the bones which You have broken rejoice. ⁹Hide Your face from my sins and blot out all my iniquities.*

We all have weaknesses and blind spots in our characters and we are all broken. We need to keep battling each day to do better and ask God for forgiveness through Jesus’ name, our loving advocate. “Father, hide my depression from Your face. Blot out the issues I have with being able to process things because I just cannot do it. Recognize who I am, Father, and let ME recognize who I am in Your hands.” That is how we become cleansed.



Seek to be restored:

Psalms 51:10-13: (NASB1995) *¹⁰Create in me a clean heart, O God, and renew a steadfast spirit within me. ¹¹Do not cast me away from Your presence and do not take Your holy spirit from me. ¹²Restore to me the joy of Your salvation and sustain me with a willing spirit. ¹³Then I will teach transgressors Your ways, and sinners will be converted to You.*

“Help me, LORD, overcome so I can help others now and in Your kingdom.” Isn’t that the point of our Christian walk? Especially for those of us who have those kinds of issues that are just in our wiring. What a beautiful privilege!

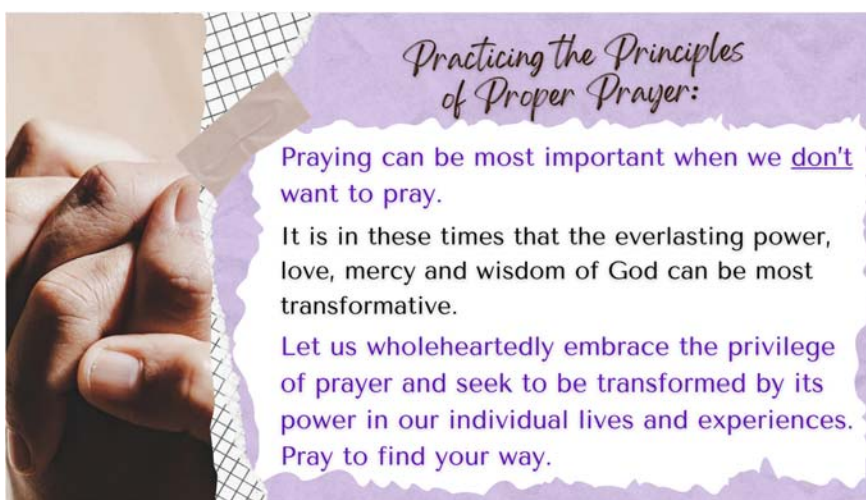
God is not looking for perfection; He is looking for us to rely on Him. That is victory.



Seek to always remember the lesson:

Psalms 51:16-17: (NASB1995) *¹⁶For You do not delight in sacrifice, otherwise I would give it; You are not pleased with burnt offering. ¹⁷The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit; a broken and a contrite heart, O God, You will not despise.*

This is the point, especially with experiences like depression, anxiety and PTSD that are out of our control. God does not desire the perfection of something looking good. He desires that we have a heart for Him, despite not being able to totally overcome these difficulties. This is where God's answer to our prayers lives. It is in the heart attitude. He is not worried about us overcoming our difficulties; He is worried about us working on it in faith and trust.



We are all unworthy. That is why we come in front of what is called a *throne of grace*, and that's why we have Jesus as our Advocate (1 John 2:1). He covers all our imperfections, and our relationship with the Father is through Jesus and because of Jesus. This is why we can feel comfortable approaching our Abba Father.

Hebrews 4:15-16: (NASB1995) *¹⁵For we do not have a high priest (Jesus) who cannot sympathize with our weaknesses, but one who has been tempted in all things as we are, yet without sin. ¹⁶Therefore let us draw near with confidence to the throne of grace, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need.*

Going to God through Christ in prayer unlocks the potential to live a fulfilled life, even if we do not have victory over everything we face. It is the fulfillment of God's will, God's providence, God's spirit through Christ helping us to grow, even though imperfect, into stronger Christians so that we can be an example of why Jesus Christ lived, died and was raised. Prayer changes things.

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



Next episode

Join us next week on August 28, 2023

Episode 1296: Do Christians Have to Go to Church?



@christianquestionsministries



cqbiblepodcast

Text CQREWIND to 22828

to receive our Weekly Newsletter, Show Notes, and Study Questions

Bonus Material and Study Questions

Recommended additional study:

Humility

Ep. 1179: Can Humility Keep Me From Success?

<https://christianquestions.com/parables/1179-success/>

Jesus uses competing for status to teach us about true success

The influence of social media

Ep. 1210: Whose Voices Are You Listening To?

<https://christianquestions.com/character/1210-voices-influence/>

Identifying what we hear, its affects and how to rise above the fray

Depression and anxiety

Ep. 1124: Does My Anxiety or Depression Invalidate My Christianity? (Part I)

<https://christianquestions.com/character/1124-anxiety-depression/>

Understanding how anxiety and depression affect my Christianity



Parents and Bible class teachers, continue your studies on this topic with these short, animated videos for kids at ChristianQuestions.com/YouTube:

- **What is humility?** <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LzKuL4hx0Dc>
- **How should we pray?** <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JogWGY2N90s>
- **What should we pray for?** <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=EQwPx5CiqVo>
- **Why is prayer important?** https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=n_nvt43iyzA
- **What is reverence?** <https://m.youtube.com/watch?v=VSwUxxW5OS0>
- **Who was David? (Part 1)** <https://m.youtube.com/watch?v=BDVRsUxuCxU>
- **Who was David? (Part 2)** <https://m.youtube.com/watch?v=F2JlvkWUyEg>
- **Why do we pray if God already knows our thoughts?** <https://m.youtube.com/watch?v=hyzBmB-UmQM>

In Hezekiah's time when the people of Israel wanted to go to Egypt for aid against Syria, Isaiah expresses the need to abandon our convenient thoughts and cling to true righteousness:

Isaiah 30:18-22: (NASB1995) ¹⁸Therefore the LORD longs to be gracious to you, and therefore He waits on high to have compassion on you. For the LORD is a God of justice; how blessed are all those who long for Him. ¹⁹O people in Zion, inhabitant in Jerusalem, you will weep no longer. He will surely be gracious to you at the sound of your cry; when He hears it, He will answer you. ²⁰Although the Lord has given you bread of privation and water of oppression, He, your Teacher will no longer hide Himself, but your eyes will behold your Teacher. ²¹Your ears will hear a word behind you, this is the way, walk in it, whenever you turn to the right or to the left. ²²And you will defile your graven images overlaid with silver, and your molten images plated with gold. You will scatter them as an impure thing, and say to them, Be gone!

The necessary sincerity of prayer:

Matthew 6:5-8: (NASB1995) ⁵When you pray, you are not to be like the hypocrites; for they love to stand and pray in the synagogues and on the street corners so that they may be seen by men. Truly I say to you, they have their reward in full. ⁶But you, when you pray, go into your inner room, close your door and pray to your Father who is in secret, and your Father who sees what is done in secret will reward you. ⁷And when you are praying, do not use meaningless repetition as the Gentiles do, for they suppose that they will be heard for their many words. ⁸So do not be like them; for your Father knows what you need before you ask Him.

Nehemiah, a rarely spoken of servant of God, was instrumental in the rebuilding of the walls of Jerusalem. His prayers and actions brought this most improbable task to fruition:

Nehemiah 1:4-7: (NASB1995) ⁴When I heard these words, I sat down and wept and mourned for days; and I was fasting and praying before the God of heaven. ⁵I said, I beseech You, O LORD God of heaven, the great and awesome God, who preserves the covenant and lovingkindness for those who love Him and keep His commandments, ⁶let Your ear now be attentive and Your eyes open to hear the prayer of Your servant which I am praying before You now, day and night, on behalf of the sons of Israel Your servants, confessing the sins of the sons of Israel which we have sinned against You; I and my father's house have sinned. ⁷We have acted very corruptly against You and have not kept the commandments, nor the statutes, nor the ordinances which You commanded Your servant Moses.

The power of our prayers for others:

Ephesians 6:18-20: (NASB1995) ¹⁸With all prayer and petition pray at all times in the spirit, and with this in view, be on the alert with all perseverance and petition for all the saints, ¹⁹and pray on my behalf, that utterance may be given to me in the opening of my mouth, to make known with boldness the mystery of the gospel, ²⁰for which I am an ambassador in chains; that in proclaiming it I may speak boldly, as I ought to speak.

Prayer as a partner of God-honoring actions:

Psalms 105:1-7: (NASB1995) *¹Oh give thanks to the LORD, call upon His name; Make known His deeds among the peoples. ²Sing to Him, sing praises to Him; Speak of all His wonders. ³Glory in His holy name; Let the heart of those who seek the LORD be glad. ⁴Seek the LORD and His strength; Seek His face continually. ⁵Remember His wonders which He has done, His marvels and the judgments uttered by His mouth, ⁶O seed of Abraham, His servant, O sons of Jacob, His chosen ones! ⁷He is the LORD our God; His judgments are in all the earth.*

Brings us guidance:

Luke 6:12-13: (NRSV) *¹²Now during those days he went out to the mountain to pray; and he spent the night in prayer to God. ¹³And when day came, he called his disciples and chose twelve of them, whom he also named apostles:*

Prayer gives us the ability to participate in the lives of others:

Luke 6:28: (NRSV) *bless those who curse you, pray for those who abuse you.*

Philippians 1:2-6: (NRSV) *²Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. ³I thank my God every time I remember you, ⁴constantly praying with joy in every one of my prayers for all of you, ⁵because of your sharing in the gospel from the first day until now. ⁶I am confident of this, that the one who began a good work among you will bring it to completion by the day of Jesus Christ.*

Humility, as implied throughout our whole discussion, is a basic key:

1 Peter 5:6-9: (NASB1995) *⁶Therefore humble yourselves under the mighty hand of God, that He may exalt you at the proper time, ⁷casting all your anxiety on Him, because He cares for you. ⁸Be of sober spirit, be on the alert. Your adversary, the devil, prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour. ⁹But resist him, firm in your faith, knowing that the same experiences of suffering are being accomplished by your brethren who are in the world.*

Study QUESTIONS

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

<https://christianquestions.com/character/1295-prayer-life-part-ii/>

See:



1. What are ways we can improve on the following immature prayer behaviors:
 - a. Prayers based on fanciful or wishful thinking. (James 4:1-3, 5:15-16)
 - b. Are the thoughts I have during prayer mine or the LORD's? (Luke 12:16-21, 29-31, Psalms 32:8-10)
2. How should we present ourselves while praying?
 - a. How should we frame our prayers? (Luke 18:9-14)
 - b. What is the danger in letting our meandering thoughts lead our prayers? What is a better practice? How does a *selah* moment help us with this? (Ecclesiastes 5:1-2, Daniel 9:17-19)
 - c. How should we present ideas and plans to God in prayer? What character trait is necessary? (James 4:15-17, Isaiah 55:8-11)
3. How do we pray when we cannot find gratitude or we are afraid?
 - a. How do we pray when there does not seem anything for which to be thankful? (Psalms 13:1-6, Romans 8:12-16)
 - b. What beautiful privilege is ours when we realize our relationship to our Abba Father?
 - c. Have you ever tried to hide sins from God? Is this possible? (Psalms 66:18-20, Romans 8:26-28)
 - d. How does Habakkuk show reverence when approaching God? (Habakkuk 1:2-3, 13-17, 2:1-3)
Again – what character trait is essential? (James 4:7-10, Proverbs 9:10)
4. What are suggestions for when we shy away from prayer altogether?
 - a. What is the danger in not praying when we are full of anxiety and unworthiness?
 - b. Explain how David felt about not praying when burdened with sin. (Psalms 32:1-7)
 - c. How do we combat forgetting to pray when we are preoccupied with the cares of life? (Matthew 6:25, 1 Thessalonians 5:16-22, Psalms 4:4-5, 103:1-5)
 - d. Dissect Psalms 51:1-17. How do these psalms teach us to overcome our challenges?
 - 1) Seek forgiveness – why? (verse 1)
 - 2) Seek to be cleansed – once cleansed, what will we be able to see? (verses 7-9)
 - 3) Seek to be restored – once restored, what will we be able to do? (verses 10-13)
 - 4) Seek to remember the lesson – what does the Lord expect of us in overcoming challenges? (verses 16-17)
5. Which of these categories need work in your own prayer life?
 - a. In what way will these suggestions help you transform your relationship with our Abba Father?
 - b. Why must we approach God through Jesus? (1 John 2:1, Hebrews 4:15-16)