

# A PRACTICAL PRIMER ON PRAYER

by

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The Moody Bible Institute of Chicago

## CHAPTER FOUR -

### PRAYER IN THE QUIET TIME

**"Pray to thy Father"** (Matthew 6:6)

READING GOD'S WORD is only part of the Christian's quiet time. Another phase of it is praying to our Heavenly Father.

Let us always begin our prayer with praise and thanksgiving. GOD intended praise to be a large part of the Christian's worship. The Book of Psalms, longest in the Bible, is a book of worship and has one hundred fifty chapters, most of which are praise to GOD. **"Praise is comely for the upright."**

Praise is different from thanksgiving. Thanksgiving is for a definite thing which we have received, but praise is for the fact that GOD is GOD. Praise Him that He gave His SON to die on the Cross for your sins. Praise Him for the privilege of praying in JESUS' name. Praise Him for His Fatherhood. Praise Him! Praise Him!

After praise comes thanksgiving. We are all too prone to ask the Almighty for favors, but to be lax in thanking Him for them. How many times did you pray for that thing? Have you thanked Him that many times for granting your request? Search your heart and thank Him for His many blessings.

After your soul is flooded with gratitude to GOD, then make your petitions. What will you pray about? Everything! JESUS tells us not only to pray for big things, such as the filling of the HOLY SPIRIT, but also for small things. We see that GOD answers lesser prayers as well because, when the man dropped the borrowed ax into the water, GOD made the iron to swim.

Isn't it wonderful that we have a GOD who is a Father and who is interested in everything which concerns us? **"The Lord will perfect that which concerneth me"** (Psalm 138:8).

The scope of prayer is narrowed only by the confines of our lives and desires. We can pray about anything to the GOD who with infinite attention to detail fashioned the insect and the star-flung sky.

If you want to be certain that your prayers will be answered, you must learn to claim promises.

Search the Word for the things which GOD has promised to do and then ask Him to do them.

"It is a blessed way of praying, to pray upon a promise and to plead, 'Do as Thou hast said,' " is the way Robert Murray McCheyne words his encouragement to pray promises.

Here are a few promises that you may wish to pray.

- For material care: "**Give us this day our daily bread**" (Matthew 6:11). "**Bread shall be given him; his waters shall be sure**" (Isaiah 33:16). There are many bread promises, but I have found no cake promises. Cake is the extra goodness of the Lord.

- For clothing: (Matthew 6:31-33)

- For the salvation of loved ones: (II Peter 3:9)

- For the salvation of a husband: (I Peter 3:1) (Please note the condition attached to the promise: the wife must be meek).

- For the spiritual growth of loved ones: (Philippians 1:9-11)

- For wisdom in making decisions: (James 1:5 and Isaiah 30:21). Please note the condition in the Isaiah promise.

- For strength in or deliverance out of trouble: (Psalm 91:15 and Isaiah 43:2)

We cannot consider prayer without including faith, for faith is a very real part of prayer.

"**When ye pray, believe.**" Does that seem hard to do? If so, here are George Mueller's rules for increasing your faith.

1. Carefully read the Word of GOD. (Romans 10:17)
2. Maintain an upright life and a good conscience. (Hebrews 10:22)
3. Do not shrink from opportunities where your faith may be tried. (I Peter 1:17)
4. When the hour of trial comes, do not work a deliverance for yourself. (Daniel 3:17)

All these rules are important, but I want to comment upon the last two. "Do not shrink from opportunities where your faith may be tried."

This is so important. Unless your faith is tried, it will not grow. When the disciples asked the Lord, "**Increase our faith,**" His answer included the thought that if one uses what he has, his faith will increase.

Time after time in Scripture we see the Lord testing a person's faith that it might grow. For instance, there is the time when the nobleman came to ask that his son be healed, as recorded in John 4; then there is the time when JESUS delayed answering the request of Mary and Martha for their brother's healing. If you will dare to pray for a definite request, your faith will grow.

Mueller's fourth point, "Do not work a deliverance of your own," is warning against a human temptation. Because we are afraid that GOD will not answer, we try frantically to solve our own problems. But GOD will answer. The thing is that He does not answer ahead of time, but on time.

I remember once when I was going to Bible school that I did not have carfare for the next day. I had faith until five o'clock in the evening; then I grew discouraged. But at seven o'clock a friend who owed me some money came and paid me!

Another way to increase your faith is to keep a section of your devotional notebook for prayer requests. When you pray for something, write it down with the date; then watch for the answer.

I remember vividly when I started mine. A close friend, for whose healing three of us had prayed earnestly, died. My faith tottered, and doubt taunted me that perhaps many other prayers had not been answered. I decided to keep books and see.

I bought a notebook; and as I prayed, I wrote down my request with the date and the verse if I was claiming a verse. Then I left space to write whether or not the prayer had been answered.

The first page records twelve known answers and three not granted, as far as I know.

The second page, fifteen known answers out of seventeen requests.

The third page, twenty-three known answers out of twenty-four requests.

The fourth page, fourteen known answers out of fifteen requests.

The fifth page, ten known answers out of eleven requests.

The sixth page, twelve known answers out of thirteen requests.

The seventh page, six known answers out of seven requests.

The eighth page, ten known answers out of twelve requests.

The figures themselves stagger one. Those prayers covered many things: the renting of a room, the grace to forgive, a new dress for Easter, a missionary speaker for a service, and prayers for others.

GOD forgave me for my lack of faith; and out of this experience came one of the greatest blessings of my life, the proof that He does answer prayer.

If you will keep a record of your prayers, your prayer life will be improved in two ways. For one thing, it will weed out your prayers. As you write down requests, they will seem so petty and selfish that you will not pray about them.

Then, too, the list of answered prayers will increase your faith. When the devil tempts you to doubt, as he will, you can point to the pages and say, "GOD has answered before; He will answer again." It is an anchor for your faith in time of testing.

If faith is a necessary part of prayer; so is persistency. JESUS teaches this in the parable of the judge and the importunate widow. (Luke 18:1-8)

And why should we not persist in prayer? We are willing to persist in other matters. A good illustration of this is given by Isaac Page, for years a missionary to China under the China Inland

Mission. When he was in China, a beggar used to stand at the door of his compound. Every time he saw Mr. Page - if it was once or a hundred times a day - he would beg, "One lone cash." A cash is a very small sum in China. But, rain or shine, hot or cold, time after time the beggar cried, "One lone cash! One lone cash!" Nothing ever stopped him.

Why should we not persist that much in our praying to GOD? Why not plead day after day for the salvation of a loved one? For laborers to be thrust out into the harvest field? For a life transformed by the Spirit?

But you object, "Suppose I do not feel like praying?" To that I can only answer that prayer is not a mood, but a duty. If we did only what we felt like doing, not much would be accomplished. Suppose a woman washed the dishes only when she was in the mood?

"True faith is prayer without feeling," was the conclusion of Francis Fenelon, outstanding Christian of the seventeenth century, whose small book entitled *Christian Perfection* is read often in these days by Christians who need help along the way.

"Pray hardest when it is hardest to pray" is the encouraging word of Charles H. Brent. And William Booth, founder of the Salvation Army, testified that, more often than not, he went to the place of prayer reluctantly, but that when he refused to give in to his feelings, GOD always blessed him.

Now that we have pointed out the duty of praying regardless of feeling, let us consider the different things which cause dryness in prayer, a state more common than most of us realize.

Because people dislike to admit that they feel that way, the condition is seldom brought into the open and discussed. Sometimes the answer is simple.

Dryness may be caused by a slowing down of your growth. As human beings, we grow continuously; but the older we become, the less obvious is the growth. So it is spiritually; as we become adults in the Lord, we grow more slowly. A babe in CHRIST can often be seen to grow by "leaps and bounds," but the growth of a minister is seldom noticeable.

Or we may lack the desire to pray because our lives are untroubled. When life goes along smoothly and there is no emotional problem clutching at our hearts, we are inclined not to pray as ardently as when we are in trouble. I am afraid that is why many Christians have trouble.

It is so easy for us to become self-satisfied and self-centered.

"Often our trials act as a thorn hedge to keep us in the good pasture, but our prosperity is a gap through which we go astray." Thus Charles H. Spurgeon expressed the need for trouble in the life of a Christian.

However, the cause of dryness in prayer may be deeper. It may be caused by sin.

Perhaps your sin was that you didn't obey the Word, and consequently you lost your taste for it. You "watered the Word." You said, "I don't think the verse means exactly that." For example,

Scripture says, "**Take therefore no thought for the morrow.**" But the woman who loves the world excuses herself: "We're supposed to take care of ourselves, though." She buys closetfuls of clothes and extra sets of dishes, saying, "If I don't, I won't have any." It may be that the Lord didn't want her to have so many things, but wanted her to devote herself to Him!

Or you make the excuse, "Tithing is Old Testament only." Are you sure? Look up Luke 11:42.

It may be that there has been sin against someone. Our prayer life is closely bound up with our relation to our fellow man, for GOD says, "**When ye stand praying, forgive**" (Mark 11:25). You cannot expect GOD to answer your prayer if you have an unforgiving spirit. "But," you argue, "GOD does not mean for me to forgive, because that person hurt my child." Unless a thing is unfair, there is nothing to forgive. You need only to remember that wicked men crucified CHRIST and that He forgave to know that GOD means for you too to forgive.

If you would enjoy fellowship with GOD, you must obey Him. He will bless you afterwards.

We even sin in this matter of confessing sin.

Our natural pride is so great that we dislike to admit that we have done wrong. We seem to think that if we merely attempt to stop sinning, that is enough. But Scripture does not say, "If we stop sinning. . ." but rather, "**If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.**"

Perhaps you have drifted into unconfessed sin because you use what is called the "editorial we" in your prayers. You say, 'Lord, we have sinned.' You do that to lessen your own sense of guilt; but as long as you do it, you won't get close to GOD. It is like approaching Him in a crowd.

Instead, ask yourself: In what instance did I fail to obey GOD? Ask the HOLY SPIRIT to direct your thoughts to any sin in your life. Read your Bible; and after each verse ask yourself, "Have I obeyed this?" GOD convicts of sin when the heart responds to His Word.

If sin has robbed the Christian of his blessing, two things are required of him. He must be right with both GOD and man. He must confess his sin to GOD and make restitution to the person wronged.

If you have wronged another, apologize. Don't hesitate to apologize. You may have the idea that making an apology will humiliate you, but it won't. It takes a big soul to have the grace to admit, "I was wrong." And here is a safe rule to follow in making restitution. Make it only as far as you have wronged. If the wrong was only in your heart, correct it there. If you have made an unkind remark, apologize to that person alone. But if you have gossiped, go to everyone to whom you have told the wrong story and correct it.

But we hope that your reluctance to pray is not caused by sin. Let us say it is merely that your mind wanders.

Many Christians have faced this problem. Here is a suggestion made by Hudson Taylor, founder of the China Inland Mission:

"Regarding a wandering mind in prayer, I have found more help in praying aloud and praying while walking about-praying as to a present Lord - than in any other way."

Reading the Word will also stimulate your praying. Read a verse, then pause and pray. The Word will give vision to your praying by bringing to your mind friends and conditions which need prayer.

Try variety in your quiet time. Instead of reading your routine chapter a day, read only a verse and analyze it.

Ask yourself: Am I really living this verse? For instance, "**Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind, and with all thy strength**" (Mark 12:30). Does the Lord come first in your heart? Even ahead of your family? Is He the delight of your innermost being, or do you have secret ambitions in which He has no part? Does He dominate your mind, or do you think thoughts which by their very nature exclude Him? Do you actually give Him all your strength in service?

Or go to the other extreme and read a larger portion of the Bible than usual. Choose a book like Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians, or Philemon to read through at one sitting. You might once in a while even spend your quiet time reading a missionary magazine and thinking of the vastness of GOD's love, which encircles the whole world.

Vary your prayers too. One day pray for no one but yourself. Search your heart, humble yourself before the Lord, and dedicate yourself anew to living for Him. Let Him through His Spirit point out what He would take away from your life and what He would add to it.

Another day do not pray for yourself at all. Forget your own problems. You have already committed them to the Lord. Pray for others. Pray for your neighbors, mentally going from one house to another in your block, naming each member of the household. Or study a map of the world and pray for country after country, both the Christians and those who have never even heard of JESUS. Pray as the HOLY SPIRIT brings names and conditions to your mind. Pray for those for whom you have never prayed before.

There are two ways to cure reluctance to be alone with GOD. One is to go down into the valley of the shadow of death, face the fact of the judgment seat of CHRIST, and come up to keep your quiet time. Few people live their lives with the surety of judgment always in view; but if you go through an illness which makes it real to you, then you will know the importance of being alone with GOD each day.

The other way is to fall in love with the Lord JESUS. Love for the Lord, like earthly love, does not come to all in the same way. With some, it is love at first sight. From the first moment they see Him, they fall at His feet, delighted with Him. Others grow slowly into knowing Him, into adoring Him. But whether this love rushes or creeps into your soul, when it comes, nothing can keep you from your quiet time and the joy of being with the Lover of your soul.

**Wait on the Lord**

My soul, wait only on the Lord,  
Expecting nothing save from Him.  
Rest all on His unfailing Word  
Nor ever let thy faith grow dim.  
Thine every need shall be supplied,  
Thy heart's desires be freely given,

And no good thing shall be denied  
The soul in harmony with Heaven.  
All human strength but disappoints,  
Its wrecks along life's path are strewed;  
But they who wait as GOD appoints  
Shall daily find their strength renewed.

On eagles' wings of faith they rise  
And far above earth's tumult sail,  
They run, unwearied, toward the prize,  
They walk, and neither faint nor fail.  
However, hope!, as seems thy case,  
Go spread it out before the throne;

And in His boundless, matchless grace,  
Our GOD will make His power known.  
Then in His strength go meet thy task,  
Assured He bears with thee the load.  
If great thy need, then largely ask;  
All things are possible with GOD.

- Mrs. W. A. Vroman

~ end of chapter 4 ~

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