

ARE YOU A MAN OF PRAYER?

by Jim Clayton

"The sheep are never so safe from the wolf as when they are near the shepherd." - Charles Spurgeon

Fast Facts: Although 90% of Americans say they pray (60% say they pray every day), the ways they pray vary significantly, according to pollster George Barna. Two out of three unchurched Americans (63%) pray regularly, but only one out of three (34%) is sure that praying makes any difference. In contrast, nearly 70% of the "born-again" respondents think God personally responds to their prayers.

Among those who pray:

- 95% express gratitude to God
- 61% make specific requests of God
- 76% ask God to forgive particular sins
- 12% pray in tongues

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How is your prayer life? If you are like most of us, it has seasons, and sometimes lacks consistency. I cannot think of anything more important than intimacy with our Heavenly Father. "It is good to be near God." (Psalm 73:28) Nearly fourteen hundred verses in the Bible talk about prayer. A rich and fulfilling prayer life is essential to our spiritual growth.

This is not a "how to" on prayer. These are simply some ideas that have benefitted me in my time with God. I encourage you to give them a try to see which ones work for you.

1. **Find Your Ideal Time.** Are you a morning person or a night person? When are you most alert? "Therefore be clear minded and self-controlled so that you can pray." (1 Peter 4:7) Identify your "optimal prayer time." How many times have you fallen asleep while praying? For me, morning works out best. It is a great way to start the day. I get up earlier now than I ever imagined, and I am not even a morning person! Make it a regular part of your schedule - and stick with it! "Be faithful in prayer." (Romans 12:12) Pencil it in your planner if you must. Why is it when we get busy our time with God is often the first thing to go? Make it a priority! Even a few minutes each day is better than none at all. It will hardly affect your schedule, and it's easy. I started with just a few minutes, and I now have a powerful extended prayer time every day. If you are not a consistent pray-er, here is an experiment: For thirty days, set aside a few minutes each day for a regular time with God. Give it a try and see what happens. It will make a difference!

2. **Isolate Yourself Somewhere Private, Quiet and without Distractions.** "But when you pray go into your room, close the door and pray to your Father." (Matthew 6:6) This will be your "refuge," your place of retreat. Stay out of the bed! This is not nap time. I have a desk set up specifically for this purpose, so I am always ready. I turn off the furnace or air conditioner, and close the door to get it really quiet. How else will you hear that "still, small voice?" Naturally, you can pray anywhere, such as in the car, at work or around the house. However, true "quiet time" is the key to a powerful, effective prayer life.

3. **Be Quiet and Listen.** "Be still and know that I am God." (Psalm 46:10) Contemplate His presence. Take a moment to realize that Almighty God, the Creator of the universe, is waiting to hear from you! "God has surely listened and heard my voice in prayer." (Psalm 66:19) Anyone who knows me will tell you I like to talk, especially about God. So you can imagine what it is like when I talk to God. He patiently listens to my prayers, and waits for His chance to speak. Finally, as I wind down my prayer time, He gets ready to share some wisdom or guidance with me (which I just requested). Then I say "Amen," and I am done. "Jim," He says to Himself, "I have so much to share with you, if you would only listen." Let God speak to you. While you are praying, pause, be quiet and allow Him to respond. Many times you will not get an answer, but sometimes you will. You must learn to discern His voice. It may be a thought or a feeling, but you will sense His leading. "Listen carefully to the voice of the Lord your God." (Exodus 15:26)

4. **Talk with Your Best Friend.** Be yourself. Remember you are relating to a real Person. Do not be formal or ritualistic. A friend once explained how she talks with God in a casual, friendly way, and encouraged me to try it. I had always prayed something like "Thanks Lord, forgive me Lord, I want this and I want that." It was quick, and always the same, except my wish list at the end. Having a casual conversation with God was foreign to me. It was awkward at first, but it quickly became natural and rewarding. I just realize Jesus is there with me and talk to Him. This has had a tremendous impact on my spiritual growth. It has given me an incredible intimacy with God, and I am much more aware of His presence. He is your best friend. You can share anything with Him! Are you angry? Tell Him. If you do not feel close to Him, say so. Laugh, cry or scream if you need to; He is there for you.

5. **Talk with the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit.** When you pray, to whom are you praying? Speak to all three members of the Trinity. Tell God you want to be His man. Tell Jesus you want to be more like Him. Ask the Holy Spirit to fill you with God's power. Ask Him to open your spiritual eyes to see and your spiritual ears to hear what God is saying.

6. **Pray with A.C.T.S.** - A.C.T.S. is an easy way to remember key elements of prayer. My prayer time has improved dramatically since I started using it. It's simply prayer in four parts:

Adoration - "Praise be to God!" (Psalm 68:35) Tell God how much you appreciate Him. Express your love for Him. Praise His power and majesty. This is a great way to begin your prayer time. Sometimes I watch the sun rise, and praise God for the beauty of His creation. You should never run out of praise. "How awesome are your deeds!" (Psalm 66:3)

Confession - "If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just, and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness." (1 John 1:9) Tell Him where you have fallen short. Be specific. I thank Him for the forgiveness I have in Christ, and ask for help and strength to turn away from future temptations.

Thanksgiving - Always "glorify him with thanksgiving" (Psalm 69:30) You have plenty of reasons to be thankful. Thank God for His love, His faithfulness, His patience and a million other things. Express gratitude for what He's doing in your life. Thank Jesus for dying on the cross for you. Thank the Holy Spirit for indwelling you, and never leaving. Thank Him for being your conscience, your counselor and that "still small voice."

Supplication - "Make your requests known to God." (Philippians 4:7) Tell God what you want, no matter how small it seems to you. Do you really think any of your requests are big to God the Creator? You should have lots of intercessory prayer here. Remember: As a Promise Keeper, you are committed to pray for your pastor and your church every day.

Ideas for a More Fulfilling Prayer Life

1. **Have a "Mini Worship Time."** Listen to praise music before you begin your quiet time. I love to do this while I drink my coffee. Sometimes, I sing along. (Fortunately no one can hear me.) Nearly every praise song we sing in church is available on CD or cassette at the Christian bookstores. My favorites include:

- Promise Keepers worship music
- The Great Songs of Praise series
- The Hosanna Series
- Songs From the Loft
- The Vineyard Collection

Try singing without music. I do this sometimes before or after praying, and it is very uplifting. "Sing to God, sing praise to His name." (Psalm 68:4)

2. **Begin with a Bible Reading or Devotional. Even a short reading can help get your mind focused on God.** I love to read the Psalms and the Gospels. (The Message, by Eugene H. Peterson is great for this.) I start with a devotional, and then spend time in God's Word. He often uses this time to speak to me. Many devotionals are available at Christian bookstores, such as My Utmost for His Highest by Oswald Chambers. My two favorites come by mail: The Navigators' Closer Walk (\$20/year donation - 719 594-2371), and Charles Stanley's In Touch (Free - 800 323-3747).

3. **Use a Prayer Journal.** A prayer journal is simply a list of people and things to pray for. It keeps you focused and consistent in your time with God. How many times have you forgotten to pray for someone? Once it is in the journal, you will not forget. (Tip: To get it into the journal, jot it down on a piece of paper or in your planner right away.) I use one from Chuck Swindoll's Insight for Living (800 772-8888). It is organized by weeks, so you have a daily/weekly list and an everyday list. It also has space for answered prayers, which is great because it shows what God is doing in your life. It helps you be a Promise Keeper and a man of prayer. "The prayer of a righteous man is powerful and effective." (James 5:16)

4. **Get Out of the Rut.** "And when you are praying, do not use meaningless repetition." (Matthew 6:7 NASB) Occasionally, your prayer time may get stale. Change it! If you usually sit in a chair, get on your knees, or stand up. Ask God to restore you. Read something. Listen to some music. Sing something. Go to a different place. One morning, as I got ready to pray, I felt distant from God. I said "Lord, I do not feel very close to you today. I'm sorry." I decided to listen to some music instead. While listening to a song about "the Redeemer," God wrapped His arms around me, and I was on my knees in tears, overwhelmed by His presence. He said "Jim, I was here the whole time. My love for you does not change. You're the one who changes." I ended up having an awesome prayer time that morning! Step out in faith and be a Man of Prayer!

"But you, dear friends, build yourselves up in your most holy faith and pray . . ." (Jude 1:20)