

CONTEMPLATING PRAYER



ORGANIZING AND UNDERSTANDING MY PRAYER LIFE

Everyone's prayer life and the organization thereof are personal. It is driven by the Holy Spirit and where they are in the maturity of their faith. No two people pray the same and probably shouldn't. We should all be continually working to improve our relationship with God through prayer. As we improve our prayer life and walk more closely in the Spirit of Christ our lives will more brightly reflect the Glory of God. And isn't that our goal?

It is very easy to get lost in the multitudes of books and papers written on improving and organizing your prayer life. I did a web search on "improving prayer life" and got 85,100,000 hits. On "organizing my prayer life" there were 83,000,000 hits. I spent a few days browsing through some of these and hit upon three key precepts that seem to be reflected in a majority of the documents. They are presented below. NOW I do not want to represent these principles as the "correct" way to approach your prayer life. I only state that they seem reasonable to ME at this point in my walk of faith. Your prayer life must feel right with your Spirit driven conscience.

Daily devotional time is key to Christian maturity. The devotional time should contain a balance of reading scripture, scripture study, meditation and prayer. Prayer Life is therefore important to our maturity. The following precepts are offered as a guide not as a rule or outline. We must define our own Daily devotional routine. Even if we start out with only 10 minutes a day once we establish the habit it will grow. Soon You Will find a peace that follows you through the day.

The following guidelines and concepts were derived from "LEADING LIFE-CHANGING SMALL GROUPS" by Bill Donahue
Zondervan, Willow Creek resources.

Suggested follow on reading: "Too Busy Not to Pray" by Bill Hybel.

PRECEPT I

What should be in a prayer? One of the most common outlines for a prayer is “ACTS”. This prayer guide has been in use for years and is cross denominational.

- A – Adoration
- C – Confession
- T – Thanksgiving
- S – Supplication

A, Adoration (Psalm 100 & 136)

Suggestions:

1. Choose one of God’s attributes; praise Him for his character.
2. Paraphrase a psalm.
3. Pray back a psalm.

C, Confession (1 John 1:9)

Suggestion: Take an inventory of yesterday. Is there anything there that displeases the Lord? Make a list, then destroy it. If there is something on the list that you would consider to be a habit put it on your prayer list.

T, Thanksgiving (FACTOID this one is not included in the Lord’s Prayer) (Luke 17:11-19, 1 Thess. 5:16-18)

Suggestion:

1. Spiritual
2. Relational
3. Material
4. Physical

S, Supplication (Phil. 4:6-7; 1 John 5:14-15) [to ask humbly and earnestly]

Suggestion: Categorize your needs under the following headings:

1. Major concerns
2. Relational
3. Physical/material
4. Spiritual
5. Character

Discussion: Should every prayer contain all of the “ACTS”?

How should “ACTS” be applied to your prayer life?

PRECEPT 2

Four Principles of Prayer: Rom. 8:26-29

Romans 8:26-29 gives us some insights into prayer. As you read the passage and discuss it, you will find some of the principles listed below. God certainly answers earnest prayer, but not always in the way we expect. In our "NOW" culture good news churches too often quote the promise "your prayers will be answered" out of context without preaching the prerequisites. No, God does not give us all we pray for, nor should he be expected to.

1. The Holy Spirit helps us to know what and how to pray (v.26)
2. The Holy Spirit intercedes on our behalf (v.26)
3. God hears our hearts more than the words in prayer (v.27)
4. Earnest prayer is always answered (vs. 28-29), though not always according to our agenda.

In his book "Too Busy Not to Pray" Bill Hybels states that God has four basic responses to our prayers.

NO—Your request is not in God's will.

OT: 2 Sam. 12:15-18, 22-23

NT: Matt. 26:36-39

SLOW—Your request is not in God's will at this time.

OT: Gen. 15:2-6; 21:2

NT: John 11:3, 6, 14-15, 17, 43-44

Grow—Your motives are wrong. (in our culture "grow up")

OT: Num. 14:26-45

NT: James 4:3

Go—Your request, timing, and spiritual condition are ok...**YES!**

OT: 1 Kings 18:36-39(cf., James 5:17-18)

NT: Acts 12:5-17

PRECEPT 3

PREREQUISITES FOR ANSWERED PRAYER

Though it is clear from Scripture that God always answers our prayers in some manner, there are also some guidelines for effective praying. Certain practices or attitudes can hinder your prayers and, in such cases, God will not respond to them. The passages below help us to understand that we must be in a right relationship with God and with others in order for our prayers to be effectively heard by God.

Harboring unconfessed sin will put a barrier between you and God (Ps. 66:17-19).

God hears the prayers of those who obey His commands (1 John 3:21-23).

God will not hear prayers that have wrong or selfish motives (James 4:3).

We are instructed to pray according to His will, not according to ours (1 John 5:14-15).

When we pray, we are to ask in faith. Unbelief is a barrier to answered prayer (Mark 11:24).

An ongoing abiding life in Christ (having regular fellowship with Him) will allow your prayers to be heard. However, when fellowship is broken, so is communication with God (John 15:7).

Sometimes we don't have answered prayers because we do not ask. We are to pursue appropriate requests regularly and bring them to God (Luke 11:9-10).

Praying in the Spirit (that is, under the control of the Holy Spirit) is also a prerequisite. We must also persevere in our praying (Eph. 6:18).

If you do not forgive someone for wrongs that person has done to you, then God says He will not forgive you. Restored and right relationships are essential for open communications with God (Matthew 6:14-15; Mark 11:25).

We are to pray with thankful hearts. Those of us who come before God without a spirit of thankfulness will find our prayers not heard (Phi. 4:6).