

Prayer - Focus On The Father

Here's an outlook that can make prayer an adventure rather than a burden.

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OF ALL THE INGREDIENTS IN DISCIPLESHIP, THE AREA MANY OF US STRUGGLE WITH MOST IS PRAYER.

According to one recently published estimate, a typical Christian layman spends about three and a half minutes each day in prayer. Full-time Christian workers average about seven minutes per day. This pitiful situation must amaze even the Lord Himself, for [Isaiah 59:16](#) records that when no one was found to intercede for His people, God was appalled.

[Isaiah 59:16 \(KJV\)](#)

¹⁶ And he saw that *there was no man*, and wondered that *there was no intercessor*: therefore his arm brought salvation unto him; and his righteousness, it sustained him.

Why do we fail to take full advantage of the privilege of prayer? Is it a lack of discipline? Are we too busy? Are we unmotivated?

Perhaps the basic cause of our weakness in prayer relates to how we view God. We may have no genuine awe for the One "**who stretched out the heavens and laid the foundations of the earth**" ([Isaiah 51:13](#)). God seems more like a superhero from a child's cartoon, whittled down to human size.

If we aren't captivated by God, prayer is a tedious task. It becomes a discipline that only those with wills of steel can master.

I once regarded prayer as "**gutting it out**" before God. It meant trying to bring reams and reams of petitions before the Lord. The more requests I could bring, the more spiritual I was.

I also misinterpreted statements from godly men about the importance of prayer. Martin Luther's statement that "**I have so much business I cannot get on without spending three hours daily in prayer**" implied to me that prayer was a guaranteed formula for success.

Rather than being dynamic communion with the sovereign Lord of the universe, prayer was an exercise meant to wrestle effects into the lives of people and to manipulate God's hand. Prayer became lifeless and tedious. It was like castor oil: tasting terrible, but good for me.

Yet God reminded me of the truth I was neglecting: *He wanted to commune with me.* What does this mean? *Communion* is defined as the intimate sharing of thoughts and emotions, and as intimate fellowship or rapport or communication. This is the kind of relationship God wants between Him and me.

I saw I had become hardened to the excitement of walking in this continual awareness of God's presence. I realized afresh that He desires open access to communion with me. He has little interest in the petition gymnastics I was trying to perfect in prayer. He wants me to be preoccupied with Himself.

Seeing God this way enables us to stand in awe of Him. It stimulates our heart to vital communion and conversation with Him. Seeing God as He is requires faith on our part, but whoever is enamored and thrilled with God is then rightly motivated to pray.

Discipline will still be necessary, but prayer won't be drudgery. I believe that's what [John 4:24](#) is hinting at: "**God is spirit and his worshipers must worship *in spirit and in truth.***"

To grow in communion with God requires appreciation of His awesomeness and wonder. This may seem an intangible objective, but there are practical steps we can take. When undertaken in a spirit of faith, these actions can bring new life and vitality to our relationship with God.

What then can we do? God has graciously given us two major resources to enable us to see Him as He is: His works and His word. Both are avenues for deepening heartfelt communion with the Father of Glory.

What are the works of God, and how can they help us appreciate God? Most of us think of the works of God as being his spiritual work in people's lives. It is good to rejoice and express our praise to God as we see this. But another work of God, neglected by many of us, is His creation. The universe has been marred by sin, but it still declares God's glory. In our modern secularization many of us have lost our sense of wonder at the ordinary miracles God performs all around us each day.

God wants us to experience awe and wonder when we see the return of spring, or the variety in the animal world, or the impressive powers of wind, rain, and sea.

All of these are God's handiwork. Failing to return praise to Him as we observe them is just like failing to return the glory to God as we see Him work in someone's life. Isaiah wrote, "**Lift your eyes and look to the heavens: Who created all these?**" ([Isaiah 40:26](#)). We, too, should consider the One who made it all, and we can ask God to help us see Him in His creation.

The second resource available to us is God's word. The Bible is a vast reservoir of riches designed to remind us of the greatness of the God we serve. Many passages throughout Scripture focus on what God is like. When you read them, think of the implications these attributes of God have for our lives, and talk with God about them.

The life of Jesus Christ as told in the gospels also draws our attention to God's character. Paul in [2 Cor. 4:6](#) mentioned how God's glory was "**in the face of Christ.**" As we read about Jesus talking with and living among people, we see vivid examples of God's character in action.

One aspect, you'll remember, in our definition of communion was that of *sharing*. Communion means sharing the same thoughts as we communicate. Therefore we need to respond to God about the specific things He has spoken to us about.

We often fail to do this when we read the Bible. In a particular passage, God may speak to us about His holiness. But our mind is preoccupied with how we can come up with enough money to pay next month's rent. So when we put down our Bible and pray, what do we talk to God about? Not His holiness, but the rent money!

It is not wrong to pray about our needs, but God wants us to listen to Him and give Him a proper response. Imagine telling someone, "**I love you very much,**" only to hear him respond, "**I sure hope I get a pay raise soon at work.**" Such conversations don't do much to build intimacy in a relationship. So listen to God and respond specifically to what He has said.

Another way to appreciate God and commune with Him is to read and meditate on the great prayers of the Bible. Solomon's prayer of dedication for the temple ([1 Kings 8:23–53](#)) began with lavish praise for God. When the early Christians prayed for boldness ([Acts 4:24–30](#)) most of their words recounted what God had already done. No wonder their prayer for boldness was clearly answered. Many of the psalms of David and the prayers of Paul also focus on who God is and what He has done, rather than on their requests.

Growing in reverent communion with God isn't another burden to add to your already busy schedule. It is not an activity, but far more an attitude of heart that should especially influence your Bible study, Scripture memory, and quiet times, as well as prayer.

William Carey said that "**secret, fervent, believing prayer lies at the root of all personal godliness.**" We could add that an exciting sense of reverence and worship—an increasing appreciation of God's presence—lies at the root of all secret fervent, believing prayer.

Five Essentials

I want you take time to recognize five essentials for cultivating an attitude of worship in our daily devotional time with God.

RECOGNIZE GOD

Experiencing God is an end in itself—to realize you are meeting with the Lord Almighty. To grow in this kind of devotion we can ask God what Moses asked in [Exodus 33:18](#)—"Show me your glory."

Here are ways we can bring this recognition and adoration of God into our daily devotions:

—Meditate on one or more of God's names or characteristics, such as Holy One, Almighty, Savior, good, merciful, compassionate.

—Meditate on God's glory. Some helpful passages to consider are [Isaiah 6:3](#); [1 Tim. 6:15–16](#); [Rev. 1:12–16](#); and [Rev. 20:11–21:4](#).

—Read a psalm of adoration and talk to God about what you find.

—Read a passage from the journals of a God-fearing man or woman, or from another devotional book.

ACCEPT YOUR CLEANSING

How often have you confessed your sins to God, knowing He hears and forgives you, but you never sense the cleansing? Perhaps it would help to imagine washing your face in the sink, and then watching as God pulls the plug, removing the dirty water and leaving only you-clean before Him. The result is a praising, loving, forgiven sinner.

TAKE A STAND AGAINST SIN

Not only do we need to accept God's cleansing and forgiveness, but we should make a stand with Him in our fight against sin, since "**without holiness no one will see the Lord**" ([Hebrews 12:14](#)). J. B. Phillips' translation of [Romans 12:9](#) is excellent advice: "**Let us have a genuine break with evil and a real devotion to good.**"

LISTEN TO WHAT GOD HAS TO SAY

Often we come to God in our devotions thinking, *What do you have to say about ME today?* We indicate to God what we want Him to talk to us about, and we want to be able to make an application to prove to ourselves that we have met with Him. God, however, wants to speak with us about Himself- "**Here am I, here am I**" ([Isaiah 65:1](#)).

POUR OUT YOUR HEART TO GOD

Tell God what is happening in your life and let Him know how you are feeling. David wrote, "**Pour out your hearts to him, for God is our refuge**" ([Psalm 62:8](#)).

Keep in mind, though, that self-analysis is not communion with God. When King Hezekiah received a letter threatening Jerusalem, he spread the letter out before the Lord and prayed about it ([2 Kings 19:14–19](#)). His prayer presented his problems not in a self-centered way, but in light of God's supreme sovereignty.

One day God will be satisfied when we stand fully in His presence to worship Him as He deserves. But even now He asks us to love Him. This means spending time in daily worship, responding with heart and mouth to who He is, and listening to His every word with an eagerness to do His will.