



THE PRAYER CLOSET

*Transforming Lives Through Intercessory
Prayer And Fasting*

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THE HIT & MISS PRAYER LIFE

Do you struggle to be consistent in your prayer life? The “hit and miss” prayer life is a constant threat to every believer. This phrase refers to inconsistency in prayer. You know, your prayer life is strong and consistent for a while. Then, you go for a period of time when you don’t pray much and when you do pray, you struggle to get the words out. You get caught in the vicious cycle of being hot and cold in your prayer life. You go through times when there is seemingly no power or life in your praying.

For some believers, this is a day to day struggle. One day you pray with power and insight. The next day you struggle to pray or you might not even pray at all. Rather than this up and down struggle over a period of time, you experience it from day to day. You never know what your prayer life is going to be like from day to day.

The guilt and frustration that you experience from this adds to the agony. After all, you are supposed to know how to pray. You question yourself, “After all these years of being a Christian, why can’t I pray better than this?” This is especially true when you hear the glowing testimonies of others concerning their prayer lives. Many times I have cringed as I heard others talk about their prayer lives. It makes you wonder why you have such a difficult struggle in prayer.

Can anything be done to deal with the “hit and miss” prayer life? Can a believer break this cycle of being hot and cold in prayer? The believer can confront and break this cycle. You can

establish consistency in your prayer life. You can overcome the guilt and the frustration that this brings into your life. There is hope for dealing with the “hit and miss” prayer life.

Your heavenly Father stands ready to help you establish consistency in your prayer life. He desires that you seek Him on a daily basis. He yearns for you to enter into His presence and spend quality time with Him. He has saved you for the purpose of fellowship. You can depend on His help and encouragement in this matter. He longs for you to pray with power and insight. God wants to work in your life to accomplish this.

In this issue of *The Prayer Closet*, we will focus on developing consistency in your prayer life. It is designed to help you break the cycle of the “hit and miss” prayer life. In order to help you or those you teach break this cycle, we need to consider three topics.

Three Foundational Truths

In order to develop consistency in prayer, you must keep three basic truths in mind. These truths provide the foundation for the believer’s prayer life. They should also motivate the believer to seek God daily. These truths are found in **Ephesians 2:18**, “For through Him we both have access by one Spirit to the Father.”

The first truth is that *the Father has saved you for the purpose of prayer*. God saves sinners for the purpose of communicating with Him. This

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text declares that the believer has access into the presence of God. When a believer prays, he or she is entering into God's presence. His heart and ears are open to the believer that cries out to Him. God desires that His people take advantage of this privilege. He longs for the believer to praise Him, confess his or her sins, give thanks, make requests, intercede for others, and listen to His voice. He saves in order to enter into relationship with people. Prayer is the essential key to this relationship.

How can this truth help you develop consistency? This truth should remind you to whom you are praying. You are praying to the eternal God who has created all things. You are entering the presence of the only and the mighty God of time and eternity. You are entering the presence of the God of the Bible. Look at all the marvelous and miraculous works God has done in this world. This is the God to whom you are praying. You have an open door into His presence at any time and place. This is your privilege as a child of God. How can you neglect or ignore such a glorious God and such a staggering opportunity?

The second truth is that *Jesus Christ died that you might have the opportunity to pray*. The text says that it is "through Him" that we have access to the Father. The "Him" of this text is the Lord Jesus Christ. It is because of Jesus that the believer can enter the presence of God in prayer. The death and resurrection of Jesus opened the way into the presence of God for those who trust in Jesus. Sin placed a barrier between God and man. Yet, Jesus Christ died on the Cross to deal with man's sin. When a sinner turns to Christ and receives Him as Lord and Savior, that person is forgiven. That person is clothed with the righteousness of Jesus. Sin has been dealt with through Jesus. He or she can now enter the presence of God. The believer can enter God's presence with boldness and confidence because of Jesus, "Therefore, brethren, having boldness to enter the Holiest by the blood of Jesus, by a new and living way which He consecrated for us, through the veil, that is, His flesh" (**Hebrews 10:19-20**).

How does this truth apply to your consistency in prayer? You must remember that the privilege of prayer is costly. It cost Jesus His life. He had to shed His blood and die on a Cross so that you might have the privilege to pray. It is too easy to forget the price that was paid for you to pray. I

understand that it is difficult to find the time to pray. And it is a struggle to be faithful in prayer. But, what did Jesus have to endure to grant you the opportunity? What sacrifices did He make to give you the privilege of prayer? He suffered agony and pain as no other person ever has or will. He freely gave His own life. Surely love and sacrifice like that can motivate us to be faithful and make sacrifices in order to pray and seek the Father.

The final truth is that *the Holy Spirit empowers you to pray*. It is the Holy Spirit who empowers you to take advantage of this access that was planned by the Father and purchased by the Son. The text says, "For through Him we both have access *by one Spirit* to the Father" (emphasis mine). The Spirit is the One who grants the power and the insight to pray. He is the Author of prayer in the believer, "And because you are sons, God has sent forth the Spirit of His Son into your hearts, crying out, Abba, Father!" (**Galatians 4:4**). He initiates and burdens the believer to pray. It is His work in the believer. He has been sent by the Father to do this in the believer.

How should the empowering of the Spirit affect your consistency in prayer? It should teach you that you must depend on the Holy Spirit in order to pray. True prayer is not something that can be done through the power of the flesh. One can go through the motions of prayer in the flesh. Yet, there must be dependence on the Holy Spirit to pray with power and insight. A faithful and fruitful prayer life is accomplished in you as you rely on the Holy Spirit. This should motivate you to seek the filling of the Spirit, "And do not be drunk with wine, in which is dissipation; but be filled with the Spirit" (**Ephesians 5:18**). It is only through His power that you can pray. At the same time, you need to deal with the sin that would grieve and quench His work in your life. The Spirit's work in prayer calls for you to be sensitive to His leadership.

These three truths provide the foundation of your prayer life. They are also strong motivations and encouragement to pray with consistency. As you strive to be consistent in prayer, look to and remind yourself of these truths:

- ◆ *The Father has provided me with access into His presence. He longs to hear my voice and for me to listen to His.*

- ◆ *The Son has purchased for me the access into the Father's presence. He sacrificed His life that I might experience a life of prayer.*
- ☾ *The Holy Spirit empowers me to take advantage of this privilege. He lives inside of me and grants me the power and insight to pray.*

The Biblical Basis For Strong Prayer Habits

Consistency in prayer flows out of developing strong prayer habits. When I use the word "habit", I am not referring to a rut or a routine of prayer. Nothing is worse or more boring than simply going through the motions of prayer. God does not bless or honor ritualistic, superficial praying. This kind of praying means nothing to God. Yet, when I use the word "habit", I mean an act that is repeated so often that it becomes involuntary. There is no new decision of the mind each time the act is performed. It is when prayer becomes a spontaneous and natural part of your life. You do not have to think about praying; you do not have to make a conscious effort to pray. Prayer has become essential and vital to your life. It is something that you practice because you have developed the habit of seeking God.

The Bible frequently refers to those who developed strong prayer habits. The psalmist testified, "Evening and morning and at noon I will pray, and cry aloud, and He shall hear my voice" (**Psalm 55:17**). He also declares, "My voice You shall hear in the morning, O LORD; in the morning I will direct it to You; and I will look up" (**Psalm 5:3**). Prayer had become like breathing to the psalmist. It had become a spontaneous and natural part of the psalmist's life. He prayed throughout the day because it had become a significant habit in his life.

Daniel also developed strong prayer habits. In **Daniel 6**, the king signed a decree outlawing prayer in the kingdom. Although he knew that it was against the king's decree, he could not stop praying. He would not neglect prayer. The Word of God says, "Now when Daniel knew that the writing was signed, he went home. And in his upper room, with his windows open toward Jerusalem, he knelt down on his knees three times that day, and prayed and gave thanks before his God, as was his custom since early days" (**Daniel**

6:10). Daniel did not defy the king's decree because he had a spirit of rebellion. The last phrase of this verse reveals why Daniel prayed even though the king had outlawed it. The Bible says that he prayed because it "was his custom since early days." Daniel prayed because it was a spontaneous and natural part of his life. It had become an essential and vital part of his life. He had developed the habit of prayer in his life. He could no more neglect prayer than he could breathing.

The best example of developing strong prayer habits is Jesus Christ. Throughout the gospels, you will notice that Jesus pulled aside to pray. This reveals that prayer was vital and essential to His life and ministry. The Bible declares in **Mark 1:35**, "Now in the morning, having risen a long while before daylight, He went out and departed to a solitary place; and there he prayed." Jesus loved to pray. Prayer was often His way of resting. Like the psalmist and Daniel, prayer had become involuntary to him. It flowed out of His life because He had developed the habit of prayer.

Developing Strong Prayer Habits

The biblical examples that we have examined establish the truth that consistency in prayer results from strong prayer habits. How then can you develop these prayer habits? These are some basic steps that you can take to develop these habits in your life. Prayer can become natural and spontaneous to you. Yet, it will take commitment and work from you.

Establish a set time for prayer.

This is critical for developing a strong prayer habit. It is true that you can talk with God any time of the day or night. Yet, when you vary your time of daily prayer, you hinder the habit-forming process. Strive to meet God at the same time each day or night. Set a particular time when you are going to meet with God. Andrew Murray states why this is important, "He who has no set time for prayer does not pray." Make an appointment with God at a set time in your day or night.

Establish a time goal for prayer.

It is important that you give God a specific amount of time daily for your prayer habit. It is not enough to say, "I plan on spending some time with God today." Set a goal of how much time you are going to spend with Him. Jesus asked His disciples why they could not watch and pray with Him for one hour (**Matthew 26:40**). Seek to give one hour of your day to God. If that seems unrealistic to you, set a daily goal of at least fifteen minutes a day to spend with Him. Then strive to build on this. Don't allow your feelings or your schedule to strip you of your time with God. I realize that this could be turned into a legalistic trap. And there may be times when you spend more than an hour with God in prayer. Every believer needs to be sensitive to the Holy Spirit in this matter. Yet, I offer this step because it is easy to let your prayer time slide in the face of time constraints. Too often we are more willing to sacrifice our time in prayer than our time in any other part of our schedules. If you have a goal of a certain amount of time, it will help you be more determined in spending that time in prayer rather than sacrificing it for something else on your schedule.

Establish a daily affirmation to pray.

Develop an affirmation that you are going to pray consistently. You might consider this affirmation, "My most important appointment today is with my heavenly Father." You can use this or develop your own from it. Whatever way you choose to do this, say this affirmation aloud each morning. Before you can develop the habit of prayer, you must remember the importance of prayer. Stating and restating a daily affirmation like this can help you establish this truth in your mind. It can help you remember the importance of prayer.

Be determined.

It is easy to make the commitment to pray. Yet, sustaining that commitment presents the real challenge. You must determine in your heart that you are going to make the time to pray. Do whatever you must to spend time with God. You may have to rearrange your schedule. Your spouse may have to make some sacrifices to give you the time you need. You may have to sacrifice some good things for the greater thing—communication with God.

Practical Steps For Sustaining Your Commitment To Pray

In the last section, we examined three basic principles for developing strong prayer habits. Now I would ask you to consider the following suggestions for sustaining your commitment to pray. These are practical suggestions to help you sustain your daily prayer life. As stated earlier, making the commitment to pray is not difficult. Living that commitment out in day to day life amid the pressures and stress of life is the real challenge. These suggestions are offered to help you follow through with your commitment to pray. These suggestions are presented to help you sustain your commitment to pray and develop consistency in prayer.

- ◆ *Ask God to enable you to be consistent in prayer.* The Word of God says in **Colossians 4:2**, "Continue earnestly in prayer, being vigilant in it with thanksgiving." It is the will of God that you earnestly continue in prayer. He commands you to pray fervently, seeking Him regularly. Plead this verse of Scripture to God. Ask Him to empower you to continue earnestly in prayer. Pray that He will help you to be consistent in prayer. You can pray this prayer with confidence. It is God's will and He will respond, "Now this is the confidence that we have in Him, that if we ask anything according to His will, He hears us" (**1 John 5:14**).
- ◆ *Enlist people to pray for you concerning this matter.* If you are struggling in this area, ask another believer or believers to pray for you. Ask them to pray for God's help in this area of your walk with God.
- ◆ *Use the days of the week as an outline for prayer.* Have a different topic that you will cover in prayer for each day of the week. One example of this is:
 - Monday-Healing
 - Tuesday-Lost
 - Wednesday-Church
 - Thursday-Nation and current issues

Friday-Family
 Saturday-Leaders
 Sunday-Personal needs

In this type of plan, you can pray specifically for all the people that need healing on Monday. That will be your primary focus for that day. Of course, you need to be sensitive to the Spirit in this matter. You can pray about other matters on these days as He leads. There may be pressing needs and burdens that you should pray about daily. Yet, your focus will primarily be on those who need healing on Monday. You don't necessarily have to use this plan. You can use this plan or develop your own from it. But the key is to have a particular focus or theme for each day. It will help provide you with direction for your prayer life. This direction will help you develop consistency. If you pray without direction, you will wander and falter in prayer. This will lead to inconsistency in prayer. The great enemy of consistency in prayer is a lack of direction. If your praying does not have some direction, you will not pray. You don't want to be tied to a plan so much that you are not open to the Spirit's leadership. Yet, you do need some direction in order to establish the prayer habit in your life. God is a God of order and not chaos.

- ◆ *Pray through the Scriptures systematically.* This is something that I have found to be extremely helpful to developing consistency in prayer. One day I thought, "I preach and teach through the Scriptures on a systematic basis. Why shouldn't I pray through the Scriptures regularly?" This practice has helped me with consistency in prayer. In order to do this, you need to select a book of the Bible. In the beginning, you might consider one of the smaller books of the New Testament. Each day read a passage from that book. This might consist of one verse to numerous verses. Once you read through the passage, ask yourself the following questions:

What can I adore God for in this verse (these verses)?

What sins do I need to confess because of this text?

What can I give thanks for from this text?

What do I need to request of God from this text?
 What does this text teach me to pray for others?

Your answers to these questions do not have to be detailed. But, this will help you in seeking God for that day. I have been amazed at how the text that I am praying applies to my life. Many times the text and the things that I pray for from the text speak directly to my needs and burdens at that particular time. And, even more amazing, many times the requests from the text that I make for others is exactly what is needed at that time. You might consider a book like Philippians or 1 John to start this practice. As you move through the book, it will help you develop consistency in seeking God. It will help you know what to talk with God about on a daily basis.

- ◆ *Keep a list of prayer requests and answers.* It is important to keep a record of what you are seeking God for and the answers that He is granting. This can also provide you with direction. By keeping a record of these things, it will give you a continual focus for your praying.
- ◆ *Ask the Holy Spirit to create a spirit of prayer in you.* The Holy Spirit is the Author of prayer in our lives (**Galatians 4:6**). He is the One who teaches and empowers the believer how to pray. Plead with Him to create a spirit of prayer within you. Pray that He will create a fresh longing to seek the Father. Call on Him to release the yearning for prayer into your life.

Healing Prayer: The Character of God

The following is a prayer guide that you can use to pray for healing. This prayer guide is based on the character of God. Use the character of God as the basis of your pleading for healing. Call on God to be true to His character in healing the person. These prayers are not magical formulas. They are simply ways of pleading with God to release His healing power in the lives of people who need that healing. These prayers are offered as a guide to help you in seeking God for His healing