



THE PRAYER CLOSET

Equipping & Encouraging Believers
In Prayer

A MONTHLY PUBLICATION OF THE PRAYER CLOSET MINISTRIES, INC.

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VOLUME V

AUGUST, 2002

ISSUE 7

BACK TO THE BASICS

I'm not sure what I would do without Post-It notes. I buy those yellow, square notepads by the case. If you walk into my office you would see them everywhere—on the desk, on the wall, on the file cabinets, and in my daily planner. I'm continually writing notes on them. You will find phone numbers, addresses, dates and places of meetings, and just overall information that I need to remember. Those notes provide me with constant reminders of things that I need to remember. As I deal with the continual flow of information in my life and ministry, there are certain things that I need to remember.

It's the same way with prayer. There is a great need to be reminded of certain truths concerning prayer. There are some truths about prayer that you must return to over and over again. There are basic, simple truths that you need to remember and apply to your prayer life on a regular basis. **No matter what your level of maturity, there are truths about prayer that have to be kept in mind continually.**

Why is there a need to return to these basic truths? It is because of our tendency to forget these things. The more familiar you are with something, the more likely you are to take it for granted. When you take these truths for granted, it will affect your praying. Forgetting these truths will hinder and weaken your praying. Yet, when you remind yourself of them and refresh your heart and mind with them, it can deepen and strengthen your prayer life. It can anchor your prayer life regardless of what you feel or what you see.

The prayer life of Elisha provides us with the example of these basic truths: From his prayer life, we can see in a fresh and new way the simple truths about prayer that we need to be reminded of on a regular basis. His praying for the Shunammite's son in **2 Kings 4** is a vivid reminder of what we must keep in mind concerning prayer as we seek the Lord throughout our lives. We will see the truths that we must return to over and over again regardless of our maturity in prayer.

Preparation and power in prayer go hand in hand.

2 Kings 4:8-37 records the miraculous intervention of God in the life of a young man. This miracle of God took place through the praying of the prophet of Elisha. The mother of this young man had noticed that Elisha was a holy man of God (**2 Kings 4:9**). Because of this, she and her husband opened their home to Elisha, "Please, let us make a small upper room on the wall; and let us put a bed for him there, and a table and a chair and a lampstand; so it will be, whenever he comes to us, he can turn in here" (**2 Kings 4:10**).

In response to her kindness, Elisha desired to bless her. When he found out that she had no child, he said, "About this time next year you shall embrace a son" (**2 Kings 4:16**). He prophesied and prayed in the same sentence. When the appointed time came, she gave birth to a son.

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In a few years, tragedy struck this family when this miracle son died (**2 Kings 4:18-20**). The child's mother determined to find Elisha and have him pray for this child. His birth was a miracle. She believed that God could work another miracle through prayer.

When Elisha recognized that it was the Shunammite woman coming, his response is notable. He said to his servant, "Look, the Shunammite woman! Please run now to meet her and say to her, 'Is it well with you? Is it well with your husband? Is it well with the child?'" (**2 Kings 4:25-26**). He begins asking questions. He wanted to know what was happening so that he would know how to pray. He desired to prepare before calling on the Lord God. This was a situation where the power of God was needed. He had to prepare in order to pray.

This is a vital truth that we need to remember in our praying. Preparation before we pray leads to power when we pray. There are times when we will not know the facts concerning a person, a situation, or a need. And there is definitely a place in our prayer lives for spontaneous praying. Yet, it is crucial that we develop the method of preparing to pray. It is a vital part of a healthy, powerful prayer life.

How many times do you wing it when it comes to prayer? You know, you go through random requests rambling from one thing to another. You don't gather the facts; You just say whatever comes to mind. How long do you expect God to listen to that kind of praying? How long should God listen to that kind of praying? Unless your situation requires instant prayer, don't rush into prayer. You must ask yourself the question, "Do I know enough about my request to focus God's attention on it?"

How do you make preparation to pray about situations, needs or people? The following are some simple, practical steps that you might consider in getting yourself ready to call on God.

- **Gather information.** Zero in on what you want to talk with God about. Find out as much as you can about the person, need, or situation that you are bringing before the Lord in prayer. If it is a personal request, record as much information as you can in your journal or in a notebook. When you approach God, be focused and be specific.

In cameras with automatic focus, you can push a button to bring the subject into sharper focus. You should do the same with your praying. Gather information and come before the Lord with a specific focus. Inadequate preparation speaks volumes to God about our concern and our faith when we pray.

- **Guard against generalities.** A sure way to deaden and render your prayer life useless is to pray in generalities. Be careful of filling your prayer life with general requests. The more specific you are, the more powerful your praying.
- **Visualize the request.** By this, I am not referring to the New Age technique of visualization. What I am saying is visualize the people for whom you are praying. This will help you to focus. It will personalize your praying. And it will make the person's need more real in your heart and mind.
- **Search the Word of God for Scripture verses concerning the request.** Look at what the Word of God says about your request. Come before the Lord with the need and His Word concerning that need. Approach Him with the need and His promises.
- **Prepare yourself before you approach God in prayer.** It is essential that you prepare your heart and mind before you enter God's presence. Powerful and effective praying does not flow out of rushing in and out of the presence of God on a daily basis. It results when you prepare your heart and mind to enter His presence. The "Approaching God" section in this newsletter will provide you with a basic model of how to get ready to come before the Lord God.
- **Be open to the Spirit's leading.** When you enter His presence with your requests and the information about them, be open to the Holy Spirit. He may lead you by emphasizing some aspect of your preparation. He might give you fresh insights and Scriptures. Enter God's presence with your information ready to follow the Spirit's direction.

These are some simple steps that you might consider using to prepare before prayer. Again, I realize that there are times when you will pray spontaneously. I call these "arrow" prayers—short prayers that you send into God's presence at a

moment's notice. And, you might not always have the details of all that you pray about. Yet, strive to develop the practice of preparing to pray, especially before your set times of prayer. It can enable you to pray specifically and powerfully. And it can deliver you from the deadness of praying whatever comes to mind.

Prayer is the key to God's power and blessing.

When this woman reached Elisha, she conveyed to him what had happened (**2 Kings 4:27-28**). She poured her heart out to him concerning her son. Elisha then tells his servant, Gehazi, to take his staff, lay it on the child's face, and see what happens (**2 Kings 4:29**). Pretty weird isn't it?

Elisha was not looking for magic. In the Bible, God performed mighty miracles in some unusual ways. Throughout the Bible, God worked in strange ways to do miraculous works (**Mark 5:25-34; Acts 19:12**). God is not limited in the way that He works. He can use whatever way He chooses to work, to heal, or to bless.

The staff solution proved unsuccessful, "Now Gehazi went on ahead of them, and laid the staff on the face of the child, but there was neither voice nor hearing. Therefore he went back to meet him, and told him, saying, 'The child has not awakened'" (**2 Kings 4:31**). God is sometimes pleased to use unusual means for accomplishing His purpose. Yet, you must remember that these are the exception and not the rule. God has purposed primarily to use prayer in accomplishing His purpose and releasing the miraculous into the lives of people. When Elisha reached the house, he began praying, "When Elisha came into the house, there was the child, lying dead on his bed. He went in therefore, shut the door behind the two of them, and prayed to the LORD" (**2 Kings 4:32-33**).

Prayer is the key to God's power and blessing. God has chosen to work through prayer. It is the way that He releases His power. He transforms lives through prayer. This is His way. How we need this burned into our hearts by the Holy Spirit!

There is no substitute for prayer. No plan or program will ever take the place of crying out to God. You can read books on prayer, go to

conferences about prayer, and listen to tapes on prayer. But it will not replace your taking the time to talk with God. Everything is secondary to you humbling yourself before God and seeking Him through prayer.

When you pray, God is listening. He is ready to hear you; He is ready to work. He is waiting for you to cry out to Him. Don't lose heart. Don't give up. Prayer is the key to receiving God's power and blessings. This truth should encourage you. The path to His miraculous, life-changing power is through prayer. This is the way that He has determined to work.

Not only should this truth encourage you, it ought to stir you to pray. It should help you shake off spiritual laziness when it comes to prayer. Since God has chosen to use prayer as His way of working, it should motivate you to seek Him with all your being. God hears and answers prayer. He responds in mighty power to those who believe in Him and call on Him. There is no substitute for this. If you are not seeking, you are not receiving. Your Father has determined to bless and change lives through prayer. If you are not praying, you will not see lives blessed and changed. If you quit praying, there is no hope. If you get lazy in your praying, you cannot expect God to hear and answer. God's Word stands firm and true even to this day, "Yet you do not have because you do not ask" (**James 4:2**). Prayer is the key to receiving God's power and blessing.

Prayer is not a substitute for being actively involved in the lives of others.

After Elisha had shut everyone out of the room, he laid his body over the dead boy's body—eyes to eyes, mouth to mouth, and hand to hand. It wasn't a perfect fit. This was a boy and Elisha was a man.

The question remains why Elisha did this. Though we cannot fully explain why the prophet did this, we can learn from his example. The issue is that Elisha did more than sit by while he prayed. He took action. He made contact with the boy.

This is an important truth to remember. Prayer is not a substitute for being actively involved with others. It cannot take the place of meeting

needs. Prayer is the foundation of ministry. It is the powerful starting point and anchor for reaching out to people. Yet, it does not replace personal contact with others.

God had sharply convicted me about this necessity. The focus of my ministry is prayer. I love to pray. I love talking about it, writing about it, and speaking about it. It is the passion of my life. Yet, God has over and over again reminded me that it does not substitute for personal contact and ministry to others in need. God has called me to pray. But He also called me to share the good news of Jesus, to help the poor, to love the hurting, and to meet the needs of others. Spending time in the prayer closet is not the way to escape the world; it is the way to prepare for reaching the world.

Some believers give the impression that they have done all that God desires when they have prayed for others. Prayer is a necessity. But it is not a substitute for serving others. True faith will lead you to reach out to others, "Thus also faith by itself, if it does not have works, is dead" (**James 2:17**). The faith that moves you to pray will also move you to show mercy to others, to share the gospel with them, and to reach out in tangible ways. It is hypocrisy to ask God to touch and bless the lives of others if you are not willing to become actively involved with people. If your faith does not motivate you to reach out to and serve others, you can be sure that it will not please God nor move His hand when you pray.

God desires that you combine prayer and service. It is not an either/or choice. He longs not only for you to seek Him, but also to help others in tangible ways. These things cannot be separated from one another. They must be coupled together.

Prayer is not finished until there is a response from God.

2 Kings 4:34 says that the flesh of the child became warm after he had prayed. The Bible then says, "He returned and walked back and forth in the house, and again went up and stretched himself out on him, then the child sneezed seven times, and the child opened his eyes" (**2 Kings 4:35**). Elisha did not give up! The prophet kept praying until God resurrected this child from the dead.

The first time Elisha prayed the boy's flesh began to feel warm. The second time he prayed the child sneezed seven times. What happens when you sneeze? You expel air from your lungs out your nose and mouth. Yet, how could this boy sneeze? This boy had been dead for a while. There was no air in his lungs. But, he sneezed **seven** times! It was a miracle of God. God granted life to this young man, filling his lungs with oxygen by His almighty power. And this miracle took place because Elisha persevered in prayer. He did not give up and God worked a miracle.

This text reveals that prayer is not finished until there is a response. Prayer is not a once-and-forget it exercise. God loves to hear your voice. He never grows tired of hearing from you. You can never go into His presence too much (**James 1:5**). God longs for you to call on Him again and again and again.

Prayer is not like a drive-thru at a fast food restaurant. At a drive thru, you tell them what you want and then you pick it up all in one trip. You make your request and then get what you request in a quick and convenient way. This is not the way that God works. Prayer is not quick and convenient. It is a relationship in which you seek God and He prepares you for the answers to your requests. Sometimes God is pleased to answer immediately. There are times when I have prayed and the answer came at that moment or in a short time. Yet, there are some requests that I have made that it took time—a month, six months, or years. There are some requests that I am waiting for the answer even now.

God longs for you to persist in seeking Him. It is your way of showing Him your dependence on Him. It is your way of showing how desperate you are for Him to answer. It is His way of preparing you for what He longs to give you. Sometimes it is His way of teaching you how to change your request so that it comes in line with His will. God does not want you to give up. He wants you to keep seeking Him with all your being.

How would you describe your attitude in prayer? Are you persistent or impatient? An impatient spirit and persistence do not go hand in hand. They are exact opposites. Maturity in praying takes places as we forsake impatience and seek to be persistent in seeking God.

You must develop the discipline of praying for the long haul. Jesus says, "Ask, and it will be given to you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you" (**Matthew 7:7**). The words "ask," "seek," and "knock" are commands. Jesus is teaching you to bring your needs and your burdens to your heavenly Father. You can make requests of your Father. If you literally translated this verse, it would read, "You must keep on asking, you must keep on seeking, and you must keep on knocking." You may have to continue seeking God over a period of time before you receive an answer from Him. It is your Father's desire that you continue to seek Him until there is an answer. He is pleased with this attitude of faith and dependence. He will hear and answer!

Practical Applications

The following are some practical steps to help you apply the truths of this passage. You might consider using them to help you get back to the basics of prayer.

- *Keep a prayer journal.* You might consider keeping a record of your prayer requests. In this journal, you can write down your requests and the answers that you receive to those requests. You can customize your prayer journal to fit your prayer life. There are a variety of prayer journals on the market today. You can make your own with a notebook or a binder with filler paper. The key issue is to keep up with what you are asking of God. By doing this, you can praise Him for His mercy and goodness in answering you. You can also find encouragement in His faithfulness in answering you. And it will help you know when you need to modify your requests according to God's will.
- *Pray specifically.* When you seek God, pray as specifically as you can. Gather as much information as you can about your request. Zero in on the request when you approach God.
- *Ask God to convince you of the necessity of prayer.* Prayer is not important; it is a necessity. It is God's ordained way of communicating with you and granting you those things that you need and desire. Plead with the Holy Spirit to work into your heart the conviction that prayer is the

great necessity of your life. Ask Him to help you view prayer as He views it. Pray for His heart concerning prayer.

- *Pray that God will help you deal with the obstacles to your prayer life.* Each believer has obstacles to prayer that he or she must confront. The obstacles hinder your prayer life. Ask that the Holy Spirit would enable you to deal with anything that hinders your prayer life.
- *Ask God for a servant's heart.* It is our tendency to avoid serving others. Plead with the Holy Spirit to create with you the heart of Jesus (**Matthew 20:28**).
- *Pray for a spirit of persistence.* One of my struggles in prayer is the issue of persistence. In my own weakness and frustration, I began crying out to God for persistence. I asked Him to enable me to pray for the long haul. The verses that I plead before Him is **Luke 18:1** and **Galatians 6:9**. You might consider asking God to create within you a spirit of persistence.
- *Immerse yourself in the wisdom of God.* When you have to persist in prayer concerning a request, there is a tendency to doubt God. You begin wondering if God is listening—if God cares. At this time, you must immerse yourself in the wisdom of God. God is wise and He works out all things according to His wise purpose. Fill your heart and mind with the Word concerning His wisdom. Rest in His unsearchable and indescribable wisdom. The following are some verses that you can begin with.

Approaching God

Prayer is speaking and listening to the almighty, eternal God. It is the most amazing and majestic privilege that a person can have. When you pray, you are entering the presence of the mighty God of heaven and earth. What a staggering opportunity!

Because of this, you should prepare yourself to speak to Him. It is crucial to do some "heart work" before you enter the presence of God. The Spirit convicted me of this as I began a time of prayer. He pointed out to me that I would rush into the presence of God and then rush out. He revealed that I was trying to seek my Father without making

preparation and that it was a hindrance to my prayer life.

Out of this, I developed a basic model of preparing to pray. You might consider using it or developing your own from it. You don't have to spend an elaborate amount of time on each point of the model. Sometimes I spend a couple of moments going through the outline. At other times, I will spend a couple of minutes at each point. However, there are times when I have had to take more time preparing. You will need to be sensitive to the Spirit and to the condition of your heart.

Stillness

"Be still, and know that I am God; I will be exalted among the nations; I will be exalted in the earth" (**Psalm 46:10**).

The first step in preparing to pray is to get still before the Lord. Most of us have hectic, fast-paced lives. Our minds are filled with all that we must do and where we have to be. There is a great need to get still before Him. It might be helpful to take a few deep breaths. I simply pray, "Father, help me to be still before You."

Scripture

"The entrance of Your words gives light; it gives understanding to the simple" (**Psalm 119:130**).

After stillness, read the Scripture. You can read a verse, a passage, or a chapter. The reason for this is that the Word focuses you on God. It helps you start getting your perspective fixed on the God. The Word also has a washing affect (**Ephesians 5:26**). It can cleanse your heart and mind with its powerful and unchanging truth.

Searching

"Search me, O God, and know my heart; try me, and know my anxieties; and see if there is any wicked way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting" (**Psalm 139:23-24**).

After reading the Scripture, ask the Holy Spirit to search you. Pray that He will reveal anything that might hinder you in approaching God. Plead that He will bring to light anything that would hinder your fellowship with God.

Silence

"But the LORD is in His holy temple. Let the earth keep silence before Him" (**Habakkuk 2:20**).

There is a difference between stillness and silence. Stillness gets you ready to silent before God. Stillness is calming your mind and spirit in order to be silent and listen to God. During this time of preparation, I simply pray, "Father, I'm listening. What is on Your heart?" After a period of silence, I then enter into a time of speaking with Him and listening to Him.

It's important to take time and prepare yourself before you enter your Father's presence. He is worthy of this preparation. He is the Most High God who reigns over all. And, you need the preparation. Preparing to pray will deepen and strengthen your times of prayer.

When You Don't Know What To Pray

In this newsletter, I have stressed the need to gather as much information as possible about the person or the situation for which you are praying. It is crucial to pray as specifically as possible. Zeroing in on your request will grant you power to plead.

Yet, what do you do when you don't know the details? How do you pray when all you have is a name or names and perhaps a sketchy detail or two? Many times I have had people walk up to me and say, "I'd like you to pray for _____." When I've asked for details, the person would not feel comfortable or free to share any. The person would walk away and I'm left thinking, "All I have is a name and someone wants me to pray for him/her. Lord, what do I do?"

The following are some practical suggestions that you might consider using in this type of situation.

- (1) *Plead for the filling of the Holy Spirit* (**Ephesians 5:18**). It is the Holy Spirit who enables you to pray (**Galatians 4:6**). It is only through His power that you can intercede for

others. You especially need His help in this type of situation.

- (2) *Ask the Holy Spirit to provide you with insights and Scriptures to pray for this situation.* You may not know the details of the situation, but the Holy Spirit does. Added to this, He knows the mind of God concerning this situation, "For what man knows the things of a man except the spirit of the man which is in him? Even so no one knows the things of God except the Spirit of God" (1 **Corinthians 2:11**).
- (3) *Trust that God will use your intercession for the person or situation* (Matthew 21:22). Even though you don't have the details, you can still make a difference in the lives of those that you will never know in this life. Only eternity will reveal the eternal good that is wrought through this kind of intercession.
- (4) *Don't focus on your lack of knowledge; fix your focus on God and His ability to work in the situation* (John 5:17; James 1:17). God is always at work. He is the good and powerful God. Don't let your lack of knowledge frustrate you. Believe that God, who is good and sovereign, will work in this situation as you pray.

The following is a simple prayer guide that you might consider using in this type of situation. You can pray these prayer pointers with confidence because they are based on the Word of God.

- *Pray that the person or persons involved with seek God with all their being.*
"Then you will call upon Me and go and pray to Me, and I will listen to You. And you will seek Me and find Me, when you search for me with all your heart" (Jeremiah 29:12-13).
- *Plead that God would be glorified in this situation.*
"Therefore, whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God" (1 **Corinthians 10:31**).
- *Ask that God would reveal Himself in fresh and new ways to the people involved.*
"And God said to Moses, 'I AM WHO I AM'" (Exodus 3:14).
- *Pray that God would meet the need or needs in the situation according to His riches and His will.*

"And my God shall supply all your need according to His riches in glory by Christ Jesus" (Philippians 4:19).

- *Ask that Satan and his demons would be bound and removed from the situation.*
"He who sins is of the devil, for the devil has sinned from the beginning. For this purpose the Son of God was manifested, that He might destroy the works of the devil" (1 **John 3:8**).
- *Plead that God would grant divine strength and peace to the person or persons involved.*
"The LORD gives His people strength, the LORD blesses them with peace" (Psalm 29:11).

Transforming Your Church

The following prayer guide can help you intercede for your church. It is intended to help you plead for genuine change and renewal in your church. It is based on 1 **Timothy 1:1-11**. You can pray this for your church and for those around you.

- (1) Plead that the believers would have a heart for the Word of God and that they would seek to understand it. Ask Him to deliver them from getting caught up in endless speculation over myths and useless points (1:4)
- (2) Pray that the people will live a life of faithfulness to God and His Word (1:4).
- (3) Ask that the believers will be filled with love that comes from a pure heart, a clear conscience, and a sincere faith (1:5).
- (4) Pray that false teaching or foolish notions will not trap the believers. Ask that the believers would focus only on the pure and powerful Word of God (1:7).
- (5) Plead that the believers will share the Word of God with the lost (1:7-11). Pray that they will grow in their understanding so that they can share it with those who need to hear it.

Changing Your Church In October

October could change your church forever. What would happen if the believers in your church covered every aspect of the church's life? October is Pastor Appreciation Month. At The Prayer Closet, we have developed materials to help you pray for your pastor. We would encourage you to

observe Pastor Appreciation Month. And there is no better way to show your love and appreciation to your pastor than to commit yourself to pray for your pastor. You might also consider making October a **special emphasis of prayer for your church**. A church cannot carry out the will of God if it is not saturating every aspect of its life in prayer. The following resources can help you observe Pastor Appreciation Month or carry out a special prayer emphasis for your church.

Praying For Your Pastor Key Ring

This key ring contains Scripture prayers to help you pray specifically and powerfully for your pastor.
Suggested Donation: \$2.00

Praying For Your Deacons Key Ring

This key ring contains Scripture prayers to aid you in praying for the deacons of your church.
Suggested Donation: \$2.00

Praying For Your Pastor's Wife Brochure

This brochure contains a variety of Scripture prayers and strategies to assist you in interceding for your pastor's wife.
Suggested Donation: \$.25

Praying For Your Church Manual

This manual will help you cover every aspect of your church's life and health with prayer. Its simple format will renew veteran prayer warriors and encourage beginners in prayer.
Suggested Donation. \$10.00



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