



THE PRAYER CLOSET

Equipping & Encouraging Believers
In Prayer

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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.

Dr. Kevin Meador, 595 Stratton Road, Decatur, MS 39327 (601) 635-2180

Email: prayercloset_1998@yahoo.com

OUR WEB PAGES: www.prayerclosetministries.org - www.kingdompraying.com

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.