



# THE PRAYER CLOSET

Equipping & Encouraging Believers  
In Prayer

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## GOD-CENTERED PRAYER

At a recent conference, a mother shared with me that she had started working at the school where her children attended. Now that the kids were older, she desired to work outside of the home. And she also wanted to be near her kids. They were rapidly moving toward graduation and leaving home for college. She believed that this would be a good experience for her children and her.

She soon found out that this was not the case. As she walked down the hall one day, she saw her son and his friends. She went up and said, "Hi, honey. How's your day going?" The mother said that her teenage son looked like he was going to die. The red-faced son sighed deeply and announced to the group, "Everybody, this is my mom." The mother lamented that the only time that her kids wanted to see her at school was when they needed money or the keys to the car. She was greeted only with "Gimme this" or "Gimme that."

As I thought about this woman's story, it seems apparent to me that this is often the way that we respond to God. Think about it. When do we get serious about prayer? It's usually when there is a need. We're burdened. We have desperate circumstances. It seems that our praying is characterized by "Gimme this" or Gimme that."

This happens because our praying is man-centered. It is focused on us—what we want, what we need, what we feel. God does long for you to make requests (**Matthew 7:7-11**). God does desire for you to bring your burdens to Him (**1 Peter 5:7**). Yet, He also desires that you become more God-centered in your praying. He yearns to be the focus,

the priority, of your prayer life. He never wants your requests to become more important than Him. He wants you to find in Him the answers to all your needs and situations.

This issue of *The Prayer Closet* is devoted to developing a God-centered prayer life. This newsletter will offer practical suggestions to help you do this. As you begin this new year, I pray that you will commit yourself to pursuing a God-centered prayer life.

### What Is A God-Centered Prayer Life?

A God-centered prayer life focuses on God. It is a prayer life that makes God's glory, God's will, and God's kingdom preeminent. It is built on the truth that prayer is a relationship with God—a relationship in which the believer seeks God, depends on God, and surrenders to God. The God-centered prayer life is characterized by commitment to seek God.

In contrast, the man-centered prayer life focuses on self. It is a prayer life that makes my glory, my will, and my needs preeminent. It is built on the belief that God exists for me—that God exists to bless me, help me, and do whatever I want. The man-centered prayer life is characterized by convenience. I seek God when it is convenient for me.

The main difference between God-centered and man-centered praying is one of perspective.

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It's all about how you approach God. The God-centered prayer life approaches God and says, "How should I pray about this need, this person, or this situation in light of God's will, His glory, and His kingdom?" The man-centered prayer life approaches God and says, "This is what I want; this is what I would like to see; this is what I need."

For most believers, their prayer lives are a mixture of both these. Sometimes our praying is more God-centered than self-centered. Sometimes the opposite is true. Yet, the key is to grow out of self-centered praying into prayer that is focused on God—His will, His glory, and His kingdom. The believer must seek to bring all his or her requests and burdens to God and pray in the light of God's glory, will, and kingdom.

## Why Should I Pursue A God-Centered Prayer Life?

Why should a believer seek to be God-centered in prayer? *First, Jesus teaches us to pray this way.* In the Model Prayer, Jesus declares, "In this manner, therefore, pray: Our Father in heaven, hallowed be Your name. Your kingdom come. Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven" (Matthew 6:9-10). The will, glory, and kingdom of our Father and God are to be the guiding principles of prayer. They are to be preeminent. In all of our praying, these must be our focus. In all of our asking and pleading, we must seek to align our requests with His will, glory, and kingdom. This makes prayer God-centered. It also provides us with great power and delight in prayer. When your praying is in agreement with His will, glory, and kingdom, you will see the impossible become the possible, the incredible a living reality.

*Second, God is worthy.* Your God is the living Lord of time and eternity. He is the one true and living God. No one and nothing can compare to Him. Nothing can match His excellent greatness. He is worthy of being the focus of your praying. He is worthy of the preeminence in your praying.

*Next, God's character should lead to God-centered praying.* God is not a vending machine or a genie that exists solely to bless you and perform for you. He is a loving Father who wants an authentic relationship with You. He longs to change you. He yearns to use You in His kingdom.

He desires to teach you how to communicate with Him and pray according to His will, glory, and kingdom. These things are due to His character. He is a personal, loving, faithful God. Self-centered praying focuses only on self. It is not concerned with God's character that longs to be in relationship with You, changing you and using you. The character of your Father should move you to make Him the priority of your praying.

*Your need should stir you to be God-centered in your praying.* What is your greatest need? Your greatest need is God. The psalmist reveals this by declaring, "Whom have I in heaven but You? And there is none upon the earth that I desire besides You. My flesh and my heart may fail; but God is the strength of my heart and my portion forever" (Psalm 73:25-26). You are the creature; He is the Creator. You are finite, weak, and sinful; He is infinite, omnipotent, and holy. You must depend on God. God's will, glory, and kingdom are for Your best interests. When you are living for God's will, glory, and kingdom, you are experiencing the very best that this infinite, omnipotent, and holy God can purpose. When God is the focus of your praying, you will find Him sufficient for all the needs of your life.

*God-centered praying builds faith.* When you focus on God in your praying, it will build your faith. Looking at His greatness encourages and strengthens your faith. Yet, when you focus on people, needs, or situations, it will begin weakening your faith. You can't fix your focus on people, needs, or situations and expect to have the faith and boldness to intercede concerning these things. You must look to God. You must seek for His will, glory, and kingdom.

In my personal prayer life, I have found that I struggle the most when my focus is on everything but God. When I am looking only at people, needs, and situations, I find that it drains and weakens my faith. It creates a situation where I feel hopeless and don't have the faith or boldness to pray with power and effectiveness. When I start asking "Why?" I find my heart sinking and my faith weakening.

Yet, when I focus on God, I find that my faith grows. When I get my eyes off of what I can see and look to the living God, it encourages and strengthens my faith and boldness to pray. I have found that the best question to ask is not "Why?" but "What?" My praying has been transformed by

asking questions like “What is Your will?” “What will bring You glory?” or “What is going to advance Your kingdom in this situation?” As my focus returns to God, it increases my faith to pray with power and boldness.

*Finally, God-centered prayer protects you against disillusionment with prayer.* I encounter people on a continual basis who are disillusioned with prayer. They don’t pray because they don’t believe that it “works.” At some time, they prayed and did not get what they requested or God didn’t work things out like they felt that He should. For this reason, they don’t see any need to pray. This is unfortunate. Yet, it is the result of man-centered praying.

If you’re praying is self-centered, you will grow disillusioned with prayer. This is because prayer is a relationship with God. It’s about a relationship in which you speak to Him and He speaks to you. It’s not about getting God to do what you want or getting Him to “fix” the situations in your life. Prayer is a relationship in which you get to know God and align your life and desires with His will, glory, and kingdom. As you do this, you will experience power and delight in prayer. ~~God-centered praying protects you against disillusionment with prayer.~~

## How Can I Develop A God-Centered Prayer Life?

There is no formula for developing a God-centered prayer life. There is no simple series of steps; it’s about developing a relationship to God. It is cultivating a relationship in which you become passionate for God—His will, glory, and kingdom.

The following are some suggestions on how to develop a God-centered prayer life. It is only through God’s power and help that you can deal with your self-centeredness and grow in your passion for God.

- *Ask God to purify your understanding of Him.* The Word of God commands that we are to have no other gods and that we are not to make gods for ourselves (Exodus 20:2-7). These two commands reveal our tendency to develop false ideas about God. Our lives can be cluttered with misconceptions and deceptions about the true nature of our God. Plead that your belief

about God will be purified. Ask that you will know God as He is.

- *Pray that your desires will become His desires.* Ask the Holy Spirit to enable you to desire what the Father desires. The Holy Spirit knows the desires of the Father. Plead with Him to produce those desires in you by His own powerful working. Call on Him to produce in you the ability to desire what God wants in all circumstances.
- *Plead that you will root out all self-centeredness.* Unfortunately, self-centeredness is a deeply rooted sin in our being. It can manifest itself in your life in powerful and cunning ways. Call on the Holy Spirit to help you root it out of your life. Pray that you will be able to remove it from the depth of your being.
- *Pray for a heart for His glory.* Ask that you will have a heart for God’s glory in all things, especially in your prayer life. Pray that the Holy Spirit will create within you the hunger to see God glorified. At the same time, pray that you will not be preoccupied with your own glory. Ask that you will not desire the praise and recognition of others.
- *Ask for a more personal understanding and experience of His love.* Self-centeredness melts in the light of God’s love. As you understand and experience more of God’s love, you will cling less and less to self-centered plans and desires. The overflowing, unconditional love of God breaks through selfishness and brings a person to seek and focus on God. Plead for a deeper understanding and experience of His love.

The following Scripture prayers will help you to put the preceding principles into action. I would encourage and challenge you to pray the following prayers every day for the next year. You can pray one a day, a combination each day, or all of them each day. But, consider pleading these truths for you and your prayer life.

**WARNING: THE FOLLOWING PRAYERS CAN CHANGE YOU AND YOUR PRAYER LIFE FOREVER.**

Father, I need You. I pray that You would purify my understanding of You. By the Word of God and the Holy Spirit, remove from my mind and heart any misconceptions or deceptions concerning You. Reveal Yourself to me. Cause me to know You as You are (**Exodus 20:2-7**).

Father, I need You. Your Word says to delight myself in You and You will give me the desires of my heart. Enable me to delight in You. Create Your desires in me. I ask that my heart would long for what You love and desire. Holy Spirit, work in me so that when I desire something, it will be what my Father desires (**Psalms 37:4**).

Father, I need You. Enable me to root out the self-centeredness in my life. Help me to rip it out of the depths of my being. I pray that I would not love my life and selfishly cling to it. I ask that I would be willing to surrender it to You daily. Make me sensitive to self-centeredness in my life, especially when I pray. I plead that my praying would not be self-centered but God-centered (**James 4:2**).

Father, I need You. Not unto me, O Lord, but to You belongs all glory. I praise Your name. Father, grant me a heart for Your glory. I ask that my heart would beat to bring glory to You in all things. Teach me to pray for those things that will glorify You. Deliver me from being preoccupied with my own glory and honor. Let my life, especially my prayer life, glorify Your name. Amen (**Psalms 115:1-3**).

## The "ABC" Prayer

In my struggle to move toward a more God-centered prayer life, I have developed a prayer that I pray daily. I start each day with this prayer. And, I use it before my prayer times in order to help me get prepared to seek the Father. You can use this or develop your own from it. The key issue is to pray for the removal of anything that will keep you from focusing on God—His will, glory, and kingdom. Each petition in the prayer is based on the letters "ABC".

Accept my life. The beginning of this prayer is a reminder that I have been bought with a price. It is a time to reaffirm the commitment of my life to

Him. Declare to God that your life is not Your own but that it belongs to Him and Him alone.

Break my will. Since I belong to God, I am to do His will. I am to strive to do and pray His will. Yet, my stubborn will is slow to respond to His will. I pray for the merciful but powerful breaking of God's will before that day or that prayer time.

Crucify my desires. Ask God to crucify any desires that you have that are not His desires. Our desires can often get in the way of desiring and praying for what God longs to do.

Conform me to Your will. Now that I have surrendered myself to Him, asked Him to break my will and crucify my desires, I am now ready to pray for my life and prayer requests to be conformed to what He desires. Plead that your life and praying will be conformed to His holy purpose.

## Praying For Area Churches

~~Does your church pray for the other~~ churches in your area? In a recent prayer seminar, I mentioned the need for a church to pray for surrounding churches. After that session, a member of the church came to me and said, "What happens if we pray for these other churches and they begin to win people to Jesus and grow larger than us? How will that help our church?"

At least this church member was honest. Some churches have no concern for anyone outside their own four walls. And it is unfortunate that we view other churches as competitors rather than co-laborers for Jesus and the kingdom of God. Our concern must be for more than just our own church; we must open our eyes and see our part with other churches in the Kingdom work. Do you remember the theme of this issue—God-centered or self-centered? We must lift our eyes up and see what God is doing around us and pray fervently for the work of **God's kingdom!**

I would encourage you to pray for the surrounding churches. God will honor your personal intercession for your other brothers and sisters in Christ. You might consider having a list of these in your prayer room or giving a list to all that are involved in your prayer ministry. In a