

The All-Time  
**10 Best Tips on Prayer**  
for Beginners That I Have Ever Heard

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## INTRODUCTION

Thank you for your interest in prayer and this booklet.

This publication will introduce you to the **10 Best Tips on Prayer for Beginners** that I have ever run across.

These tips have helped me immensely in my own prayer life on many occasions.

Please just relax, have some fun with this, and find one or two new ideas that could be beneficial for you. If that's successful, I encourage you to pass this along to friends and family that could also gain from it. If just one person gets closer to God, then, I believe, the whole world has been improved.

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# 1. Schedule a Prayer Time.

**Make an appointment with God.  
Make it a priority.**

Setting aside TIME is the most important place to begin developing your prayers. If you never take some time to pray, your prayer life will never grow. It will never develop. Start with a small amount that you are willing to commit to. If you are not willing to commit some of your time to prayer, give up now.

## MAKE AN APPOINTMENT WITH GOD

Make an appointment to meet with God just like any other appointment. If it's not on your schedule, it will tend to be put off easily. You would certainly remember an appointment that you have today with the President of the United States, wouldn't you? Well, isn't God more important to your life than the President.

## MAKE IT A PRIORITY

If you have available time, that's great. But for most of you, finding time to pray will mean that you have to SACRIFICE something else that you are now doing instead. Probably you are enjoying that other thing (TV, sleep, business, friends, kids, reading, etc.) or you wouldn't be doing it. Prayer has to be moved up the list of daily priorities so it is high enough to bump off something else that has heretofore been considered more urgent and important. It has to become a strong enough priority so that you can't go to bed until it is accomplished, like brushing your teeth.

So start right now to find that activity that you can delete from your life in order to be able to get more God in your life. Look at a long range perspective. We know that good eating habits and getting regular exercise are vital for long term good health. Unfortunately, it's easy to bump them aside on a day to day basis in favor of things that seem more urgent. But since they are essential, we must learn to raise them to a priority level that takes precedent over "urgent" matters. We need to learn to distinguish between "urgent" and "important". In the same way, it's essential to raise prayer to a high priority so that it becomes a daily habit in spite of everything else that we have to do also.

Next decide how much time you are going schedule it in your day to begin your new prayer life. Be reasonable with yourself, ten or twelve minutes might be a good start. If you can't squeeze out ten or twelve minutes somewhere, then you're not being serious.

When your best friend calls, you make time to talk to him or her even if something else that is important too has to be sacrificed. You may not know it yet, but God is your best friend and making some time for Him every day is going to be the best long term investment that you have ever made.

You may need some help with resetting your priorities to include a daily prayer time. I believe a deeper understanding of the value of prayer can really help. It can give you the necessary motivation to pray. I have found quite a number of explanations of the value of prayer that have really helped me. Make your own list. It will be a great support reference for you to back up the value of praying FOR YOU. You could do a search on the Internet for "Why pray?" or "The Importance of Prayer." Pick the ideas that you really like and that are convincing for you. Then make a list of them.

## **2. Just Get Started.**

**Night time prayer or morning prayer**

**Start small**

**Work up to longer prayers.**

"The journey of a thousand miles begins with a single step."

"Don't bite off more than you can chew."

"Take it one step at a time."

"Keep your goal within reach."

"Just do it!"

JUST GETTING STARTED is the way to begin. Don't spend too much time thinking about it. Don't wait until you are "in the mood". Don't look for the "right time" or "right place". Obstacles will always come up that make for wonderful excuses why you should be distracted from prayer or be delayed in starting your prayer. Ignore them and focus on just getting a start, even if it's a very small one.

If the present time doesn't seem quite right to you, then maybe just talk to God "along the way". Pretend He is your invisible friend next to you as you drive or walk somewhere during your day. Be open and honest as you get started. "I don't know if you're there right now or not, but I hope you can hear this. I'm on my way to the store and I don't have time to stop and pray, but it would be nice if you come along with me and help make it a smooth trip."

Incidentally, I experience that there is a force that is very real which actively attempts to prevent me from praying. I have to overcome that force by making effort almost every time. I believe that you will experience this force of opposition as well. So therefore, if I were you, I'd expect it.

## NIGHT TIME PRAYER OR MORNING PRAYER

Most of us decide to pray at the end of the day. This is good, but usually by then I'm not only physically tired, but I'm emotionally drained as well. Often it will seem that you haven't got the spiritual energy and power to initiate a conversation with anyone, let alone God. Who would want to invite the Almighty God to visit them in such a state of mind?

Please realize that this is a deception. A recent experience proves it to me. I was going to go to bed early because I felt unusually tired. Several of the kids had been ill and I was feeling it too. Then the phone rang. It was my best friend from 800 miles away. We hadn't talked in a month and he was going to be coming this way. When I hung up 15 minutes later, all traces of tiredness were gone. I was emotionally and spiritually recharged. Why? The energy that is generated from positive emotional give and take can revive us. It's even better than sleep.

Prayer in the same way can revive and re-energize you if you are tired. It can work like the energy from a loved one if you can successfully make an emotional connection with God. Many times I have had the experience of being energized from my prayers and then not being able to go to sleep for a long time. Sometimes even I have purposely avoided a "deep" prayer because I wanted to be able to go right to sleep.

So when you get to the end of today, try not to plop down in front of the television and watch whatever is on for an hour. I can pretty much guarantee that it will NOT revive you spiritually or emotionally. You might even be feeling worse after watching TV. So end today differently than usual. Take time for an honest talk with God.

Morning prayer is vital for starting your day so don't neglect it. If you have to, even get up just 10 or 15 minutes earlier. Morning prayer really helps prepare you for the various events and circumstances that lie ahead. Think over the upcoming day as you pray. Even review your schedule with God and look for His insights on how to handle situations and responsibilities that you will encounter. If you are going to be meeting a person that is difficult for you to love, ask God for His perspective. New insights from prayer, especially in loving difficult people, have been very exciting for me.

## START SMALL

Any new relationship with another person starts out with small talk. It's the same with prayer. Even a meeting of old friends who

haven't seen each other for a long time starts with small talk. Take time to get acquainted with God. Sometimes getting started is the hardest part, so start with honest small talk about how things are going.

If you are learning to pray, then you realize, of course, that you are on unfamiliar ground. But remember that everyone started in that same place. Even the greatest men of prayer throughout history started where you are. They had doubts in the beginning. They had their "ups and downs" in prayer. Take your baby steps and let go of your pride. It will be over soon.

### WORK UP TO LONGER PRAYERS

Start with three or four minutes at a time. Then, when you are ready, try seven. Eventually you can reach twelve comfortably. Then challenge up to 21 and 40 minutes a day. Finally you can attempt 60 minutes a day. This is probably the most spiritually satisfying if you desire to go that far. The reason that I suggest these numbers rather than others is because they are used in significant events in the Bible and in God's creation. For example, Jesus was in the tomb 3 days and he had 3 main disciples. Jesus had 12 disciples. There are 12 months to the year. Jesus fasted 40 days and Noah was on the ark 40 days. There were 7 days in the creation. Jesus asked his disciples to pray with him for 1 hour in the Garden of Gethsemane. You get the idea.

## 3. Think of God's Point of View

### **Ask for insight**

### **Understanding confession and repentance**

One of the best pieces of advice that I ever read on prayer was from a famous Chinese Christian, Watchman Nee. He taught that God will not do His Will until we pray and ask Him to do it. Even though God wants to do His Will very much, He will not violate our freedom by interfering before we ask Him to. If God interfered, then that would violate our freedom and thus destroy our ability to give and receive true love which requires that we be free.

If we don't ask, then God cannot interfere with the workings of our hearts. If He did, then He would be controlling us against our will. This would destroy our freedom and simultaneously destroy true love. Without freedom there cannot be true love because we would be like robots.

God is a parent who truly loves His children but He also respects their creativity and responsibility. He would never choose

to force them to love Him. That's a contradiction to the nature of true love. God chooses to wait until His children are ready to respond and then give them what was actually His Will all along.

#### ASK FOR INSIGHT

So then, just what is God's point of view? I find it very helpful to meditate for a few minutes on this subject - what God must be feeling. I send a silent thought to God, "Help me see from Your point of view, Heavenly Father, and if there is anything that I can pray for that will help You, then send that thought into my mind."

#### UNDERSTANDING CONFESSION AND REPENTANCE

Sometimes I have found myself in deep repentance after better understanding God's perspective. Because of what we humans are doing to each other and to our world, we are giving great pain to our loving parent, God! Often I see more clearly where I have not devoted enough time and thought to God and have allowed worldly concerns to occupy too much of my time. Through this exercise, I find it much more natural to repent and feel very cleansed.

Once you offer to God your apology for not seeing His perspective and understanding His heart better, then you'll receive His deep genuine forgiveness. Then a new closeness comes over you. Whenever we are building a relationship with another person and we can make a connection to the other person's feelings and perspective, then we feel much closer to that person. It's even nicer when it's with God.

Confession and repentance are sometimes very misunderstood concepts. Their purpose is NOT to paint yourself as a terrible sinner and eternal reprobate. The purpose of repentance is to apologize to God for your mistakes so that you can receive forgiveness and then end up CLOSER to God. The net result of repentance should be a feeling of joy and forgiveness. If you are repenting and then feeling depressed at the end, you're doing something wrong. God wants you to move forward and move closer to Him. The conclusion of that is a deep inner joy.

Be careful to note whether you feel joy after you have confessed or repented. If not, then you must be farther away from God, not closer. Obviously, that's not the desired result that you want and especially not the result that God wanted. Therefore, check up on the results of your prayers. Are they making you happier?

## 4. Be specific.

### **Making a prayer list.**

The success of your prayer in connecting to God depends a lot on the actual content of what you are praying for. Praying for "peace on earth" is good, but it's very hard to relate to it with your emotions, especially for a beginner. Probably a person like Mother Teresa had a close heartistic connection to praying for "peace on earth" because she was emotionally connected to so many people in need and felt deeply that each one was a child of God.

But most of us cannot emotionally relate to the large, more abstract concepts at first. For a better prayer, try to be able to conceive clearly what you are praying for. This means to be specific.

If a child goes to his/her parent and says, "I need help!" or a student goes to the teacher and says, "Can you help me?", then the immediate response is "What kind of help do you need?" If the child or student never answers that question, then it's hard to give the help needed. I believe this analogy is also true in prayer.

Here's a hint if you can't think of anything specific to ask for. The first thing you might want to pray for is "Help me know what to specifically pray for."

Many people believe that "God already knows what I need." so why should I have to tell him? That is true, God does know. But God in His wisdom won't give it to us until we are ready and willing to receive it. As The Bible says, we have to "ask before we can receive". By demonstrating our maturity to God, we actually free Him to answer our prayers more easily. A parent does not want to spoil a child. The parent's primary concern is that the child is growing up virtuously.

The most wonderful ability that God created in us is the ability to love and create, but that nature inherently requires our independent response out of our free will. We are creating ourselves as we grow and develop and we must develop our consciousness of ourselves as reflections of God. The three major aspects of the human spirit are the intellect, the emotion, and the will. All three of these grow and develop over time according to our own effort. Without our participation and willing effort, our spirit doesn't grow. God has placed our spiritual growth under our own dominion. We are responsible for how well or how poorly it grows. Since we have an eternal spirit, then our intellect, emotion, and will continue forever to grow and develop. This allows us to draw closer and closer to God in a never ending relationship that is always getting deeper and deeper.

God has the parental wisdom for giving us not only what we want but how much of it we are ready to receive. When a five year old child asks, "What's sex?", you don't give them the whole complete truth. You have more wisdom than that. So remember to be specific in your prayers.

## MAKING A PRAYER LIST

Making a "Prayer List" is very helpful in being specific. Write it down and have the list with you when you pray. Keep adding things to the list and subtracting them all the time. This helps you clarify exactly what you want to pray for and it serves as a reminder in case you might run out of inspiration. The slight drawback of a list is that it can tend to become rote and then boring. We naturally tend to avoid things that are boring. So if you feel that your prayers are starting to bore you, then stop using the list for a while.

In the world today there are many books being written and seminars being held on the value of setting goals in your life. One universal point that is always stressed is that goals must be SPECIFIC if you ever want to reach them. This lesson applies equally and very importantly to our prayer life as well. We must be specific.

The things that you are praying for should be clear and detailed. They should be as specific as possible. No building was ever built, no patent ever given, no masterpiece ever created without specific and complete details. When you can clearly conceive in your heart and mind the purpose in your prayer, then it can be realized on earth by you and God together.

Visualize in as much detail as possible the results you want from your prayers. Even write it down to help clarify it. This can help substantialize your benefit from prayer and help you to see your progress. Also, very importantly, if what you are praying for comes true, then you can recognize God working in your life. Experiencing God is essential to developing your prayer life and your faith.

## 5. Pray out loud.

### **Three hints. Be creative.**

This is a hard one. Although God will still hear your prayer if you pray silently, I have found that my prayers are less than 50% as effective if I pray silently.

Just as if I'm talking to my closest friend, when I speak the words out loud, it forces me to clarify my thoughts. When the words come out and I hear them expressed, then I can move along to the next

thought. If I keep the words in my mind, it's harder to keep going and my prayers tend to taper off to nothing very quickly.

A common problem that beginners face in praying out loud is embarrassment. Obviously, God is invisible so you may feel that you are just talking to the wall. That's pretty embarrassing for your ego. Suppose you found out later that God wasn't really listening and you'd been talking to nothing all that time. You'd feel really foolish then, wouldn't you? If someone passes by and sees you talking to nothing, they might think you are crazy.

### THREE HINTS

Here are three hints that I have found helpful to get you started. First, find something or "someone" to talk to. If you have a picture of Jesus, talk to his picture as if you were talking to him in person. You might also want to try a picture of a person you know who really loves you. Or you can choose a person that you really respect and admire in history. Talk to that person as a representative of God and have him or her relay your message to God.

A second idea is to use the "Dear Diary" approach. In other words, write it down. Write a letter to God and express clearly your feelings and desires. As you see them taking shape on the paper you will naturally be praying for these things at the same time. After they are written down, then you might also want to say them out loud.

A third hint is to tape record your prayer. This sounds pretty radical but is very effective. It might seem that it would be very embarrassing but it is an excellent way to train yourself for a life of prayer and it especially prepares you to pray in public. When you are praying and you come to a pause, then pause the tape recorder. After you have recorded your prayer, then be sure to go back and listen to it. Listening to your own prayers from an "outsider's" point of view, you will be pleasantly surprised that you like them. You will be able to improve them more quickly because of this new perspective you will have. You can even imagine what God must be thinking as He listens to your prayer.

### BE CREATIVE

One of my "mental hobbies" is observing the obstacles and inhibitions that come up inside myself that prevent me from praying. I enjoy creating unique and fun ways to overcome my fears and embarrassments.

Prayer should be varied just like any relationship. Sometimes it should be light. Sometimes it should be fun. Sometimes it will be deadly serious and tear-filled. However, it should always be

specific. Real prayer should not ever be thought of as "spacing out". That is an unattractive relationship and leads people to give up praying.

## **6. Pray with other people.**

This is hard. It takes a commitment and it requires us to become vulnerable. It means that we are opening up our very personal thoughts and desires in prayer to someone else. However, the rewards are far, far greater than the price.

As two people each draw closer to God in prayer, they are simultaneously growing closer to each other. Think of it as a triangle with God at the top and those praying on opposite ends of the base. As they each move closer to God, then they have in fact moved closer to each other also.

One of the times that I feel the closest to my wife and children is after we have been praying together. I'm not talking here about the brief prayer that we have as a family every morning before school or the bedtime prayer at night. For us, those are just short prayers like saying grace before we eat. These we rotate every day. Everyone takes his or her turn. The deep closeness I'm referring to are the times when we pray together for a longer time or take the time to share the more personal side of ourselves with each other.

You may have heard the saying "the family that prays together, stays together." This is not just sloganism, but truth because you will be intimately sharing your lives with each other.

When praying together, it is important that each person that is present be a participant. No one should be left out. If only one person prays, then there often isn't the "horizontal" give and take that makes a base for everyone to experience God. In the Bible it mentions that wherever two or more are gathered, then God can be present. But in my experience this doesn't just mean two bodies in the same location. It means that the spirits of two or more people are participating together.

There are a number of ways you can do this. My wife and I have an ongoing 12 minute prayer each day. We alternate who prays first each day and say just a prayer from our hearts. The person who goes first prays for a while and then stops. Then the other person prays. If the 12 minutes is not up, then the first person prays again. This continues until the time is up.

You don't have to set a time limit on it, but we feel personally that we should give at least 12 minutes to our prayer and by the end we feel good that we have accomplished something. If we prayed less

time, it might be one of those "hurry-up and get it over with prayers" (if you know what I mean). Prayer brings us closer and often we find ourselves sitting together afterwards and sharing our hearts for quite a while. It's also a good time to talk about the children or catch up on other important family business.

I recommend setting a time limit because you can feel a completion and a sense of accomplishment and be able to measure your progress a little better. If you really get into the prayer, there is no reason to stop of course when you get to the time limit. (I didn't really have to say that, did I?)

Another technique is that each person prays for one point or one subject only. Then the next person prays for a different point. Then back to the first person again. This works well if you are using a prayer list or are in a larger group.

You could also try having each person just pray one sentence and the next person pray a sentence. Let your creativity work a little. If you have more than two people, then you can make a circle and do the same things as above.

One more quick point on praying with others. This one is rather obvious. Who should you choose to pray with? Naturally, pray with your family members and loved ones. I also suggest that whenever possible, find other people that are more experienced at prayer than you are that you can pray with. Look for the opportunity to pray with established groups. I have no doubt that they would welcome you, especially if you make it known to them that you are a beginner and want to learn. Not only will these people be a great support system through rough times, but also you can learn about prayer more quickly through "mentoring" than going it alone.

## **7. Pray for others.**

### **Both of you will benefit.**

Praying for others is very helpful, not only to the person that you are praying for, but it's also helpful to YOU. This develops the most important spiritual muscle that you have, namely your heart. We know that to grow our brainpower we must read and study, but we often fail to realize that to become a good compassionate person we must also make a lot of effort and learn to have concern for others.

Babies are born as totally self-centered and self-absorbed beings. In order to become a good parent they must make a huge transition somehow into beings that will have an unconditional love and concern for their children. This doesn't happen automatically like the growth of our bodies. It's a process that requires education and practice, practice and more practice.

Try to be as specific as possible as you pray for others. My children many times pray, "Heavenly Father, please bless everyone." We can safely assume that God is doing His darndest to bless everyone. The best way we can help God, however, is particular, specific, and unique concern and empathy for other individual people and their circumstances. We can be "instruments" for helping God to work in the lives of other individuals, but it's nearly impossible for us to help God to take care of "everyone".

## BOTH OF YOU WILL BENEFIT

We benefit at the same time because praying for others grows and develops our own personality and heart to become more like God's. Our prayer energy directed at a unique person and situation is much more effective than the scattergun approach of "bless everyone".

It has been proven to me beyond all doubt that people can communicate thoughts to each other across a room or across the country without ever verbalizing those thoughts. Many times I know my mother is about to call me because the thought keeps coming into my mind to call her.

New research is showing that people in the hospital that are being prayed for by total strangers have a higher cure rate than those who are not prayed for.

Just as thoughts can be communicated, so too prayers are communicated as well. In fact, prayers have even more influence because they carry not only thoughts but an emotional power. Prayers carry healing power and this doesn't only mean a healing of the body but also a healing power for the spirit. Prayers can help other people deal with depression, anxiety, anger, fear, resentment, and hatred to name just a few.

Prayer for others also helps us to a new and deeper understanding of the person we are praying for. It connects us to God's feelings for that person. Later when you meet with that person in the flesh, you will experience that you have new love and empathy for him or her. Prayer helps us to learn patience. It helps us better understand the things we can change and the things we can't. And especially prayer helps teach us forgiveness.

As already mentioned, be as specific as possible in what you are praying. Rather than just praying, "God, please bless Elizabeth", be more specific. "God, please surround her with a feeling of joy." "God, please put ideas into Mary's mind how to serve others." "Heavenly Father, please melt the pain and resentment that are in Bill's heart with your love."

As you pray for a person, try to reach out to them and understand them with your own heart. This will help you to know what to specifically pray for. It's a real joy when you can understand a person better and love them more because of your prayers. You will have a new and changed feeling toward them and that new empathy will become manifest substantially in your relationship the next time you meet the person.

## **8. Ask Questions.**

### **Listen for Answers from God Review the answers**

Jesus said in Matt. 7.7, "Ask and it will be given you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you." Also in Matt. 21.22, he said, "And, whatever you ask in prayer, you will receive, if you have faith."

This is a very important point to remember about the dynamic of our relationship with God. A parent is always interested in giving to his or her children, however, the parent wants input from the child. When I buy clothes or a new toy for my children, I always want to know first what size, what color, etc. do they want.

God too wants to hear from us. Naturally, He prefers to hear us express the needs of our hearts more than our needs for physical possessions because that's where His primary concern for our happiness lies. However, He does listen to our material needs as well.

I have often found it helpful to write down a question and then pray about it. Usually I write down the answer as I receive it and this has been a wonderful experience. What I mean is that I write down the thoughts that come into my mind in a "stream of consciousness" manner. The answer can often be complicated and even take several stages to develop so writing it down is really the only way that I could practically receive the answer. Just as in a conversation, one thought builds upon another. If I was just listening, there wouldn't be enough substantial thought for me to grasp the idea and hold it so I could follow step by step to the whole understanding. If there are several ideas as part of the answer, it's very hard to get it unless I write it down.

The value of writing may not make sense until you try it, but I sincerely urge you to try this technique. I don't imagine it works for everyone, but for me it has lead to some wonderful experiences. After my initial prayer question, many thoughts start flowing into my mind and may eventually go off in a totally different direction that I never would have thought of. By writing it down, God leads me to a

deep, definite, and personal message that He had for me that I never would have thought of on my own.

## LISTEN FOR ANSWERS FROM GOD

Give and take is essential in communication. In order to have a satisfying prayer, you must feel not only that God is listening to you but also you must feel that He is responding. How long would you keep talking to someone on the telephone if they totally stopped responding? You would quickly realize that you had been "cut off". So, please think of prayer as a two way relationship. Not only are you talking to God, but you are listening for His answers coming back.

So then, how can a beginner recognize that God is responding to him or her? God often speaks in that "still small voice" that you can only hear with your inner heart. It's very easy to doubt what you hear because we aren't accustomed to listening to it. The message is often fleeting like a dream or yesterday's conversation so you may doubt that you ever heard it at all. It may also be confusing as to what it means in reality and how you should interpret it.

I once read a couple books on St. Francis of Assisi. He misunderstood the message that he got from God. God told him to "rebuild my church" so he went into the country and found a little old broken down church in ruins and rebuilt it. Of course, now we realize that God's message was for St. Francis to "rebuild" the Catholic Church as a whole, not some building.

Again I suggest you take notes on the thoughts that come to you during prayer. Write down what you feel is coming from God as you try to listen. Many times our understanding of things is progressive. In school you have to go to second grade before you can go to third. In sports, in music, it's the same. So also it's like that with prayer and you need to make progress through time and practice. So it's important to see yourself in a process and making steps along your way.

## REVIEW THE ANSWERS

Another value of writing it down is that you can REVIEW it later. This gives you the opportunity to analyze with both your rational mind and your emotional heart whether the message is really from God. If you have a good friend whose spiritual wisdom you trust, I can suggest that you show it to him or her if you have doubts. It's often advisable to be cautious with spiritual messages because they can be deceiving.

The helpful messages that I attribute to God are the ones that uplift me to a very high ideal for myself and hold me to a very high standard of personal conduct. They are very forgiving and very encouraging. They are very empowering, but they are also righteous. The kind of messages that predict a certain event at a specific time, in my experience, are not very reliable.

In time, as you pay attention and are looking for messages from God, you'll find them. Each of us is unique and God will speak to us uniquely, but you'll know it's a message from Him. The dream or thought or experience will be qualitatively different from the usual. It will endure longer and remain vivid whereas others fade quickly with time.

## **9. Create a holy environment.**

**Gather inspirational reading materials.**

**Prepare your surroundings with pictures, music, flowers, candles, etc.**

Each one of us is definitely influenced by our environment. Whole fields of college study are now investigating how color, smells, sounds and even touch influence us in positive and negative ways.

I encourage you to be absolutely serious about the environment for your prayer. We all know that eating a lot of junk food will gradually over time lead to a decline in our physical health. The exact analogy applies to the health of our mind and spirit. The current state of television, movies, some music and art can have a seriously negative effect on your spiritual health.

I heard a wonderful example recently. A father was having the usual argument with his children about some TV show or movie or music or something. He didn't like it and they thought that it was OK. It wasn't really "hurting" them although they knew there were immoral and violent parts in it.

The next day he made their favorite brownies but before serving it, he let them know that he had put a tiny speck of dog poop in it. Certainly it was only a tiny bit and it wouldn't really be a problem. But as you would expect, they wouldn't even touch it, even though it was just a tiny speck of dog poop.

The analogy is obvious. We allow all kinds of "dog poop" in the spiritual environment around us and totally disregard any effect it might be having.

When my wife and I want to pray and the children have the television on in the other room, I have to totally get out of earshot

in order to be able to pray. Almost every television show I know will destroy my prayer environment. You can't have give and take with a TV. It is totally the master and you are totally the object if you enter a relationship on its terms. It will not respond or react to anything you do so be careful not to become a "tube slave".

If you find a place in your house that is the most comfortable for you to pray, then cultivate the atmosphere in that area. Each time you pray there, you will be adding good energy to the place and making it more suitable to better and better prayers. I believe that inanimate objects absorb energy from the living things around them. Then they reflect that energy back. As an example, my children say they can feel closer to me when they are sitting in my favorite chair or if they put on my favorite jacket. So cultivate your own "prayer place" with your prayer energy.

## GATHER INSPIRATIONAL READING MATERIALS

Not many of us are living our daily routine on an elevated spiritual level like a saint, right? So it's to be expected that it will be normally hard to get "into the mood" for prayer. This is where a cultivated spiritual environment can really help support your prayer life.

One way to cultivate your prayer environment is with materials that move your emotions such as inspiring books. The experience of prayer is qualitatively better when it's an experience of the heart and emotions. Prayer is not satisfying if it's just an intellectual conversation. So you may want to try "jump starting" your prayer with something that can move your emotions like reading. A good tip is to read something brief that is inspirational or emotional.

The main reason for reading something inspirational is to move your heart so you can pray. The key point is that you want to get into prayer, therefore keep whatever you read BRIEF. You don't want to read a favorite book and get distracted and read on and on. You don't want to fill up your mind with distracting thoughts. You just want to move your heart of love and compassion.

There are a lot of books on the market such as the Chicken Soup for the Soul series. These are collections of short stories that are designed to move your heart and emotions. I suggest keeping several different types of inspirational materials in the place that you usually pray. As you prepare to pray, look over the various materials and try to "feel" which one contains a "heavenly" inspiration that would be right for you at this time. Usually one of my assorted materials just seems to be more spiritually attractive when I ask for guidance.

Some things that I suggest are The Bible, inspiring quotes and sayings you've collected, poems or letters from loved ones, etc. But don't be limited by written materials.

#### PREPARE YOUR SURROUNDINGS WITH PICTURES, MUSIC, FLOWERS, CANDLES, ETC.

Some people are very emotionally moved by pictures of loved ones, photos or paintings of nature. Maybe you like having some fresh flowers. Many people find that a lighted candle really helps create a mood. Throughout history most religions the world over have used candles. For other people, music moves their hearts. Some people pray over the articles in the daily newspaper, especially if there has been a tragedy. Experiment for yourself. Just the act of preparing the environment will help stimulate and cultivate your environment for better prayers.

Just remember that your environment should ASSIST you to pray. It should not be a distraction from your real purpose - connecting to God.

## 10. Build your foundation step by step.

**Have patience.**

**Prayers that God cannot answer.**

**Take irreversible steps.**

**It's all worth it. Never give up.**

Life is full of ups and downs. Everyone without exception has times of struggles. Expect them. And when they come, learn to be consistent through them for as long as they last.

#### HAVE PATIENCE

If you pray for something once or twice and it doesn't come true, what should you think? Should you conclude that God doesn't exist? Should you decide that prayer doesn't work?

Maybe the answer seems obvious, that you didn't pray long enough or give it enough time. But I have met people that came to those conclusions after trying prayer for a few times. These type of people are really looking for miracles. Prayer should not be like buying a lottery ticket and leaving it all up to God to make you the winner.

Prayer is something that functions very much in the real world and God is very much a God of natural laws. If you are going to build a house or a business, or if you are going to raise your children to maturity, then you have to put hours and hours of thought and meditation into it.

Believe it or not, God created these natural laws so that we could have more joy and more love. It wasn't to inhibit us. Joy and love are attributes of the PROCESS and the relationship. They are experienced through the give and take in the relationship and the growing and developing of some new creation. As you grow your business or build your house, there is joy and happiness at each step along the way in the process as you see your creation taking shape. As your children grow through your nurturing, there is joy and happiness in the process and the relationship. Joy and happiness are not some trophy that comes on some specific day when the job is completed.

If you focus only on some certain end result, you will be disappointed. Even if you obtain it, you won't experience long lasting joy, but only a momentary feeling. Prayer should be thought of more like breathing or eating. You have to do it every day for good health. It's not like dialing 911 when you are in trouble and expecting God to send an ambulance instantaneously.

One time I was asked to give a talk on the subject of growing up. I was frustrated myself at the time with the slowness of my own spiritual growth and I had to pray strongly to understand the subject. The result was a great (and practical) answer from God. I believed that God created all things to grow over time and that this was GOOD. But I couldn't understand why things couldn't go faster.

Here's a paraphrase of the thoughts that answered my prayers. "Suppose when I created everything, I made it so that a result would instantaneously follow the cause without any time in between for growing. Then what would the world be like? That would mean that if a husband and wife made love at night and conceived a child, then poof, the very next day the child would be born. How would that be? Would that be the best for creating love? I don't think you'd like it. Love is actually created only by effort through a give and take relationship over time. All the parts are necessary. Parents who had a child instantly would not be prepared to love that child. In fact, the whole world would be chaos and confusion because everything in your environment would be totally changed every new day."

I was satisfied. If you think about it this way, then time is actually an expression of love also. As you grow in love and wisdom, you also learn patience.

## PRAYERS THAT GOD CANNOT ANSWER

Another reason that prayers may not be answered is that God may not, in fact, be able to answer your prayer. Why is that? We often say God is all powerful, but we forget that He has imposed limitations on Himself in the interests of the greater good. The greatest good of all is true love. For love to be true, both people

must freely choose that love. Therefore, God will not interfere with force over anyone's heart. By God's design, He will not force us to love Him. By His design I cannot force my children to love me. All I can do is try to create a positive energy that can greatly support the development of a love relationship, but nobody, not even God, can guarantee specific results.

If God created us in such a way that some outside force, like Himself, could make us change our love, then other outside forces besides God could also make us change. Our hearts would be totally vulnerable to outside forces that could change them. Then you'd have the case where love would not be eternal. Then true love could not exist. We'd be more like robots. Obviously, this is not what God wanted, nor what we'd want.

Therefore, in affairs of the heart, you may have to pray for a long, long time for some particular result to happen if many people and events are involved. It takes time for circumstances to be moved into the right sequences for any outcomes to take place.

Think about how hard it is to change yourself. You know it's even harder than that to change another person. It's harder still to change someone else when you are limited to thoughts and prayers and can't use your physical voice or body. People have to change themselves and most of us are only occasionally open to change on any given day at any given moment.

## TAKE IRREVERSIBLE STEPS

As you have probably experienced during times of struggle, it's easy to doubt everything - all the way back to whether God exists or not. All the things that you learned and believed when times were better are now open to doubt. Some people, in these moments, take their feelings as "reality" and they are no longer sure that God exists. Consequently, they fall totally out of any level of faith at all. Now they'll have to start all over again at the bottom of the ladder of faith. They end up losing all the progress they had made in the better times. The struggles eventually pass, but they are left without faith.

As you make progress in your life of prayer, mark definite and irreversible steps for yourself so you don't have to start over when you have a period of struggle and doubts.

For example, "God exists" is a basic step. When you have truly experienced through your heart and your mind that God exists, then you should mark off this step. You can say to yourself, "I have now absolutely concluded that God exists. No matter what may happen in the future or how much I struggle and doubt and no matter who-so-ever

might oppose me, I will never again doubt or question that God exists." Make an affirmation that "Even if unbelievable tragedies occur in my life so it seems impossible that a good God exists, still I know He is real." "Even if a majority of the smartest people on earth who ever lived claim there is no God, then they are all wrong." "Even if my parents and brothers and sisters and all my friends ridicule me and laugh at me, still I know there is God."

Once you come to this conclusion then you have taken a rock solid step and don't need to waste time questioning this again. If you don't take decisive steps like this in your life of faith, then during times of struggle and doubt you may slip all the way down to zero faith. Growing your faith is somewhat like going to school. Each grade level builds on past levels and doesn't go back and question them. That would be like "flunking" and having to repeat a grade again and again. Spiritual truths also build on each other.

Here are some other suggestions for "steps" or conclusions that you might want to make in your life of faith. The main point is that when you are feeling spiritually high and connected to God and your whole intellect and heart believe this statement is certain, then in that moment you decide that you will never question this statement again. No matter how low you feel or confused or how much others may challenge you or how much circumstances seem to contradict that statement, when you bump up against it, you say to yourself, "I'm not going there, I've already decided that issue for good and I don't need to waste time questioning it again."

- \* God knows me and loves me. God knows who I am. He knows me very well. He sees everything I do. AND He loves the real me despite any shortcomings I have.
- \* God wants the best and only the best for me at all times. God wants to be actively involved in my life if I allow it.
- \* Jesus is my personal Messiah. Jesus' death was for me personally.
- \* Jesus loves me personally AND I can experience it.
- \* I can become like Jesus.
- \* My life has purpose, meaning and value which is given by God. AND I can realize that to its fullest potential.
- \* I will live forever.
- \* God's purpose was to build His Kingdom on earth and He will accomplish it.

IT'S ALL WORTH IT. NEVER GIVE UP.

Imagine you are at the end of your life reflecting back over all the goals you ever had, all the things you did, all of your accomplishments. Now rank those things with the following accomplishment: "I developed a wonderful relationship with God."

It seems to me that a wonderful relationship with God would rank #1 above all the others. Suppose you climbed Mt. Everest or were an Olympic Gold Medalist or you made more money than Bill Gates. Suppose you developed a cure for cancer or found a way to feed all the starving people of the world or you brought an end to war forever. Still inside you there would be an unfilled emptiness. Each of us has a deep shaft within us that goes to the bottom of our hearts. That shaft was meant to be filled by God. If He's not there, we're an empty shell.

Stick to it. Don't expect instant gratification. This is a lifelong effort. It's meant to be because you will be alive for eternity. Develop a prayer habit that will last forever. Plan out how much time a day or a week you want to use to develop your prayer life. The experts on physical exercise are now recommending 30 minutes a day or at least an hour three times a week. A healthy spiritual life needs that much time and effort - maybe more.

Don't give up. You can rest at times, but don't give up.

## **CONCLUSION**

### **Take action right now!**

You are now finished with this booklet and I hope it has been helpful and inspirational. But now is the time to start the hard part - putting it into practice.

The best way to benefit fully from new ideas is to put them into action immediately. Do something right this minute. Make a decision right now what your next step will be. Do it right now. Then follow up more today. Before you set this booklet down, decide what you are going to do next. What one thing are you going to do differently today? It can be a small change, but definitely it should be done TODAY and preferably right now.

For example, you could decide your "prayer place" at home and that you are going to sit there tonight for at least 10 minutes and think about prayer.

I wish you fantastic success. Getting closer to God, our Heavenly Father, is a lifelong process, in fact, it's an eternal process. Therefore this is not a sprint, it's a marathon. The rewards, like in any worthwhile endeavor, far, far outweigh any effort that is required.

Please write me if you have any comments or suggestions. Share this booklet with others. God is like the loving parent that has called us on the phone, but we have put Him on "hold". He is there waiting eternally for us to just pick up the receiver.

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