

## Why Is Prayer So Tough?

Preached by Phil Kayser at DCC on 4-22-2007

### I. You are not alone

Last week I quoted Lloyd Jones as saying, "Everything we do in the Christian life is easier than prayer." Is there anyone here that can relate to that statement? I certainly can. Prayer is sometimes a chore. One author said that prayer is like breathing – it must be done even if we can't do it very well." But there is a certain mystery to this difficulty in the Christian life, because if it was like breathing, you would think that it would be easier. Even though there are times when the Spirit draws our hearts out into a sweetness of fellowship, and there are other times of real power, there are many times when we find ourselves utterly unmotivated to pray. For years I got discouraged over this fact and thought that I was alone. I thought, "Man, there is something strange about me. Maybe I'm not regenerate." (Which actually, is not a bad question to ask. We'll get to that in a moment.) But I had an idealized view of prayer. All I had read was the good times of prayer that prayer warriors had written about. They rarely wrote about their failures. But when I found out that almost every saint of old has had the same difficulty (at least at first), and when I found out *why* we have the same difficulty, and how they got over that difficulty, I found it so encouraging. So let me share first of all that it isn't just Phil Kayser and Martyn Lloyd Jones who find prayer tough.

The great theologian, Alexander Whyte, said, "There is nothing that we are so bad at all our days as prayer." That may be an exaggeration (and I think it is), but some of us certainly feel like that at times. And yet, Alexander Whyte realized the absolute indispensability of prayer. And he experienced many seasons of sweetness, power and joy in his prayer life. John Newton, the guy who wrote the hymn "Amazing Grace," said this: "I find in my own case an unaccountable backwardness to pray. I can read, I can write, I can converse with a ready will, but secret prayer is far more spiritual than any of these. And the more spiritual a duty is the more my carnal heart is apt to start away from it." Man! I can identify with Newton. My restless spirit wants to get to the work, and to forget that the real work is on our knees. If you thought that you were the worst of sinners in your prayer life – well, that's John Newton's testimony.

The Puritan writer, Thomas Shepard, said, "There are times in my life when I would rather die than pray." In an earlier century, Richard Hooker said, "...when we pray, how are our affections many times distracted! How

little reverence do we shew to the grand majesty of that God, unto whom we speak! How little remorse of our own miseries! How little taste of that sweet influence of his tender mercy do we feel! Are we not as unwilling many times to begin, and as glad to make an end, as if God in saying 'Call upon me,' had set us a very burdensome task?" [Works, vol. 2, 302 col. 1] In modern English he is saying, "Hey, what should be the most pleasant task in the world, I often find burdensome. And I don't understand why I find it burdensome. I know prayer is a privilege and an important aspect of success in ministry. And yet I find my heart many times strangely pulled away." I tell you what: I appreciate the honesty of these saints.

In fact, many of these writers have given the same testimony that I give, that when we actually get into prayer, we find our hearts caught up to God, we find freshness and power poured into our lives. We find our times with God to be sweet. But then next time we need to go to prayer, our hearts many times still resist. It is sometimes hard to explain this tug of war. We tend to have this tension between knowing the greatness and the sweetness of prayer and our flesh's resistance to it.

And there are good reasons why it is tough. If you can understand those reasons, it will help you to lay hold of prayer with more fervency, and to lay hold of prayer when you don't feel like it. And that is where the bulk of this sermon is going to be.

## **II. Self-Examination**

. But before I give you some of the reasons for why true believers can find prayer difficult, I should point out that prayerlessness can be a sign of unregeneracy. In fact, it is one of the biggest evidences that we are not regenerate – that we have fooled ourselves. And I would be faithless in my duty as a pastor if I did not point this out. I said earlier that prayer is like breathing – even when it is difficult, it must be done, or there won't be life, right? I came to realize that there was a difference between the difficulty I had with prayer after I was saved and the difficulty with prayer before I was saved. After I was saved I wanted to pray, even though I had difficulty with it. It grieved me that I did not pray as I ought. And I also found more and more times of sweetness, refreshment and empowering from His throne. So there was quite a different characteristic of my prayer life before and after regeneration. And the Puritans found the same.

And it is worthwhile for covenant members to examine themselves on this question. Just as a newborn baby breathes if it is living at all, a newborn Christian prays. Certainly there may be difficulty with breathing, but total lack of prayer is a sign of total lack of life.

In fact, the Bible says that lack of seeking God is one of the distinguishing marks of an unbeliever. Romans 3:11 says, **there is none who seeks after God.** Now they do pray in a sense, but it is not true seeking after God. It is not praying in the Spirit. This is an absolute statement – there is none who seeks after God. Isaiah 31:1 says they **go down to Egypt for help... But do not look to the Holy One of Israel nor seek the Lord!** 2 Timothy 3:2 describes them as unthankful. Hypocrites are characterized by hearts that are far from God.

Of course, my mind is quick, and I would respond to myself, “But I do pray sometimes. Is that not a sign of life?” But we saw last week that the prayers of the righteous have a quite different character from the prayers of an unbeliever. And as I look at my prayers before regeneration, I can see a man-centeredness in those prayers. Sure there was weeping. I didn’t want to go to hell. But there was no evidence of the sovereignty of God drawing me to His lordship. Oh, I prayed. But it was a different kind of prayer.

Christ said that *pagans* pray. But their prayers are not evidence of sonship according to Christ. So when I say that prayerlessness is an evidence of an unborn heart, I am not talking about any kind of prayer, but I am talking about what Ephesians and Jude call praying in the Spirit.

For example, some pagans view prayer as magic. They love it. If they pray a certain way, or a certain number of times, the prayer itself gives them power. It is a ritual. A pastor friend of mine in Kansas City knows a monk from an Eastern religion who prays 18 hours a day. That is remarkable. That’s all he does. He prays. So we are not saying that pagans can’t utter words that they consider to be prayers. Some say a lot of prayers. There are some Easterners who have helped themselves out in the past with prayer wheels. These are wheels that have prayers written on them, and for each time the wheel spins around you have another prayer offered up. And that has saved these monks so much time and energy. They just sit there spinning the wheel for hours a day and can think about other things. Then came electric wheels that made it automatic. Then came the photocopy machine where you could print up tons of prayers and float them down the river. Then came the computer. I think you get the point. But are Romanists any different when they feel that they have to say a certain number of Hail Mary’s and a certain number of Our Father’s that God will answer them because they have gone through the ritual? It is a magical view of prayer. And Christ says that it is actually a sign of unregeneracy. It is not spiritual breathing. It is a counterfeit.

Of course, like a Pharisee I comforted myself that I was not like those guys. I didn’t have a magical view of prayer. But that still didn’t help me

completely. I still doubted whether I showed evidences of God's life within me. If prayer is a sign of life, surely I ought to be more given to it. I reminded myself that I prayed more than most Christians did, because I beat the average. But that's not saying much. The average amount of time spent by pastors has recently gone up from 18 minutes a day to 39 minutes (Christianity Today, May 24, 2005). But the average for other Christians remains at five minutes a day as of 2002 (Barna, 2002). But it did trouble me that most of my praying was done where others could see me pray. It was either at a prayer meeting, in the family or some other place where people would notice. And Christ said that this was no indication of life. In the Sermon on the Mount Christ gives as indications that we are truly Sons of God that we do charitable deeds, fastings and prayers where no one else will notice. He was excluding public charity, fastings or prayers. But He was saying that if the public times are the only times, then we have no evidence of being a living, breathing, spiritual son of God. Prayer can be counterfeited like everything else.

Now by this time you might be questioning whether this line of reasoning is even healthy. Surely this is morbid introspection. I wasn't even going to talk on this point, but as I was driving home from Kansas City yesterday afternoon I was convicted that we really don't examine ourselves often enough. Paul said, **Examine yourselves as to whether you are in the faith.** (2 Cor. 13:5). That commandment presumes that you can be fooled into thinking you are a believer when you really are not. Those are stakes you can't just ignore or fool around with. Paul said, **Test yourselves. Do you not know yourselves, that Jesus Christ is in you?—unless indeed you fail the test** (2 Cor. 13:5).

All we are doing is this: We have already admitted that most of us find prayer difficult. Maybe you are wishing that you hadn't admitted that. Some of you may have been lying when you failed to raise your hands, or you might be much more mature. Only God knows. But most of us have difficulty with prayer. And so the question is, "How do we tell the difference between our difficulty and the difficulty of the counterfeit Christian? Both can give the appearance of seeking God, but only the elect wishes he had more. Both have times when they feel distant from God, but only the elect cries out during those times like David cried out – "My soul thirsts for you." "Lord, I don't like this dryness. I need you. I want you. I hunger for you. I am not satisfied with my dry state of spiritual existence." That's a sign that we are breathing. We may have spiritual emphysema, but praise God, we are breathing.

I'm always encouraged by Piper's line of thinking. He says that we ought to delight in God. That is a sign of God's life more abundant. But he points out that if we don't delight in God, there is still evidence of grace if we long to delight in God. That's recognizing our need. That's one evidence of our being indwelt by God's Spirit. And if we don't even have that longing to delight in God, He points out there is still evidence of grace when we at least repent of our lack of such longing. Such repentance, such grieving shows recognition of our need. It is like the baby who hasn't been breathing, and suddenly recognizes it by gasping for breath. So even though the main portion of this sermon is designed to be an encouragement to believers who struggle with prayers, I wanted to at least alert you to the fact that if there is no sign of a desire for prayer, it may be an indication that you are not yet regenerate; that you are tares among the wheat. And if that is the case, you need to call out to God to convert you. And perhaps His Spirit hovering over this congregation will use the Scripture to call you to new life and give you spiritual breath.

### III. Why Prayer is so difficult

#### *A. Satan's opposition*

But let's spend the rest of the sermon dealing with the difficulty that saints have. The first reason prayer is so difficult is that Satan and his demons are trying to do everything they can to hinder prayer. Zechariah 3 shows Joshua the high priest standing to minister, but it pictures, **Satan standing at his right hand to oppose him**. Here is the high priest of Israel – someone whom Zechariah portrays as a true servant of God. And Satan is right there opposing everything that he is doing. And since prayer was one of the main functions of a priest, Satan was opposing Joshua's prayer life.

Paul talks a great deal about this Satanic resistance, and we need to be aware of it. The Puritans were much more aware of this obstacle than we tend to be. The Puritan, Richard Sibbes, wrote long ago: "When we go to God by prayer, the devil knows we go to fetch strength against him, and therefore he opposes us all he can."

When I first came to Omaha as a pastor, I came under incredible demonic attack. But I didn't at first recognize it as demonic. I'll just mention demonic resistance to prayer. The first year I really struggled to pray. My mind was foggy, it would wander, I would struggle to pray, and I had no idea why. Prayer had been much easier for me earlier. I stumbled on Mark Bubek's writings and began reading his warfare prayers out loud. I immediately felt the fog lifting and for the first time in over a year I was able

to pray freely and spontaneously. I didn't put two and two together until this happened two or three times after reading the warfare prayers. And it dawned on me that I was having difficulty praying because of Satanic oppression. Since that time I learned how to recognize his hand and how to resist him. In fact, I have included some of his prayers in the Spiritual Warfare booklet.

## ***B. Our human flesh is opposed to prayer***

### **1. Broken relations (1 Peter 3:7)**

But don't think that our flesh is not just as capable of hindering our prayer life. Remember that we said that this is one of the characteristics of unbelievers? When God converts us, we do not instantly become sanctified. God infuses into us life and a new ability to breath this spiritual breath. But the flesh still tends to drag us down. And if we are not crucifying the flesh, there will be less and less prayer. The flesh does not stay neutral. You are either putting it to death or it is growing.

1 Peter 3:7 speaks of sinful relations between husband and wife as hindering our prayers. The more we embrace sin, the less we desire prayer. And of course, God doesn't answer our prayers. David said, **If I regard iniquity in my heart, the Lord will not hear** (Psalm 66:18).

### **2. Pride (James 4:6)**

And probably the chief sin that hinders prayer is pride. James 4:6 says that God resists the proud but gives grace to the humble. Now if God Himself resists us when we are proud, you know that our prayers will bounce off the ceiling and have no more impact than a spit wad against a brick wall. So we have 1) Satan resisting us, 2) our flesh resisting us and 3) God Himself resisting us. No wonder we have a hard time in our prayers.

But pride left unchecked removes any motivation to pray. Pride makes us dependent on ourselves, and every prayerless person *is by definition* a proud person. He is proud because he sees no desperate need to depend upon God. So pride is the great enemy of prayer. If you are not abusing your pride, it is abusing your prayer life. The two are opposed to one another.

In other sermons I have given a number of ways for crucifying pride, but spiritual prayer is another way to do so. It's a great tool for crucifying our pride. And any time there is crucifixion going on inside, it is not comfortable. So initially it is harder to pray. But as you persevere in hanging that devil on the cross it grows more and more weak and gives less and less

resistance, which makes prayer more and more easy. The two cannot coexist together.

E. M. Bounds said,

"Praying is humbling work. It abases the intellect and pride, crucifies vain glory, and signs our spiritual bankruptcy, and all of these are hard for flesh and blood to bear."

No wonder Lloyd Jones said that "The ultimate test of the Christian life is the amount of time we give to prayer." Have you tested yourself in the area of prayer? It tests the character of our Christianity. Do we simply depend on flesh and blood, or do we depend upon God to do all things?

Do you know why we must pray in Christ's name? It's not because it is a little magic formula that changes things. And it's not simply a code that clues us in that we can now open our eyes. Our whole life must be characterized by living through His name. In Acts 3:16 Peter says, **And His name, through faith in His name, has made this man strong.** Christ's name brought healing. The phrase "through faith in his name" is an explanatory phrase, and if you take it out, the sentence would read "And his name... has made this man strong." What was the means of Christ's name bringing healing? It was faith in His name. A brief study of Christ's name shows that everything – absolutely everything flows through Christ's name. In Acts 3:6 Peter says, **In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, rise up and walk.** In the New Testament we are commanded to pray in His name (John 16:26), gather in His name (Matt 18:20), cast out demons in His name (Mark 9:38), work miracles in His name (Mark 9:39), preach remission of sins in His name (Luke 24:47), are justified in His name (1 Cor. 6:11), plead with people in His name (1 Cor. 1:10), give a cup of cold water in His name (Matt 10:42), trust in His name (Matt 12:21), receive a little child in His name (Matt 18:5), and on and on. In fact, Colossians 3:17 says, **"And whatever you do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through Him.** This command to do all in the name of Jesus is repeated so frequently that I think we need to spend a bit of time explaining what is meant. It doesn't simply mean tacking a little phrase at the end of your prayer.

Look at Acts 4:7 for the meaning of the term. The enemies of Christ capture Peter and John and are about to interrogate them, and in Acts 4:7 it says, **And when they had set them in the midst, they asked, "By what power or by what name have you done this?"** To do something in someone's name means by someone's authority or with their authorization. So when police arrest someone in the name of the law, it is with the authorization of the law. Or when someone comes in the name of the king,

he is representing the king and has been authorized by the king to come. The action of that officer was the action of the king. When you sign your name to a credit card, you are authorizing a deduction.

Let me give you a parable to help you to understand this. Let's say that you were a criminal who had daily broken the law for years and years. Sometimes you broke the law deliberately, and sometimes it was unknowingly. But you were a hardened criminal. And I think that is a fair picture because the Bible says that all of us sin daily in this manner. So here you are, a repeat criminal. Finally, you were caught and thrown into jail. And while there you noticed all kinds of people in a similar predicament. *And they are all making excuses.* Some think that the fault is with the law - the laws are too hard to keep, and they yell curses at God. Others blame the system, or blame their parents or rationalize that they aren't so bad. Some even think of themselves as victims. But you sit there with your head in your hands knowing full well that you are deserving of hell.

But to your surprise, Jesus comes into the jail room and calls you by name. And you are surprised that He even knew you. You are even more surprised that He starts telling you about all your sins - even sins you had long forgotten about. HE knows everything about your life. And yet, He tells you that He is willing to be your attorney. And he tells you that every case that He has taken on, he has gotten the person off the hook. Well, for the first time you get your hopes up and say, "Sure, I'd like to be your client, but I can't afford it." And he says, "Don't worry about it, you can charge it all to my account." Well, you are downright thrilled. And you say yes.

But Jesus jolts you into reality when he says, "I insist that you declare yourself guilty before the court of every crime we have talked about." And confused, you begin to protest, saying, "But they will throw the books at me. I can't admit to those sins. What would my neighbor's think of me? What would my mother think of me?" Jesus says, "Well, then. I won't be your attorney. You're going to have to trust me, and the first step of trust is to admit guilt to everything." Your pride hurts; you are nervous; but you finally say, OK."

Jesus says, "Here's what I plan to do. I plan to go into the courtroom myself wearing your name. The court will declare you guilty. I will then go and be crucified as specified by the law on behalf of you and all the other clients I have taken on." When you get into the courtroom and they accuse you of these crimes, admit to them, but say, "I already died. Just look in the books." And they look in the books, and sure enough. It says, "In 30 AD Phil Kayser died and paid the penalty for every crime that he has

committed." And because there can't be double jeopardy, you will go out a free man. The law will not be able to touch you.

Well, you are thrilled. You are willing for Jesus to be your substitute. But Jesus gives one more shocker. "There's one catch," He says. "From that time on, as far as the law is concerned, *it means that you no longer exist.*" Since you died with me in 30 AD, you no longer have a separate ID apart from me. Dead people can't purchase things. Why? They don't have any legal rights. They don't exist. Dead people have no authority to enter into contracts, or to marry, to start a business or to do anything else. You'll have to do everything in my name. The moment you try to do things in your own strength and in your own name your spiritual checks will bounce, your spiritual credit card won't process and you will be frustrated. It can't be done. In fact, the spiritual police will come after you, because you are a crook. Your only safety is in your being dead as far as the law is concerned. From here on in, you are both legally and experientially dependent upon Me [Jesus] for money, for love, for strength for everything. If you don't do it My name, you are doing it in your own name and strength, and the law will come after you and render you powerless. You now have a bank account in heaven, and I have already blessed you with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus. When you pray for something at that bank, sign it in My name, or you won't get a dime.

Are you beginning to catch the significance of why Christ's name is repeated so frequently? Without it we can do nothing. To come in His name is to come in His power, His authorization, His authority. And it takes faith to do that. But what is encouraging about that passage I read from in Acts 3 is that Jesus not only provides the healing, the forgiveness but (amazingly) He provides even the faith and repentance. Acts 3:16 says, **And His name, through faith in His name, has made this man strong, whom you see and know. Yes, the faith which comes through Him has given him this perfect soundness in the presence of you all.** He speaks of the "faith which comes through Him [through Jesus]." Faith is not something that we can provide. Paul said, **I know that in me, that is, in my flesh, dwells no good thing.** That's why we come in His name. We can't provide anything. We can't pay the attorney's fees. We can't even make the phone call to ask the attorney to come. He came to us. We love Him because He first loved us. So this verse says that faith is a gift of God. It comes through Jesus. That's why Acts 18:27 speaks of those who **believed through grace.** It takes grace to bring a person to the place of faith.

Well that has profound ramifications for prayer. It gives new meaning to James when it says, **you don't have because you don't ask.** God has

willed for the kingdom to advance through prayer. Of course, we find that we can't even pray as we ought. That's why Romans 8 says that the Spirit has to be given to help us pray right. That is why we are commanded in Ephesians 6:18 to be **praying always with all prayer and supplication in the Spirit**. Christ has to supply even the Spirit to make our prayers acceptable, because the prayers of the flesh will not do. Pride and self-sufficiency must be crucified if we are to receive anything of spiritual power. Prayerlessness is pride because it is a denial that everything must come through Christ's name.

### 3. Impatience. Why does God make us wait? (Gal. 6:9)

Another obstacle to prayer is impatience. Why does God make us wait? And we've got to convince ourselves of the truth of Galatians 6:9 which says, **And let us not grow weary while doing good, for in due season we shall reap if we do not lose heart**. Too many Christians are part of the instant generation and they give up if they don't get an answer right away. But God wants us to be farmers who patiently continue to pray until the harvest comes in. Our prayers are planting seeds.

Not all seeds grow. And in the same way, not all prayers are answered with a yes. God answers our prayers in four words: No, Slow, Grow, Go. His "no" answers may be disappointing at the time, but when we look back, we will always see that it was for our good. Like the little child who is disappointed when the parent won't let her touch the hot stove, we many times are convinced that our spiritual hot stoves would be great to touch, and God says, "No." Lewis Carroll said, "I have had prayers answered--most strangely so sometimes--but I think our heavenly Father's loving-kindness has been even more evident in what He has refused me." Think of the people who dug the well that Joseph was later thrown into. They must have been frustrated that God had answered "No" on getting water. But if God had answered them "Yes," Joseph would have drowned. His answers of "No" are always a blessing.

But God's answer of "Slow" can also sometimes be frustrating. God has His perfect timing for His answers, and we can trust Him.

His answer of grow is similar to slow in that God wants us to grow up before He answers our prayer. He knows we have some maturing to do, and the quicker we mature, the sooner we will enter into the desires of our heart.

The answer of "go," is basically a rebuke. God rebuked Moses for praying in Exodus 14:15 and told him that action was required, not prayer. He told Moses to stop praying and to go forward. If we pray for wisdom on an exam but haven't studied, we are asking God to bless laziness. God says,

“Go. Do your responsibility. Then your prayer for blessing will be taken seriously.” We can’t pray for God to convert our neighbor if we aren’t taking action to talk to the neighbor. So when you are impatient, keep those four words in mind: no, slow, grow and go.

### ***C. Busyness***

Let’s quickly look at five more excuses for prayerlessness. The first excuse is that we are too busy. This is the excuse that my flesh offers up all the time. But it is a lame excuse. People who are too busy for prayer somehow never seem too busy to shower, get dressed, brush their teeth, sleep, eat, drink, or do a host of other things. It’s a matter of priorities. Luther once said something to the effect that "I have so much to do today that I need to spend the first three hours with the Lord." We will look at some antidotes to this excuse in a bit.

### ***D. Trouble Concentrating***

Another excuse is that we have trouble concentrating on our prayers. This is an affliction that makes my mind wander off track. So let me quickly anticipate antidotes by giving you what has worked for me.

First, I find it helpful to pray out loud. This becomes a tool that forces my mind to concentrate on the work at hand.

Second, I will walk back and forth. I find that this pacing keeps my mind alert and it definitely keeps me from falling asleep on my knees.

Third, I try to make my time of intercession to be when my mind is least tired.

Fourth, I keep a pad of paper handy so that I can write down a thought that is intruding and go on with my prayers.

Fifth, I try to remember the greatness of the God I am talking to. I think it was Alexander Whyte who recommended that I think on the vastness of God’s creation to stir up my mind to the greatness of the God I am petitioning. When your mind wanders, just start thinking of Google Earth as it moves out from your address and outside the planet. But let your mind keep traveling past our Galaxy and into other Galaxies and remind yourself all the time, I am praying to the God who created all this. I find that it helps me to be inspired to concentrate.

Sixth, try to keep a prayer list so that you can go down the page when your mind has forgotten what you were praying about. And I’ll say more about this in a minute.

### ***E. Fatigue***

These tips will help with the next three excuses of fatigue, interruptions and boredom as well.

### ***F. Interruptions***

### ***G. Boredom***

## **IV. Antidotes to this struggle to pray**

### ***A. Recognize that God's grace for prayer usually comes as we pray***

But let me end with some general antidotes to our struggles with prayer. The first antidote is to recognize that God's grace for prayer usually comes as we pray. This is God's way. When Jesus commanded the man with the withered hand to stretch forth his hand, the man could have responded: "I can't. That's the problem. You need to heal it first, and then I will stretch it forth." But Christ wanted him to will to do the impossible, and it was in the attempt to do the impossible that God's grace healed the hand. The waters of the Jordan River were not parted until their feet touched the water. And in the same way, we often do not experience the joy and power of prayer until we by faith begin to do what we don't want to do. As W. Graham Scroggie used to say, "Pray when you feel like it, pray when you don't feel like it, pray until you do feel like it." When David cried out to God and said, "My soul thirsts for you," it was an admittance that he was dry. Frequently I go into prayer not feeling like it, and emerge from prayer amazed at God's touch once again.

Spurgeon said, "The more we pray, the more we shall want to pray. The more we pray, the more we can pray. The more we pray, the more we shall pray. He who prays little will pray less; but he who prays much will pray more. And he who prays more, will desire to pray more abundantly." But prayer is far too important of a thing to hang on your feelings. Pray whether you feel like it or not.

### ***B. Remind yourself of the power that flows through prayer.***

Second, remind yourself of the power that flows through prayer. It's not that prayer is powerful, but that God has chosen to exhibit His power in the weakness of prayer.

Andrew Murray, in his book *The Ministry of Intercession*, said,

"Surely, of all the gifts of the early church for which we should long, there is none more needed than the gift of prayer. When Peter was kept in prison, 'prayer was made without ceasing of the church', Peter was delivered. Stone walls and double chains, soldiers and keepers, and the iron gate all gave way before the power of prayer from heaven; that prayer brought down the rescue. The whole power of the Roman Empire as represented by Herod was impotent in the presence and power of the church of the Holy Spirit yielded in prayer." There are many Scriptures that show the connection between prayer and the unleashing of God's flood upon a people.

A.C. Dixon, the pastor of Moody Church, once said,

"When we rely upon organization, we get what organization can do; when we rely upon education, we get what education can do; when we rely upon eloquence, we get what eloquence can do, and so on. Nor am I disposed to undervalue any of these things in their proper place, but when we rely upon prayer, we get what God can do."

I have seen this in my own ministry. When counseling, I am sometimes up against a brick wall, and I offer up a simple prayer: "Lord, please give your wisdom, and I thank you for your promise in James 1 that you will." And I go into the counseling expecting God's answer. And lo and behold, into my head pops the answer that I need. I have seen miracles occur in China through prayer, warnings that helped me avoid the police just in the nick of time, opportunities to talk with top government officials. I am absolutely convinced that there is power that flows through prayer. And I have to remind myself of that when my flesh does not want to pray.

### ***C. Pray out loud***

I've already mentioned praying out loud. Now this may seem weird to you, but this was the way they almost always prayed in the Bible. In fact, for that matter, they always read books out loud. The first record that we have of someone reading silently was Ambrose, in the fourth century. Ambrose totally surprised Augustine by reading silently and very quickly. So even though it may seem a little strange at first to pray out loud, there are many benefits. First, it keeps your mind on track. Second, animated speech can arouse our emotions to aid us in the fight against apathy. There is something about the voice being engaged with vigor that stirs up even more vigor of the heart. Third, if we are resisting Satan in our prayers, he can't read our thoughts. If you want Him to flee, resist him out loud like Jesus did. But I have found the discipline of praying out loud has hugely helped my prayer life. Praying silently can put you to sleep.

***D. Start by praying the Psalms or some other portion of Scripture.***

I have also found it very helpful to read the Psalms, hymns or prayers of others and make them my own prayer. Many times the Psalms especially have given me faith to ask as I ought. There is a power in praying Scripture. And since faith comes by hearing and hearing by the Word of God, our faith is elevated when we pray the Scriptures. Matthew Henry was one of the Greatest to make every phrase in his prayers come from Scripture. I highly recommend his book, *The Method of Prayer*. That is praying according to God's will. And since God always hears prayers that are according to His will, it gives us confidence in praying.

***E. Keep a prayer list.***

Keeping a prayer list can also help a person to keep on track. If you really want to get motivated, write down four columns in your prayer notebook: 1) date of the request, 2) the request itself, 3) the Scriptures you plan to claim and 4) the date and circumstances when answered. One of the things that I have found is that we tend to be forgetful of the many answers God has already given. When Satan tempts us to think that God never answers our prayers, we can open up our prayer book and refer to hundreds or perhaps thousands of answers. Forgetfulness is ingratitude, and recording the answers not only glorifies God, it builds our faith and expresses our gratitude.

***F. Remind yourself of the enormous issues at stake (Eph. 6:10; John 15:5; etc).***

A sixth thing that helps me to get back on track is to remind myself of the incredible issues that are at stake. Ephesians 6:10 warns us that we are in a spiritual battle, and we must be able to stand strong in the strength of the Lord. Prayerlessness will lead to powerlessness. We need to be convinced of that.

Likewise, others in the kingdom are facing battles, and we ought not to forsake them in their hour of need. Alan Affleck said, "Uriah the Hittite was in the hottest part of the battle and his fellow soldiers withdrew from him on the command of King David - We do the same thing to our fellow soldiers when we withdraw our prayers from them." There are consequences to prayerlessness.

But I like to remind myself also that without Christ I can do nothing. Our flesh likes to deny that fact, but the more we are convinced of the truth of John 15:5 – **without Me you can do nothing** – the more we will be stirred up to prayer. Isaac Bashevis Singer once confessed, "I only pray

when I'm in trouble...but I'm in trouble all the time, and so I pray all the time." If you really believed John 15:5, you too would see yourself as being in trouble all the time, and needing prayer all the time. The issues at stake are enormous.

***G. Keep at it even when you find yourself failing***

But the last piece of advice that I would give is to keep at it even when you fail. This has been the advice of hundreds of praying saints from the past. They have admitted that they have failed. But they get up and try again. Proverbs 24:16 says, **for though a righteous man falls seven times, he rises again.** Get up again, despite the difficulty. The more times you get up, the easier it will become.