

**Taking Your Prayer Life
to the Next Level**

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Taking Your Prayer Life to the Next Level

- I. The Challenges With Prayer
- II. Looking At God
- III. Looking At Ourselves
- IV. Looking At Our Communication
- V. Practicing Prayer

How can I improve my prayer life?

What can I do to make communication with God more central and more fulfilling?

Learn to pray with our eyes open; not our physical eyes, but the eyes of our heart.

In prayer, it's not what you know; it's what you *do* that counts.

Resource: *Pray With Your Eyes Open* by Richard L Pratt, Jr.

The Challenges With Prayer

- Guilt
- Time
- Focus
- Frustration
- Lack of Fulfillment
- Finding Appropriate Solutions



• Guilt

• Time

• Focus

• Frustration

• Lack of Fulfillment

• Finding Appropriate Solutions

The Challenges With Prayer

- Where to go for help?
- Definition of Prayer
- Three Main Elements of Prayer
 - God
 - The Believer
 - The Communication

Where to go for help?

Definition of Prayer:

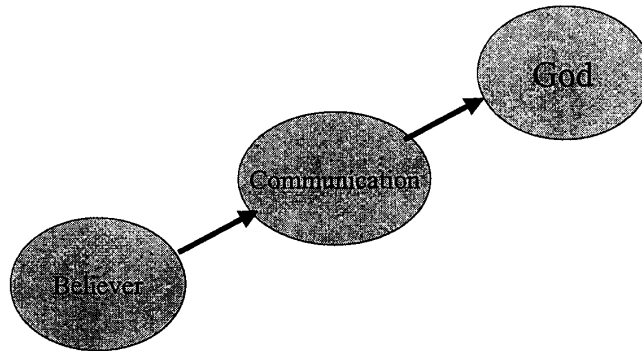
Three Main Elements of Prayer

-God

-The Believer (You)

-The Communication

The Elements of Prayer



What role does God play in prayer?

Psalm 66:18

Psalm 54:2

How do we speak to Him?

-Close Personal Friend:

-Sovereign King of the Universe:

Our perception of God:

-Reliable: Psalm 28:1

-Strength: Psalm 18:1

Pay attention to yourself as you pray.

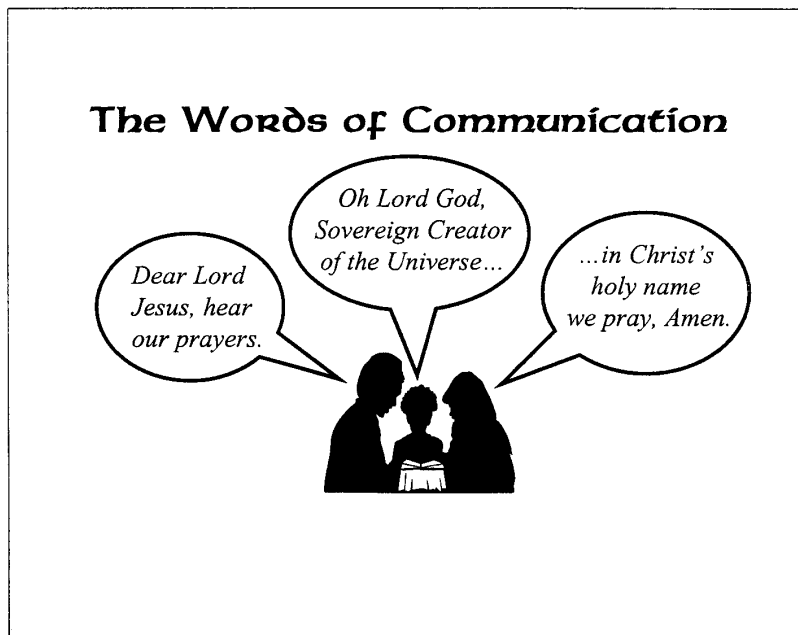
“Speak for yourself” when you pray.

-Jubilant: Psalm 146:1

-Strong Desires: Psalm 38:9-10

-Deep Discouragement: Psalm 22:1-2

Do your prayers arise from your heart?



Does God hear our prayers directly or is there an intercessor?

Hebrews 7:25

John 4:23-24

What does it mean to worship or pray *in spirit and truth*?

- Spirit

1 Cor 3:16

- Truth

John 1:14, 1:17, 8:32, 16:13

God the Father invites you to worship and prayer, God the Son ignites us to worship and prayer, and God the Spirit incites us to worship and prayer.

Be conscious of the words you pray.

Use variety when you talk with God.

Psalms serve well as examples of prayer.

-Praises: Psalm 136:1

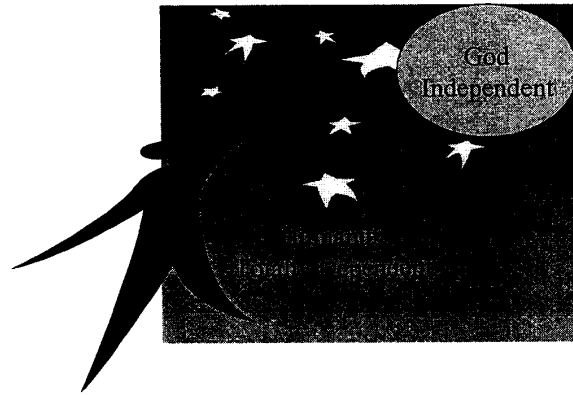
-Laments: Psalm 90:7

-Statements: Psalm 43:4

-Questions: Psalm 77:7

Adapt biblical prayers to how you are feeling at the time of prayer.

Looking At God



Believers look at God in a variety of ways.

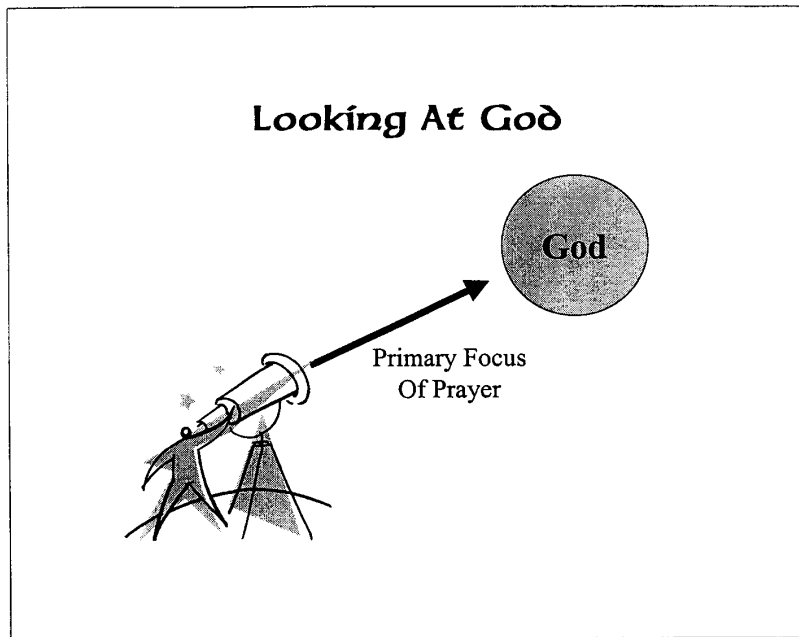
Psalm 123:2

We should look to God with a servant's gaze.

Tendency: Live as if we have no need for God.

We are totally dependent on God.

Psalm 104:27-28



A servant's look is not an occasional glance at God but an intense gaze at Him.
Proverbs 20:12

Sporadic and halfhearted attention to God will never yield life-enriching prayer.

Addressing God

- ❖ Light of the World
 - ❖ Fountain of Wisdom
 - ❖ Lord of Heavenly Armies
 - ❖ Master Potter
 - ❖ Safe Hiding Place
 - ❖ Helper
 - ❖ Rock and Fortress
 - ❖ Bread of Life
 - ❖ Prince of Peace
 - ❖ Giver of Gifts
 - ❖ Almighty Sovereign
- Break forth into our darkness
 - Grant us insight
 - Strike down our enemies
 - Mold us into the image of Christ
 - Keep us hidden from harm
 - Assist us in this task
 - Let us take refuge in You
 - Fill our hungry souls
 - Bring an end to war
 - Give us the powers we need
 - Display Your power

Need to address Him meaningfully.

The Bible provides countless ways of addressing God.

2 Tim 4:8; Eph 1:22; Col 1:15; Rom 8:29; Rev 19:16; Rev 22:16

His character is so rich and multifaceted that He deals with us according to our individual needs.

Forgiveness: Psalm 85:4

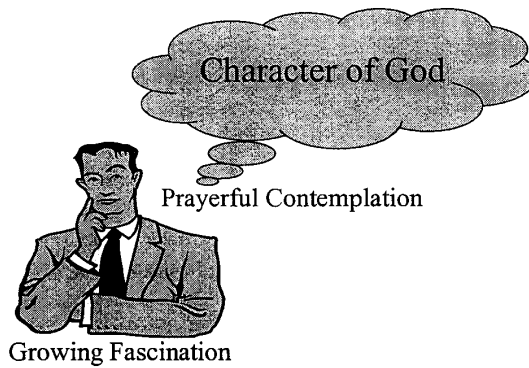
Wickedness: Psalm 94:2

Basic to all prayer is the attitude of a needy servant.

Our hearts must be intensely centered on God as we pray.

This intense gaze may be enhanced by using a variety and selectivity when addressing God.

Fascination With God's Character



When was the last time you were fascinated with God?

Fascination with God results from enthusiastic appreciation for His character.

Psalm 27:4

Psalm 89:14

Psalm 18:1-3 shows clearly how fascination and contemplation are tied together in prayer.

Contemplate God through using descriptions.

Dan 9:4

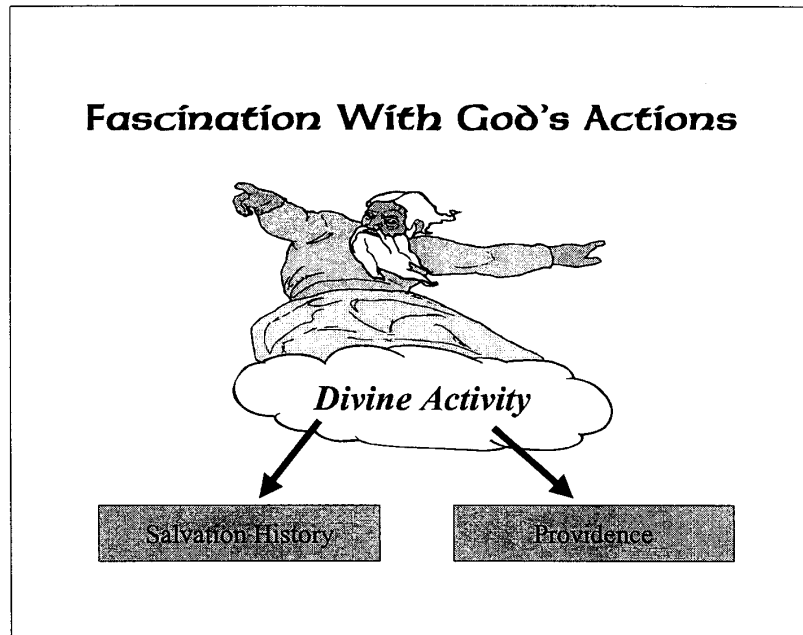
1 Kings 8:23

Contemplate God through metaphors.

Psalm 18

Col 1:18

Fascination With God's Actions



Prayerful reflection on the acts of God leads to fascination with Him.

A keynote of biblical history is that God reveals His character through His deeds.

Psalm 36:5-9

James 1:17

God's action in history:

Psalm 77:11-20

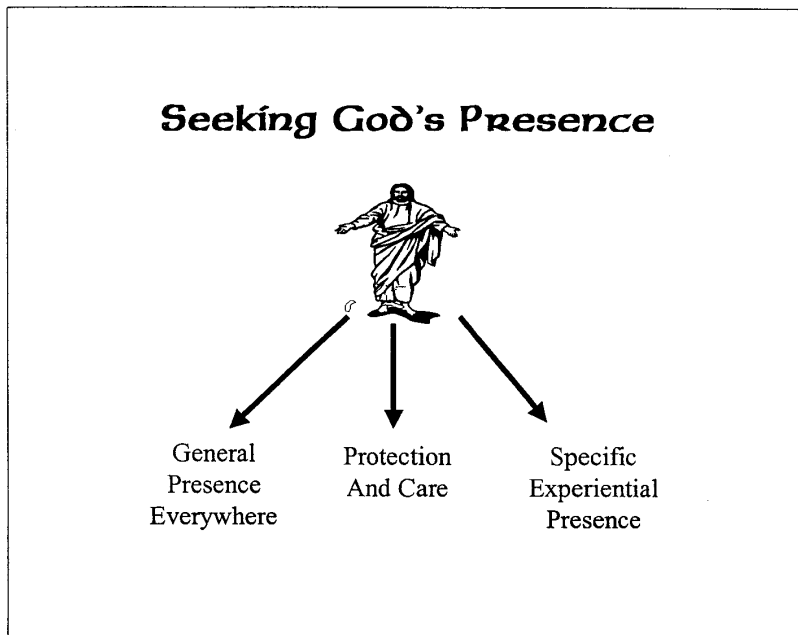
Psalm 46:8-10

God's providence:

Psalm 104:10-18

Each day we see God's providential care all around us.

Reflection on the providence of God in vivid and compelling detail can stir your hearts to an ever-increasing astonishment with Him.



At times does God seem far away?

It is the experience of every Christian to wander through the dry desert of feeling far from God.

God is near.

He is Everywhere: Jer 23:23-24

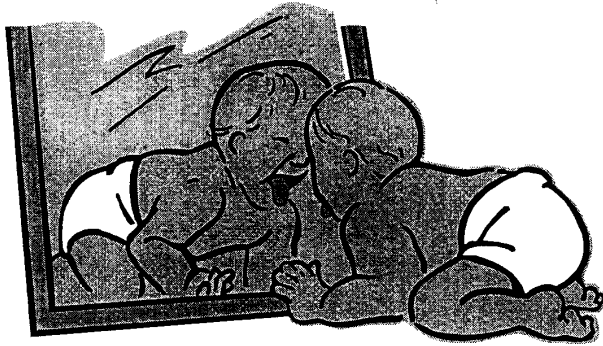
He Protects and Cares for His Believers: Gen 28:20-21; 39:2; Psalm 46:1-2

Experiential Presence: Gen 3:8; Acts 2:1-4; 1 Kings 8:29

If we ignore God in our prayers, we cannot expect Him to bless us with an awareness of His special presence.

James 4:8a *Draw near to God and He will draw near to you.*

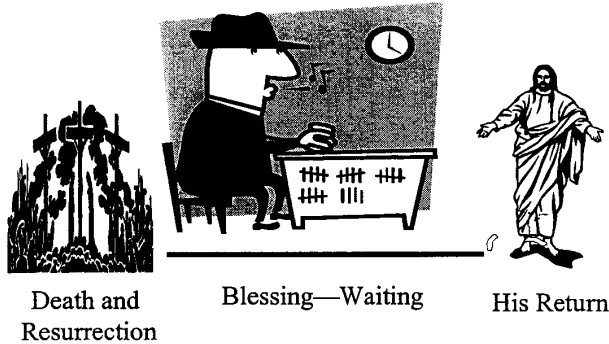
Looking At Ourselves



The second element of prayer is the believer, the human source.

Ps 54:2 *Hear my prayer, O God; Give ear to the words of my mouth.*

Praying Between the Times



Do you sometimes feel that prayer has nothing to do with real life?

So why “waste” time in prayer?

Prayer is a crucial ingredient in our walk with Christ.

Every Christian’s life is both a time of great blessing and a time of much waiting.

Blessed as a result of Christ’s wondrous work. Eph 1:3

Yearn for the return of Christ because sin still troubles us. Gal 5:16-17

How should we respond to the mixed experience of blessing and waiting?

1 Thess 5:18

Rom 12:15

Eccl 3:4

How are we to deal with the positive and negative dimensions of life when we pray? Is it acceptable for us to talk with God about our attitudes?

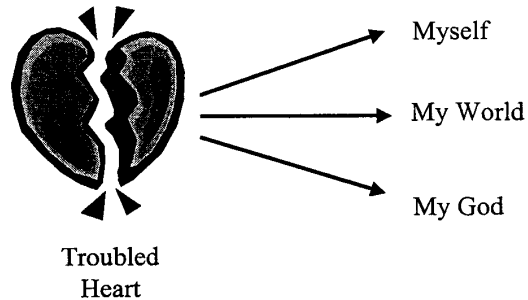
Praise and Joy: Psalm 145:1-7

Pain, Distress, and Agony: Psalm 69:29, 1-2, 19

Before you approach God in prayer, examine your attitudes.

How do you feel about God, the world around you, and yourself?

In Times of Trouble



What is the best way to handle feelings of frustration, guilt, and anger?

Is there any legitimate outlet for the troubles that plague our hearts?

God wants you to come to Him just as you are.

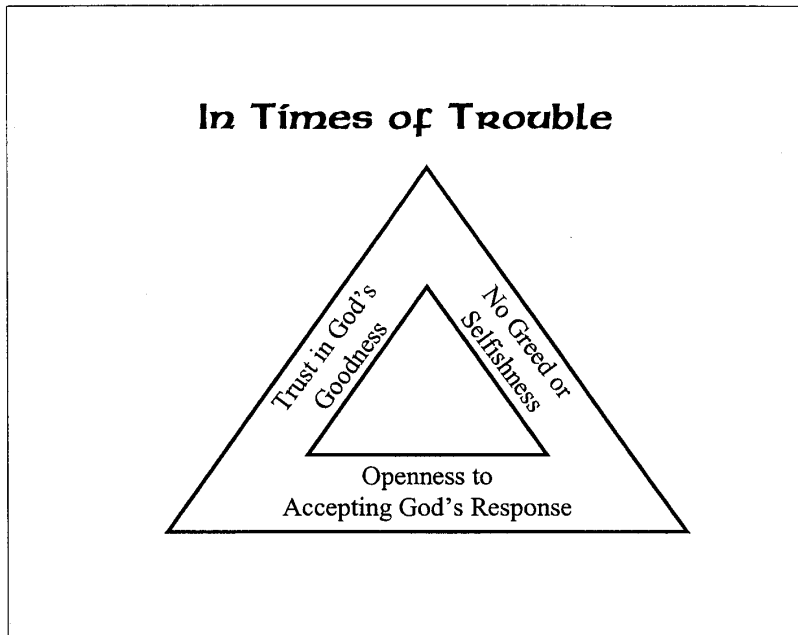
- About Yourself: Psalm 22:1, 6, 14-15; Psalm 55:2; Psalm 69:2; Psalm 90:10
- About Your World: Psalm 22:6b-7, 12, 16
- About God: Psalm 22:1-2

We try to hide our genuine attitudes from God, but God knows our hearts.

How do we put troubles into words when we pray?

- Himself: Psalm 22:6, 14, 17
- His World: Psalm 22:7, 8, 12-13, 18
- His God: Psalm 22:1, 2, 4-5, 9-10

When you pray, give careful attention to your laments about yourself, your circumstances, and your God.

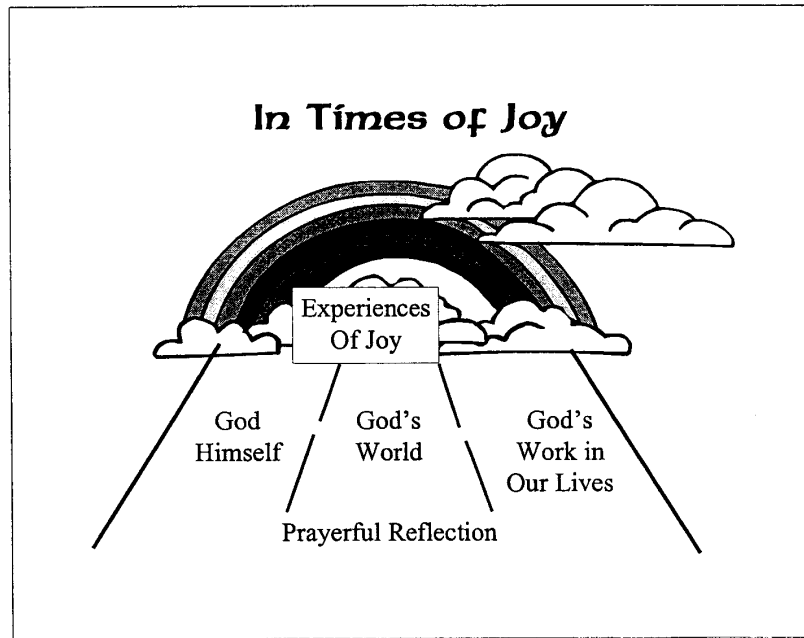


Expressing our troubles to God can easily move into rebellion against Him.
Psalm 95:7b-9; 1 Cor 10:10

Expressions of our troubles in prayer are subject to at least three limitations:

1. Trust in the goodness of God.
2. Not be motivated by greed or selfishness.
3. Openness to receiving God's response with gratitude.

Prayer is a channel through which you may express your deepest troubles to Him in honesty and devotion.



Are there tremendous blessings in your life but often fail to delight fully in them because of problems that remain?

What joys may you expect to have as a believer?

How are you to make these attitudes a part of our prayers?

Christians experience two kinds of joy:

1. Quiet Confidence: Matt 28:20b; Psalm 23:4; Rom 8:35-37

2. Exhilarating Excitement: Psalm 150:1-6

How can we bring joy into our lives? Is there a path to joy?

The Psalms are filled with examples of believers who use prayer as a way to joy. Psalm 59:3-4, 17; 13:2, 5-6

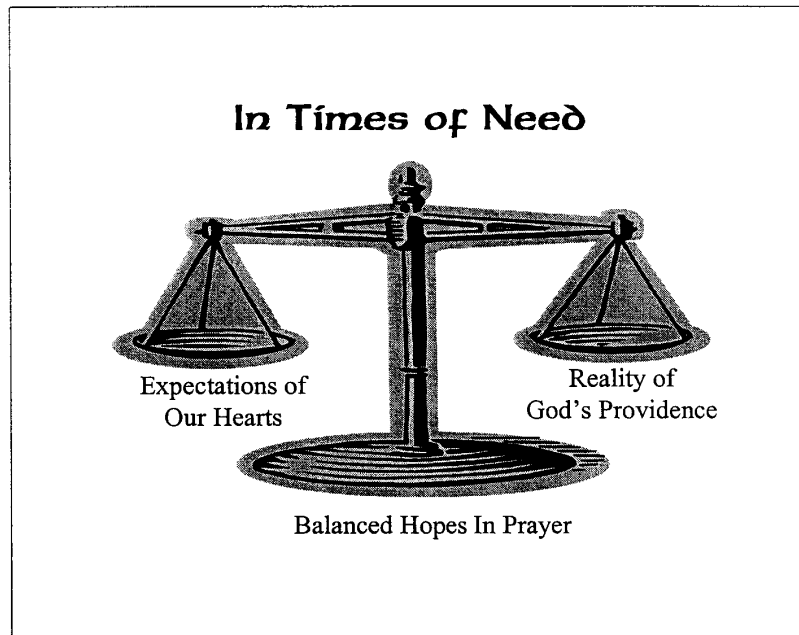
Prayer is not a magical joy pill. Psalm 88:1, 18; 2 Cor 12:7-9

When we are anxious and troubled, seek God and cast your cares at His feet.

Be careful not to allow our needs petitions to crowd out joy in prayer.

What experiences bring us exuberant joy?

- Rises out of reflection on God. Psalm 104:1; 117
- Look at the world around us and see God's blessings there. Psalm 104:24-25
- Enumerating the ways God has blessed our personal lives. Psalm 116:12-14



What motives should lie behind your petitions?

The Bible tells us it is good to request what we need. Matt 6:11

However, we are forbidden to make requests out of greed. James 4:3

To guard against greed in prayer, couch petitions in a deep and abiding sense of contentment with God's provisions. 1 Tim 6:6-10; Phil 4:6

Are you trying to change God through prayer?

God has a comprehensive and unchangeable plan for His creation. Eph 1:11

God is able to take evil in this life and transform it into good. Rom 8:28

Prayer has been ordained as a way by which God may be moved to action.

Why pray when God already knows and controls everything?

God has made prayer a wonderfully powerful means by which we may interact with Him and effectively shape the course of history. Exod 32:9-10, 11-13, 14

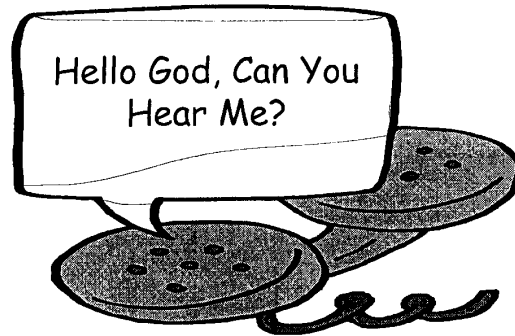
How may you expect God to respond to your requests?

Humble trust in God. Forsake our own plans and accepting His holy plan.

John 14:13-14; John 16:23; John 15:7; Matt 7:7-11

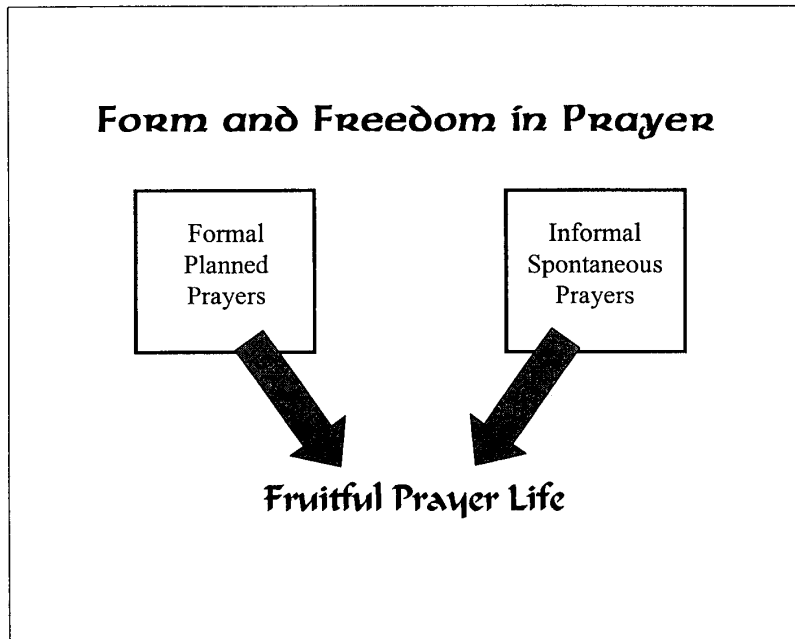
Balance expectations with reality. If the acts of God do not follow what we expect, the difficulty lies not in God's integrity, but in the reliability of our judgments.

Looking at Our Communication



How are we to talk effectively with God?

Are there ways to communicate more fully our thoughts and attitudes to Him?



How much forethought should we give to the content and arrangement of our prayers? Should we simply say what comes to mind, or should we plan what we are going to say?

Form in Prayer: Forethought makes communication with God more fruitful. God is worthy of careful preparation, thus planning our prayers is appropriate.

Benefits:

- Keep the elements of our prayers balanced. Lord's Prayer-Matt 6:9-13
- Provide beauty and depth. Psalm 50:1-2
- Portray careful and creative use of language. Psalm 84:1-3

Can also use prayers from prayer books, hymnals, and devotional books.

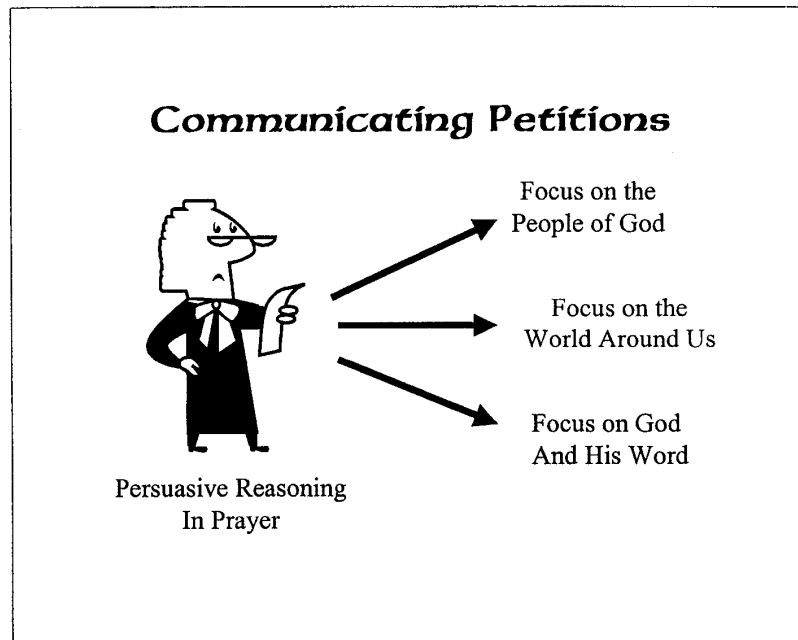
Freedom in Prayer: In Scripture God has revealed Himself to us in ways that invite us to speak with Him informally, just as we do with family and friends.

- God as our Father. Matt 6:9; Gal 4:6
- God as our friend. James 2:23; John 15:15

Pitfalls:

- Tend to become rote and repetitious; fall into fixed patterns.
- Can put us at odds with many biblical models for prayer

Variety keeps our prayers vibrant and meaningful.



Have you noticed how Christians often pray as if they have just dialed God on a radio request line?

Prayer is much more urgent, intense, and persuasive than rapid-fire requests.

Luke 11:5-10; Psalm 69:4b,13,14; Psalm 144:2,7; Luke 22:44

God invites us to build a case before Him in prayer.

Gen 18:24-25; Psalm 69:16-18; Psalm 22:6-8

Be careful not to turn this legitimate dimension of prayer into an occasion for arrogance before God.

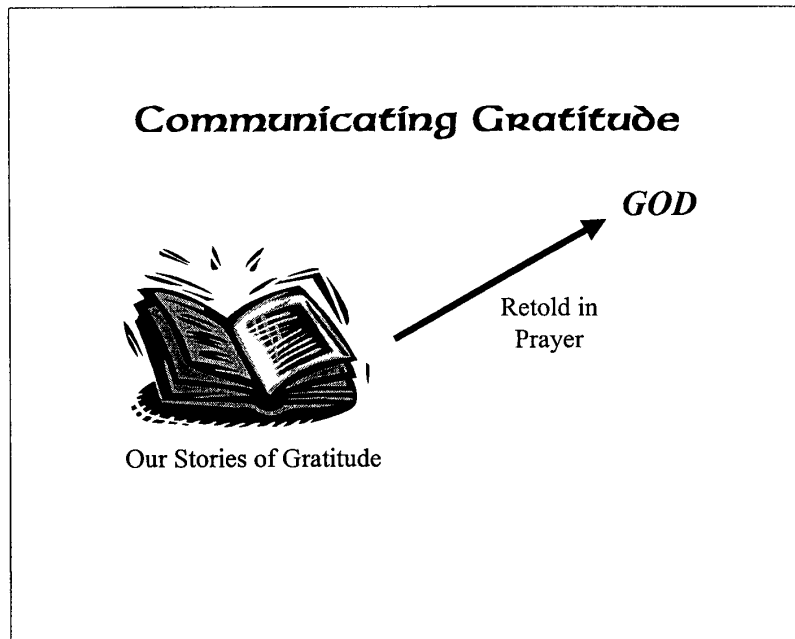
Once God has acted, we must humbly accept His holy and wise decision.

David: 2 Sam 12:22-23; Paul: 2 Cor 12:8-9

What specific kinds of support can we legitimately offer to God?

Three categories:

1. Reflection on *God's people*. Exod 32:11
2. Considerations of the *world around us*. Exod 32:12
3. Appeal to the character of *God and His Word*. Exod 32:13



Are there words to convey effectively our thanksgiving and gratitude?

Thanksgiving in prayer is a deep appreciation for what God had done for us.

1 Thess 5:18; Psalm 30:1; Psalm 34:1-2

One of the challenges: lack of words to express our appreciation for God.

The psalmists primarily showed their appreciation for God by giving detailed accounts of what God had done for them; take the form of *stories*.

Psalm 30:6-10; Psalm 18:6-9

Every believer has a story to tell. God invites you to come to Him and tell Him your story. Though he already knows the blessings He has given you, it gives Him the pleasure of enjoying your gratitude.

Will giving thanks to God have any effect on our lives?

Source of encouragement when the burdens of life weigh heavily on us.

Psalm 30:11-12; Psalm 34:8-10

By telling God our stories of gratitude we can come to know in a deep and personal way that God is good to us here and now.

More Than Words

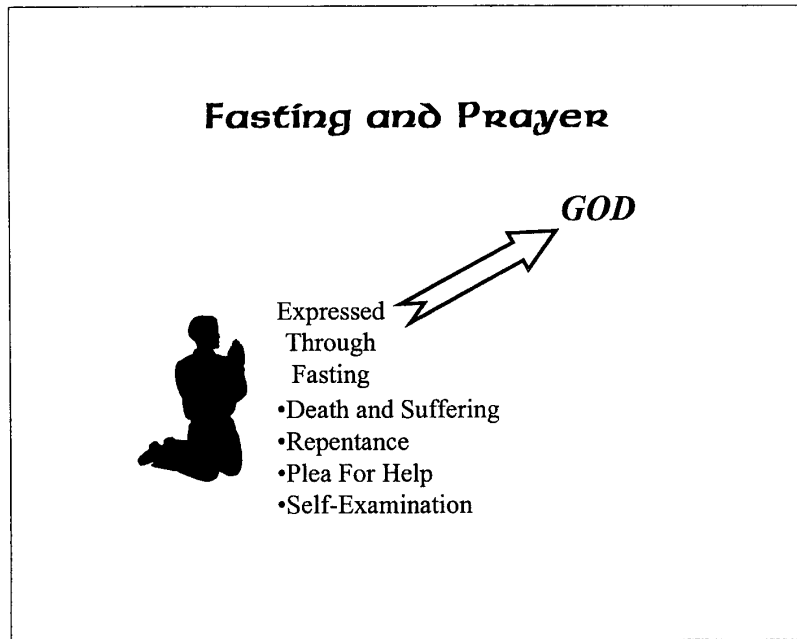


People use more than mere words to communicate.

God pays attention to the inflection of our voices, our expressions, our posture, and other forms of body language.

How does God want us to speak to Him with more than words?

- Weeping. Psalm 39:12; Psalm 6:3,6-7; 2 Kings 20:5b
- Singing. Psalm 9:1-2; James 5:13
- Kneeling. Psalm 95:6-7a; Dan 6:7,10
- Lifting Hands. 2 Chron 6:13; 1 Tim 2:8; Psalm 63:3-4; 28:1-2; 143:6-7



In the Bible, *fasting* is a religious rite.

Expresses to God our intense concern and preoccupation with something.

- Death and Suffering. 2 Sam 1:11-12
- Repentance. Jonah 3:5; Ezra 10:6
- Plea for Help. 2 Chron 20:3; Esther 4:16
- Self-Examination. Num 29:7

If we want to communicate with God in ways that reveal deep need and yearning for Him, we must make fasting a part of our lives.

Fasting provides a wonderful opportunity to communicate our deepest and most intense sense of devotion to God.

Practicing Prayer

In prayer, it's not what you *know*,
it's what you *do* that counts!!!

Prayer is like learning to play
football or the piano. It takes
practice.



Basic Elements:

- A—*Adoration* (His character; His actions)
- C—*Confession* (sin revealed by Holy Spirit)
- T—*Thanksgiving* (blessings and trials)
- S—*Supplication* (our needs; needs of others)

In prayer, it's not what you *know*, it's what you *do* that counts.

Prayer is like learning to play football or the piano. It takes *practice*.

Use A-C-T-S and Bible examples as starting points, then based upon what's going on in your life at the time of prayer, did down deep and talk with God, talk with Jesus.

Practice varying the content and form of your prayers according to your circumstances, your emotions, and your attitudes.

Imitate the freedom and creativity of the psalmists and other other biblical figures.

Practicing Prayer

Private Prayer

- Quiet Time in God's Word
- Daily Devotional
- 7-Minute Devotional
- Personal Retreat



Corporate Prayer

- Church Service
- Sunday School
- Bible Study Group
- Retreat or Conference

How do you ensure your daily *private* prayers do not become monotonous and boring?

- Quiet Time in God's Word
- Daily Devotional
- 7-Minute Devotional: 1 minute opening prayer; 2 minutes studying Bible passage using observation, interpretation, and application; 1 minute meditating; and 3 minutes in concentrated prayer about the passage.
- Personal Retreat (Matt 4:1): 2-hour period divided into 30-minute segments

We are also called to communicate with God *corporately*.

- Church Service
- Sunday School
- Bible Study Group
- Retreat or Conference: 3-hour period divided into 45-minute segments

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