

Praying the Major Types of Prayer

In Ephesians chapter six, Paul challenges the Christian to, “*pray with all prayer.*” There is the prayer of *praise and thanksgiving*; the prayer of *confession*; the prayer of *petition* or *supplication*; the prayer of *intercession* and lastly, there is the prayer of *meditation*.

If we are going to pray powerful prayers and have a *powerful prayer life* we must consistently balance the use of all of the *major types of prayer*.

God gave us different types of prayer. Each prayer type has a very unique role in developing and strengthening your walk with Christ. If you are weak and inconsistent in any one of the basic prayer types you are going to be weak in how you relate to God.

It is kind of like eating. Nutritionists say “If you fail to eat a balanced diet, you will be physically weak.” If you fail to have a balanced prayer life, you will be spiritually weak.

If you eat from only one or two food groups, you become physically sick. This same principle applies for a balanced prayer life.

Last time, we saw in the New Testament letter of James that many do not get their prayers answered because they do not ask. The Bible also says that many do not get their prayers answered because when they ask, they do so with the wrong motives.

When it comes to having a balanced prayer life, many do not have a balanced prayer life because they spend too much time *petitioning* the Lord when they should be *praising* the Lord in prayer.

Then there are Christians who may spend a lot of prayer time thanking the Lord but fail to confess their sins to Him. Because sin has marred their fellowship with the Lord, He does not hear no matter how much they thank and praise Him.

This reminds me of the sneaky, Eddie Haskell character on *Leave it to Beaver*. Eddie was always plotting and scheming and getting into trouble but when he was in the presence of Ward and June Cleaver, he postured himself as an angel with his overdone, good manners and often a compliment such as, “*That's a lovely dress you're wearing, Mrs. Cleaver.*” However, when no parents were around, Eddie was always up to no good — either conniving with his friends, or picking on Wally's younger brother Beaver. Ward Cleaver once remarked that “*[Eddie] is so polite, it's almost un-American.*”¹

Some of us approach God like this in our prayers (and even in our worship). We go to God saying “praise you” and “thank you” while and God is probably saying to Himself, “*Alright, what is it that you really want Chuck? Whatever it is, you're not getting it because you are not right with Me*” “Psalm 66:18 says, “*If I regard iniquity in my heart, The Lord will not hear.*”

So we need to have a balance prayer life. The purpose of this message is to summarize the various kinds of prayers into five basic types.

¹ http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Eddie_Haskell

It is essential to understand each basic type of prayer and to practice each basic prayer type on a regular basis. Each type has a unique and vital role in the believer's relationship with God.

1.) *Praise and Thanksgiving*

Praise and thanksgiving are the primary ways we give daily adoration and worship to God.

Our primary purpose is to praise and worship the Father. What is the supreme commandment in all of Scripture? *"Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind."* (Matthew 22:37)

Praise and thanksgiving flow out from a love relationship. Psalm 50:23 - *"He who offers a sacrifice of thanksgiving honors Me..."*

The Scriptures exhort us to give God the praise and offer thanks to Him.

In the Old Testament we find in Psalm 100:1-5 these words, *"Shout joyfully to the LORD, all the earth. Serve the LORD with gladness; Come before Him with joyful singing. Know that the LORD Himself is God; It is He who has made us, and not we ourselves; We are His people and the sheep of His pasture. Enter His gates with thanksgiving, And His courts with praise. Give thanks to Him; bless His name. For the LORD is good; His lovingkindness is everlasting, And His faithfulness to all generations."*

In the New Testament it is written in Hebrews 13:15, *"Through Him then, let us continually offer up a sacrifice of praise to God, that is, the fruit of lips that give thanks to His name."*

In Psalm 65:1, David writes a song with the words, *"Praise waiteth for thee, O God, in Zion: and unto Thee shall the vow be performed."*

It seems that David wrote these words either as a song of praise for something wonderful that God did in his life or David's anticipation of an answer to a prayer that he, in earnest, had made.

Whatever it was, David obviously attached a vow to God that if He would grant his request, he would render God praise and glory.²

This should be our attitude when it comes to our prayers. Like David we should say, *"Praise waiteth for Thee, O God..."*

I remember early in my Christian walk I used to hear some of the older believers offer up prayers of petitions to God and then end those prayers with something like this, *"....and we're going to be careful to give your Name the praise when you do it..."* Psalm 65:1 is probably the Scripture on which this saying is based.

By the way, how many of us do take the time to thank God for answered prayer? Not just a blanket statement saying, "Thank you Lord" but a regular time of *deep* praise and thanksgiving to God.

One way to help you to remember to praise and thank God for answered prayer is to keep a record of your prayers in the form of a diary or a prayer journal.

² <http://www.biblebb.com/files/edwards/prayer.htm>

A balanced biblical prayer life absolutely *requires consistent* time in deep praise and thanksgiving to God.

2.) *Confession*

Prussian king Frederick the Great was once on a tour of a Berlin prison. As he walked by their cells the prisoners would fall on their knees before him proclaiming their innocence making pleas like, *"I'm innocent of what I'm accused of O great king; please grant your servant a pardon!"*

But there was one man who remained silent. King Frederick called to him, "Why are you here?" *"Armed robbery, Your Majesty,"* was the reply. "And are you guilty?" *"Yes indeed, Your Majesty, I deserve my punishment."*

Frederick then summoned the jailer and ordered him, *"Release this guilty wretch at once. I will not have him kept in this prison where he will corrupt all the fine innocent people who occupy it."*

The Bible teaches that it is through *confession* that we receive God's forgiveness and maintain a Spirit-filled and empowered life.

A balanced, biblical prayer life not only requires a significant time of praise and thanksgiving to God, it requires significant time in regular confession to Him. Only then can we stay truly filled and empowered by the Holy Spirit.

In Ephesians 4:30 the Apostle Paul writes, *"And do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, by whom you were sealed for the day of redemption."* The Paul goes on to list some of the things that grieves the Holy Spirit: *"Let all bitterness, wrath, anger, clamor, and evil speaking be put away from you, with all malice. And be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, just as God in Christ forgave you."*

Consistent confession and cleansing represent the primary ways we grow and become conformed to the image of Christ and there are multitudes of Christians who are stunted in their spiritual growth because of unconfessed sin. Again, we are reminded of the words in Psalm 66:18, *"If I regard iniquity in my heart, the Lord will not hear me."*

Confession must be thorough. The psalmist said in Psalm 139:23-24, *"Search me O God and see if there be any wicked way in me"* When we do not practice regular confession, sin begins to back up—let's call it "spiritual constipation."

Even the world recognizes the emotional and physical suffering that is connected to the guilt and shame that has piles up over time. But their solution for this suffering is not to confess but to mask and to anesthetize or numb the guilt and shame with drugs or psychobabble to justify the sin that led to the guilt and shame.

In Psalm 32:3 David said, *"When I kept silence, my bones waxed old through my roaring all the day long."* In verse five he writes, *"I acknowledged my sin to You, And my iniquity I have not hidden. I said, "I will confess my transgressions to the LORD," And You forgave the iniquity of my sin."*

In verses 10 and 11 he declares, *"Many sorrows shall be to the wicked; But he who trusts in the LORD, mercy shall surround him. Be glad in the LORD and rejoice, you righteous; And shout for joy, all you upright in heart!"*

There is nothing like getting up off your knees after having confessed your sins before God and experiencing that feeling of joy and freedom that comes when that the load of guilt and shame you've been carrying around has been lifted!

The first type of prayer is *praise and thanksgiving*. The second type of prayer is *confession*.

3.) *Petition*

There was a pastor who had a kitten that climbed up a tree in his backyard and then was afraid to come down. The pastor coaxed, offered warm milk, etc.

The kitty would not come down. The tree was not sturdy enough to climb, so the pastor decided that if he tied a rope to his car and drove away so that the tree bent down, he could then reach up and get the kitten.

He did all this, checking his progress in the car frequently, then figured if he went just a little bit further, the tree would be bent sufficiently for him to reach the kitten.

But as he moved a little further forward, the rope broke. The tree went "boing!" and the kitten instantly sailed through the air — out of sight.

The pastor felt terrible. He walked all over the neighborhood asking people if they'd seen a little kitten.

No. Nobody had seen a stray kitten. So he prayed, "Lord, I just commit this kitten to your keeping," and went on about his business.

A few days later he was at the grocery store, and met one of his church members. He happened to look into her shopping cart and was amazed to see cat food.

Now this woman was a cat hater and everyone knew it, so he asked her, "Why are you buying cat food when you hate cats so much?"

She replied, "You won't believe this," and told him how her little girl had been begging her for a cat, but she kept refusing. Then a few days before, the child had begged again, so the Mom finally told her little girl, "Well if God gives you a cat, I'll let you keep it."

She told the pastor, "I watched my child go out in the yard, get on her knees, and ask God for a cat.

And really, Pastor, you won't believe this, but I saw it with my own eyes. A kitten suddenly came flying out of the clear blue sky, with its paws outspread, and landed right in front of her." Never underestimate the power of prayer.....

There was some debate on the Internet concerning whether or not this was a true story but I thought I would use it as a springboard (pardon the pun) into our next prayer type...*petition*.

Petition is the type of prayer in which we present our individual needs and desires to God. Petition is the type of prayer that people use the most when communicating with God.

Petition prayers are the easiest for us to pray because we are a needy and oftentimes greedy people.

Proverbs 30:15 graphically communicates this truth saying, *“The leech has two daughters; Give and Give! There are three things that are never satisfied, Four never say, “Enough!”*

The word "leech" is derived from an Arabic root meaning "to adhere" and is translated in later Hebrew literature as "bloodsucker." The leech, then, is a figure for the greedy and insatiable appetite of human desires.

Proverbs 30 goes on to mention: (1) "the grave," which is never filled with its victims; (2) "the barren womb," which continually longs for a child; (3) "the earth," whose thirsty ground is never completely satisfied with water; and (4) "the fire," which rages all the more as it is fed—all of these images communicate the greedy and insatiable appetite of human desires.

When the Christian petitions the Lord—when the Christian brings his or her prayer requests before the Lord—these personal petitions are to be *biblically based* and born from the heart of *God Himself*.

The petitions that God answers are those that focus on *His* greatest priorities for our lives. The prayers that God answers are those that bring *the most eternal good*.

Psalm 37:4 says, *“Delight yourself in the Lord; and He will give you the desires of your heart.”*

Did you notice that this is a *conditional* promise? This means that if you are *“delighting yourself in the Lord”* that is, you are conforming to God's will, He will give you the desires of your heart.

Some Bible teachers have even interpreted this passage as saying, *“If you delight yourself in the Lord, He will place in your heart desires that reflect His will.”*

Psalm 21:2-3 reads, *“You have given him his heart's desire, And You have not withheld the request of his lips...For You... meet him with the blessings of good things...”*

If I am walking in the Spirit, I am not going to ask God for something that is not according to His will. If I am delighting myself in the Lord, the things that I petition Him for will align with His purposes.

Petitions that are according to His will are the one that are going to get answered. 1 John 5:14-15 says, *“...this is the confidence which we have before Him, that, if we ask anything according to His will, He hears us. And if we know that He hears us in whatever we ask, we know that we have the requests which we have asked from Him.”*

Now 1 John 5:14 begs the question: *“What is the will of God for our lives?”* If Christians are to pray according to the will of God in order to get prayers answered, they must be familiar with the will of God and that's another sermon in itself (I have some notes in my archive of sermons for anyone who requests it).

If you are delighting yourself in the Lord, He will place in your heart desires that reflect His will. As God places in your heart desires that reflect His will, just go ahead and pray!

4.) Intercession

Someone has said, *“God's greatest agency for winning men to himself is the prayers of other men. How few ever enter into the positive, practical power of prayer. It is the mightiest force in the universe, and the Christian world is blind to this fact.”* - Courtland Meyers

Intercession is the type of prayer that focuses on the needs of others. Why intercede?

- People need the Lord
- People don't know they need the Lord
- God is looking for intercessors

When the Christian intercedes, he or she spiritually stands in the gap for someone who needs the Lord.

When the Christian intercedes, he or she spiritually stands in the gap for a family or even a nation that needs the Lord. We see this illustrated in Ezekiel 22:30.

Ezek 22:23 And the word of the LORD came to me, saying,

Ezek 22:24 "Son of man, say to her: 'You are a land that is not cleansed or rained on in the day of indignation.'

Ezek 22:25 "The conspiracy of her prophets in her midst is like a roaring lion tearing the prey; they have devoured people; they have taken treasure and precious things; they have made many widows in her midst.

Ezek 22:26 "Her priests have violated My law and profaned My holy things; they have not distinguished between the holy and unholy, nor have they made known the difference between the unclean and the clean; and they have hidden their eyes from My Sabbaths, so that I am profaned among them.

Ezek 22:27 "Her princes in her midst are like wolves tearing the prey, to shed blood, to destroy people, and to get dishonest gain.

Ezek 22:28 "Her prophets plastered them with untempered mortar, seeing false visions, and divining lies for them, saying, 'Thus says the Lord GOD,' when the LORD had not spoken.

Ezek 22:29 "The people of the land have used oppressions, committed robbery, and mistreated the poor and needy; and they wrongfully oppress the stranger.

Ezek 22:30 "So I sought for a man among them who would make a wall, and stand in the gap before Me on behalf of the land, that I should not destroy it; but I found no one.

God is a God of love but He is also holy. While His patience with sinners is long, He is obliged by His own holy and righteous character to deal with sin.

In Ezekiel 22, He describes the sinful state of land and its inhabitants and then looks for someone like an Abraham or a Moses to stand in the gap before Him on behalf of the land but found no one.

Ezek 22:31 "Therefore I have poured out My indignation on them; I have consumed them with the fire of My wrath; and I have recompensed their deeds on their own heads," says the Lord GOD.

Today we live among a majority of people who do not know God. This is not my opinion. This is not my assessment. In Matthew chapter seven, Jesus said that *there are many on the broad road that leads to death and few that are on the narrow road that leads to life everlasting*. He says that there are few that even find the narrow road to life (Matthew 7:13-14).

Like in Ezekiel's day, there are many who have not been cleansed of their sin and are not experiencing the forgiveness and blessing of God. There is rampant crime; there are wolves in our communities that are tearing the prey, shedding blood, destroying people and pursuing dishonest gain.

Like in Ezekiel's day, the people of the land have committed robbery, mistreated the poor and needy and have wrongfully oppressed the stranger.

Just like in Ezekiel's day, God is looking for somebody who is willing to stand in the gap before Him on behalf of our land so that He should not destroy it.

Intercession is praying for the lost. It is praying for the defenseless such as the widow, the orphan and unborn that face the death sentence of abortion.

Intercession is praying for God's blessing for the evangelist or pastor.

God has ordained intercession as the *primary* way He works to save the lost and empower the church.

God is calling His church to stand in the gap for those under the influence of drugs.

God is calling His church to stand in the gap for those under the influence of sexual promiscuity.

God is calling His church to stand in the gap for those who are in bondage to false teachers.

God is calling His church to intercede for those who are in psychologically chained to a state welfare system. Their grandmother was on welfare; their mother was on welfare; they are on welfare and now they have children out of wedlock all destined to be welfare recipients.

God is calling His church to intercede for those in foreign lands who are enslaved to pagan religions.

He is calling Christians to stand in the gap for those under corrupt political systems where Christ cannot be openly and freely worshipped.

Some time ago Southern Baptist missionaries in remote inner China sent out a request for people not to pray for them. Instead, they said, *"Pray for our people [that is, the Chinese people]! They are lost, trapped in deceit, headed for eternal darkness."*

The missionaries did not pray for their safety but for the *lost* they were trying to reach. This lines up with the Apostles prayer request in Acts 4. They were warned not to speak or teach in the name of Jesus (vs. 18). But when the authorities released them, Peter, John and the rest of the believers prayed, *"Now, Lord, look on their threats, and grant to Your servants that with all boldness they may speak Your word..."* (vs. 29)

This is what the prayer of intercession is all about. It is standing in the gap for those who need to be saved. It is interceding for those who need to hear the Good News of Jesus Christ—how He died for our sin, how He was buried and was raised from the dead three days later!

Many who claim the name of Jesus Christ are praying for our president and rightly so. But what should you, as a Christian, be praying for? Should you be praying that he get his agenda passed? Should you be praying for his protection?

Paul lets us know in 1 Timothy 2:1-4 how we should be praying for our leaders: *"Therefore I exhort first of all that supplications, prayers, intercessions, and giving of thanks be made for all men...for kings and all who are in authority, that we may lead a quiet and peaceable life in all godliness and reverence. For this is good and acceptable in the sight of God our Savior, who desires all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth."*

God is not on the political right or the political left. He is not liberal and He is not conservative. He is the *"Savior, who desires all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth."*

5.) *Meditation*

On the Internet are found many definitions for the word, *mediation*. As we consider the last major type of prayer we will be defining meditation simply as *the act of reflecting on God's Word and quietly listening for His still small voice*.

A biblically balanced prayer life includes time to *pause and listen* for God's still small voice.

Some of you may remember the time in the Prophet Elijah's life, just after his victory over the prophets of Baal, that the wicked Queen Jezebel threatened his life. He had prayed down fire from heaven and now the fiery vengeance of a wicked woman causes him to run for his life.

In 1st Kings chapter 19 Elijah meets up with the Lord and begins to whine, cry, complain and moan about his situation saying he is the only prophet left and everyone is seeking to take his life.

In verse 11 to 13 we find these words:

1 Ki 19:11 And he said, Go forth, and stand upon the mount before the LORD. And, behold, the LORD passed by, and a great and strong wind broke the mountains apart, and scattered in pieces the rocks before the LORD; but the LORD was not in the wind: and after the wind an earthquake; but the LORD was not in the earthquake:

1 Ki 19:12 And after the earthquake a fire; but the LORD was not in the fire: and after the fire a still small voice.

Oftentimes we make the mistake of searching for God and trying to hear God in the hustle and bustle and face-paced busyness of our lives.

Believe it or not, some crave noise. They need noise. Quietness frightens some people. Many of the kids at the high school where I work walk around all day listening to their iPods and MP3 players. We get into our cars and turn on the radio. We come home and turn on the TV. The malls and stores where we shop have music playing in the background.

If you've ever wondered why God doesn't speak to you as often as you would like and why you don't always hear Him—it is because He speaks *most* to those who consistently still their hearts to listen. God says in Jeremiah 29:13, "*You will search for me and you will find me when you search for me with all your heart.*"

Meditation is not simply "opening your mind" or "freeing your mind" as Morpheus says to Neo in the *Matrix* movie. Again, meditation is *the act of reflecting on God's Word and quietly listening for His still quiet voice*.

In reality, God has already spoken. Hebrew 1:1-2 says, "*God, after He spoke long ago to the fathers in the prophets in many portions and in many ways, in these last days has spoken to us in His Son, whom He appointed heir of all things, through whom also He made the world.*" (compare Matthew 17:1-5)

Jesus is the **Logos**, the living Word (John 1:1)—the living expression of God to us. The Bible is God's written Word (2 Timothy 3:16-17)—it the written expression of God to us.

The process is as follows: You read the Scriptures, choose a portion of what you read to reflect on and then you listen quietly for God's still quiet voice.

A healthy relationship must be two-way! When we pray *we* talk to God; when we meditate *He* talks to us.

If petition is the type of prayer we do the most, meditation is the kind of praying we practice the least yet we find places in Scripture where God's people prayed the prayer of meditation:

Psa 63:1 O God, You are my God; Early will I seek You; My soul thirsts for You; My flesh longs for You In a dry and thirsty land Where there is no water.

Psa 63:2 So I have looked for You in the sanctuary, To see Your power and Your glory.

Psa 63:3 Because Your lovingkindness is better than life, My lips shall praise You.

Psa 63:4 Thus I will bless You while I live; I will lift up my hands in Your name.

Psa 63:5 My soul shall be satisfied as with marrow and fatness, And my mouth shall praise You with joyful lips.

Psa 63:6 When I remember You on my bed, I meditate on You in the night watches.

Psa 63:7 Because You have been my help, Therefore in the shadow of Your wings I will rejoice.

Psa 63:8 My soul follows close behind You; Your right hand upholds me.

An Exhortation to Pray

Scripture unapologetically let us know that we are nothing without God. Would you agree?

Psa 100:3 Know that the LORD, He is God; It is He who has made us, and not we ourselves; We are His people and the sheep of His pasture.

Psa 100:4 Enter into His gates with thanksgiving, And into His courts with praise. Be thankful to Him, and bless His name.

Psa 100:5 For the LORD is good; His mercy is everlasting, And His truth endures to all generations.

Back in Genesis we find what distinguished the godly line or people from the ungodly line.

Gen 4:25 And Adam knew his wife again, and she bore a son and named him Seth, "For God has appointed another seed for me instead of Abel, whom Cain killed."

Gen 4:26 And as for Seth, to him also a son was born; and he named him Enosh. Then men began to call on the name of the LORD.

Genesis 4 records when men began to worship and proclaim the name of Yahweh. Those in the lineage of Seth who called on the name of the Lord are contrasted with the wicked lineage of Cain.

It is the pagan who do not seek the Lord and who do not call upon the Lord:

Psa 14:1 The fool has said in his heart, "There is no God." They are corrupt, They have done abominable works, There is none who does good.

Psa 14:2 The LORD looks down from heaven upon the children of men, To see if there are any who understand, who seek God.

Psa 14:3 They have all turned aside, They have together become corrupt; There is none who does good, No, not one.

Psa 14:4 Have all the workers of iniquity no knowledge, Who eat up my people as they eat bread, And do not call on the LORD?

Prayer to the True and Living God has always been the hallmark of the true believer. Prayer has always been the evidence of our love for and reliance upon the God of our salvation: It is the true Christian—not the “Christian” in word or title, but the person who abides in the Vine and regularly seeks the Lord.

John 15:4 "Abide in Me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself, unless it abides in the vine, neither can you, unless you abide in Me.

John 15:5 "I am the vine, you are the branches. He who abides in Me, and I in him, bears much fruit; for without Me you can do nothing.

John 15:6 "If anyone does not abide in Me, he is cast out as a branch and is withered; and they gather them and throw them into the fire, and they are burned.

John 15:7 "If you abide in Me, and My words abide in you, you will ask what you desire, and it shall be done for you.

John 15:8 "By this My Father is glorified, that you bear much fruit; so you will be My disciples.

Prayer takes work. It's just hard work.

Psa 119:147 I rise before the dawning of the morning, And cry for help; I hope in Your word.

Psa 119:148 My eyes are awake through the night watches, That I may meditate on Your word.

Psa 119:149 Hear my voice according to Your lovingkindness; O LORD, revive me according to Your justice.

A Challenge...A Dare to Prayer

The great people of the Bible were the people who talked with God in prayer. Not those who talk about prayer; nor those who could explain prayer. The great people of the Bible and those that God uses today are those people who take time and pray.

Like many of us, they do not have time. Time must be taken from something else. Those “something else” time slots are very important--very important and pressing, but still less important and less pressing than prayer.

Prayer is our most important work as Christians. It is a journey filled with the satisfaction of helping the helpless, and of seeing the purposes of God fulfilled and the strategies of Satan thwarted.

It's in the unseen arena of prayer that the real work of God is forged. We often see the results in the visible world, but God is moving behind the scenes, acting in response to those who labor daily in prayer.

A vivid example of this truth is found in Exodus 17 where the Israelite army fought the Amalekites on the plain of Rephidim; Moses stood on a hill overlooking the battle. Whenever he held up the staff of God, Israel prevailed. But when he lowered the staff, the Amalekites prevailed.

A clear principle of prayer emerges from this account: God acts in response to the prayers of his intercessors. God acts in response to the righteous who lift their hearts to Him in fervent prayer; supernaturally enabling those he has called to accomplish the assigned task.

Set up a prayer schedule this week—in the morning, at noon at night. Designate a quiet place in your home to pray. If you don't have the time—take it from something else. May God be glorified in your commitment and obedience. Let us pray.