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Thoughts on Prayer

By

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Table of Contents

Devotions: Prayer

How I learned to Pray from a Jewish Peasant

The Three Answers to Prayer

Point of View: God or You?

How to Recognize God's Voice

Six Ways to Deal with Prayer Distractions

Six Things to Pray About in the Middle of the Night

What is an Intercessor?

The Significance of a Prayer Partner

A compilation of blog posts about prayer by [Michelle Ule](#)

This EBook is a gift from the family of the late

LWML member Marilyn Frandsen

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Devotions: Prayer

Prayer is a conversation between a man or woman and God. Genesis 3 indicates God walked and talked with Adam and Eve in the cool of the evening after they finished their work.

He expected to see them and spend time with them. God wanted to hear about their day.

“Call to Me, and I will answer you, and show you great and mighty things, which you do not know.”
~Jeremiah 33:3

The Jeremiah passage indicates God wants conversation with us so He can show us things we don't know or understand. He wants to be engaged in our lives.

Because I often talk to God about what I'm reading in the Bible, segueing into prayer is easy.

Jesus himself gave the best example in the Lord's Prayer in [Matthew 6: 9-13](#):

How to use PRAY in prayer

I use an acronym, PRAY, as an outline for prayer, especially during my daily quiet time with God.

P= Praise

R= Repent

A=Ask

Y= Yield.

Praise

I begin by praising God for what He has done in my life; answers to prayer; His character.

That enables me to remember I am talking about my life and the situations of others with the Creator of the Universe.

I'm not talking to a friend—I'm talking to someone who really does control everything.

Sometimes I just sing a song or a hymn, anything to focus my mind on the majesty, character, ability, and creativity of God.

Repent

I need to clear my heart before God—confessing not only sins I recognize, but also to tell Him what’s troubling me. Maybe I’m irritated with a friend. Maybe someone upset me.

Often, when I complain to God about a person or situation, He points out the sin is in my life.

If I don’t confess my sins and ask for forgiveness, I’ll be unable to live in peace with others, not to mention God.

Ask

Once I remember who I’m talking to and my soul is clean before Him, I can ask for things—for both myself and others. It feels like God can hear me better, and I’m more comfortable asking Him for things.

Often my repentance brings up new issues to discuss with Him.

I think about what I’m asking—because I cannot ask God to do anything not in line with His will as demonstrated in the Bible. If my prayer request isn’t something God would honor, why ask?

As Father Tim says in the novel, *Out of Canaan*: “The only prayer that never fails: Thy will be done.”

Yield

I give the day, the situations, and my life over to God to use to His glory every day. The day usually goes better as a result!



How I Learned to Pray from a Russian Peasant

How did you learn to pray?

I learned from a fictitious Jewish Russian peasant named Tevye.

I grew up in a household in which God and religious beliefs were not discussed.

But I had questions about how to pray—the where and how—which weren't answered in my non-God-discussing household.

So, I was left to learn myself.

As a teenager, I recognized Jesus as my savior in a Lutheran church which prayed freely.

In addition to liturgy, they prayed what I considered “freelance” prayers--they addressed God without a script.

I listened, but had trouble figuring out how to pray to the God who was newly alive to me in such an extraordinary way.

***Fiddler on the Roof* demonstrates how to pray**

I found my answer in *Fiddler on the Roof*.

I loved how Tevye addressed God. He spoke naturally and practically with the easy familiarity of someone who knew God well and felt comfortable with Him.

Tevye expressed his faith within a Jewish context, true, but his manner felt real and easily applicable to my prayers.

I started talking to God the same way. I shared everything with Him. I laughed with Him at irony, told Him my dreams and hopes; joys and sadness.

He created me, after all, and knows my heart and life better than I do!

I shared this idea (and a film clip) with our youth group, hoping to show them prayer is a conversation with God.

In the opening scene, I asked them to observe:

- How did Tevye address God?
- What was his attitude?
- If you were God, how would you respond to him?
- What can we learn about prayer from Tevye?

Finding Different Words

They struggled with my questions but better understood when they read passages from Eugene Peterson's Bible paraphrase *The Message*:

- *"Don't fret or worry. Instead of worrying, pray. Let petitions and praises shape your worries into prayers, letting God know your concerns."*~Philippians 4:6-7
- *"God's there, listening for all who pray for all who pray and mean it."*~Psalm 145:18
- *"How bold and free we then become in his presence, freely asking according to his will, sure he's listening."*~1 John 5:14

My point? When praying, let's be honest like Tevye.

Let's tell God what's on our hearts, even if we feel ridiculous ("Could I have a parking place?"), or we're angry ("Why did this happen to me?"), or if we want to complain ("I don't understand how you could let this happen.").

When we pattern our prayers after Tevye's intimacy—feeling free to tell God anything—the words flow, and we may be better able to see and hear when He answers.

At least that's what I learned from watching a Russian peasant pray.



The Three Answers to Prayer

Three. That's it.

You can expect one of three answers to a prayer.

Everyone loves the first answer: **yes**.

That means God agrees with us.

No, is the second answer.

While a **no** can be disappointing, at least it's an answer. We can adapt ourselves to **no**. We may not understand why, but **no** *is* an answer.

But the third answer is the one most people moan about, because it feels so, well, indecisive: **Wait**.

I used to squirm when the answer came back **wait**, but I've changed my mind.

I think **wait** is an exciting answer.

Wait is like a "parade rest."

Wait says there's more to come and we get a front row seat.

Years ago, I played in the UCLA Marching Band. The Bruins went to the Rose Bowl one year, and the band marched in the Rose Parade through Pasadena

While lots of fun, we traveled five miles.

Periodically, we paused to "mark time."

That meant we stood in one spot and lifted our legs up and down marching in place--neither moving nor playing.

Occasionally the whistle blew for a halt or "parade rest."

We stopped marching, stood with legs comfortably apart, and tucked our instruments against our right sides.

Finally, we could relax—if only momentarily.

“Parade rest” is a lot like **waiting**.

It was an opportunity to catch our breath. We didn’t talk, but we could think about what we’d seen on the route, and where we were headed next.

We could turn our heads and see where we were. It was a pause, but we had to remain alert.

The whistle could sound any minute and we’d step off to follow the drum major wherever he led us.

A stadium full of thrilled and excited fans awaited us at the end of the parade route.

God’s answer **wait** is a lot like my experience in the band.

Wait as a promising answer to prayer

When God asks us to **wait**, it sometimes has more to do with Him getting things in order—and whatever He needs to do hasn’t happened yet.

Often it may have to do with us—we’re not mature enough to handle a **yes** or a **no**-- or perhaps we have lessons to learn before God can answer our prayer.

Something isn’t ready yet.

As a result, while we wait for the answer to become clear—because sometimes a **no** is a good answer—we can savor our moment to rest.

We can review what brought us to this moment of needing to wait. We can take a deep and often necessary breath.

Look around and relax. Ponder what is to come and rejoice with what currently is.

If we ask God, He may show us the why, or maybe just give us peace about the wait.

The whistle to depart will come soon enough, and then it will be time to move on to that **yes** or **no**.

We want to be ready to step off at God's answer to our prayer.

Isn't **wait** great?



Point of View: God's or Your's?

Whose point of view are you using to walk through life?

God's or your own?

The question comes out of the lawless period of Judges 17:6:

“In those days there was no king in Israel. Everyone did what was right in his own eyes.” (ESV)

Tired of Samuel and God, the Israelites demanded a king, “like the other countries.”

Samuel appealed to the Lord, who replied:

“Obey the voice of the people in all that they say to you, for they have not rejected you, but they have rejected me from being king over them.”

The Israelites didn't care about God's point of view.

They wanted to use their own ideas of how to live and run their nation.

So, God let them.

It didn't turn out well.

What is a point of view?

In literature, the point of view is that of the person through whose eyes the story is told. One of the first lessons an author learns is to write in one point of view.

“Head-hopping,” or jumping between different characters' point of view is often done in movies. Called “omniscient point of view,” it may work in a movie, but it can confuse book readers.

You can follow and understand a book better if only one person narrates the story.

So, what is God's point of view?

God's point of view is how He sees events.

We can figure it out by reading what He says in the Bible.

God never contradicts Himself, or Jesus, or the Holy Spirit. His character remains consistent through eternity. We can rely on Him not to change.

He provides His point of view frequently in Scripture. Here are four examples:

- *“For I know the plans I have for you, declares the Lord, plans for welfare and not for evil, to give you a future and a hope.” Jeremiah 29:11*
- *“And we know that for those who love God all things work together for good, for those who are called according to his purpose.” Romans 8:28*
- *“Keep your life free from love of money, be content with what you have, for he said, ‘I will never leave nor forsake you.’ Hebrews 13:5*
- *“God is not human, that he should lie, not a human being, that he should change his mind. Does he speak and then not act? Does he promise and not fulfill?” Numbers 23:19*

God sees believers through the lens of Jesus' death and resurrection.

What difference does it make?

When we run into a problem, heartache or trial, the overriding point of view can make a big difference in our response.

Do we rely on our own understanding of the situation, or do we acknowledge God may be doing something we don't know about?

Our reaction to a situation can determine how well we come through it.

The key is deciding whose point of view we'll trust—our own or God's. That involves faith, along with spiritual discipline.

As Christians, our desire should be to please God alone, no matter the cost to ourselves.

Rather than a stiff-upper-lip/gut-it-out response to challenges, choosing to believe God's point of view can be a relief.

We can turn the prism of our expectations and try to see how God may be looking at the same circumstances.

Or not even that.

We can choose to simply trust the God who created us, to bring to pass what's good for us and which will bring Him glory.

Practical steps

When distressed, worried, upset, afraid, we can wallow in our emotions.

But after a while, even we can get tired of tears and frustration.

Fortunately, we can tell God what we're feeling and why.

He can take it—because He sees our lives through His point of view, not ours.

He sees beyond eternity to the purposes He has. We can then choose—will we trust Him or depend on ourselves?

Life works best and peace comes when we choose to trust God with the circumstances of our lives.

Sometimes He even gives us a glimpse of what He's up to.

We worship the God who spans time, and who knows what He is doing.

He will never leave us nor forsake us.

Thanks be to God.



How I Recognized God's Voice

This is how I recognized and thus heard God's voice one day.

Oh, not in an audible way, but in a clearly recognizable way.

As a writer, I understand “voice” is a term for how I differentiate a character's way of speaking from another's in a manuscript.

Readers should be able to read dialogue and recognize which character is speaking without being told—because they “sound” different.

Their statements are consistent with **who** they are and **how** they behave.

The same is true of God.

The Bible is our textbook, our guide, our conduit into hearing and recognizing God's voice.

Since Jesus and the Holy Spirit are also God, their three voices remain consistent—from Genesis to Revelation.

The similarity and consistency of God's voice in three persons is one of the reasons we're told to “interpret Scripture with Scripture.”

God does not change. God's voice may be spoken with a different “accent,” but the intention and meaning are the same from beginning to end.

He's also consistent and doesn't contradict Himself.

How I heard God's voice in a blog post.

While still in bed, I asked God to be at work in my life that day.

I wanted to be His hands, His feet, His servant, and to understand what others say to me through the filter of His ears and His mind.

By giving the day to God, I moved forward expectant that whatever happened came through His direction.

That day I started at the computer, and one of the first things I read came from a friend. Several ideas caught my attention in a blog post by Reverend Paul Anderson called [How to Overcome Presumption](#):

The God who says, "Behold I do a new thing," is not obligated to the past. Yesterday does not determine tomorrow. But we who fall into routines can make them into ruts—and miss the Spirit.

These particular lines struck me:

"How foolish to think that God will automatically bless our plans because we have creative ideas.

"Good ideas often prove a hindrance to the kingdom of heaven coming into our midst.

"David didn't need a good idea to defeat the Philistines. He did something far better than to check with his generals—he wisely consulted God. We need to do the same."

How Oswald Chambers spoke God's voice to me

When I read the January 11 *My Utmost for His Highest* reading, my eyes focused on this line:

"A lack of progress in our spiritual life results when we try to bear all the costs ourselves."

What parallel do you see with Anderson's blog post?

How the Bible spoke in God's voice to me.

My Old Testament reading came from [Judges 7](#).

It's the chapter after Gideon's famous encounter with God over wet and dry fleeces.

In chapter 7, Gideon and his men sought to destroy rampaging Midianites. He started with 10,000 men and God whittled the number down to 300.

Here's God's direction in verse 2 of a dramatic story:

“The people with you are too many for me to give the Midianites into their hand, lest Israel boast over me, saying, ‘My own hand has saved me.’”

Three very different readings all had a message I needed to hear. Why?

God responds to our circumstances—whether we recognize it or not

I was working on a project that involved researching how to do something that day.

My plans included reading suggestions from experts, outlining their advice, and then executing the plan.

Except—was that what God seemed to be telling me to do?

When I read the Judges passages, I stopped to ask God if I should review the ideas.

Would they distract me from what God wanted to say?

What would you do if God spoke to you like this?

Coincidence?

Some might argue three very different readings from which I heard the same message three times, is a coincidence.

Check out my final reading about Zacchaeus in [Luke 19](#), if you want to believe that.

Instead, I took to heart what looked like an admonition to consult with God first and follow His direction.

He had other plans for me that day.

Asking God saved me time, frustrations, and achieved His goals, not mine.
And that is how I recognized God's voice one day.



Six Ways to Deal with Prayer Distractions

“How do you deal with prayer distractions?”

What a great question from our daughter!

My husband laughed. “When do I not get prayer distractions?”

I agreed. “It’s a frequent problem.”

“Any suggestions?” she asked.

Six Ways to Deal with Prayer Distractions

1. Recognize prayer distractions are likely to occur.

- Minimize distractions or set a timer.
- If you need to get some chores done first, get them started—like the laundry and the dishwasher.
- Turn off the telephone and bring a glass of water.
- Get a blanket or sweater or socks.
- Choose a better time.

2. Ask God to help you stay focused.

Hey, you’re praying anyway, why not ask God to help you stay on task? He’s just as interested in what you have to say as you are!

3. Work through a list and picture exactly who or what you’re praying about

If I’ve agreed to pray for someone, it helps to picture them and their situation. This often sparks more effective praying.

It also reminds me someone needs me my prayers. I need to take the request seriously.

4. Read Scripture

Read Scripture out loud.

Start with a psalm or two, speaking them into the air and listen to what you're saying.

If praying about a specific need, find a pertinent Bible passage and substitute names (including yours) in the appropriate place.

5. Write down the distraction and return to prayer

I've been doing this for years.

Say you're praying and something insists it needs to be done RIGHT. NOW.

Write yourself a note and return to prayer.

Or, ask God to remind you to do it at a better time (I usually pray this in the middle of the night).

6. Follow the distractions and pray about them

Sometimes the prayer distraction won't go away.

That means the Holy Spirit may be at work.

So, pray about the distraction:

"Okay, Lord, I know the birds are noisy this morning and they have nothing to do with what I'm praying about, but let me thank you I can hear.

"Thank you for birds to enchant and praise you. I'm grateful to be in a quiet enough place to hear them, and that I don't have to worry about my safety or theirs.

"Thank you for the good things we receive from birds."

If you pray long enough, the distraction can turn into thanksgiving.

Prayer distractions will always be with us.

They're part of a busy life. Satan doesn't want us praying.

Often, it's busyness that limits our ability to sit, listen, open our hearts, and pray.

I've found it helps to ask God to remove them, so I can talk to Him in peace.

He wants to hear me just as much as I want to hear Him!



Six Ways to Pray in the Middle of the Night

Do you pray when you can't sleep?

If you're lying awake at night with nothing better to do, consider turning over your heart, mind, soul, and (weary) body to the Creator of the Universe.

Here are six things to pray about

1. The state of your own heart. It's often during night reviews that I recognize I've offended someone or behaved poorly. Sometimes words I've said eat at my soul and my sin causes me to toss and turn.

It's then I need to take time to review my life, confess my sins, ask forgiveness, and release it all to God.

On good nights, confession is all it takes for me to fall back asleep.

2. Whoever is lying heavy on your heart.

A friend is in the ICU; things don't look good. Maybe I'm the only person awake or available to pray at two o'clock in the morning?

I've been drafted and I embrace the opportunity.

Babies seem to come in the middle of the night— why not include pregnant moms and their babies on the list?

God probably woke you for a reason.

Examine the needs you've prayed about during daylight and hand them over to God.

3. Your family.

Sometimes sleeplessness results from worry. Maybe someone you love needs to be forgiven.

Or perhaps you need to ask forgiveness of someone. (Don't wake them up, but discuss it with the Lord and make your confession in the morning).

Perhaps you have a wayward child? Maybe there's a glitch in your marriage? Is your father impossible? Are you avoiding a family issue?

The Lord speaks to us when we're available. Maybe the best time to get your attention is when nothing else demands your thoughts?

4. Those in authority over you.

Your parents, your spouse, your boss, the president of the United States. We're called to pray for those in authority over us and the middle of the night is as good a time as any.

5. Things you're thankful for.

I love the song "Count Your Blessings," from the movie *White Christmas* and often sing the lyrics before launching into my list:

*"When you're worried and you can't sleep, just count your blessings instead of sheep/
And you'll fall asleep, counting your blessings."*

6. If all else fails, pray that however much sleep you get, when you wake up in the morning you will be sufficiently rested for that day.

My friend Karen shared this advice when we were young sleepless moms. I often just say, "Karen's prayer, please."

In L. Frank Baum's *The Scarecrow of Oz*, the Scarecrow and the Sawhorse settled down for the night in the corner where they "waited for the living creatures to wake up."

I think of those two when I'm awake in bed waiting for the (other) humans in my house to rise.

That assumes, of course, I'm done praying. The middle of the night often can be the most fruitful time to pray.



What is an Intercessor?

What is an Intercessor? Why do we need one?

The definition is basic: an intercessor is someone who prays, petitions, or begs God in favor of another person. It's a Biblical concept from Scripture.

The most famous case is when Abraham bartered God down from the need to find 50 righteous men to 10 righteous men in order to spare Sodom and Gomorrah.

Abraham's intercession worked—God agreed—but he couldn't find ten God-lovers and the cities were destroyed.

Famous Intercessors

Other well-known intercessors include Moses, Samuel, Noah, Job, Jeremiah, and a host of others. Several women also interceded for Israel: Anna, Huldah, and certainly Esther.

Jesus prayed for His people all the time.

In all cases, they desired people to know the one true God and to trust Him.

They recognized how far the Israelites had traveled from the true faith and they begged God to intervene.

The lack of an intercessor caught God's attention as well. In [Isaiah 59: 15-16](#), God himself asked,

"Then the LORD saw it, and it displeased Him That there was no justice. He saw that there was no man, And wondered that there was no intercessor."

If God looks for intercessors on our behalf, surely, we need them?

Intercessor and Prayer

When someone prays for another, they're called intercessors and they practice intercessory prayer.

While praying for someone recently, I realized it did no good for me to ask God to help them if they had no concept of Jesus as savior.

If that person has no interest in worshipping God or Jesus, an answer to prayer ultimately wouldn't mean anything to their spiritual health.

The person needed to know Jesus more than s/he needed to have something in their life "fixed."

How does one intercede in a case like that?

By keeping our eyes on God, not on our opinion of our friend's need.

Intercessor = Standing in the Gap

One way of understanding intercession is to imagine "standing in the gap," between a person and God.

Jesus is the one who stood in that gap and connected people with God by His death on the cross. He and the Holy Spirit intercede on our behalf before God.

But sometimes people lack the faith to pray.

I've volunteered more than once to pray for friends because the situation was so difficult, they just couldn't pray. Perhaps they were too angry at someone—even as they knew they needed to pray.

Or perhaps their circumstances were so difficult, they couldn't imagine what to pray or if God would hear them. (He would hear them, they just felt too broken to remember).

I suggested, "Let me pray for you. I don't have your frustration. I can pray."

That's what being an intercessor means.

An Intercessor is led by the Holy Spirit

Intercessory prayer often is the result of a prompting by the Holy Spirit—a sudden insight into someone else's life.

In other words, the Holy Spirit gives us a window into another's life (perhaps of their sin), and our calling as an intercessor is to pray for that individual within the will of God.

It's not to judge them for failings.

We need to have God's view of their situation when we pray.

I like to tell friends who gain knowledge about others, "God's just drafted you into His prayer army."

Praying for others often is the most important and loving thing we can do for someone.

That's what it means to be an Intercessor.



The Significance of a Prayer Partner

How can a prayer partner help our spiritual growth?

I hadn't given the question much thought until my prayer partner moved.

We weekly walked around the lake and prayed together for 18 years. That was a long time to share our hearts, confessions, and hopes with someone outside our families.

But the relationship was of great value to us—and others—because we prayed. Here's why:

Praying

Obviously.

We started one day when we decided to walk around a local lake to brainstorm how to handle the children's choir and then finish with prayer.

We trusted each other from the start.

Through four seasons, in beautiful sunshine and frigid days, we circled the lake, and prayed.

We learned to pray hard prayers. I don't think I could have voiced some of those prayers without the encouragement and help of my prayer partner.

Confession

Confession is good for the soul and we made good use of it.

The Scriptures advise us to "Confess your sins one to another," and it was helpful for us. Telling someone else your failings "airs" them out. No longer secrets, they no longer have power.

Guilt often stalks me, so it helped to be told what I thought might be sin wasn't really sin.

Many times, she clarified if what I felt came from genuine repentance or from an over-sensitive people-pleasing nature. I needed her counsel—especially if I found myself complaining or gossiping.

I had to confess those sins way too often.

On the other hand, knowing I would have to confess to her often helped me avoid sin in the first place.

Advice

We both have large families.

While we were careful about how much and what we discussed, we also provided insight into relationship issues that stymied us.

I'm a better family member because of the wisdom my prayer partner shared with me.

Encouragement

Like it or not, the poor woman listened to all my stories.

She heard the plot or theme of every talk, novella, novel, or essay before I wrote it!

When I bewailed not knowing what I was going to say at the next talk, she'd laugh. "God probably hasn't given you the example yet."

She was always right.

Love

My prayer partner always showed me love.

She had my best interests and that of my family at heart. Sure, we sometimes despaired of situations we found ourselves in, but I knew she would assume the best.

A common faith

My faith in the God I've known for a long time grew over the years. My prayer partner knows theology forward and back. She also explained musical concepts in ways I could understand.

Her love for God made her an excellent confidant and her commitment to Jesus blessed me.

We also spent a lot of time laughing.

Now what?

We'll catch up in eternity—and rejoice over the answers to prayer!

I'm so thankful I had a prayer partner. Why not find a prayer partner yourself?



About the Author

Michelle Ule is the author of ten published books in historical fiction and biography.

She's been a weekly blogger since 2011, usually writing about history, real life, and faith, and has written [numerous blog posts about prayer](#).

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