

- ***READ Luke 11:1-4*** As Jesus is concluding a time of prayer, His disciples come to Him and request that He teach them how to pray. It is also mentioned that John has taught his disciples how to pray, also. A couple of things I recognize from this are 1) Jesus was a man of prayer, put great emphasis on it, and His disciples recognized that, and 2) prayer is an essential part of the life and practice of the strong man or woman of God. We often talk about the importance of prayer and the impact it can have in our lives, but have you ever found yourself struggling with prayer? Have you ever experienced prayer problems?
- In full honesty, I have found myself in that place. There have been points in my life where my personal private prayers were few and the ones I did say were just flat out poor. And you know the result? My faith suffered for it. I felt spiritual weak and disconnected in many ways. My fervor and zeal was decimated and I just wasn't motivated to strive for holiness and godliness in everything that I did. If you have ever felt this way then you very well might have been experiencing some prayer problems, as well.
- Things didn't start to improve until I rededicated myself to consistently excellent prayer. We all most admit that not all prayers are created equally. Just because someone says "dear heavenly Father" and "in Jesus name I pray, amen" with some words sprinkled in between doesn't mean that they have prayed well. Satan would love to fool us into thinking that is all that is needed for good prayer, but we couldn't be more wrong in thinking such.
- So what kind of prayer problems have I faced, and what prayer problems might you have faced in your life? Let's take a few minutes this evening to examine some problems that could present themselves and what we can do to overcome them.

I. Problems with our prayers.

A. Problems with the quality of our prayers.

1. I think our problems in prayer can be broken down into three different categories. The first we will focus on is the quality of our prayers. The second will be the substance of our prayers, and then we will talk about the frequency of our prayers. To begin with, let's consider some issues that might cause our prayers to just simply not be of good quality.
2. **Wandering Mind:** When I think about times when my mind just wasn't engaged in prayer even though I was trying to pray, I think about either times I didn't get away from other things enough to pray, or I think about those night time prayers where I was so sleepy that I never finished the prayer before I dozed off. In either instance, I had a problem with my mind not being fully engaged in what I was doing in prayer.
3. **Empty Prayer:** One of the reasons I might have that wandering mind during prayer is because I just prayed...well...because prayer is something that a Christian is supposed to do. I've grown up hearing constantly about my need to pray, so I prayed...yet my mind and heart were a thousand other places in the world besides being invested in my prayers to God. The quality of these types of prayers is extremely lacking.

B. Problems with the substance of our prayers.

1. But it also showed in the substance of my prayers. Remember, the disciples came to Jesus wanting to be taught to pray so that their prayers would be of godly quality and substance. Sadly, there have been times in my life where the substance of my prayers have been way off base.
2. **Repetitious Prayer:** Poor quality and poor substance in prayer really go hand in hand together. I can think to times where I constantly repeated the same things over and over again simply from muscle memory. This makes me think of Jesus's rebuke of the Gentiles who prayed using meaningless repetition so that their many words might seem good. (**Matthew 6:7**) I had my little spill that I had prayed a thousand times before and as long as I prayed that a couple of times a day then I could feel ok about myself. The problems in my prayer life have been real and it showed in the quality of my prayers.
3. **Poorly Focused Prayer:** Unlike the prayer of Jesus, my focus was often on the tangible things of this life. I wanted good health, safety, success, and any other number of things that I thought I either deserved or needed at that time. My heart was focused on earthly things and that left little to no room for the spiritual aspects of this life. Over three quarters of Jesus's model prayer in Matthew and Luke's accounts show a focus on spiritual things, and that just isn't where I was when I was facing some serious prayer problems.

C. Problems with the frequency of our prayers.

1. Finally, not only were the quality and substance of my prayer poor, but I just didn't pray all that frequently or consistently either.
2. **Infrequent Prayer:** It's one thing to just not be good at prayer because maybe we haven't been taught to pray by Jesus through His or other people's examples, but it another thing all together to just give no effort at all to pray. Sure I would sometimes hit the important prayers before meals...sometimes...but there was not rhyme or reason to any other prayers through my day. Maybe before a big test, game, or something else I deemed important I might have prayed, but there was no solid prayer habits to be found in my life.
3. So where did this leave me? Sadly, I have to admit that it wasn't in a good place. I have really struggled spiritually in the past and I can almost always draw direct connections between my spiritual well being and health and the efforts I am putting in to praying. So what has helped me, and what can help you to be better in your prayer life so you can get past these prayer problems? Let's take the last few minutes to talk about some prayer problem solutions.

II. Solutions to our prayer problems.

A. Recognize the privilege and importance of prayer.

1. We are, or at least I was, just flat out bad at prayer because I don't think I grasped the fact that prayer was me being able to talk to the Creator of the universe and Him actually be willing to hear me. He tells us through Peter to cast *"all your anxiety on Him, because He cares for [us]" (I Peter 5:6,7)* How incredible is it to consider that lowly and pitiful humans have an ear with the mighty God of heaven. What type of God would humble Himself to even hear our insignificant pleas? A God who loves us and cares for us is the God who would be willing to do such a thing, so if I truly grasp this then I should be very willing to do better in my prayers
2. But praying well also shows our dependence upon God, and that can bring us peace that we will not find anywhere else in this life. I think about Paul's words to the Philippians in **Philippians 4:6,7**. He encourages the brethren to cast their cares upon God by prayer and supplications so the His peace would fill their hearts and be with them through the most difficult struggles they might face during their Christian journeys. Prayer brings us peace!
3. Prayer is an opportunity to pour our hearts out to God (**Romans 10:1**), and we ought to want to do that since He does care for us, and He wants to bless us as His children. Paul's greatest desires of his heart were poured out to God in prayer, and we can do the same thing.
4. If nothing else, we should want to pray well and often because the faithful prayer of a godly person does much good, and often that good is accomplished through the things we have just discussed. (**James 5:13-18**) If I recognize these things as being true, then why would I want to do anything but offer up fervent prayers to our great God?

B. Pray with a clear mind and clear goals.

1. We can overcome the problems of repetitive and poorly focused prayer by giving a concerted effort to pray with a clear mind and clear goals. We often set ourselves up to fail when it comes to our prayers because we go into prayer with our minds full from others things of the day and we have no goals for what we want to accomplish with our prayer.
2. When I think about individuals in the Bible that are well known for their prayer lives, I think about how they were able to set themselves up for success in prayer because they prayed with clear minds and clear goals. Think for a second with me about Daniel, Jesus, and Paul.
3. Daniel set himself up for success in prayer because he would pray in a place where there was peace and quiet and little to no distractions. (**Daniel 6:10**) Jesus did something very similar when He would leave the multitudes and go to a quiet place to pray.
 - a) **Matthew 14:23**, *"After He had sent the crowd away, He went up on the mountain by Himself to pray, and when it was evening, He was there alone."*
 - b) **Mark 1:35**, *"In the early morning, while it was still dark, Jesus got up, left the house, and went away to a secluded place, and was praying there."*
 - c) **Luke 5:16**, *"But Jesus Himself would often slip away to the wilderness to pray."*

4. Jesus knew that His best prayer could be done without the distractions of His daily activities, but Jesus was also very purposeful in His prayers. I think of **John 17** where He prayed very specifically for His disciples and their faiths. That prayer was focused on them, and we could learn a lot from his purposeful prayer and how He prayed with a goal and focus in mind.
 5. If we are struggling through some prayer problems, then I would advise that we take some time to consider how it is that we pray. Are our prayers always at hectic times of the day when we can't focus on what we're trying to say to the Lord? Are our prayers seemingly the exact same every time we bow our heads? Do we pray simply from muscle memory or are our minds truly engaged in what we are saying and do we pray with a purpose? Think about the best settings in which we can pray the best and seek to commit ourselves to prayer at those times and in those places.
- C. Establish a consistent habit of prayer.**
1. Finally, we can help to overcome our prayer problems by establishing strong and consistent habits with our prayers. We are sometimes hindered by our inconsistency in the frequency of our prayers, but if we will dedicate ourselves to consistent and frequent prayer, then I am confident that we will benefit greatly in our spiritual strength and feelings of closeness to God.
 2. Again, let's consider some good examples of individuals who were consistent in their frequency of prayer. Just a moment ago we mentioned how David was consistent in his prayers by going to a quiet place where he could truly concentrate, but something we didn't not was that **Daniel 6:10** also notes the fact that Daniel had a wonderful habit of frequent prayer. Notice that it says that he "continued kneeling on his knees three times a day, praying and giving thanks before his God, as he had been doing previously." It is very obvious to us that Daniel was a man dedicated to his prayers and nothing that happened, even an edict from the king to not pray, would stop him from his prayers to the God whom his full trust was in.
 3. One man we haven't mentioned yet would be Nehemiah. No less that six times throughout the book that bears his name, we find Nehemiah in deep and sincere prayer to God. In nearly every situation he found himself in, Nehemiah found a reason to pray and lay the issues at the feet of his God. He prayed for the wall. He prayed during his distress from enemies. He prayed for strength against enemies. He prayed for strength in their work. He truly encapsulates **I Thessalonians 5:17** in the fact that he prayed without ceasing.
 4. Then we might also consider again the example of Jesus. Go back to our opening text where we see Jesus's disciples asking Him to teach them to pray. They did so after He had just concluded praying. I can just imagine the disciples looking around and not finding Jesus and someone asking where He was. I can just see someone looking up nonchalantly and saying, "He's probably out by himself praying, again." He was so dedicated to prayer and communicating with His Father, and we like His original disciples would do well to learn from and emulate His example.
 5. So what can we do to be more consistent in the frequency of prayer? Let's begin by being like David and planning times for our prayers. The most logical times throughout the day seem to be first thing in the morning, before our meals, sometime during the day, and then before we go to bed. Doing this would give us six prayers each day. But can I say that this doesn't mean that we pray these six times and wipe our hands and be forget about prayer the rest of the day. No, we can then be like Nehemiah and find other times throughout the day to be in prayer. In times of trouble, we need to pray. In times of victory, we need to pray and gives thanks. In times where we recognize blessings, we need to pray. Like all three of these men, we need to pray without ceasing and be dedicated to prayer.

There will be times where we will struggle with prayer. More than likely our problems will fall into somewhere in among the problems we have discussed, but I hope our solutions will quickly give relief and aid to grow stronger and closer to God through our strong, meaningful, and consistent prayer. May God bless us and we with us as we show our faith, trust, and dedication to Him in prayer. ***PRAYER***