



Praying the Word Series Week 1 - Slow Down and Pray

March 10, 2024 - Pastor Jason Carter

The purpose of this series is to give frameworks in prayer to help us meet with God. We want all of us to leave with a growing desire to meet with the Lord and pray. That prayer would become a part of us, become natural, where we don't even have to think about it because it is a part of us. We need to broaden our understanding of prayer. It is multi-faceted and there are many ways in which prayer expresses something in our relationship with God.

We have identified 3 ways or practices we want everyone to practice each week to help us stay connected to God.

1. **"Check in" prayer:** Throughout our day (text message prayer as PR calls it).
2. **Devotional prayer:** Psalm 63:8 NKJV "My soul follows close behind You; Your right hand upholds me." NIV says "I cling to you." This type of prayer is about creating a time to meet with the Lord where you can slow down, read the Bible, pray, and listen. Don't get caught up in how much time but that you are making conscious time to meet with the Lord.
3. **Extended prayer:** A longer time frame where you want to meet with and process with the Lord, possibly to intercede for someone or a situation. Mark 1:35 NIV "Very early in the morning, while it was still dark, Jesus got up, left the house and went off to a solitary place, where he prayed."

Pray today: Holy Spirit, help me grow in my desire to meet with you. My soul desires more. I want to know you. I want to stay connected to you. I want to hear You. I want to be led by You. Please meet with me and light a fire in my heart. In Jesus' name.

Last week's medical emergency during service is a great example of our practice of prayer:

People begin waving to get attention and help; Someone is already dialing 911; someone asks questions, evaluates breathing, clammy hands; doctors, nurses, and security team all step into their proper protocols; Holy Spirit had already prepared a nurse for the impending medical emergency that morning;

This is the difference between reacting and responding. We respond because we have been trained. We do not react out of emotion, confusion, or chaos. The same principles apply to our growth in prayer with God:

We are connecting, meeting, listening, waiting, and spending time in our relationship with God SO WHEN life happens, we **respond** to the situation by engaging God in prayer because we have practiced going to God.

- How do you act when situations arise? Do you react or respond?

- Would you say there is room to grow in your prayer life?

According to a survey by the Pew Research Center, fewer than half of U.S. adults pray daily—and this number has fallen precipitously in the past 15 years, from 58 percent of respondents in 2007 to 45 percent in 2021. Moreover, Crossway reports that only 2 percent of poll respondents are “very satisfied” with their prayer lives; a much larger percentage spoke of “moderate” to “low” satisfaction.

Why we don't pray:

We don't know how: We feel lost or frustrated. Where do we start?

We think we are too educated to need it: We lean into reason and solutions rather than recognizing our need of God. We make space for the natural but not the supernatural.

We treat it as one of several options: If this doesn't work, then I will...

We lack discipline and intentionality: We say we want to and should, but we don't.

We make it transactional rather than relational: We want something from God. We put in our order and move on.

We struggle with unanswered prayers: We are disheartened by the tension of unanswered prayer, His silence, or our disappointment. For many years, I felt like I needed a ready excuse in case God did not answer.

We think prayer takes too much work: Am I doing it right? We think we have to do it a certain way or it won't be answered. Like we may be disqualified by a technicality. And when in doubt, people don't.

We haven't learned what method of prayer works best for us: We think there is only one way and the way we tried we didn't like.

We get bored: We want immediate results. We don't know what to say. We don't enjoy it. We don't know how to calm our souls.

We make excuses: I don't have time: my job, my kids, my schooling... I am not good at it. It's embarrassing. Or many of the reasons we already listed above...

We need to learn to slow down:

Prayer needs to be like breathing: “God, meet me. I need You. I love You.”

John 15:4-5 NIV ⁴“Remain in me, as I also remain in you. No branch can bear fruit by itself; it must remain in the vine. Neither can you bear fruit unless you remain in me.”⁵“I am the vine; you are the

branches. If you remain in me and I in you, you will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing.”

- God will stay connected to you, but will you stay connected to God?

Jeremiah 2:13 NIV “My people have committed two sins: They have forsaken me, the spring of living water, and have dug their own cisterns, broken cisterns that cannot hold water.”

God is the source of our life. Our prayer life is our life.

We have forsaken Him as the spring of living water in a dry and thirsty place. We then dig our own well, trying to create our own access to water, to life, but we are broken. We need Him to be our source. When most of us think of prayer we think of transactional prayer (I pray and God you answer). BUT God wants us to be in relationship with us, for us to bring things to Him, to wait on Him and learn to trust and just be with Him.

Psalms 84:1-2, 4-5 NIV “How lovely is your dwelling place, Lord Almighty! ² My soul yearns, even faints, for the courts of the Lord; my heart and my flesh cry out for the living God... Blessed are those who dwell in your house; they are ever praising you. ⁵ Blessed are those whose strength is in you, whose hearts are set on pilgrimage.”

This is **deeper** than soul level. Deeper than reason and intellect. This is central to our life and our core being. This Spiritual DNA of our life-connection to God. Our very mind, soul, and body long to be with God, and our strength is found when we determine to pilgrimage through life with Him as our source.

- How do we nurture this type of longing for God? How do we learn to live from this place? What would it look like?

There is nothing our soul longs for more, but we just don't want to admit it.

- Do you see this in your self? How so?

In the book *Thinking Fast and Slow*, Professor of Psychology Daniel Kahneman details two primary mental states, or two ways we experience our world:

FAST THINKING: This is our default state, where we think quickly and reactively. We do not have time to actually stop, reflect, or process because there's so much stimuli. This is where we spend most of our time (amped up/on autopilot).

SLOW THINKING: We have time to stop and reflect in this state. This mode takes time, effort, and intentionality. Strategy, life-changing decisions, analysis, and reflection are all done in our slow-thinking state.

The interesting thing is, when we are in our slow thinking state, we are actually forming and shaping how we are going to think when we are in our fast thinking state of mind. Our slow

thinking habits begin to affect our fast thinking. This is what prayer helps us to do. Slow down and be transformed so that we respond differently in life.

Our *slow thinking* habits begin to *affect* our fast thinking. *Prayer* helps us slow down and *transform* our thinking so we can respond differently in life.

Scripture speaks to slow thinking

Psalm 63:5-7 NLT ⁵“ You satisfy me more than the richest feast, I will praise you with songs of joy.⁶ I lie awake thinking of you, meditating on you through the night.⁷ Because you are my helper, I sing for joy in the shadow of your wings.”

Psalm 5:3 NIV “In the morning, Lord, you hear my voice; in the morning I lay my requests before you and wait expectantly.”

Andrew Newberg, an agnostic (believes the existence of God/divine/supernatural is unknowable) neuroscientist at Thomas Jefferson University and Hospital, has been lauded as one of the 30 most influential neuroscientists alive. He's authored several books, including How God Changes Your Brain, and does extensive work scientifically documenting the effects of prayer on the human brain. His work is heralded in diverse publications, from NPR to medical journals. Here's what he concluded.: **Biologically, regular extended prayer over 8 weeks can change the brain to such an extent that it can be measured on a brain scan.**

Prayer fortifies or builds new neural pathways in areas of the brain associated with social interaction, compassion, and sensitivity to others. Regular prayer **also decreases** anxiety, stress, and depression in scientifically measurable ways, positively changing our neurochemistry. Consistent extended prayer also **works against** anger and rigidity in the brain by reducing stress hormones.

Science proves the Bible.

These scientific findings might raise the question, “Wouldn’t any act of mindfulness produce the same benefits?” **Studies show it does not.** Kenneth Pargament of Bowling Green State University, in his controlled research of mindfulness alone versus prayer found **significant** positive differences in mental and physical health in various situations when people **pray** versus when they practice mindfulness or materialistic meditation.

Psalm 84:5 NIV ⁵“Blessed are those whose strength is in you, whose hearts are set on pilgrimage.”

Sometimes we get caught in a flurry of activity and don't have time for prayer. Or we are trying to check all the right boxes as if God will disqualify our prayer because of a technicality. Sometimes we want to outsource it and go to those who have a good prayer life or a good relationship with God.

BUT God doesn't want you to have second-hand information or relationship with Him.

PJ's thoughts: As a father, I want my kids to talk to me. I may not be able to solve their problem, but I want to walk life out with them. They are adults and they have to make their own choices, but I will give everything I can if they ask. This is not an apples-to-apples comparison because God is able to do anything BUT we can grasp the reality of how much more God wants us to talk to Him.

Quote "God sometimes allows in His infinite wisdom what He could prevent in His perfect power." Life can be difficult and at times tragic. We ask why. There is mystery in what He allows versus what He prevents. The Bible says, "**All things work together for good**" (Romans 8:28) **but not** all things are good. Prayer moves us closer in trust through relationship, where we can lean in. God wants us to press in when it is difficult.

- How have you learned this in your life? Maybe you haven't yet, and you need to hear others share their journey of learning how to trust God even when He allows hard things.

Prayer is mysterious. It goes against our desire for human action. It requires patience and trust especially when we can't see the answer, or it doesn't seem to be forthcoming. Prayer can be frustrating and feel like wasted time when we think we are only ones trying to get an answer.

But you are not the only one with unanswered prayer

Pete Greig founder of the 24-7 prayer movement that has reached half the nations on the earth. God has utilized him powerfully and yet his wife has a brain tumor that is incapacitating her body. It is a mystery that requires trust.

Prayer is a lifeline. It positions us in God and in relationship to receive strength, hope, and the ability to endure. Answers do come. Understanding grows. It doesn't mean you don't have faith. There is tension and mystery because we do not know what all God is doing. It is bigger than us.

- How have you experienced this in your life?

- Have you ever been in a difficult situation and someone's very presence helped even if they said little?

Prayer is about *being* with God, not just receiving. We grow into *enjoying* the *company* of the *King*.

Just knowing this person was near made a difference. Often, we just desire to be in God's presence. It is life-giving. We are always in God's presence, but we just have to calm ourselves to be aware of it and acknowledge it. **Mother Teresa's Prayer:** Both God and I sit and listen. We communicate with our presence, not words.

But prayer must be developed, not always by skill but by persistence. Not flowery words but intentionality. Not by getting it done like a task but by constantly keeping the channels open to connect at any time. Prayer is about being with God and not just receiving. We grow into enjoying

the company of the King. It takes time, perseverance and faith. It means making it a priority and not an option

There are many different expressions of prayer in the Bible:

Various aspects of prayer - Ephesians 6:18

Meditating on Scripture - Psalm 1:2

Journaling - Psalm 102:18

Delight - Psalm 1:2

Confession - Psalm 51

Lifting hands - Psalm 141:2

Clapping hands - Psalm 47:1

Bowing down - Psalm 95:6

Singing - Psalm 51:1

Shouting - Psalm 98:4

Seeking - Psalm 27:8

Waiting - Psalm 27:14

Intercession - 1 Timothy 2:1

Petition - Philippians 4:6

Listening - Psalm 25:14

Imprecatory prayer (justice) Psalm 58:6

- What ways do you enjoy praying? What ones are hard for you? What area of prayer would you like to grow in?

People who have grown in the practice of prayer experiment with different prayer rhythms and practices, adopting a variety of techniques and approaches to cultivate a personal rhythm that included: Morning devotions, prayer retreats, prayer meetings, evening prayers, prayer lists, and ancient prayers. - *Lead with Prayer* book

3 types of prayer times for us to implement each week:

- 1. "Check in" prayer:** Moment by moment prayer: In the moment prayer. Sticky note prayer- a reminder to pray. Text message prayer. This is any moment you don't have time to get away to pray but need God. Could be one line you pray through the day to reset or connect with God. OR pause and pray before a meeting, a conversation, or a challenging situation (like if you enter a situation where you normally lose your cool or get anxious). OR take 1 minute with the Lord and say "Lord, I am engaging you now." The goal is to stay connected to God throughout the day
- 2. Devotional Time:** You pray as you engage the word of God in a devotional setting and sit with the Lord in prayer. You take more time to sit with and engage God. You may process your day, ask God to strengthen you, refresh or cleanse you, cast your cares/worries on Him and thank Him for all He is to you. Maybe you just want to be present with the Lord (Mother Teresa). **Praying while driving is great, but shouldn't be the only source because your mind can't be fully present
- 3. Extended time with God:** This is intentional longer time to process with God, pour out your heart or have a conversation. You may do a pray through prayer which is committing to praying over serious issues or circumstances until there is a release. Extended prayer can also be waiting on the Lord with no agenda, simply drawing near, soaking- maybe put on worship music and just be in God's presence. Find the time and find the place.

We may be naturally bent to any of these. We need to figure out the ways and times that help us connect and edify ourselves in the Lord.

- Are you bent to any certain one(s)?
- How will you implement these 3 this week? And every week?

God is not a microwave. He is not about immediate gratification. He is also not about a methodology. It is decision plus discipline. A follow-through even when we don't feel like it.

- Prayer is confidence in the "suddenlies". What does this mean?

What now?

Figure out the place where you can get some quiet. Determine if you should play music or if music is a distraction. Is morning or evening best? Ask yourself when you should meet with the Lord alone and when can you participate with a group of people to pray. Put prayer on your calendar. Schedule God.

- What do you need to do?

<https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/article/evangelicals-bothered-pray/>