

PERSPECTIVE

JUNE 2022

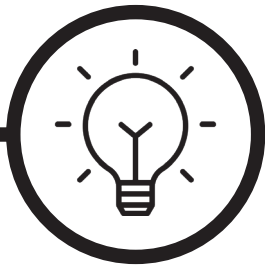
WHAT'S THE SPIRIT'S ROLE IN MY PRAYER LIFE?



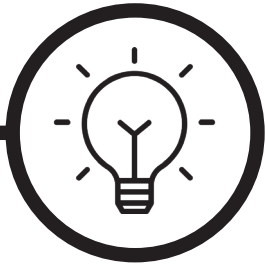
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James Chiang



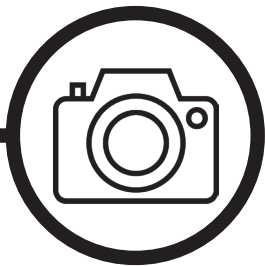
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What's the Spirit's Role in My Prayer Life?

"I want to do it *all by myself*." If you are a parent or have been around young children for any length of time, you're probably very accustomed to hearing this phrase. I heard it most recently while teaching my daughter how to play tennis. She listened attentively and watched curiously as I demonstrated some of the basic movements. Suddenly an expert, she wanted to run around and swing at the ball without any help from daddy. I could see the frustration build as she tried very hard to hit the ball without much success. My daughter is fairly resilient. She did not give up right away and tried various things to no avail. Eventually, the smiles were completely gone, and tears came. She declared that tennis was too hard and not fun, and she was not interested in playing anymore.

I share this story not to throw my daughter under the bus (she's good at table tennis!). I share it because, at times, I'm tempted to take a similar approach to prayer. I readily affirm prayer's importance and blessing, and I'm grateful for Jesus' clear teaching on how to pray (Matthew 6, Luke 11). But when it comes to the nuts and bolts of daily practice, prayer can sometimes feel like work I have to figure out on my own. *What* should I pray for today? The sick, unsaved neighbors/coworkers/friends, my family, my/other churches, missionaries, governments? Which particular ones? And *how* should I pray for these things? I've prayed for healing or wisdom, and nothing seems to be happening. Should I keep asking? Should I ask differently? This may or may not be your inner monologue, but it is easy to see how our sinful hearts can turn prayer into a work that we must perform ourselves. Prayer can start to feel like a joyless obligation, so much so that you are tempted to stop praying altogether.

Thankfully, those who are in Christ have been given the Helper, the Holy Spirit. Yes, God commands us to pray. But in his grace, what God commands us to do, he also enables us to do. God graciously granted his children his very self, the third Person of the Trinity, to help us to pray. So we should not pray *in the flesh*, meaning approaching prayer as a work that we ourselves initiate and fulfill. Rather, we are called and enabled to pray at all times *in the Spirit* (Ephesians 6:18). The Holy Spirit is actively at work in us through prayer, for our good, and for the glory of God. Specifically, the Holy Spirit draws us to pray, and he uses prayer to build us up and equip us for the work of ministry.

THE HOLY SPIRIT DRAWS US TO PRAY

Preaching on Jude 20, Charles Spurgeon said, "That prayer which is not in the Holy Ghost is in the flesh... and we are told that they which are in the flesh cannot please God. All that cometh of our corrupt nature is defiled and marred, and cannot be acceptable with the most holy God...the seed of acceptable devotion must come from heaven's storehouse."¹

When we pray in the flesh, we feel that it is our responsibility to wake up each morning and find (or manufacture) the desire to pray from our own storehouse. Some days that's easy to do; other days, it seems an onerous task. String together a few days of prayerlessness, and it becomes a guilt-inducing trend. String together a few weeks/months, and it becomes a heart-numbing habit.

I have gone through seasons of dryness when it comes to prayer. Sometimes the dryness was a lack of prayer; at other times, it was going through the motions of daily prayer. Looking back, the dryness could usually be traced to 3 things. First, I took my salvation for granted. I had developed a prideful familiarity with God, rather than regularly thanking God for opening my eyes to the truth and beauty of the gospel. I had forgotten that, but for the grace of God, I would still be cherishing iniquity in my heart, and the Lord would not have listened to me (Psalm 66:18). Second, I felt ashamed and unworthy to pray due to struggles with sin. And third, I treated prayer like a transaction rather than a relationship. It was easy to feel content with the good gifts associated with being a Christian. While I would not have said it this way, my prayer life in those seasons showed that I valued God's gifts more than God himself.

Are you currently in a season of dryness? Take heart, dear brother/sister, for those who are in Christ have the Holy Spirit. Jesus said in John 7:38-39: "Whoever believes in me, as the Scripture has said, 'Out of his heart will flow rivers of living water.' Now this he said about the Spirit, whom those who believed in him were to receive..." First, the Spirit will remind you of the gospel, that Jesus saved us, not because of works done by us in righteousness, but according to his own mercy (Titus 3:4-5). As you follow His leading to remember this beautiful gospel each day, a fresh thankfulness will well up within you. Second, when you struggle with feelings of condemnation, the Spirit will point to the sure standing of those who believe in Christ, for God has given the Spirit as a guarantee, so we are always of good courage (2 Corinthians 5:5-6). And third, the Spirit

will not leave you to view prayer as depositing coins into a cosmic vending machine. Rather He will stir you to cry out to God as a son who loves his father. As it says in Romans 8:15, “For you did not receive the spirit of slavery to fall back into fear, but you have received the Spirit of adoption as sons, by whom we cry, ‘Abba! Father!’”

In short, the Spirit will (re)supply you with the desire to pray. He is not content for believers to remain in prayerlessness or to simply go through the motions. He draws those whom he has sealed to the throne of grace. His grace does not waver by the day, and it is freely given. If you are in a season of dryness, repent and ask for his powerful, preserving help. If you are a prayer warrior and don’t struggle with the discipline of prayer, praise God and boast in the Lord.

THE HOLY SPIRIT BUILDS US UP IN PRAYER BY TEACHING US THROUGH THE WORD

When we pray in the flesh, we come to prayer with our own agenda. We often start with requests for ourselves and move outwards in concentric circles, e.g., next to our families, then our closest friends, etc. Since our agenda can be quite long, we often don’t get around to praying for other things.

To be clear, we can and should let our requests be made known to God (Philippians 4:6). But, do you primarily come to prayer to speak? Or do you come to listen, to be taught and molded by him?

Karate Kid is one of my favorite movies. The protagonist Daniel is eager to learn karate to defend himself against bullies. He thinks he’s hit the jackpot when he meets a karate master named Mr. Miyagi. Daniel shows up to the first lesson, eager to learn how to kick and punch. Much to his surprise and dismay, Mr. Miyagi has him do household chores. Daniel spends all day painting the fence. The next day is spent scrubbing the floors and then waxing cars. None of this was on Daniel’s agenda, and he becomes frustrated and then disillusioned with Mr. Miyagi because it all seems like a waste of time and even a bit self-serving. But, everything Mr. Miyagi did was intentional. The chores were designed to slowly build up Daniel’s strength and to sear foundational karate movements into Daniel’s muscle memory. I’m a lot like Daniel. I can often go to God in prayer with my own agenda and expectations. Since my agenda is filled with “good” things, I see no reason why a loving God won’t directly answer my request, to my satisfaction, in a timely manner, in the order it was received.

Yet God is God and we are not. Remember that the Spirit is intent on teaching us the Word of God. We are told by Jesus in John 16:13-14, “When the Spirit of truth comes, he will guide you into all the truth, for he will not speak on his own authority, but whatever he hears he will speak, and he will declare to you the things that are to come. He will glorify me [Jesus], for he will take what is mine and declare it to you.” When we pray in the Spirit, we follow Jesus’ instruction in Matthew 6 to acknowledge that the Father is the one who is in heaven (not us), that his name is hallowed (not ours), and that our first request is for *his* kingdom to come and *his* will to be done. In the book *Prayer*, Tim Keller writes, “Our prayers should arise out of immersion in the Scripture...the wedding of the Bible and prayer anchors your life down in the real God.”ⁱⁱ A sanctified prayer life centers on God, who informs and conforms our requests with the Word. And when we pray for specific wisdom for a difficult situation, we ask in faith (James 1:6), believing that the Spirit will help us discern how to apply the Bible.

Pray through Scripture during your quiet time and memorize verses for meditation throughout the day. The Holy Spirit will press the Word into your heart and mind, changing what you pray for and *how* you pray for it, to make you more like Christ.

THE HOLY SPIRIT BUILDS US UP IN PRAYER BY COMFORTING US

When we pray in the flesh, we can feel utterly helpless to pray when we are going through severe suffering or trial. We may feel like we can’t put words to our heartache and pain. We may intellectually understand the true things that we should pray for, but it’s hard to say them with conviction.

Over the past year, I have often received the question, “How has it been going as a new elder?” I usually respond that it has been both a joy and a burden, two sides of the same coin. The joy comes from getting to know more of the congregation more deeply. The burden comes from being more acutely aware of the trials and sufferings that our dear brothers and sisters are going through...broken relationships, infertility, miscarriages, unsaved children, chronic illnesses, and cancer. My own 15-year-old niece was recently diagnosed with Stage 4 colon cancer. I want to be strong in the Lord and bold in my requests. But often, when confronted with such heavy things, I find myself weak and at a loss for words. I know many of you know what that’s like.

Brothers and sisters, prayer is one way that God ministers

to us. When we feel lonely or depressed but nonetheless go to Him in prayer, we attune ourselves to the assured fellowship and comfort of the Holy Spirit (2 Corinthians 13:14, Acts 9:31). We do not serve a God that despises our weakness. Rather, Romans 8:26 tells us that “likewise the Spirit helps us in our weakness. For we do not know what to pray for as we ought, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us with groanings too deep for words.” God knows there will be times when we are at a loss for words, yet He has provided a way to pray. We don’t need to wait until we’ve first sorted out our feelings and are prepared to say all the right things. In Psalm 139:4, we are told, “Even before a word is on my tongue, behold, O Lord, you know it altogether.” God hears and understands the silent cry, for the “Spirit intercedes for the saints according to the will of God” (Romans 8:27). He carries our cry to the throne of grace, and He gently leads us to deeper trust in God’s sovereignty and goodness.

If you are suffering, please reach out to a brother or sister and ask for prayer. And if you are the one *being* reached out to, be diligent in praying with and for your suffering friend. While it is good to desire to share truth and wisdom, be mindful of and trust in the Spirit, who is at work even amidst silence.

THE HOLY SPIRIT BUILDS US UP IN PRAYER BY FILLING US WITH THANKSGIVING & JOY

When we pray in the flesh, we are very focused on the problems of life and things we wish we could change. A seemingly innocuous request for a new job may actually arise out of a grumbling spirit.

In my twenties, I really struggled to embrace the gift of singleness and to remain content in the Lord as friend after friend got married. I would joke that I should be the lead actor in the next romantic comedy because I have been a groomsman ten times (not a joke). I remember fighting off doubts about God’s love or thinking that God simply loved others more than me. As I wrestled in prayer, the Spirit reminded me of God’s faithfulness—unmerited gifts of salvation, the church, daily bread. Faced with the undeniable bounty of God’s love, I was convicted of my sin and repented of being ungrateful and making marriage an idol. Don’t get me wrong, I still desired to be married, but the Spirit replaced my grumbling with thanksgiving and turned my sadness into joy.

In this life, you will face disappointment and suffering. When you pray, instead of getting tunnel-visioned on the object of the solution to your problem, make a point to

thank God for his many blessings, both big and small, especially when you don’t feel like doing it. Thank him for saving you and for renewing your inner self day by day (2 Corinthians 4:16). Rejoice in the hope that does not put us to shame because God’s love has been poured out into our hearts through the Holy Spirit (Romans 5:5). Be filled with the Spirit, singing and making melody with your heart, giving thanks always and for everything (Ephesians 5:18-20). When you saturate your prayers with thanksgiving, the Spirit will help you see the afflictions of this world as light and momentary, preparation for an eternal weight of glory beyond all comparison (2 Corinthians 4:17). He will produce in you the fruit of joy.

THE HOLY SPIRIT EQUIPS US THROUGH PRAYER FOR THE WORK OF MINISTRY

When we pray in the flesh, prayer is often a hurried afterthought. We focus on the “main event” of ministry—the logistics of hosting a dinner with a neighbor or being at our post serving at church. We don’t prioritize spending time asking the Lord to go before us and accomplish the work.

I think part of the problem is that we overestimate our own abilities. We think that our words and actions, if carefully crafted and excellently executed, have the power to make things happen. So we busy ourselves with our vocations, marriages, parenting, eldering, deaconing, giving, and evangelism...with prayer as window dressing. We forget that our work will only bear real, lasting fruit by God’s sovereign will. Before you go out, pray. Ask God for the wisdom and strength to carry out the work and ask God to produce the fruit. The Spirit will remind you that God is the one who prepared good works beforehand to walk in (Ephesians 2:10). The Spirit will then equip you with power (Acts 1:8) and the ability to speak the word of God with boldness (Acts 4:31). When we are weak, he is strong.

Perhaps you’re a new Christian, and the task of making disciples seems daunting. Or perhaps you’ve been laboring in the church and harvest field for decades, and you are confident in your own experience. In either case, remember that we are powerless to breathe life into dead hearts, nor can we cause people to grow. But God can do it! So start the work of ministry with prayer.

CONCLUSION

Jude 20–21 says that “praying in the Holy Spirit” is a means of grace to “keep yourselves in the love of God, waiting for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ that leads

to eternal life.” Christians are called to persevere in prayer. I would be remiss if I didn’t mention that self-discipline is important for perseverance. By all means, build prayer into your daily schedule, and have a membership directory, missions pamphlet, and *The Valley of Vision* on your nightstand. Keep a prayer journal, and ask a brother or sister to hold you accountable for private prayer.

Just don’t say in your heart, “I want to do it all by myself.” Though my daughter was ready to give up, as her father, I was committed to encouraging her to try again with my help because I love her. So it is with our heavenly Father. He designed prayer to be intensely relational. The Holy Spirit draws us to the throne of grace, where audience with the Father is made possible by the intercession of the Son. As we keep in step with the Spirit and pray, he lovingly builds us up and powerfully equips us for the work of ministry. Let us not settle for a dry prayer life when we have access to rivers of living water.

– James Chiang

ⁱ The Spurgeon Center for Biblical Preaching at Midwestern Seminary, “Praying in the Holy Ghost”, November 4, 1866.

ⁱⁱ Keller, Timothy. *Prayer*. Penguin Books, 2014.

Prayer: Experiencing Awe and Intimacy with God

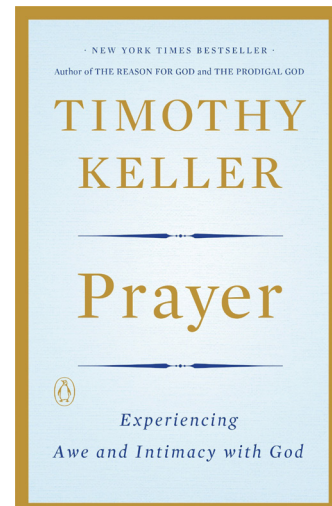
Written by Timothy Keller

Keller begins by acknowledging he is not the first person to have written a comprehensive book on prayer. But when asked to suggest a book about understanding and practicing Christian prayer, he didn't have anything to give them. Many books about prayer are theological, experiential, or methodological, but not all three simultaneously. Keller seeks to include all three points in *Prayer: Experiencing Awe and Intimacy with God*.

Keller explains prayer is not just words we say or a feeling we experience, but both. He claims that all have a sense of needing something/someone, and prayer is the only way we can bridge the gap between our neediness and the one who can satisfy us. But this kind of prayer is not merely repeating words to God, nor is it mystically trying to achieve enough peace to be free of needing to be satisfied. Knowing God truly is intellectual and emotional. We must pray with rationality (1 Corinthians 14:15), and we must pray with enjoyment, and willingness to listen to him. By studying his word and meditating to the point of delight (Psalms 1-2), we can experience inward love and joy that is life-changing. Prayer is both a conversation and an encounter with God. Keller shows us how these aspects are not mutually exclusive but necessary to experience awe and intimacy with God through this book.

This book gave me new ideas and convictions about my own prayer life. It provides practical points about how to grow in prayer without belittling the Christian, making prayer legalistic, or making prayer too casual. God listens to our prayers and wants to hear from his children. He cares for us deeply, so deeply that he sent his only Son to die for his children, yet we have trouble communicating back to God in response. This is what Keller seeks to help us do. In 266 pages, he sheds light on transitioning from listing off prayer requests to true, fruitful, and joyful prayer that leads to love for God. I would highly recommend this book to any Christian who seeks to love God more and communicate more deeply with him!

– RECOMMENDED BY HANNAH HAIR



Excerpts from the Book

1

"To be adopted is a new legal event, but of course it means more than that. To be adopted into a new family means a revolution in how you live your life day to day. In Christ, therefore, believers are not only legally but personally established in God's fatherly love."

– Encountering God, p. 69

2

"You should not begin to pray for all you want until you realize that in God you have all you need. That is, unless we know that God is the one thing we truly need, our petitions and supplications may become, simply, forms of worry and lust."

– The Touchstones of Prayer, p. 139

3

"It is the truths of the gospel- Jesus' dying love, His unconditional commitment to us, His costly sacrifice, our adoption into God's family- that make the sin itself hateful in our eyes."

– Intimacy: Finding His Grace, p. 217

The Autobiography of George Müller

Written by George Müller

Towards the beginning of his ministry to orphans in Bristol, England, George Müller observed a widespread lack of trust in God among many he encountered. This so moved him that it became one of the principal reasons he established a house for orphans. He longed to strengthen the faith of the saints by pointing them to visible proof that God the Father is faithful to all who put their trust in him.

This encouragement and reminder are as needed in our day as in the 1800s in England. George Müller was convinced that if a poor man, like himself, simply by prayer and faith, were able to obtain the means to care for orphans, then the faith of the children of God would be strengthened (not to mention the witness it would be to the unconverted).

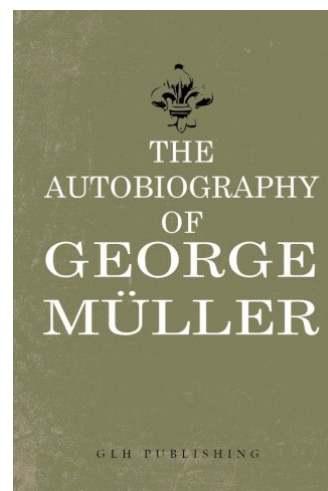
After a life of indulging “sinful pleasures” and even spending time in prison, George Müller fully surrendered his life to Christ. His conversion is a great reminder that God works in the hearts of the unlikeliest of sinners. It is also a reminder that the example we set matters: it was the example of a brother who preferred to labor in Poland as a missionary rather than enjoy a comfortable living with his wealthy family that finally led Müller to saving faith.

From his conversion, Müller’s life was one of full devotion to Christ and laboring in his service. The Lord ultimately led him to Bristol, England, where he founded the Scriptural Knowledge Institution and ministered to thousands of orphans. He and his wife were moved to sell their possessions and give to the needy by a deep conviction. Likewise, he was moved not to ask anyone for financial assistance, not even the brethren.

Through many trials, Müller persevered, always trusting in the promises of God and relying on prayer and faith to sustain him. Many instances, too many to recount, are depicted in the book of poverty and want, but he never wavered in his reliance on God to provide (and God always showed up).

George Müller is one who was willing to “get into the wheelbarrow,” as they say. In an age of doubt and self-reliance, even within the body of Christ, this autobiography serves as a wonderful reminder of the power of prayer and living a life of surrender to Christ for his glory and honor.

– RECOMMENDED BY SCOTT HARTY



Excerpts from the Book

1

“[t]he first and primary object of the work [establishing an orphan house] was, and still is, that God might be magnified by the fact that the orphans under my care are provided with all they need, only by prayer and faith, without any one being asked by me or my fellow-laborers, whereby it may be seen that God is faithful still, and hears prayer still.”

– Home for Destitute Orphans, p. 68

2

“My heart’s desire and prayer to God is, that all believers who read this may by these many answers to prayers be encouraged to pray, particularly as it regards the conversion of their friends and relations, their own state of heart, the state of the church at large, and the success of the preaching of the gospel.”

– Plenty and Want, p. 117

3

“Indeed, in all my experience I have found it thus, that if I could only settle that a certain thing to be done was according to the will of God, the means were soon obtained to carry it into effect.”

– Faith Strengthened by Exercise, p. 136

JUNE

These Scripture readings have been selected to help you prepare for the Sunday morning message. Take Up & Read!

June 1	Psalm 31	June 17	Psalm 119:73–80
June 2	Psalm 32	June 18	Luke 6:37–42
June 3	1 Peter 1:22–2:5	June 19	Luke 6:43–49
June 4	Psalm 33	June 20	Psalm 80
June 5	Psalm 34	June 21	Psalm 76
June 6	Psalm 53	June 22	Psalm 77
June 7	Psalm 49	June 23	Psalm 78
June 8	Psalm 50	June 24	Hebrew 13:7–21
June 9	Psalm 51	June 25	Psalm 79
June 10	Romans 3:9–20	June 26	Psalm 80
June 11	Psalm 52	June 27	Psalm 126
June 12	Psalm 53	June 28	Psalm 122
June 13	Luke 6:43–49	June 29	Psalm 123
June 14	Luke 6:1–11	June 30	Psalm 124
June 15	Luke 6:12–26		
June 16	Luke 6:27–36		

*Sermons in bold

TAKE UP & READ

NEW MEMBERS



Joju
Abraham



Betty
Abraham



David
Garcia



Kacie
Grella



Tyler
Hartwig



Ashley
Waddington



Mount Vernon
BAPTIST CHURCH