

The Question has been asked, what does the life of a man in prayer look like?

In order to answer that question, we must first answer another, what is prayer? I define prayer two ways: 1) Prayer is a conscious action performed by a given individual in which communication with the divine is attempted and achieved. In prayer we lift up our eyes to the heavens and present our case, whatever it may be, to God. This is done acknowledging the otherness of God. We are incapable of doing things ourselves, and so we seek the aid of someone outside our own existence. Philippians 4:6 tells us "Do not be anxious for anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving, let your requests be known unto God." 2) Prayer is a state of being, which when attained, reflects a life that to the modern unbelieving eye might seem a paradox: a life filled with humility and confidence, purity and emotion, meekness and strength, wisdom and faith, zeal and contentment, hatred of sin and love of humanity. What does prayer as a state of being mean, you might wonder? It is a life in which constant communication, ceaseless supplication, and tireless dependence upon the grace of God is both voiced and acted upon. 1 Thessalonians 5:17 reminds us to "pray without ceasing." So what does this look like? Well that is the question that requires us all to be here.

In the rest of this discussion I will be addressing the types of prayer, the modes of prayer, the attitudes of prayer, and the effects of leading a prayerful life. I will run through each of these separately, and then tie them all together. Hopefully by that point, we will have a better picture of what a life of prayer looks like.

There are four types of prayer, as found in scripture. The first is Adoration. Exodus 15:11 is a good example of this: Moses is singing, and by the way, singing is a mode of prayer, "Who is like you O Lord, among the gods? Who is like you, majestic in holiness, awesome in glorious deeds, doing wonders?" It is this type of prayer that acknowledges the creator/creature distinction. With adoration we praise God's otherness. Our praise and glorification touches on who God is, what He has done, and what He is doing in our lives. Also, adoration is for the sake of adoration. We do not, or should not, praise God with the goal of getting anything in return. It is a no-strings-attached prayer of praise. It is a response on our part either to the hand of God working on our behalf, or for the simple purpose of lifting the name of God above all others, publicly acknowledging that God is God, and we are not Him.

Thanksgiving is the other reply we make to God when He has blessed us with any given thing. Psalm 138 gives a picture of what Thanksgiving looks like: "I give you thanks O Lord with my whole heart, before the gods I sing your praise, I bow down toward your holy temple and give thanks to your name for your steadfast love and your faithfulness, for you have exalted above all things your name and your word." Thanksgiving involves our honest gratitude to God for everything in life. There are an endless amount of blessings that we have received, and we are called as sons of God to honor him as God, and to give him thanks. Gratitude and thanksgiving are the signatures of a redeemed life. We give thanks to acknowledge that we do not have the controls, and to point in the direction of the one who does.

The next type of prayer is confession, in which we humbly and honestly acknowledge our sins before an almighty God. Psalm 51 shows us what confession is: "Have mercy on me O God, according to your steadfast love, blot out my transgressions, wash me thoroughly from my iniquity, and cleanse me from my sin. For I know my transgressions and my sin is ever before me." In confession we bring to God our sins and ask that he forgive us for the sake of Christ. This also brings to the forefront God's otherness, or to use a related word, His holiness. God is so thoroughly set apart from us, and therefore cannot look upon iniquity. However, through the apostle John, he has promised that "if we confess our sin, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness." (1 John 1:9) Through confession and the forgiveness that we find in Christ, we gain access to the very throne room of God.

The final type of prayer is Supplication. With supplication we bring to God our needs, desires, problems, debates, etc. In Psalm 64, David says, in supplication, "hear my voice O God, in my complaint, preserve my life from dread of the enemy, hide me from the secret plans of the wicked." In our supplication we bring to the throne of Grace any and all requests with the understanding that God will answer every request in his own way and time, which often looks very different from the way we imagine. Sometimes, God says no, and we must learn to understand that, and accept it. From that we learn how to pray. We ask for a brand new corvette, and God says no. We have learned something.

Speaking liturgically, these four types of prayer follow one another in our worship of God. We first confess our sins, gaining access through our forgiveness to the heavenlies. In Church

history this has taken the form of the Kyrie Eleison, which was originally, a nine part prayer, beseeching the mercy of God. Once we are given access into heaven, we glorify him and sing his praise. This is historically speaking found in the Gloria in Excelsis and the Sanctus. Other forms of Adoration include hymns of praise and confession of Faith (the Credo), in which we affirm the truths of God's character and actions in history on our behalf. Following Adoration comes our Supplication. We come before the throne, asking that God break us and cleanse us, making us holy and fit for his service. He does this through the preaching of the word. The Agnus Dei would fall into this category, as we again beseech the mercy of God, and also ask that he grant us his peace. Following this, we give God our thanks. Liturgically speaking this happens in the Table, the feast of the Eucharist. Thus we have a general progression from Confession to Adoration to Supplication to Thanksgiving. This is not a watertight progression by any stretch, but it is helpful to recognize the flow of things, especially as we are here trying to ascertain what a life of Prayer looks like.

How do we pray? Many of us assume, as did I until I began thinking on this further, that prayer only happens when we bow our heads, fold our hands, and whisper to ourselves the Lord's Prayer. But that is not so. Certainly that is one way of praying. But given our definition, and he who defines wins, Mr. Wilson, Prayer needs to happen every minute of the day, "without Ceasing." However, we cannot spend the whole day with our eyes closed. Our definition you will remember is that prayer involves a constant communication with the divine. Therefore, prayer must be something more and different than what we normally think of. I would suggest to you, that there are primarily three ways that we pray. The first is the way we all think of, eyes closed, head bowed, hands folded in the lap. The second way is when we read scripture. In the act of absorbing the words of God we are communicating with him. He is speaking to us. Prayer should never be thought of as only a one-way street. We pray to God, but he responds. It is much more like a telephone call. Though some have blasphemously pictured prayer as a real, actual telephone call, the idea behind it is orthodox. We speak to God, God speaks to us. This happens in Scripture. The third way of praying is through music, specifically liturgical music. In liturgical music, we transcend ordinary dialogue and enter into a type of prayer. Through music we can confess our sins, exalt our God, bring to Him our petitions, and give Him thanks. Now these modes of prayer are not mutually exclusive, and all three are necessary to the full orb'd prayer life. But we must remember that all three are necessary.

There are, as I see it, five attitudes to imbibe in our prayers. They are transparency, devotion, zeal, confidence, and faith. Let's start with the last. Prayer must be accomplished by faith. It is through faith that we approach the throne at all. It is through faith that our requests may even be spoken. Apart from the faith of Christ, we have no advocate standing on our side in the Heavenly Court room. Apart from the faith of the Spirit, we have no one interceding on our behalf with groanings too deep for words. This is the faith that the Father gives us, and we must remember that apart from it, we can do nothing. A true faith of this kind will automatically bring humility, and keep you from being puffed up, which again, destroys healthy prayer.

This faith is the foundation for everything. Most immediately it is what gives us confidence that we may approach the throne. And we must pray with confidence. Hebrews 4:16, "Let us then draw near with confidence to the throne of Grace, that we may receive mercy and grace to help in time of need." With boldness and confidence we may approach, knowing that God delights in the prayers of his people, and the prayers of a righteous man availeth much. We know that we have the Righteous Man on our side, praying for us, and calling us to pray. In this knowledge we find great assurance that our prayers will be heard, giving us every reason to be confident and bold.

In our prayers we must also be zealous for the hand of God. If our prayers are monotone and half-hearted, they will go nowhere. It is almost as if you pray behind a locked door, and the keys to set your prayers free, so that God may hear them, are sincerity and fervor. Zeal must accompany your prayer life. If you are not zealously asking for God to work, you are not asking. This is apparent throughout the Psalms. The accusation of half-hearted prayers will never be laid against David. "Zeal for your house has consumed me," he says in Psalm 69. We must never appear before the throne without a fervent spirit. This does not mean our bodies must always be full of energy and ready to sprint at the drop of a hat. But our spirit must be. Our spirit must be zealous in every communication we make with our Father. This means in Confession, Adoration, Supplication, and Thanksgiving. May you be known as one who has a zeal for God.

Zeal will naturally give rise to devotion. We must be constantly praying, ceaselessly praying. We must be devoted to prayer. Again this means more than bowing the head. We must be devoted to reading the Scriptures and to praising with harp and lyre and song. Devotion is a key ingredient to a healthy prayer life. It is difficult to develop a healthy prayer life when you are not constantly practicing, constantly reading and singing, immersing yourself in God's Word through His Spirit. It is true that practice makes perfect. The more we fill up our days with Scripture, Prayer, and singing

God's praises, the easier it will be for the Spirit to guide and direct us, conforming us to the image of Jesus Christ.

Finally, in our prayers we must exhibit the attitude of transparency. We must bring to the table, everything. We must not try to hide anything from God, for it is fruitless. It will only frustrate your desires for God to answer your prayers. If you act like there is nothing you need to confess or nothing that God doesn't need to know, you have entered the valley of self-deception. It is a deep valley, impossible to negotiate. Once you enter, the only way out is to fall, until you reach the river called Honesty, which flows at the bottom. Only after you have fallen into the river will you be carried out of the valley. God knows everything. God sees the heart. He sees the closet you stuff everything into, and lock. Only an honest, transparent prayer life will please the Lord through faith, and cause him to look upon you with pity and love.

I have thus far given you a few lists of items connected to Prayer. I defined prayer being four fold, containing the elements of Confession, Adoration, Supplication, and Thanksgiving. I have defined prayer as involving bowing the head, reading Scripture, and singing praises. I have also defined prayer as needing to be through faith, with confidence, zealous, devoted, and transparent. With this fuller definition I believe I can answer the original question, what does the life of a man of prayer look like.

The life of a man of prayer must be first and foremost, a Sabbath-centered life. If the worship of God is not the primary event of every week, than the battle is already lost. It is in the worship of God that we learn to live life the other 6 days of the week. In worship we devote ourselves to prayer, through bowing the head, reading the Word, and singing psalms, hymns and spiritual songs. We confess our sins, give glory to God, present our petitions, and give Him thanks. We must do this all through faith, with confidence, zealously, devotedly, and transparently. Once we have that down, and accomplished in a way that is pleasing to God, the rest will follow naturally. But since that last sentence will not suffice for this examination, let me continue.

Starting on Monday, anyone bent on leading a life of prayer, must make sure to devote himself to the reading of the word, the singing of songs, and the action of prayer. Of course this must be done, again, through faith, with confidence, zealously, devotedly, and transparently. This also must be done throughout the day. As we drive to work we sing the praises of God. As we sin against our brother, we confess it, and make restitution. As we receive a blessing, we give thanks,

and as needs arise, we make our requests known unto God. This must be done down to the tiniest matter. For example, you have a stack of papers at your desk and need a paperclip. Knowing you never bought any, you look in your desk on the off chance that one is there. You open the drawer and you find one right away. Instead of saying things like "what are the odds" or "Who woulda thunk it" say instead, "Thank you Lord for this small and insignificant blessing." This is what I meant when I said a state of being. A heart, mind, soul, and body that is at all times in all places ready to surrender anything and everything to the Lord, be it thanks, sin, supplication, or a sincere "God be praised," is a heart, mind, soul, and body that is living a life for the Lord. A soul that is in constant communication with the Divine, is a soul that is healthy and strong. Now this is difficult. It means hard work. It means doing things that we lazy Americans are not excited about doing. It means committing to memory large portions of Scripture, releasing and confessing every sinful glance, biting word, or improper thought, immersing yourself in music that glorifies God and learning to understand it. There is a lot of work to be done, and frankly we are scared to try. But the reward is beyond comprehension.

What are effects of such a life? First and foremost, it gives rise to obedience. If we, with the Psalmist, meditate on the Law day and night, and place our delight in the Word of God, then we will be like a tree planted by streams of water, and we will yield fruit in our season. Also, a life of honest fervent prayer will yield a peace that will baffle mankind. Paul calls it a peace that surpasses understanding. The God of peace will grant it to you, if you without anxiety, make your requests known with thanksgiving. Think of a life free from anxiety. Hard to imagine, but it is possible. It is a life that easily counts it all joy when you encounter various trials. A life of honest fervent prayer will also grant you confidence in the will of God. When you have large decisions to make, major changes to endure, or a period of life where the immediate future is uncertain, a life of prayer will enable you to trust God and weather the storm. As soon as you give it up to God, He gives it back to you. When we try to take control of the reigns, there is only one direction we know how to go, and that is off the road. But a life of full orbed prayer knows how to let go, and how to trust that God is in control. Obedience, Peace, and Confidence in What God is doing. Imagine if every Christian experienced these three things, due to a full orbed life of prayer. How different the world would be.