

~Other Speakers S-Z: K.P. Yohannan:

Now after reading many stories of answered prayer, perhaps you are beginning to realize in a new way the power of prayer, the many reasons to pray and what the attitudes of your heart should be as you pray. Maybe now you are inspired to pray in new ways than before and are very encouraged in your heart. But unless you go one step further, this inspiration will amount to absolutely nothing.

You must begin to pray. All the understanding about prayer, all the excitement about praying more and all the good intentions in the world are completely useless, unless you pray.

Practical Suggestions for Individual Prayer

I want to make you aware of some things that are helpful to keep in mind regarding prayer.

Develop the discipline of prayer. First of all, you must realize Satan knows that prayer is the fastest way to advance the kingdom of God. Therefore, he will try everything he possibly can to stop you from praying. He will even prompt you to do "good things" to replace time spent in prayer.

At times prayer will come naturally, with little effort. But at other times, it will be a struggle to get your mind and will in gear to pray. Prayer is a spiritual discipline. Please, do not be discouraged when you feel like you are fighting upstream in prayer. Realize that it is hard because it truly is the most significant thing you could be doing. It is worth the fight. Keep in the battle.

And just as we discussed that prayer acknowledges our dependence on the Lord, it applies even in the very area of praying. Ask the Lord for His help to pray and to know how to pray. Tell Him, "Lord, I really desire to pray as You would like; please help me to pray." He most definitely will help you. Make this your daily prayer and truly depend on Him for His help to guide you. I guarantee you will see your prayer life grow.

Take it step by step. Oftentimes, not knowing how to practically start praying regularly stops people from beginning to develop their prayer life. Because they are not sure when to pray, how long to pray, what to pray for, if they should have a list of daily prayer requests or simply seek to hear what the Lord is saying each day, the act of praying is delayed until it eventually becomes nonexistent. If this is you, take time to hear what the Lord is saying for you to do right now. We learn step by step, little by little. Take those steps today.

We must make sure that we do not concoct our own prayer life, but rather are led by the Lord in all things. Maybe you would like to pray for three hours a day, but it could be the Lord wants you first to be faithful with a smaller amount. It could be that as you continue to seek Him for how He wants you to pray, He will move it up until you can be faithful to pray for three hours a day.

Or it could be that He just wants you to be faithful to pray for one need right now until that prayer is answered. Or He may desire that each day you listen to hear from Him afresh, understanding what is on His heart for the day. The Lord will show you as you seek Him. Be faithful with whatever He shows you, and you will see a difference. Prayer is more about hearing than about verbalizing. As you seek to hear what the Lord desires and you do it, you will see your life transformed.

Pray with others. One thing that I have found significant throughout my years of knowing the Lord is the incredible encouragement it is to pray with others. Many times, joining in prayer with a friend has served as not only an encouragement, but also an exciting journey on which we together see the Lord move in incredible ways through the things we agreed on in prayer. And not only does praying with another deepen our relationship with that person, but it also serves as a catalyst in prayer, while providing good accountability to stay in prayer.

Be accountable with someone and pray with them. Yet be careful to guard your time together so that it does not become a time when issues are discussed more than they are prayed for. Be sure to use this time to seek the Lord together.

Sometimes times of prayer with others can grow into larger groups, with many people involved. As it does, the following are some suggestions that are helpful to keep in mind.

Practical Suggestions for Prayer Groups

In prayer times, please be careful to avoid the entertainment trap.

Man likes to keep things busy and moving. By nature we are people who cannot sit still. It is hard to be quiet. We like pictures and slides. We like to have variety. We don't want anybody falling asleep or getting bored. Therefore, we keep so many things happening that we lose the quietness, the soberness, the intensity, the meditation and the devoutness that should be present in prayer. The sacredness of being in the holy of holies, sitting before God and gazing upon Him as we share our burdens with Him can easily be lost in the busyness and show of conducting a prayer meeting.

It is far too easy to get lost in the entertainment trap and deceive ourselves, thinking because since it felt like such an alive prayer meeting, it was productive. Unless we make sure we are listening to Him and following His lead, the Lord may be saying, "I waited for you to be quiet and open your heart to Me, but you wouldn't. You were so busy following the program that you missed Me. You talked to each other, but you didn't talk to Me; you didn't even listen to Me. There was no time when I could share My concerns with you."

I pray that this will not be so of us. We need organization, plans and agendas. Prayer meetings must not be dull.

Involvement and participation are needed. But please, in the midst of all this, let us not miss the Lord. Let it be the Lord who stirs the prayer meeting and calls us to participate.

Also, we need to be sure to guard our minds against wandering thoughts

Do you ever find that when somebody is praying and you start entering into prayer, all of a sudden your focus is gone? Your brain is on what happened during the day or some other random thought. But somehow, just before the end of the prayer, you snap back. Youâ€™re able to say, â€œAmen,â€ as though you were fully alert through the whole prayer.

Somehow, right after someone starts praying, within two or three sentences, I can be gone if I donâ€™t harness my thoughts. There are so many concerns, so much to do, so many calls I need to make that I can quickly lose focus in prayer. The enemy seeks to distract us like that so the promise â€œif two of you agreeâ€ (see Matthew 18:19) will be defeated.

Second Corinthians 10:5 speaks of this battle for our thoughts. It says, â€œCasting down arguments and every high thing that exalts itself against the knowledge of God, bringing every thought into captivity to the obedience of Christ.â€

Thousands of times my thoughts wander away in prayer. Maybe I am discouraged or depressed. Maybe I am thinking about what to do next. Many times I fail miserably. But then somehow, by Godâ€™s grace, Iâ€™m able to catch hold of what is happening. Through the blood of Jesus and the Word, we can defeat the enemy and bring our thoughts into captivity. But we must be on the alert, ready to harness those thoughts and bring them into captivity to obey Christ.

In prayer meetings, be sure to let liberty reign.

We should have freedom to be the people God has created us to be. We should have freedom to express His thoughts with the emotion He gives us.

I remember attending a prayer meeting in South Korea a couple of years ago. Iâ€™d like to go back to Korea just for that experience again. Their culture is particularly a shame-culture; that is, they do not want to do anything to bring shame upon themselves or their family. But when it comes to prayer, these people are completely unashamed. They cry out to God in their loudest voice, with streams of tears running down every face.

We must learn to have liberty to be who God created us to be and act accordingly. Our God is the God of the quiet and the calm, as well as the God of the high-energy and expressive. Iâ€™m not trying to put everybody into one box. But there should be freedom to be joyful or exuberant. There should be freedom to express pain or sorrow. Tears, like Hannahâ€™s (see 1 Samuel 1), should not be quenched or misunderstood. We should not be intimidated into acting a certain way in our prayers.

We must also watch out for too much regulation and too much control in prayer meetings

Those leading the prayer meeting should not be in total control of every second. It is not good to have someone tell you what to pray for and how to pray for it. It is not good to have to stop praying because somebodyâ€™s watch said it was a certain time. We need to be led by the Holy Spirit.

There are times when we may not have any agenda in our times of prayer. And then at other times we may have many things on our agenda. In each case, let Godâ€™s burden be given to us so that we will intercede for the things that are on His heart. Let us pray according to His will and His time frame.

At the same time, let us also be on guard against having too little regulation, order or discipline.

Sometimes prayer meetings can get out of hand if there is no framework or organization. Things can get crazy. We must avoid this because the devil can take control of these types of things. Prayer meetings can have these two extremes: There can be too much regulation so that people have no freedom, or there can be lack of any organization so that things are manipulated by the enemy. We need balance in this area.

But finally, the most important thing is that you pray! As you pray, the Lord will show you more of His heart in prayer and what He desires from you.