

Dear Ones,

At last Thursday's Testimony Meeting some were commenting on the Manna text regarding "watching and praying." It was mentioned that in so many words, your mind can wander when you are praying and it can be difficult to keep focused on the thoughts and considerations of your prayers. I have heard this dilemma mentioned by many brethren over the years and that it can be quite frustrating and can even feel disrespectful to the Lord, even though it is completely unintentional. We can end up feeling discouraged, thinking, "I am talking with my God and the next thing I know I am thinking about my 'to-do list'" or some other mundane business of life. Not good!

At the Testimony Meeting I testified that I have had seasons of consistent, deep prayer, and then I can fall out of that good habit and prayer becomes brief, and less frequent, usually is just in the morning, at bedtime, and at meal times and at meetings. Those are all good, but not - deep prayers - to me. Sometimes I have likened my prayer habit to physical exercise, or to being on a weight loss diet. Getting on a workout program or a strict food diet program for most people is hard to start, and hard to stay on. If you stick with a program for a year it can seem like forever, but then fall off of it, and 2 years seems like it just speeds past. So fast! What happened?

I was thinking about this subject on how I could help myself, and then I turned it into a talk since I figured, I know I'm not alone in this problem. Especially after I started talking with others and the "mental chatter," clutter, wandering, etc., during prayers seemed to be an experience common to everybody that I talked with about it.

In my experience, I need to take about 7-10 minutes of just sitting very quietly, eyes closed, before I ever even begin to talk with God when delving into deep prayer. Personally I use a simple breathing technique and a mental imagery technique to slow down my body, my heart rate, and thereby relax and release the energy that runs in the background all the time as we go about our daily activities. That in turn becomes a muscle relaxing technique gradually from scalp to toes, all to slow down my mind and body and clear my mind of all the day's activities. I don't think we realize just how much energy we are expending as we go through our day to day routines. With that high level of energy running, if we stop for prayer, and don't take the time to slow it all down first, and we just start right into praying, I find, that is when the mind easily wanders off down all kinds of sidetracks. So again, I'm just saying what has helped me. It takes the first step of calming my mind and body down to prepare myself for prayer. It doesn't take very long, but I have found the outcome of my communion with the Lord is so much richer when I prepare myself first. In fact I find that when this has become a

daily routine it really takes less than the 7-10 minutes I mentioned. When I am in that good prayer habit, my mind and body can slow down a lot faster with practice.

Also I think that the Lord rewards me for taking this time out of my day, giving this time to Him, to first prepare myself for spending time with Him. It is so worth it, and the Lord richly rewards me for taking the time. The only question that I have for myself is; "Why I don't mandate this for myself and never allow myself to get out of this daily habit?" (Like I think the beloved Daniel did.) But a lot of it comes back to self discipline, and what I mentioned about things like exercise and dieting. It just seems easy to let this blessing slip by. I'm glad for the Manna from Nov 3rd as it made me think about getting back to a better place in my prayer life. What a benefit!

Well, I hope that this may be helpful for you. I felt like I knew what you were talking about when this came up. I hope that this isn't presumptuous of me to write to you. It's just that what I have described has helped my prayer life and stops that unwanted mental chatter that imposes itself when I am trying to talk to my wonderful, loving heavenly Father.

Maybe you have some ideas that you can share with me from your personal experience that have enhanced your prayer life. I'd appreciate that.

Yours in Christ Jesus,  
Br Brad

Luke 6:12 "And it came to pass in those days, that he went out into a mountain to pray, and continued all night in prayer to God."

Dear Brethren,

After talking a little more about the topic of prayer with some during the Sunday meeting, I offered that I'd add some more information (hopefully not too much, but probably is) on this concept in practice. What I am going to share is actually about a relaxation technique that prepares me for prayer. This works well for me, and it might work for others too, so hopefully it will be worthwhile for you to consider.

We often say that we have the "great privilege of prayer," and indeed it is so. I would add that it is not only a great privilege, but also prayer should be a great pleasure. The question is: Do we take full advantage of that privilege and pleasure? Are we enjoying the full measure of the special fellowship God offers to us, and do we maximize the experience of personal fellowship with the Lord in a positive and comfortable and loving way on a regular basis? Do we take the time? Do we make the time, to be with the Lord in His appointed way? Do we go into our

"closet," our "private chamber," to spend time alone with the Lord? If we do, we demonstrate our great desire for Him by regularly setting aside time for prayer. Our days are full of activity and responsibilities, and there is always much to be done, but of all that we do, what can compare to spending quality, intimate time with our heavenly Father? Really nothing else compares. Matt.6:6, Mk.1:35, Lk.5:16, Dan.6:10.

WE LIVE in an extraordinarily fast paced time, truly unprecedented in all of human history. We might call it a hyper-stimulated environment; fast cars, fast internet, fast news cycles. The snail mail pace is gone, now we have email, texting, computers, smart phones, etc. Life in general comes at us very fast. Even in our communications among the brethren, we know almost instantly if somebody has taken a fall or is facing a serious health issue, anywhere in the country, we know about it almost instantly. There is a lot of information we have to process every day. What we end up with often times is simply too much mental stimulation. So, when we want to stop, and take time to pray we may find it difficult to unwind and to settle down the mental chatter and clatter running in our head, largely because of all of the stimulation that we have experienced. How can we download and clear the memory so to speak? Below is what I have found to be helpful steps, leading to a more productive and beneficial prayer life. And by the way, many people use similar relaxation methods and have found this type of exercise beneficial in a variety of settings, so certainly this is nothing new or unusual. Even the Lamaze birthing classes teach similar techniques to expectant mothers for slowing down, keeping focused and staying more calm during labor. If you find that this provides a benefit in your life you will no doubt develop your own style and formula of what works best for you. I consider this as a part of *prayer meditation*, and we need this - *slow down* - ability now more than ever given that so much comes at us in such a torrent every day. There are not necessarily specific steps that must be followed, but to get the general approach please read on...

*Ps 119:15 "I meditate on your precepts and consider your ways." (NIV)*

For myself I think there are different *modes of prayer* that are all valuable. Most praying tends to be somewhat brief in duration, while the approach we are going to consider tends to set the stage for more extended prayer time.

*Luke 6:12 "And it came to pass in those days, that he went out into a mountain to pray, and continued all night in prayer to God." [The Greek definition for "continued all night" is literally to "sit up the whole night."]*

Not to suggest spending all night in prayer, but it might be 10 minutes, or 30 minutes, all according to how you feel moved to talk with God and listen for His directions. There is no set frequency for this meditative prayer. You may incline to doing this every day or once a week. The prophet Daniel seems to have opted for three times a day. If you make this a habit you may find it so pleasant that you will look forward to it daily. And when I say, "I listen for His directions," I mean that during prayer the Lord can direct our thoughts to answers, as we dwell on what we have already learned in our studies and in our Christian walk. He can answer us by bringing to the surface what we already may know but in that we are now turning these things

over in our mind and asking for His directions He can cause us to simply see something more clearly, in a different way, with greater perception, more clearly than we had seen it before, and by this direction God can give us greater conviction in a matter.

"My mouth shall praise Thee with joyful lips: when I remember Thee upon my bed, and meditate on Thee in the night watches." Psalm 63:5, 6.

A Method of Preparing Ourselves Before Prayer:

1) These techniques are best applied during the daytime hours, when feeling fully awake and aware. This is not going to work so well at the end of the day or at bedtime when the likelihood of falling asleep is high. (Even the apostles couldn't stay awake when they tried to pray with Jesus late that night in Gethsemane.) Ideal times might be early before starting the day's activities, or late morning, after you have been up and active but still feeling energetic, and most importantly, when you can make the time for a quiet uninterrupted 20-25 minutes or so. It is important to have it settled in your mind that there is no other place else that you have to be, and nothing else that you should be doing. This time is to be devoted, dedicated time, for one purpose only -- it is a period of time for you to commune in peace and quiet alone with the Lord.

~ With that said I will add that we may sometimes awaken in the middle hours of the night and not be able to sleep. These quiet and still hours of the night can be the most blessed moments to commune with the Lord in matters of the spirit. No distractions, thus allowing for greater focus. ~

2) Sit up in a nice comfortable chair, preferably one with arm rests. (But not lying down -- too easy to nod off.) Begin by closing your eyes and relaxing your body. Observe the space taken up by your entire body; sense your physical self such as where you are in contact with the chair; be aware of your physical sensations such as where you feel coolness or warmth. Then take in a slow, deep breath, in through your nose and hold to the count of 5 or whatever is comfortable, and slowly, fully exhale through your mouth and hold for a moment. After a few normal breaths, then again take a deep lung filled breath in through your nose, holding to a count of 5, and then fully breathing out all the air through your mouth. Repeat this four times. Inhale the refreshing clean oxygen and think of exhaling any stress or anxiety out of your body and mind. While starting into this relaxation, you may like to have a word, like "peace" that you say in your mind (not aloud) as you relax. This helps to prevent your mind from wandering onto other thoughts as you are just concentrating on one word and one thought.

3) Breathing normally, now imagine a relaxed sensation, starting at the top of your head. Imagine your scalp feeling relaxed, like a warm softening feeling in your scalp as any muscle tensions or stresses start to melt away. This is a very pleasant feeling because you are starting to rest and relax your body, letting go of any tension and letting go of any nervous energy built up in your system, letting it flow out and away from you.

4) Now imagine that same ease and relaxed feeling in your facial muscles, in your jaw muscles. Reminding yourself; there is nowhere else that you have to be, and nothing else you have to do. This time is just for ease and comfort; for letting go of all tension and all your body's energy. Now, feel the muscles relaxing in your forehead and cheeks as they start to feel like warm soft putty. Now letting that feeling go down into your neck muscles, all feeling relaxed and soft and like warmed putty, letting go of all the built up energy and tension all leaving your neck.

5) Now moving down into your shoulders, then, gradually moving down into your upper arms. Taking the time to be quiet and slowing down all of your body's systems. Relaxing your body as your mind clears of all unneeded thought and activity.

6) Then moving down your arms out to your hands and then gradually out to your fingers, all the energy leaving your hands, leaving you more and more relaxed.

7) Let the energy flow out and away from your chest, then your abdomen and your back muscles. Then relaxing through your hips, all stress flowing out and away. Then moving down through your thigh muscles, your knees, and then through your calves and last through your feet and toes. Now fully relaxed, all the excess nervous energy and unnecessary thoughts are gone.

8) Now, you are still sitting up, perfectly still, your body has slowed down, your breathing and your heart rate has slowed. You are very aware of your body and your surroundings and the relaxed state that you are in, more aware than ever. Your mind is very clear.

NOW you are prepared to come to the Lord in prayer. You are now able to do so without extraneous thoughts intruding because you have set the conditions for prayer having cleared away the random thoughts and the excess energy from your body and mind. Now is a time for comforting, unhindered communion with God in prayer. There are no distractions and no interruptions.

This decompression process initially may take around 10 minutes, but after a little practice you may find that you can get fully relaxed with a clear mental condition quite quickly.

On a personal note, I usually don't use this time to pray for others and their needs and wellbeing. As appropriate as that is at other times and in other *modes* of prayer, this time is primarily to express my own thoughts and praises and thanksgivings to God. It is a time that I can make my requests to God, for His guidance, His instructions, for guidance in any services, to ask for help with decisions, to increase His spirit operating in my heart and thoughts, to tell Him of my love for Him, for His creation, for His truth, for dear Jesus, for calling me, for His spirit begotten family, and to ask that He grant me His peace, the inner peace of heart and soul that only He can give. This a time of deep devotion and the warmth of fellowship and communion.

*Deut 4:29 "But if from thence thou shall seek the LORD thy God, thou shall find him, if thou seek him with all thy heart and with all thy soul." (KJV)*

During these moments of deep, intimate prayer, I have found that I may talk with the Father about different things than might normally come to mind, since this is such a personal and sanctified time for the Father and I to be together. I just go with the flow of thoughts as they arrive. There is no hurry, there is no list to remember, just time to be joined in fellowship and to be together in spirit. This is a mode that I think of as deep, meditative prayer. I believe it is the most satisfying and the highest level of prayer that we can experience. It is so restful. But to experience this I need to set the environment appropriately.

I'll mention one other thing that I do that helps me, but it's hard to describe. When I am offering my thoughts to the Lord I try to think of letting them go. *Releasing* them from being trapped inside my own head so to speak. This is hard for me to explain but I am trying to not, hold the prayers within my own mind, but releasing them out beyond my own physicality. See, it's hard for me to describe but maybe you get my point.

J.B. PHILLIPS " Phil.4:-7 "*Delight yourselves in God, yes, find your joy in him at all times. Have a reputation for gentleness, and never forget the nearness of your Lord. Don't worry over anything whatever; TELL GOD EVERY DETAIL of your needs IN EARNEST AND THANKFUL PRAYER, and the peace of God which transcends human understanding, will keep constant guard over your hearts and minds as they rest in Christ Jesus.*"

In addition to enhancing one's prayer life, I find that this relaxation exercise is good for overall health. It brings a level of rest to the system that is unlike sleep and in some respects is more restful. Again, we live in times of considerable stress which can cause anxiety and the flesh can have much to fret over. This helps to dissipate that condition. Then, relaxation, when linked with more comforting and meaningful prayer is good for our overall well being. So that is an added benefit to enjoy.

Take the time -- Make the time,  
May God Bless Your Prayer Life Richly!

(Wow! More? After writing out all of the information above, I then realized that I had already created similar notes in my Bible program under my Dan.6:10 notes. So I've just add them in here because it is interesting to me that my method from these notes compiled around 20 years ago is almost exactly the same as what I had just produced recently. So, it still makes sense to me.)

PRAYERS: There is the COMMON or CUSTOMARY prayer of thanksgiving for a MEAL or a STUDY service. There is the CONVERSATIONAL prayer, saying what's on our mind to the Lord as we are walking on the way, or driving in the car, or mowing the grass. Like the thought of "praying without ceasing." Like Tevye did in "Fiddler On The Roof." Remember? Tevye would be pushing his milk cart down the road and talking with the Lord. Because of the troubles the Jews faced in Russia, one time Tevye was talking with God and he was saying, "Lord, I know we are your chosen people, but just *maybe* you could choose somebody else once in a while."

Ah, then there is the DEEP MEDITATIVE PRAYER. Now this kind of prayer is the best, the richest communion with God that we can experience. Now you should know that for most, it means taking some time out of your day to achieve this level of communion. This is offered to God as a sacrifice. One of praise and communion. Like we see in Dan.6:10, three times a day Daniel would stop what he was doing, clear his mind, and present himself before the Lord in prayer. And the Lord loves that we dedicate time to spend with Him, because it tells the Lord that we want to spend time with Him and Him alone. We want to disconnect from the activities of a busy day to spend time alone just with Him. Giving to Him our undivided attention, just the two of us having this visit, as a Father and his son.

And with a cleared mind, you'll be amazed at all of the things that you find you want to tell the Lord. And this time together will be pure, clean, just you and your Father in fellowship, all made possible thru the Advocacy of Jesus our Lord, the one and the only one that has made our coming to the throne of Jehovah's grace possible. And so we always say in our prayers in some form that "We come to you Father in the righteous merit of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ."

"It is said that - "THE MIND CAN ONLY TRULY FOCUS ON ONE THING AT A TIME" - so we need to start our "deepest prayers" first by THE EXERCISE OF CLEARING OUR MIND. How can we do that? START by sitting upright in a comfortable chair, but not laying down. You don't want to fall asleep. #1) Concentrate on your breathing. Focus on your breath as you inhale and exhale deeply. 3 times, take in a full, deep breath, breathing in thru our nose, holding to a count of 5, or whatever is comfortable, and fully exhaling thru the mouth, pushing all of the air out. Breathe normally a few breaths and then deeply again, repeating this deep breathing 3 times. Next, concentrate on relaxing all of the muscles in your body, focusing on one specific area at a time. Start at the top of your head, imagine your scalp feeling warm and soft like getting a massage on your scalp. Take time until that area is feeling fully relaxed. Next let that warm, relaxation of all of your muscles soften and relax in your neck. Feel the softening and warmth in the muscles and tissues in your neck. Now, going down into your shoulders. Then into your abdomen, then down into your hips, then progressing to your thighs and knees, then your calves, then last into your ankles and feet. Now your body and mind has completely relaxed and released any and all nervous tension and energy.

Your mind is completely clear, your thinking and physical body has slowed down and now is fully relaxed. You are calm, and quiet, but you are fully aware, awake and clear in mind ready to offer your prayers to your Father in heaven. Your prayers to God are the only thing that you are aware of and meditating on.

(We want to get quiet and settle down of our entire mental and physical system. This is a bit of a process and can take 10-15 minutes to achieve for someone that is new to this method, but it can be accomplished in about 3-4 minutes for someone that is accustomed to doing this. This process will allow you to clear your mind of the mundane business of life, and shut down the mental clatter that normally intrudes itself when trying to commune with your heavenly Father in prayer. NOW you can SHIFT YOUR THOUGHTS away from the mental clatter, to the Lord in unimpeded prayer and communion.)

(And one other thing, as you are praying, imagine your mind releasing the thoughts of your prayers, out from self and up toward God. That is to say, don't keep the thoughts bound inside

of your own mind, but imagine releasing them, and letting them ascend away freely from you towards God, like the ascending smoke of burning incense, up, up, released away from you and ascending toward God. Think of it as "liberating" your own prayer thoughts as you are offering them up to God as a sweet smelling incense sacrifice of praise and thanksgiving drifting upward and away from self.