

Nine Reasons to Change the Way You Pray

By Daniel Henderson

In my early years of ministry, I tended to lead prayer gatherings based on what I had seen others do—without evaluating the biblical basis for these methods.

Soon, I learned this approach was not effective for life-giving experiences. Eventually I stopped using these common approaches and embraced the preferred ideal of Scripture-fed, Spirit-led, worship-based prayer.

Many Christians still embrace what I describe as prayer “misfires.” Perhaps it would be helpful to examine each and explain a better way.

Misfire #1: “Does anyone have any prayer requests?” We’ve all been in prayer times that started with this question, typically followed by 30 minutes of detailed descriptions of a vast array of human needs ranging from slipped discs to the destructive impact of liberal politics. Clearly, our Father knows our needs, cares deeply for us, and wants to work in our lives for our good and His glory.

A request-based prayer time begins with a man-ward focus rather than a God-ward focus. This is in stark contradiction to the pattern Jesus gave us in the model prayer, which instructs us to start in worship of our Father in heaven and the grandeur and holiness of His character.

Misfire #2: “Let’s all just pray as we feel led.” This opening instruction is common and often assumes that everyone is automatically “led by the Holy Spirit” as they start praying. Unfortunately, many in the group are instinctively

“led” by personal agendas, troubling world events, or surface relational conflicts.

We don't really know what we should pray about, or how to pray about it, until we have first given quality time to seeking God's face and yielding our will to His. I pray best about my needs after I have worshiped and surrendered completely to His truth and character.

Reasons to Change the Way You Pray

I have learned that the best way to start a prayer time is with this statement: “Let's all turn in our Bibles to. . . .” Here are nine reasons why the Bible is the best starting place for prayer times:

- First, the Scriptures reveal to us the character, names, and works of God—turning our thoughts God-ward rather than man-ward.
- Second, as we follow the pattern Jesus commands for His disciples (Matt. 6:9–13; Luke 11:2–4), we must look to the Bible to provide reliable truth and inspiring insight about our Father in heaven and the holiness of His name.
- Third, the Bible gives us the best language for prayers that are according to the will of God, since His Word is His will.
- Fourth, the Bible is living, active, and penetrating (Heb. 4:12). It reveals the real needs of our hearts and lives, taking us beyond surface prayers about circumstances and people. This leads to authentic confession and trust.
- Fifth, the Bible unites those who pray as every heart and mind is aligned with God and His Word.
- Sixth, the Bible empowers us to pray in faith since faith comes by hearing and hearing by the Word of God (Rom. 10:17).
- Seventh, as the Bible inspires faith, our prayer time is

pleasing to God because we are coming to Him in the truth of who He is, confident that He is a rewarder of those who diligently seek Him (Heb. 11:6).

- Eighth, the Bible prepares us for victory in the spiritual battle. As our prayers are infused with Scripture, we are equipped to take the sword of the Spirit, God's memorized and spoken Word, as we confront temptation—just as Jesus did in the wilderness (Eph. 6:17; Matt. 4:1–11).
- Ninth, the early Church began their prayers from the Bible (Acts 4:23–31). We see that they started with God's character and Word, not their personal or collective needs. Their concerns were very serious, as they were facing hostile persecution, but they sought God's face before His hand, just as Jesus had commanded.

Calvin Miller noted, “Too often, we go into God's presence with a list of pleas, trying to talk God into granting our desire. But this kind of praying makes us ‘one big mouth’ and God ‘one grand ear.’ But when we pray the Scriptures, it makes God the voice and leaves us as the ear. In short, God gets His turn at getting a word in edgewise.”¹

So, the next time you pray together, don't misfire. Instead, allow God's Word to work powerfully to bring great blessing and benefit to your prayers. He is worthy of it and we are in need of it.

¹Calvin Miller, *The Path to Celtic Prayer* (Downers Grove, IL: Intervarsity Press, 2007), 57.

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