

3 Misconceptions About Prayer

Prayer has transformed my life and it's led me on wonderful paths that I never expected, but it hasn't always been that way. It's taken me a while to feel as if I understood prayer, and considered myself a praying person. Maybe it's because of the misconceptions that I had since childhood.

What are your first memories of prayer and how God works? Here are a few of mine that I shared in my book ***Blue Like Play Dough***.

When I was in the fifth grade, a friend stayed the night. Before we drifted off to sleep, Heidi climbed out of the bed, got on her knees, and prayed. At the time, prayer wasn't a part of my nightly ritual. But seeing her there, it hit me that something wasn't right. If God is God, then couldn't He hear my prayers as I lay on my bed? Didn't my whispered requests meet His ears, no matter what position I was in?

I remember another time I prayed in the second grade for something I wanted. It was a book of Barbie paper dolls. You know—the kind with the perforated edges and all those cool two-dimensional clothes to dress that cardboard figure in.

I desperately wanted the paper doll book, so I prayed. I told God He could make it appear, and I'd keep it just between me and Him. I made a deal, and I told Him He could drop it in my closet, and I'd only play with it when my mom wasn't around. I prayed so hard and so long (for a second grader) that I was highly disappointed the next day when I opened the closet door and the paper doll book wasn't there.

Disappointment trailed me for a week, until I was certain that God wasn't all people talked Him up to be. Until ... my birthday arrived. And guess what I received? The paper doll book! It wasn't my only gift, but it's the only one I remember today. It struck me then as I pondered it with all the contemplation

a 7-year-old possessed, that God had answered my prayer after all, just not in the way I expected (p. 128-129).

Looking back I can see a few misconceptions that I had about prayer.

Misconception #1: Prayer is an event. When I saw Heidi pray as a child it confirmed to me that prayer was an event. I understood that I didn't need to kneel to pray, but I did think it was something that I needed to tack on to my day.

For years and years I saw prayer as an event. It was a time when I need to be still and come before God. There are times when I do that. I love quiet mornings on my couch. Sometimes I even get on my knees before Him, but I've grown to discover **prayer is not an event; it's a continual conversation.**

In the last week I prayed as I rode an ATV for the first time. (I prayed I wouldn't die!) This morning I prayed as I watched my son drive away in the snow. (I prayed for his protection and for a bubble to surround his car from crazy drivers.) Last night, I prayed for a friend when she shared a need on Facebook. I didn't wait until the next morning's quiet time to pray. As I sat in front of my computer I closed my eyes for a moment, and I asked God to be with her and to give her peace.

Misconception #2. Prayer is about getting what I want. As a young girl I learned the importance of prayer from Sunday School, but I thought that prayer was a way to get what I want. I wanted paper dolls, so I prayed. Later, I wanted a new outfit, so I prayed. In high school I wanted to make the cheerleading squad, so I prayed. Yes, God's Word tells us to bring our needs before Him, but that's not the only thing prayer is about.

"Prayer is taking everything before God and listening for His voice. It's asking that my heart reflect His heart. It's begging for discernment and reading His Word. It's not

depending on popcorn prayers to get you through. Instead, it's looking back at what God has done and considering what direction He is providing. And then it's stepping out in trust that God will pull you back if He needs to" (*Blue Like Play Dough*, p. 133).

I improve my prayers when I better understand:

1. **Prayer as ongoing communication with God.** He's our Creator, our Provider, our Guide. He is with us always, and we don't need to make prayer an event. Prayer should flow out of every part of our day.
2. **Prayer is more about knowing what God wants than getting what I want.** The best things to pray are: "Lord, show me your will." "Lord, guide me in your ways." And "Lord, give me strength and peace to follow You."
3. **Prayer changes me.** As I pray in my day I see God there. When I lift up my thoughts and concerns to Him I invited Him to be part of my life, one moment at the time. I am changed because I don't see my tasks, my problems or my worries as my concern only. Instead, I hand those things over to God and I am changed.

As I improve my prayers, my relationship with God improves. As my relationship with God improves I become a different person. **Want to improve your prayers?**

1. Talk to God throughout the day.
2. Seek God's will for your life.
3. Become a person of freedom as you hand over your concerns to God.

Learning to pray has been a growing process, and I'm so thankful that God has been patient with me along the way. I'm a different person because of prayer. I'm thankful to walk in freedom, turning every need and thought over to Him.

Lord, help me to pray. Help me to turn to You through the day. I want to become a better prayer NOT so that I can get more of

what I want. Instead, I desire to know your will. I also want to walk in the freedom that will come when I turn everything over to you, Jesus. Amen.

Tricia Goyer has written more than 35 books, including both novels that delight and entertain readers and nonfiction titles that offer encouragement and hope. She has also published more than 500 articles in national publications such as Guideposts, Thriving Family, Proverbs 31 and HomeLife Magazine.