

# Change Your Prayer Habit From 'Have To' to 'Want To'

I guess we all develop weird habits over the years, some of which are completely oblivious to us until pointed out by another party.

Some are avid gum chewers and incessantly blow and pop small bubbles with it. Others use certain words repeatedly in conversation without realizing it or have a tendency to reiterate the last phrase of a sentence ... of a sentence.

One of my idiosyncrasies was exposed to me during my college years. Before then, I had no idea that I tended to eat one thing at a time on my plate. One day, at a restaurant, just after receiving our food, my friend said something like, "Enjoy your fries." I looked at him, wondering if he was suddenly turning into a waiter. "Thanks. I plan to," I responded. "No," he replied, "I mean, you're going to eat your fries first, then eat your burger. You do it every time."

Until that moment, I didn't realize how systematic and predictable I was.

I have no idea what to attribute it to, but as I look back at childhood, it probably had something to do with my abhorrence for anything green on my plate (unless it was icing, of course). I know it was nutritionally necessary, but having to eat something only made it that much worse. From peas to green beans to broccoli to eventually asparagus (the most dreaded vegetable of all), I tried to delay the "taste" of it as long as possible.

Besides, why should I confuse my palate throughout the meal by continually introducing foreign matter into it? Better to enjoy most of the experience and throw all the bad taste

together. Through the entire meal, “it” would remain on the plate as I gulped down the mashed potatoes. I could still see it lying there as I consumed the entrée.

All the while, the vegetation would almost mock me, knowing I couldn’t ignore it forever, knowing my mother wouldn’t allow me to dispose of it untouched. I would pray for the rapture, or at least a natural disaster, to come and save me from having to eat the backyard, but no! The green always wins. Eventually I would have to man up and throw it down my gullet.

Somewhere along the trail of life, I got to a point where the “have to” food wasn’t so objectionable. I have no trouble eating that stuff anymore (except the asparagus–vile weed). However, I can’t recall a time when I looked forward to the vegetable more than anything else on the plate.

Maybe it’s because they’re not sugarcoated, or maybe it’s just the “have to” label I put on it early in life. No matter how accommodating I am, I can still remember it feeling more like punishment than enjoyment.

Maybe I’ve done the same with prayer. Throughout our Christian experience, we are told we “have to” pray, and that’s true. We know it’s “good for us” and necessary to our spiritual health.

However, I can’t help but wonder if prayer doesn’t become equated with leafy vegetation in our minds for the same reasons. We don’t recognize the incredible privilege and beauty of personal interaction with the King of Kings. We’re not told soon enough that we are having a conversation with the One who put Saturn on its axis.

When we give Him the chance, He will listen and speak to us; not in broad generalizations like a head of government speaking to his constituents. No, He will be specific to our hearts when we give Him room. The Spirit will speak

specifically to us and our situation, giving us incredible life.

Our Father desperately wants prayer to move from “have to” to “want to,” or from asparagus to chocolate cake, if you’ll pardon the metaphor. He wants us to see it’s not a laborious task like cleaning the tub or reconciling our bank statement. We are interacting in love with our Savior. He’s repairing, comforting, challenging, healing, forgiving, and restoring us. It’s not a recitation of requests and a mere laundry list of “bless this person” or “help that guy”.

We are receiving life and affection from the God of Wonders. David had the right perspective when he said, *“As the deer pants for streams of water, so my soul pants for you, O God. My soul thirsts for God, for the living God. When can I go and meet with God?”* (Psalm 42:1-2)

I would pose the same question to all of us. When can we go and meet with God? That’s prayer: meeting with God.

And each time we do it wholeheartedly, we are changed. Forget past notions or previous misconceptions. Meeting with Him is the dessert bar of our experience. Ask the Lord to turn it from a “have to” to a “want to”.

Anticipate the absolute best, and you’ll receive it. Try to bless Him as much as He blesses you, and we’ll get a hint of what David was talking about. Ask Him to give you a genuine hunger and thirst for righteousness. You will be filled, whether you take it in collectively or one item at a time.

Just bring your fork.