

How to Live a Life of Prayer

I have been learning about, teaching about and writing about a praying life for several decades now. It is the grid through which I view life. It has been so transformative for me that I have spent all my adult life sharing the concept with others.

I still remember when the phrase came to me and recalibrated everything in my understanding—not *have a prayer life*, but *live a praying life*. I was a student at Baylor University and wrestling with understanding prayer. I was finding formulas and prayer rules, but those approaches satisfied neither my heart nor mind, and they didn't hold up to the test of reality. They didn't work. I wanted to know what makes prayer work.

I replaced the thought of saying prayers—sandwiching words between “Dear God” and “Amen”—with the awareness of being in the flow of His power and provision. I expanded my definition of prayer so that it includes the continual interaction between the material and the spiritual realm—sometimes articulated, but often simply an inarticulate flow between His heart and mine.

This concept of living a praying life relieved me of the anxiety of getting prayer right so that God would do what I thought He should do when I thought He should do it and how I thought He should do it. Not only did I expand my definition of prayer, but I also expanded my definition of yes. Rather than frontloading prayer with my expectations, I learned to leave it open to more than I could ask or imagine.

I learned that God rarely works within the confines of my narrowly drawn parameters. His yes most often shows up outside my construct—bigger than my best idea. If I have my focus on the best thing I can think up, I miss the better thing He has in mind.

A praying life, then, is flowing continually. Prayer is an ongoing pursuit. Rather than starting, stopping or picking up where you left off, it just moves from one level to another in

your multitasking mind. Yet this praying life is undergirded and nourished by daily times of concentrated prayer.

The Prayer Teacher

Prayer is a work that has its beginning and its effect in the spiritual realm. Those effects are manifested in the material realm. James states that prayer has effect and produces results (James 5:16). Though the effects play out in the circumstances of earth, they have their substance in the spiritual realm. A praying life is a life lived on earth in the power of heaven.

The earthly life of Jesus demonstrates this paradox. The Son of Man lived every moment in the power from on high. He lived a praying life. He alone can teach us to pray, and He alone can reproduce His praying life in us.

Jennifer Kennedy Dean *is executive director of the Praying Life Foundation and a respected author and speaker. She is the author of numerous books, studies and magazine articles specializing in prayer and spiritual formation. Visit her website for more information about her ministry.*

