

You Don't Have to Pray Long to Get God's Attention

In my early years, I was tempted to believe that prayers must be long, drawn-out and intense in order to be effective. I put a lot of pressure on myself. I even tried a 10-day fast.

But as I grew spiritually, I discovered that prayers are sometimes answered quickly, even if they are short. Once I stood in my front yard during a bad storm and asked God to divert a tornado. I didn't have time to pray for hours. I later learned that the twister had jumped over our neighborhood, and we were spared.

A few weeks ago, I had a \$15,000 need for one of my overseas missions projects. The day I prayed about it, someone from Texas called me and said she wanted to give half of the amount needed. Two days later, a person I hadn't talked to in more than 30 years called and said he wanted to give the other half.

I was reminded of Psalm 138:3, which says: "On the day I called, You answered me."

God's Word is full of short prayers. Moses prayed the shortest prayer in the Old Testament when his sister Miriam was struck with leprosy. He prayed: "O God, heal her, I pray!" (Num. 12:13). The apostle Peter wins the prize for the shortest prayer in the entire Bible. When he was sinking in the waves on the Sea of Galilee, He cried out to Jesus: "Lord, save me!" (Matt. 14:30)—and then he and Jesus walked back to the boat on the water.

When I consider the apostle Paul, who is surely the New Testament authority on powerful prayer, I see that he not only fasted and travailed in prayer for hours, but he also offered God many short requests. I don't know if he kept a prayer list

scribbled on parchment, but he knew the power of “mentioning” his requests to God.

He told the Ephesians: “For this reason I ... do not cease giving thanks for you, while making mention of you in my prayers” (Eph. 1:15-16b, ESV). He told the Thessalonians: “We give thanks to God always for all of you, constantly mentioning you in our prayers” (1 Thess. 1:2). And he wrote to Philemon: “I thank my God always, making mention of you in my prayers” (Philem. 1:4, NASB).

Short prayers are powerful. The average psalm takes only a minute or two to recite, and Psalm 117—the shortest psalm—only takes nine seconds to say. Jabez’s prayer is even shorter: “Oh that You would bless me indeed and enlarge my border, and that Your hand might be with me, and that You would keep me from harm that it may not pain me!” (1 Chron. 4:10a).

I’m not suggesting it’s wrong to pray for hours. Some situations require patience, perseverance and spiritual warfare—which is why prayer is compared to the anguish of childbirth. But some Christians give up on prayer because they assume God is timing us, or measuring our eloquence. He’s not. He welcomes even the simplest of requests.

The Bible even says he hears our “cries” (see Ps. 18:6). Sometimes a prayer doesn’t even have words! It can actually be an unintelligible groan, or just a simple “Jesus!”

A few years ago, I started the habit of praying for certain people using photos I stored in my smartphone. During my quiet time in the mornings, I scroll through these images and pray for my family, close friends and people I’m mentoring.

Sometimes I stop and pray for these people’s specific needs. At other times I simply say their names, and ask God to bless them and cause them to grow spiritually.” Then I scroll to the next set of photos and mention those names.

I can't keep track of all the answered prayers that came about because I simply mentioned people in prayer. Some of them found their spouses; some had babies after struggling with infertility; others got their U.S. citizenship; others found jobs. And some of them were healed of various physical problems. (Right now I'm praying for one friend, Gary, who needs healing from migraine headaches. Please mention his name in your prayers!)

Don't make prayer complicated. Jesus simply invites us to share our needs with Him, and He delights in answering us. When the apostle Paul invited us to "pray without ceasing" (1 Thess. 5:17) he was calling us to enjoy a daily conversation with God. Prayer should be a joyful habit, not an exhausting burden. I hope you lose count of the miraculous answers you receive.

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