

The Pastor's Prayer Life: Learning from the Past to Move from Failure to Fruitfulness

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These notes are based on Isaac Watts' *A Guide to Prayer*, first published in 1715. A current edition was published by The Banner of Truth Trust in 2001.

Part I: Persuasive Arguments to Learn to Pray

I. Because of Prayer's Purpose and Dignity: There is such a thing as correspondence with heaven, and prayer is a great part of it while we dwell on earth.

- A. Prayer is the speech which sons of God use to talk to their heavenly Father
- B. Prayer is a sacred and appointed means to obtain all the blessings that we want
- C. Infinite and glorious are the subjects of this holy communion between God and his saints
- D. Prayer is excellent and valuable in comparison with the many things (arts and accomplishments) we labor night and day to obtain

II. Prayer's Vital Part in the Character and Profession of Christians

- A. Questions about its necessity:
 - Shall we profess to be followers of Christ and not know how to speak to the Father?
 - Are we commanded to pray always upon all occasions, to be constant and fervent in it; and shall we be contented with ignorance and incapacity to obey this command?
 - Are we encouraged by the warmest exhortations and encouraged by the highest hopes to draw near to God with all our needs and sorrows and shall we not learn to express those things?
 - Is there a way made for our access to the throne by the blood and intercession of Jesus Christ; and shall we not know how to form a prayer to be sent to heaven and spread before the throne by His glorious intercession?
 - Is his Holy Spirit promised to teach us to pray; and shall a Christian be careless or unwilling to receive such divine teaching?

III. Prayer's Delight: Prayer brings God delight and is a great of advantage to our souls and to the souls of those who join in prayer with us.

- A. Its effect on our spirits:
- Practical Correction:
 - Public Effect:
 - Personal Encouragement:

IV. Prayer's Pursuit: The Honor of God and the reputation of religion in the world is affected by prayer.

- A. God deserves our best in prayer as in other areas of life and worship
- B. The World needs to hear excellent prayer

V. Prayer's Simplicity: It is easy to attain a life of prayer with the common assistance of the Holy Spirit, but it is not to be acquired without some pains and diligence.

- A. It will take patience and effort to pray effectively:
- B. It takes planning
- c. An objection to written prayers:

VI. Prayer's Neglect: There are ill consequences for prayer's neglect.

- A. You will drag on heavily in the work of prayer all your days
- B. You will give yourself up to a morning or evening form and rest in them from year to year
- C. If you have been brought up with a hatred of forms of prayer, and yet don't know how to pray without them, you will grow first inconstant in this duty, with every little hindrance diverting you; and at last perhaps you will leave it off entirely, and your house . . . will be without prayer.

Part II: "THE NATURE OF PRAYER"

I. Invocation: calling upon God.

- A. The mention of one or more of the names or titles of God
- B. The declaration of our desire and design to worship Him
- C. The expression of our desire of His assistance and acceptance

II. Adoration: honor paid to God by the creature.

- A. A mention of His nature as God with the highest admiration and reverence
- B. The mention of His many attributes
- C. The mention of His many works, of creation, of providence and of grace.
- D. The mention of His relation to us
 - 1. As Creator, Father, Redeemer, King, Friend, our Everlasting Portion
 - 2. Mention Christ who has allowed us to relate to God.

III. Confession

- A. A humble confession of the lowliness of our original nature
- B. A confession of our sins, both original and actual
- C. A confession, arising from our sense of all our aggravated sins, that we deserve punishment and are unworthy of mercy.
- D. A confession or humble representation of our wants and sorrow of every kind.

IV. Petition

- A. A desire of deliverance from evil
 - 1. From Guilt:
 - 2. From the Power of Sin:
 - 3. From Our Depravity and Appetites:
 - 4. From Temptation:
 - 5. From the World:
 - 6. From Our Just Desert:
 - 7. From Our Enemies, Yea, from Ourselves and Our Folly:
- B. A request of good things to be bestowed
 - 1. Sanctification:
 - 2. Confirmation and Assurance:
 - 3. Transformation:
 - 4. Holiness:
 - 5. Affection:
 - 6. Correction:
 - 7. Leading:
 - 8. Physical Provision:

C. These are to be offered up for ourselves and for all saints.

“Intercession” is the common name for this part of our petitions.

1. For the Church in general
2. For the Nation to which we belong
3. For our friends and near relations
4. For our enemies

D. In what manner do we make petitions?

1. We may use “importunity” in Watts’ opinion when:
2. We should not have such an attitude when:

V. Pleading

A. We may plead with God from the greatness of our wants, our dangers or our sorrows for relief.

B. The many perfections of the nature of God provide another kind of argument in prayer:

1. His Mercy & Grace:
2. His Lovingkindness:
3. His Omniscience:
4. His Omnipotence:
5. His Justice:
6. His Sovereignty:

C. Another argument in pleading with God may be drawn from the several relations in which God stands to men—particularly His own people.

1. As Creator:
2. As Father:

D. The promises of salvation [Watts says ‘covenant of grace’]

E. The name and honor of God in the world.

F. As has been the experience of ours or others in the past

G. The name and mediation of Jesus Christ-

1. The most powerful and prevailing argument is this one.
2. His Obedience:
3. His Death:
4. His Forsaking:
5. His Intercession:
6. His Blood:

VI. Profession or Self-Dedication

- A. A profession of our relationship to God
- B. A profession of our former transactions with God
 - 1. He is our Good:
 - 2. He is our Hope:
 - 3. He is our Identification:
- C. A present surrender of ourselves to God and a profession of the present exercise of our affections and graces towards him.
 - 1. “This is sweet language of prayer when the soul is in a right frame”
 - 2. Having been Justified:
 - 3. Being Sanctified:
 - 4. Determination of our Hope:
 - 5. Determination of our Loyalty:
 - 6. Commitment of our Love:
- D. A profession of our humble and holy resolutions to be the Lord’s forever [generally called a vow]

VII. Thanksgiving

We should give thanks both for benefits we have and have not prayed for!

- A. Those benefits which God has bestowed on us without our asking
 - 1. For making a distinction between us as fallen men and fallen angels
 - 2. Reconciling sinners
 - 3. For the gospel
 - 4. For being born into a land of light
 - 5. For preservations from dangers which we could never foresee nor prevent
 - 6. For not cutting us off in a state of nature and sin
 - 7. For so many conveniences and comforts
- B. For benefits we have received as an answer to prayer.

VIII. Blessing

- A. Mentioning the many attributes and glories of God with inward joy, satisfaction and pleasure.
- B. Wishing the glories of God may forever continue, and rejoicing at the assurance of it.

IX. Amen

- A. A belief of all that we have said concerning God and ourselves.
- B. A desire to obtain all that we have prayed for, longing after it and looking for it.
- C. A confirmation of our professions to God
- D. The hope and sure expectation of our acceptance as persons and as audience of our prayers

Application: Develop a prayer journal or notebook with Watts' categories of prayer so that when you read your Bible, you can write down Scriptural language in each category and so form your own prayers.