

## CHAPTER 2

### “PREPARING YOURSELF TO PRAY” PLOWING THE WAY BEFOREHAND!

**FROM: JERRY**  
**TO: GOD**  
**SUBJECT: HOW DO I GET MYSELF READY TO TALK TO YOU?**

“God—if we’re going to be talking on a regular basis, is there anything I need to do to be sure you and I will be able to communicate? I just hate talking to people who aren’t really paying attention, and sometimes you feel very, very distant. I’m not sure you’re always listening to me. What should I do?”

**FROM: GOD**  
**TO: JERRY**  
**CC: THE CHURCH**  
**SUBJECT: RE: HOW DO I GET MYSELF READY TO TALK TO YOU?**

“Jerry—you’re right. There are a few things that you could do that would make our times together more productive, and certainly more satisfying!

First, it’s important to make sure our relationship is solid! It’s also important to come with the right attitudes. Be willing to be honest, but also be willing to hear me!

The condition of our relationship actually sets the tone, and some guidelines, for how we’re going to interact! Our relationship is the basis for our conversation. Make sure you know where you and I stand, and then tell me what’s on your mind. You can have a plan, or you can just talk to me about what’s on your mind. If our relationship is right, I assure you, I’ll be listening!”

**Principle:** You can’t just crash Heaven’s gates. Prayer requires a prepared heart, and a proper relationship—both toward God—and toward your Christian brothers and sisters. Your heart attitude, or ‘heart-itude’ is more important than anything else when you prepare to pray!

It’s important to know how to pray, and proper preparation is the key! There are a number of basic prayer suggestions in *Appendix M*. But from here on, let’s get a bit more specific regarding preparing to pray.

#### ILLUSTRATION

In her book, *Teaching a Stone to Talk* (New York: Harper Collins, 1988), Annie Dillard reveals a sad but poignant story about what happens when we set out on an endeavor unprepared. She tells of a British Arctic expedition which set sail in 1845 to chart the Northwest Passage around the Canadian Arctic to the Pacific Ocean. Neither of the two ships, and none of the 138 men aboard, returned. Captain Sir John Franklin prepared as if they were embarking on a pleasure cruise rather than an arduous and grueling journey through one of earth’s most hostile environments. He packed a 1,200-volume library, a hand-organ, porcelain place settings for officers and men, cut-glass wine goblets, and sterling silver flatware, beautifully and intricately designed.

The voyage was doomed when the ships sailed into frigid waters and became trapped in ice. First, ice coated the decks, the spars, and the rigging. Then, water froze around the rudders and the ships became hopelessly locked in the now-frozen sea. Sailors set out to search for help, but soon succumbed to severe Arctic weather, and died of exposure due to its harsh winds and sub-freezing temperatures. For some twenty years, remains of the expeditions were found all along the frozen landscape. The frozen body of an officer was eventually found, miles from the vessel, wearing his uniform of fine blue cloth, edged with silk braid, a blue greatcoat and a silk neckerchief—clothing which was noble and respectful,

but wholly inadequate. Because the preparation was inadequate and inappropriate, the desired endeavor was not successful. Prayer may be spontaneous at times, but it must never stem from an unprepared heart.

#### PRAYER QUOTE

*“The first rule of prayer is to have your heart in the right mood to talk to God. We must understand that the only ones who prepare themselves for prayer adequately are those who are so impressed with God’s majesty that they can be free from all earthly worries and affections.”*

—John Calvin

#### A RIGHT RELATIONSHIP

To speak to the Father is the privilege given only to a child of God (see Isaiah 59:2). As God’s child, you have the privilege—not only to *approach* God—but to *approach* His throne *boldly* (Ephesians 3:12; Hebrews 4:16; I John. 4:17) in full *assurance* (I John. 2:28; 3:22) that He will hear (Hebrews 10:22). Imagine being able to call the God of all Creation ‘Daddy’ (Romans 8:15; Galatians 4:6)! Proper prayer recognizes *relationship* is the most important factor (Psalm 34:15). God is only obligated to hear the prayers of His children (Proverbs 15:29; John 9:31; 15:7), and it is to *their* prayers that His ‘ears are open’ (I Peter 3:12). As the perfect Father, God is never too busy to *listen* to you, to *care* about you, and to *hear* your prayers.

#### A PREPARED HEART

Once your relationship with God is settled, it’s best to begin with a prepared heart (Job 11:13-15). This might be called heart attitude, or ‘*heart-itude*’ (Proverbs 28:13). That is, a heart which is in tune with God and His will (cp. John 7:17; James 4:15-23; I John 5:14). It is a heart also cleared of world clutter, and *focused* (I Peter 4:7). Martin

Luther once watched his puppy anxiously focused on a morsel of meat, which was in his sight at Luther’s dinner table. The dog’s eyes were fixed, his thoughts concentrated, and his mouth wide open—prepared to receive what it was seeking most. “It was his sole thought, wish, and hope”, said Luther. And such should be the focus of our prayers. Even the finest instrument must be tuned before it can be played. So too, must your heart be in tune with God before He can answer your prayers. How do you cultivate a proper heart-itude?

First, be sure you have a *forgiving* heart (Matthew 5:23; 18:21-22; Acts 7:60; Ephesians 4:32; James 5:16; see *Appendix A*). A forgiving heart is a heart which has done its best to be at peace with *others*—even with an enemy (cp. Romans 12:18; see Matthew 5:23-24; 6:12). To be at peace with *others* is to be in tune with *God*. While not everyone may choose to forgive *us*, we should pray to forgive others. Jesus instructed us to forgive—and ask forgiveness—*before* we pray (see Mark 11:25). If you find it hard to forgive, ask God to *help* you forgive, and try being at peace with others the best you are able.

Second, be sure you have a *loving* heart toward your fellow Christians. While you may not always agree with everything they do, you must love your Christian brothers and sisters as Christ loves you (John 13:34; 15:12). Remember, the measure of your love for God is the measure of your love for that fellow-believer whom you love *least* (I John 4:11; Matthew 7:2; cp. Proverbs 21:13). As God’s children, we may not always get along perfectly, but we’re all in this together (I Corinthians 12:26).

Third, be sure you have a *confessing* heart (I Kings 8:33; Daniel 9:4-11, 20; I John 1:9). That is, a heart which offers no excuses, and recognizes its own sinfulness apart from Christ. This is a *repentant* heart (cp. II Corinthians 7:10). A confessing heart calls sin what it is—*sin*, and sees it as God sees it (Luke 18:13-14; cp. I Timothy 1:15; see also Psalms 32 and 51). Unconfessed sin can affect your prayer life. Someone has said, “Sin will either separate you from prayer, or prayer will separate you from sin” (Psalm 66:18). A confessing heart *falls* on God’s grace when sin occurs, but never *leans*

on God's grace. That's called presumption (see Chapter 10). How do we *lean* on God's grace? Through harboring 'pet sins' or by labeling them 'personal weaknesses' (1 John 1:9), and just taking grace and forgiveness for granted. Such sins are "...little foxes that spoil the vine" (Song of Solomon 2:15). *Confess* your sins daily to God. After all, He knew them when He saved you. Confession clears the way for prayer; it purges you of what God already knows.

Fourth, be sure you come with a *humble* heart (James 4:6). God hates pride (Proverbs 6:16-17). Pride is seeing yourself—or your accomplishments—as more important than they are, and can hinder your prayers (Psalm 10:4; Hosea 7:10). God honors humility as long as it is *sincere* (Colossians 2:18-23). God listens to the prayers of the humble heart (Psalms 9:12; 51:17; Isaiah 10:17), but hates false humility (cp. Ahaz in Isaiah 7:10-14). Don't try to bluff God with false humility.

Finally, be sure you come with an *obedient* heart. That is, a heart striving to live by God's words (John 15:7) and in submission to God's will (Matthew 26:39; John 15:7; James 1:17; 4:3; 1 John 5:14; cp. 1 John 3:21-22; see Acts 21:13-14). Even Jesus prayed in this manner (Luke 22:42), and taught us to pray this way (Matthew 6:10). Striving to live according to God's will assumes you *know* God's will expressed in His Word. Study the Word (II Timothy 2:15) to know God's will. He hasn't hidden it—if you *really* want to know it (John 7:17). It has been well-said that prayer does not change God, but it changes the one who prays. To align your will with God's will—even when it might not be what you really desire—is to guarantee answered prayer (1 John 5:14; cp. Luke 24:42; 1 John 3:22).

### AN ATTENTIVE EAR

When God does answer your prayers, do you have an attentive ear to hear Him? Even the strongest signal requires an antenna for reception, and—like our 'prayer ears'—must be tuned toward the message when it arrives. The story is told of a Little League

baseball player, who, after many strikeouts, got his first hit. His excitement overcame his wisdom however, when, in rounding first base after a clear single, he made the turn and headed for second. Sensing the decision might not have been wise, the boy stopped halfway. The fans of his team screamed for him to return to first base. The fans of the opposing team screamed for him to keep running. In an instant, the boy was tagged out. Upon reaching the dugout, the coach asked the young boy why he paid no heed to his coach's instruction. "Because," said the disheartened lad, "...with the distraction of everything surrounding me, I just couldn't hear your voice." So it is with prayer. In order to hear God's answers, we sometimes have to be as focused in our 'reception' as we were in the delivering of the prayer. We cannot allow the world to distract our prayers—or God's answers. More often than *anything* else He taught, Jesus stressed that it takes a 'tuned' and purposed ear to hear the life-instructions from our Father (Matthew 7:13-14; Mark 4:9; Revelation 2:7, 11, 17. 29; 3:6, 13, 20, 22; 13:9).

### AN APPROPRIATE PLACE

"A kneeling heart will keep you in good standing with God!" Adrian Rogers once quipped. However, just as there is no one *posture* which is more acceptable to God (except the posture of your heart), neither is there one acceptable *place* to pray (as was the temple in ancient Jerusalem). Even in the Old Testament, God didn't seem to care where people prayed. He certainly heard Jonah from the belly of a fish! However, just as a sanctified ('set apart') *heart* is pleasing to God, so too may be a sanctified *place* where you regularly go to meet with Him (cp. Acts 10:9). Personally, I have a small 'prayer closet' (cp. Matthew 6:6; Daniel 6:10) where I pray often. As a sanctified heart is reserved for God alone, so I reserve my prayer closet as my special prayer place. In there, I can kneel, weep, praise, and glorify God. While a sanctified place is not necessary, mine is special to me. It is a place of focus where I meet—early and late—with God alone. Remember though, it's not *where* you seek God, but *how* you seek Him (Proverbs 8:17).

## AN APPROPRIATE TIME

Someone has said, “Life is fragile...handle with prayer”. While your heart should be in a continual state of prayer to the Father, there are times when you want to go to that appropriate place, fall on your knees, and pour out your heart to God. For me, those times are twice a day, to be sure. One is first thing in the morning. It has been well-stated: “One of the best ways to get on your feet is first to get on your knees”. There is something special about seeking God early (cp. Proverbs 8:17; see also, the poem *A Time to Pray* at the beginning of this book). Giving God the ‘*firstfruits*’ (cp. Proverbs 3:9-10) of the day just seems to be giving Him the priority of my attention and strength. And, of course, I like to pray at evening, when I thank God for the day, and all it has brought.

## My Blog!

The proper posture of the heart, mind, and body makes us more ready to really communicate with God. Once the relationship is solid, the mind is aligned with God’s wishes, and the body is focused on prayer, our time with God will be the most effective and satisfying part of our day!

## *Heavenly Homework!*

4me2cnsdr.now —

- Do you have a special place where you go to meet with God?
- Do you generally pray with an attitude of ‘Thy will be done’ or ‘my will be done’ when you approach God?
- Do you have any ‘pet sins’ you’re harboring that need to be cleared up between you and God?
- Is there someone you need to forgive right now in order to

clear the way for the prayers you make to God?

- Is there someone you could pray for that you know will *not* be praying for you?

*To do*—

- ✓ Make sure prayer is the first and last thing you do each day. Then, fill in the gaps.
- ✓ In your daily prayers, set apart a special place for your time with God. Be sure *you* are right with Him, and ask Him to help you forgive others, as He has forgiven you.
- ✓ Try, the best you are able, to live at peace with everyone you meet today.
- ✓ When you pray today, picture God as the most loving of Fathers, and one who longs to meet and be with you, and give you gifts in love.

## *Text message summary:*

Keep in mind, your communication with God rests upon your relationship with Christ. Accept Christ into your heart as your Savior *first*. Then, your prayers to God are guaranteed to be heard—no matter when or where you pray them.

## PRAYER JOURNAL

### WHY DOES RELATIONSHIP MATTER?

*“Now we know that God does not hear sinners: but if anyone is a worshipper of God, and does His will, that person God hears.” (John 9:31)*

Why is God not obligated to hear sinners' prayers?

Why can we *boldly* approach God in prayer? Explain.

Can God hear *many* prayers at the same time? How do you know?

What *relationship* privileges do your children have with you that might help you better understand your relationship privilege toward God?

Look up 'access' in OT, and how the High Priests were required to come before a holy God. How are we like 'priests' before God? Explain.

### **WHY DOES A PREPARED HEART MATTER?**

What are some ways your heart could be better 'tuned' before you

pray? Are you holding on to unforgiveness toward anyone?

*"And when you stand praying, forgive, if you have anything against anyone, that your Father also which is in heaven may forgive you..." (Mark 11:25)*

What do you think the above verse means? How can you use it to improve your prayer life?

*"Forgiveness is the fragrance the flower bestows upon the foot that crushed it."* Discuss what you think this means.

Why is forgiveness toward *others* so important to your relationship with God? Explain.

Is there someone who may harbor *unforgiveness* against you that you could go to in order to clear the air? Who? How do you know

this would be God's will?

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What Christian brother or sister do you care for *least*? How can you improve your attitude toward them? Why do you think God feels this is necessary? Explain.

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Read Daniel 9:4-11, 20. What are some aspects of his *confession* that you can learn from?

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*"If I regard iniquity in my heart,  
the Lord will not hear me."  
(Psalm 66:18)*

Why would God want you to *confess* your sins to Him if He already knows about them, and they are already *forgiven*? Explain.

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Read Romans 6:1-23, and I John 2:1. What exactly is God's *grace*? What's the difference between *falling* on grace and *leaning*

on it in regard to sinning?

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Are there any 'little foxes' you are not confessing to God, or are calling by another name than *sin*?

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What is *godly humility*? How does the world generally view *humility*? Why?

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Why does God value humility so highly?

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What does God promise to 'humble hearts'? (II Chronicles 7:14)

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How do humility and *false humility* differ before God? Explain.

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Read John 7:17. Do you feel you know *God's will* for your life?  
How can you know it?

What are the most distracting things of this world that you need to  
prune back in order to effectively both pray *to*—and receive  
answers *from*—your Father?

What measures can you take right now to *learn God's Word* better  
in the next year? Why is this important?

**DOES GOD CARE WHERE YOU PRAY?**

*“But you, when you pray, enter into your  
closet, and when you have shut the door,  
pray to your Father which is in secret....”  
(Mathew 6:6)*

Does God care about your *posture* in prayer? How can you be  
sure?

What does ‘*sanctify*’ mean?

Where is your favorite *sanctified* place of prayer? Why there?  
Explain.

What are some distractions to your prayers you might do well to  
get rid of?

Read Daniel 8:18. Why do you think Daniel prayed this way?  
Have *you* ever prayed this way? Why? Was it for *God's* benefit or  
*yours*? Explain.

Do you think prayer early in the *morning* is important to God?  
Why?