

I am Too Busy to Pray Like That!

Prayer is the spinal cord to our spiritual life. When it is strong and healthy, the rest of our spiritual life seems to be strong and healthy. Our prayer life must be a priority. It is essential for the believer to understand their motives and why our intention to pray needs to be surrender to God's will.

What does the spinal cord do and why is it important?

The spinal cord is a crucial part of the human central nervous system. It is a long, thin, tubular bundle of nerves that extends from the base of the brain down to the lower back. The spinal cord serves as the main pathway for transmitting information between the brain and the rest of the body.

This vital structure plays a fundamental role in various bodily functions:

- **Transmission of Signals:** The spinal cord acts as a communication highway, relaying signals between the brain and the peripheral nervous system. It carries sensory information (such as touch, temperature, and pain) from the body to the brain and motor commands from the brain to the muscles and organs.
- **Reflexes:** It is responsible for coordinating reflex actions, which are rapid, involuntary responses to certain stimuli. For example, when you touch a hot surface, the reflex arc allows for an immediate withdrawal of the affected body part.
- **Motor Control:** The spinal cord plays a critical role in controlling voluntary movements. It coordinates the

activation of specific muscles in response to signals from the brain.

- **Autonomic Functions:** It also governs several automatic or involuntary functions of the body, such as regulating heart rate, blood pressure, digestion, and respiratory rate.
- **Protection of Neural Tissues:** The spinal cord is encased within the vertebral column (spine), which provides physical protection for this sensitive neural tissue.
- **Integration of Nervous Signals:** The spinal cord can process certain signals on its own, without needing to relay them to the brain. This allows for quick responses to immediate dangers.

The spinal cord is like a communication bridge between the brain and the body, ensuring that information is rapidly exchanged and allowing for coordinated movements and responses. Its vital role in the nervous system is often likened to the significance of prayer as the central and essential component of one's spiritual life.

1. Prayer is necessary not optional. Prayer is our vital transformative practice. It is intimate and personal.
2. Prioritizing prayer aligns us with God and God's will. Prayer places the will of God *first*—Jesus said, “But seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you.” Matthew 6:33 (KJV)
3. Different types of prayer enrich every aspect of our spiritual lives which empower us to be robust and effective.

4. Obstacles such as distractions, doubts, and busyness get in the way of prayer. Obstacles are to be expected and planned for as a disciple matures and grows in their faith.

Praying Using Scripture:

How to pray using Scripture can be a powerful way to encourage them to engage deeply with the Word of God. Here's a suggested assignment and a list of Bible verses they can choose from:

Assignment: Praying Scripture

Instructions:

- Select one or two Bible verses from the list provided below.
- Meditate on the chosen verses and consider their meaning in your life.
- Use the verses as a foundation for your prayers. Reflect on how they relate to your personal experiences, challenges, and desires.
- Write down your prayers, incorporating the verses into your communication with God.
- Consider the impact of praying with Scripture on your spiritual life and relationship with God.

List of Bible Verses for Prayer:

1. Psalm 139:23-24 (NIV):

"Search me, God, and know my heart; test me and know my anxious thoughts. See if there is any offensive way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting."

2. Philippians 4:6-7 (ESV):

"Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus."

3. Matthew 6:9-13 (NIV):

The Lord's Prayer, a model for approaching God in prayer.

4. Psalm 23:1-4 (NIV):

"The Lord is my shepherd, I lack nothing... Even though I walk through the darkest valley, I will fear no evil, for you are with me; your rod and your staff, they comfort me."

5. James 1:5 (NIV):

"If any of you lacks wisdom, you should ask God, who gives generously to all without finding fault, and it will be given to you."

6. Ephesians 3:16-19 (ESV):

"that according to the riches of his glory he may grant you to be strengthened with power through his Spirit in your inner being, so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith—that you, being rooted and grounded in love, may have strength to comprehend with all the saints what is the breadth and length and height and depth, and to know the

love of Christ that surpasses knowledge, that you may be filled with all the fullness of God."

7. Psalm 51:10 (NIV):

"Create in me a pure heart, O God, and renew a steadfast spirit within me."

8. Isaiah 41:10 (ESV):

"Fear not, for I am with you; be not dismayed, for I am your God; I will strengthen you, I will help you, I will uphold you with my righteous right hand."

9. Colossians 3:12-14 (NIV):

"Therefore, as God's chosen people, holy and dearly loved, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience. Bear with each other and forgive one another if any of you has a grievance against someone. Forgive as the Lord forgave you. And over all these virtues put on love, which binds them all together in perfect unity."

10. Psalm 121:1-2 (NIV):

"I lift up my eyes to the mountains—where does my help come from? My help comes from the Lord, the Maker of heaven and earth."

Select a verse that resonates with you personally and to spend time meditating on it before incorporating it into your prayers. This assignment can be a meaningful way for you to deepen your connection with God through His Word.

Kavanah—and True Prayer for Alignment with God's will

The concept that true prayer involves aligning with God's will and recognizing His sovereignty is a fundamental principle in Jewish and Biblical thought and theology. It reflects the belief that prayer is not only about making requests, but also about surrendering one's own desires and intentions to God's higher wisdom and authority.

This understanding of prayer can be traced back to various biblical passages and teachings within Judaism. For example, in the Lord's Prayer, taught by Jesus to His disciples, it is stated, "Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven" (Matthew 6:10). This phrase emphasizes the importance of seeking and aligning with God's will in our prayers.

In Jewish tradition, the idea of aligning with God's will and recognizing His sovereignty is deeply rooted in the Torah, particularly in the Shema. The Shema, found in Deuteronomy 6:4-5, is a foundational declaration of faith: "Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one. Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength." This passage emphasizes the oneness of God and the call to love and serve Him with one's entire being.

Additionally, the Jewish concept of **Kavanah**, which refers to the intention or devotion with which a person prays, is closely tied to the idea of aligning with God's will. It emphasizes the need for sincere and focused intentionality in prayer, with the understanding that true prayer involves a heart turned towards God.

The concept of aligning with God's will and recognizing His sovereignty has been expounded upon by various Jewish

scholars and theologians throughout history. It is considered a foundational principle in Jewish prayer and spirituality, and it informs the way believers approach their relationship with the Divine.

Overall, this understanding of prayer as alignment with God's will and recognition of His sovereignty is deeply embedded in Jewish tradition and reflects a core aspect of how believers relate to and communicate with God.

Kavanah and Jesus' High Priestly Prayer in John 17

Both involve a focused and intentional approach to prayer, seeking a deep connection with the Divine. As followers, disciples or apprentices of Jesus we take this prayer seriously as an example of how to apply what our Master did to our own lives.

Kavanah in Jewish Prayer:

- **Description:** Kavanah is a Hebrew term that refers to the intention or devotion with which a person prays. It emphasizes the need for sincere and *focused intentionality* in prayer, ensuring that the heart and mind are fully engaged in the act of worship.
- **Significance:** Kavanah is considered a crucial aspect of Jewish prayer, as it reflects a deep spiritual connection between the individual and God. It goes beyond mere recitation of words and emphasizes the inner disposition and attitude of the worshipper.

Jesus' Prayer in John 17:

- **Description:** In John 17, often referred to as the High Priestly Prayer, Jesus offers a heartfelt and intimate prayer to God the Father on behalf of His disciples. This prayer reflects Jesus' deep concern for His followers and His desire for their unity, protection, and spiritual well-being.
- **Significance:** Jesus' prayer in John 17 is highly significant in Christian theology. It showcases the depth of Jesus' love for His disciples and His ultimate desire for their unity and relationship with God. It also reveals His willingness to intercede on their behalf.

Comparisons:

- **Intention and Devotion:** Both Kavanah and Jesus' prayer in John 17 emphasize the importance of intentional and heartfelt prayer. They encourage a deep and sincere connection or 'oneness' with the Divine.
- **Intercession:** Jesus' prayer in John 17 involves intercession on behalf of His disciples, seeking God's protection, unity, and spiritual growth for them. This aligns with *the concept of intercessory prayer in Kavanah*, where the worshipper prays not only for themselves but also for the broader community.
- **Relationship-Centered:** Both Kavanah and Jesus' prayer focus on the relational aspect of prayer. They highlight the significance of one's relationship with God and the desire for a deeper connection and understanding.

Objections to Prayer

I understand that praying like Jesus can feel intimidating, but I want to encourage you not to be discouraged. Remember, we have the incredible gift of the Holy Spirit to help us in our prayers. Incredible fruit comes when we connect with the true Source! (Galatians 5:22-23 and John 15) When we open ourselves to the Holy Spirit's guidance, our prayers can be infused with power and depth beyond our own capabilities.

Additionally, Philippians 4:13 reminds us that 'we can do all things through Christ who gives us strength.' This includes our ability to pray. It's not about being perfect or having the right words, but about relying on the strength and guidance that Christ offers.

I encourage you to take a step in faith, even if it feels like a small one. Approach prayer with an open heart and a willingness to let the Holy Spirit work in and through you. You might be surprised at the profound connection you can experience with God. Remember, God knows your heart and desires to hear from you, just as you are.

Consistency in prayer is like building any other meaningful relationship—it takes time and effort. Don't be discouraged by any initial challenges. Even a few moments of sincere conversation with God each day can make a significant difference over time. Just like any skill, prayer becomes more natural and powerful with practice. So, I encourage you to take small steps towards consistency, and trust that God will meet you where you are in your journey of prayer.

Here are 20 Bible verses that emphasize the importance of aligning with God's will:

1. Matthew 6:10 (ESV):

"Your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven."

2. Romans 12:2 (NIV):

"Do not conform to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is—his good, pleasing and perfect will."

3. Proverbs 3:5-6 (NIV):

"Trust in the Lord with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding; in all your ways submit to him, and he will make your paths straight."

4. Ephesians 5:17 (ESV):

"Therefore do not be foolish, but understand what the will of the Lord is."

5. Colossians 1:9 (NIV):

"For this reason, since the day we heard about you, we have not stopped praying for you. We continually ask God to fill you with the knowledge of his will through all the wisdom and understanding that the Spirit gives." ohn 2:17 (NIV):

"The world and its desires pass away, but whoever does the will of God lives forever."

6. Hebrews 10:36 (NIV):

"You need to persevere so that when you have done the will of God, you will receive what he has promised."

7. Psalm 40:8 (NIV):

"I desire to do your will, my God; your law is within my heart."

8. James 4:15 (ESV):

"Instead you ought to say, 'If the Lord wills, we will live and do this or that.'"

9. 1 Peter 2:15 (NIV):

"For it is God's will that by doing good you should silence the ignorant talk of foolish people."

10. 1 Thessalonians 5:18 (NIV):

"Give thanks in all circumstances; for this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus."

11. Psalm 143:10 (NIV):

"Teach me to do your will, for you are my God; may your good Spirit lead me on level ground."

12. Galatians 1:10 (ESV):

"For am I now seeking the approval of man, or of God? Or am I trying to please man? If I were still trying to please man, I would not be a servant of Christ."

13. 1 Corinthians 6:19-20 (NIV):

"Do you not know that your bodies are temples of the Holy Spirit, who is in you, whom you have received from God? You are not your own; you were bought at a price. Therefore honor God with your bodies."

14. Matthew 26:42 (NIV):

"He went away a second time and prayed, 'My Father, if it is not possible for this cup to be taken away unless I drink it, may your will be done.'"

15. Psalm 143:8 (NIV):

"Let the morning bring me word of your unfailing love, for I have put my trust in you. Show me the way I should go, for to you I entrust my life."

16. Philippians 2:13 (NIV):

"for it is God who works in you to will and to act in order to fulfill his good purpose."

17. 1 John 5:14 (ESV):

"And this is the confidence that we have toward him, that if we ask anything according to his will he hears us."

18. Psalm 143:1 (NIV):

"Lord, hear my prayer, listen to my cry for mercy; in your faithfulness and righteousness come to my relief."

19. Acts 21:14 (NIV):

"When he would not be dissuaded, we gave up and said, 'The Lord's will be done.'"

20. 1 John 2:17 (NIV)

"The world and its desires pass away, but whoever does the will of God lives forever,"

These verses emphasize the importance of seeking and aligning with God's will in various aspects of our lives. They serve as a source of guidance and encouragement for believers who desire to live in accordance with God's purpose and plan.

Types of Biblical Prayer

There are various types of prayer described in the Bible, each offering unique insights into how believers can approach God. Here are some examples along with the corresponding Bible verses:

1. Praying Without Ceasing:

Description: This concept, mentioned in 1 Thessalonians 5:17, encourages believers to maintain a constant attitude of prayer throughout their daily lives. It doesn't mean constantly verbalizing prayers, but rather, an *ongoing awareness* of God's presence and a *disposition* of seeking Him in all circumstances.

Bible Verse:

1 Thessalonians 5:17 (NIV): "pray continually"

2. The Persistent Widow and the Unjust Judge:

Description: This parable, found in Luke 18:1-8, illustrates the importance of *persistent prayer*. The widow's persistence eventually leads the unjust judge to grant her justice. It teaches us to persevere in prayer and not lose heart.

Bible Verse:

Luke 18:1 (NIV): "Then Jesus told his disciples a parable to show them that they should always pray and not give up."

3. Abraham's Negotiation for Sodom and Gomorrah:

Description: In Genesis 18:16-33, Abraham *intercedes* with God on behalf of the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah, seeking to spare them if a certain number of righteous people are found. This demonstrates the power of intercessory prayer, where one person prays on behalf of others.

Bible Verse:

Genesis 18:23-32 (NIV): Abraham's negotiation with God.

4. Moses' Intercession for the Israelites:

Description: In Exodus 32:9-14, after the Israelites' sin with the golden calf, God's anger is kindled against them. Moses intercedes and pleads for God's mercy, asking Him to relent from destroying the people.

Bible Verse:

Exodus 32:11-13 (NIV): Moses intercedes on behalf of the Israelites.

5. Jesus' Prayer in Gethsemane:

Description: In Matthew 26:36-46, Jesus, facing His impending crucifixion, prays fervently in the Garden of Gethsemane. He asks God if it's possible to let the cup pass from Him, but ultimately submits to God's will.

Bible Verse:

Matthew 26:39 (NIV): "Going a little farther, he fell with his face to the ground and prayed, 'My Father, if it is possible, may this cup be taken from me. Yet not as I will, but as you will.'"

6. Prayers of Thanksgiving and Praise:

Description: Throughout the Bible, there are numerous prayers that focus on giving thanks and praising God. These prayers express gratitude for His goodness, provision, and faithfulness.

Bible Verse:

Psalms 100:4 (NIV): "Enter his gates with thanksgiving and his courts with praise; give thanks to him and praise his name."

Spiritual Battles

These spiritual warfare prayers and corresponding verses provide believers with powerful tools to combat spiritual challenges and seek God's protection and deliverance. They serve as a means to rely on God's strength and authority in the face of spiritual battles.

1. Prayer for God's Protection and Deliverance:

Description: This type of prayer seeks God's protection from spiritual attacks and deliverance from the influence of evil forces.

Bible Verse:

Psalm 91:9-11 (NIV): "If you say, 'The Lord is my refuge,' and you make the Most High your dwelling, no harm will overtake you, no disaster will come near your tent. For he will command his angels concerning you to guard you in all your ways."

2. Putting on the Full Armor of God (Ephesians 6:10-18):

Description: This is a specific type of spiritual warfare prayer where believers ask God to equip them with the spiritual armor described by Paul in Ephesians, which includes the belt of truth, breastplate of righteousness, shoes of peace, shield of faith, helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit.

Bible Verse:

Ephesians 6:10-11 (NIV): "Finally, be strong in the Lord and in his mighty power. Put on the full armor of God so that you can take your stand against the devil's schemes."

3. Daniel's Prayer for Understanding and Deliverance (Daniel 10:12-14):

Description: Daniel's prayer in Daniel 10 is an example of a prayer for understanding and deliverance in the midst of spiritual warfare. Daniel seeks understanding and receives a response from a heavenly messenger.

Bible Verse:

Daniel 10:12 (NIV): "Then he continued, 'Do not be afraid, Daniel. Since the first day that you set your mind to gain understanding and to humble yourself before your God, your words were heard, and I have come in response to them.'"

4. Jesus' Prayer for His Disciples' Protection (John 17:15):

Description: In His high priestly prayer, Jesus prays to the Father for the protection of His disciples from the evil one. This prayer demonstrates Jesus' concern for the spiritual well-being of His followers.

Bible Verse:

John 17:15 (NIV): "My prayer is not that you take them out of the world but that you protect them from the evil one."

5. Binding and Rebuking Evil Spirits:

Description: This type of prayer involves invoking the authority of Jesus to bind and rebuke evil spirits and forces of darkness.

Bible Verse:

Matthew 18:18 (NIV): "Truly I tell you, whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven."

To Summarize, we've explored the profound significance of prayer as highlighted in Bill Hybels' book 'Too Busy Not to Pray.' Just as the spinal cord serves as the central pathway for communication in the human body, prayer plays a similarly vital role in our spiritual lives, connecting us intimately with God. It serves as the conduit through which we transmit our deepest

thoughts, concerns, and desires to our holy, loving, transcendent God. Just as a healthy spinal cord ensures proper function of the body, a robust prayer life ensures a thriving spiritual connection, even amidst life's busyness. This aligns with the teaching of Matthew 6:33, which urges us to prioritize seeking God's kingdom and righteousness, recognizing that prayer is a fundamental aspect of that pursuit.

Bill Hybels' message resonates with the understanding that being 'too busy' *is not an excuse* to neglect prayer. Just as we wouldn't neglect the health of our spinal cord, we must prioritize prayer as the central element of our spiritual well-being. It's an invitation to cultivate a consistent and authentic prayer life, acknowledging that every sincere word spoken to God, no matter how simple or eloquent, holds immense value. The book encourages us to approach prayer with **Kavanah**, the focused intention and devotion seen in Jewish tradition, emphasizing that God values our genuine efforts in all prayer attempts—great or small. Just as the spinal cord facilitates the flow of information throughout the body, prayer facilitates the intimate exchange between us and our Creator, strengthening our spiritual vitality.

Too Busy Not to Pray: Slowing Down to Be with God. Bill Hybels. 2008. IVP.