

Balanced Prayer Diet

by Jeannie St. John Taylor

Prayer is food for the soul. Just as we need to eat a balanced diet to keep our bodies healthy, we need a balanced prayer life to stay spiritually healthy.

A few years ago, I embarked on a method of praying that was new to me. I would quote Isaiah 40:31, “But those who wait on the Lord shall renew their strength . . .” And then I would kneel or sit and focus my mind on God. I would open myself to him and do nothing but bask in his presence. It was wonderful. I had never enjoyed prayer so much before.

In the past, I had spent most of my prayer time asking God to protect my family and save my non-Christian friends. It was very hard work. The waiting prayer was so much easier. I didn’t have to think. All I had to do was quiet my soul “like a weaned child with its mother.” Just like David did in Psalm 131.

But then I remembered that Paul instructed us to pray for all Christians everywhere and for our leaders. And Jesus said he wants us to ask him for things. He says if we aren’t getting what we need, it’s because we don’t ask. I suddenly realized I wasn’t asking. By focusing on only on waiting prayer, I was not fully obeying God’s word.

I was blessing God, but I was neglecting others and myself. There are three basic types of prayer the Bible mentions.

The first is intercessory prayer, prayer for friends, family, Christian brothers and sisters, and for unsaved people. We should pray when they have health problems or family difficulties. We can pray for God to strengthen their character. We can ask God to save those who don’t know him. We can ask God to bless the people who attend our church. We can do this by shooting up brief arrow prayers all through the day as we pray for the various people we know, or we can spend a lengthy time in prayer for only one person.

The second is prayer for ourselves. We offer requests to God on our own behalf. We can ask him for anything that is according to his Will. We ask him to rescue us from trouble, or to bless us. I’ve learned it is good to offer very specific prayers so I can recognize the answers when he sends them.

Third, we focus on God through prayer. We can worship him as we sing. We can clap and dance and praise him. We can think of all the good things he has done for us and thank him profusely.

Or, as we discussed earlier, we can wait in prayer. I still pray that way. But now I make sure I pray for others, too. It’s still hard work, but God wants me to do it. He *expects* me to do it. And it keeps my prayer life in balance.