

How Prayer Feels

Many people have false ideas about what prayer is supposed to be like. Today, we want to find out what the Bible has to say about how prayer “feels” – how do you know when you are doing it right?

Revelation 1:4 John to the seven churches which are in Asia: Grace be unto you, and peace, from him which is, and which was, and which is to come; and from the seven Spirits which are before his throne;

Revelation 1:8 I am Alpha and Omega, the beginning and the ending, saith the Lord, which is, and which was, and which is to come, the Almighty.

First John says it about Jesus, then Jesus says it about Himself – “I am the one which is, and which was, and which is to come!”

Some people say this is God the Father talking ... not so!

Revelation 1:18 I am he that liveth, and was dead; and, behold, I am alive for evermore, Amen; and have the keys of hell and of death.

The Greek word translated “is to come” is ERCHOMAI ... it gives the sense of something about to happen, which is why “The Message” says, “I’m The God Who Is, The God Who Was, and The God About to Arrive.”

In the realm of the Spirit the past, present, and future co-exist. It is high and lifted up in the throne realm that we are given the ability to see this – because when we leave the earth realm we transcend time as we know it. Planet earth is but a tiny speck in the eye of God’s infinite greatness. We live out our natural lives on a virtual reality machine called Earth. The five senses manipulate us into believing that what we see, hear, feel, taste, and touch are real — but the things you sense are not real, they are not objective, they are not abiding realities at all! They are merely a passing phenomenon.

People often say, “I want something solid, I need to see the facts, I need something that’s real, I’m a realist!” Then you need GOD, for were it not for His great power beyond the things we see, none of them would exist.

Hebrews 11:3 Through faith we understand that the worlds were framed by the word of God, so that things which are seen were not made of things which do appear.

That which we perceive as reality is temporary and passing and has been established out of something eternal that your eye cannot see!

If we want to walk with God we must be willing to jump out of the boat of the five senses and learn how to let our spirit gravitate into what God is, and then bring it back down into this earth until it takes on manifestation.

Every time we meet Jesus in the book of Revelation he is the Jesus who is, who was, and who is to come! He is not confined by time. Only in the Spirit can you see the kingdom of God from this divine perspective.

A concept we must immediately grasp in order to understand God’s plan of the ages is that time is a created phenomenon consisting of past, present, and future. You cannot smell, touch, hear, see or feel time, but it is there, ever-present, always marching into the future. Time was created; it had a beginning, it shall have an end. But our God who is, and who was, and who is to come, IS the beginning and the end. He is God working out His purpose and revelation in time.

Before the creation of the universe, there was no time; at the end of the ages when the present material universe is dissolved and replaced by a new spiritual universe, time as we know it will cease to exist. It will be swallowed up into eternity just as all death will be swallowed up into victory, and there shall be no more death!

Eternity is a state of absolute timelessness, not of unending time. Eternity is a state of being without change, fluctuation or progression, resident in the very nature and person of God in whom such concepts as past, present, future, before, after, change, transition, growth, birth, death, beginning, end, etc., do not exist.

Do you see? Time is not part of eternity. Eternity is not composed of segments of time. Eternity is not time standing still. It is simply not time at all! Eternity doesn’t go on and on and on, ad infinitum. Eternity doesn’t go anywhere, nor does it do anything. Eternity simply IS. It is just a glorious experience of BEING! Eternity simply IS, just as God simply IS.

Jesus said, “Before Abraham was, I AM” (John 5:58) — not “Before Abraham was, I WAS.” There are no past or future tenses in eternity. There is only one eternal NOW!

God made a choice to create time (“In the beginning God created” – Genesis 1:1), and He is obviously God over all his creation, including time. Time changes things, but GOD CHANGES NOT!

I don’t have to serve a Jesus who WAS, because He IS – right now in my life! And even better than that, He is so far above me and beyond me, He always has such deeper depths, higher heights, and greater blessings for me to walk in, that He is also “the God about to arrive!”

And with all of that in mind, let's consider PRAYER. How is it supposed to feel? And how do you know if you are doing it right? Well, prayer is supposed to feel like WAITING. And if you are doing it right, you will always be expecting something that is "about to arrive!"

Think of someone you know who is in the middle of a terrible trial (maybe yourself!). They have waited a long time for deliverance. They wait and they pray. The waiting is long, dreary, heavy. At times, their faith is militant, defying and commanding. Other times they pray with faltering hopes, pleading words and a begging spirit. They pray, not in faith, but out of faithfulness, out of loyalty to a God they haven't seen or heard from in a long, lonely time.

There is only one reason why such a person should keep praying – because prayer and WAITING are inseparably linked, joined at the hip. Prayer makes absolutely no sense apart from waiting, because it is about being made in the likeness of Christ – and that takes time.

Think of the famous Bible characters that we love; they were without exception people of action. But still, they had to wait – sometimes for people who were stubborn, lazy, rebellious and cowardly, but most of the time for God Himself. The God who is always "about to arrive!"

- God, who could wait for one Pharaoh to die and another to succeed him, but who paid Israel "back wages" for 430 years (!) when they spoiled the Egyptians on the night they were delivered from slavery.
- God, who promised a land flowing with milk and honey but could hold up Israel's journey for forty years in a desert in order to work out a few character issues in the people.
- God, who could reject King Saul and anoint David, but could then watch for the next dozen years as Saul clung to his throne and hunted David until he became a vagabond.

Frustrating, isn't it? Few things in the Christian life puzzle and aggravate us more than prayer. Much of our doubt, disappointment and discouragement can be traced back to times when we ached and begged for God to speak or act ... and nothing happened! Our indifference toward prayer is really just a scab that has formed to protect ourselves from having our hopes dashed once again.

Because this is the case, it is absolutely vital that we grasp the concept of DIVINE DELAY. Peter says not to be ignorant of ONE THING – what is it that is so essential to understand?

2 Peter 3:8-9 But, beloved, be not ignorant of this one thing, that one day is with the Lord as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day. **The Lord is not slack concerning his promise, as some men count slackness;** but is longsuffering to us-ward, not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance.

John 9:1-3 And as Jesus passed by, he saw a man which was blind from his birth. And his disciples asked him, saying, Master, who did sin, this man, or his parents, that he was born blind? Jesus answered, Neither hath this man sinned, nor his parents: but that the works of God should be made manifest in him.

We never learn this man's age, other than that "he is of age." Let's say he was twenty. His blindness happened so that the work of God might be displayed in his life. **That's a long time to wait for the purpose of God to be displayed!** All those years of feeling for walls and railings, all those years of wandering in darkness and stumbling over obstacles. For what? So that the work of God might be displayed in his life! Frustrating, isn't it? God doesn't mind waiting. He's always "about to arrive."

THERE ARE TWO IMAGES THAT JOHN USES IN THE BOOK OF REVELATION TO DESCRIBE PRAYER – INCENSE AND FIRE.

Revelation 5:8 And when he had taken the book, the four beasts and four and twenty elders fell down before the Lamb, having every one of them harps, and golden vials full of odours, which are the prayers of saints.

The prayers of the saints of all the ages are gathered as incense before God, a beautiful fragrance that swirls through Heaven's throne room, mingling with the intensity of never-ending worship. Gathered from all corners of the globe, this incense represents the afflicted, the comforted, the lonely, the reunited, the dying, the rejoicing – they are all here before God through their prayers. It is a powerful image ... and God basks in it.

But it is also a troubling image, because this is our greatest fear about prayer! We are rightly concerned that all of our spiritual efforts may end up as just so much smoke and scent, an aromatic vapor devoid of substance. If that's all prayer is, it can do no more to heal a broken world than a splash of aftershave can do to revive a corpse!

I pray to move God's hand! I want to watch those hands bend and break, make and shape, bless and curse, heal and restore, to do ... something! I certainly DON'T pray to provide God with cologne!

Sorry Lord, but don't just smell our prayers – ANSWER THEM!

WHY PRAY? This business of “perfume” is the question behind all our struggles to pray. If prayer worked more tangibly, we might find it to be difficult work but we wouldn’t doubt its usefulness. We would see the difference it made by simply charting its progress day after day.

We often declare “LET’S PRAY” with just barely enough volume to drown out the devil’s incessant voice screaming “WHY BOTHER?” (What good will it do? We all know that this depends on the ability of machines and medicine, doctors and diagnoses, luck and chance.)

Mark 9:21-24 And he asked his father, How long is it ago since this came unto him? And he said, Of a child. And oftentimes it hath cast him into the fire, and into the waters, to destroy him: but if thou canst do any thing, have compassion on us, and help us. Jesus said unto him, If thou canst believe, all things are possible to him that believeth. And straightway the father of the child cried out, and said with tears, Lord, I believe; help thou mine unbelief.

Before you criticize this father for his weakness, remember that his boy has been like this since childhood. For many years, he has watched his son try to fight a power that he is no match for.

No father would stand by and simply watch a big bully thrash his little boy, but this father has been forced to do that. Day after day, he has been forced to witness a merciless, gloating demon pummel his child, bent on destruction. It would wither a man’s insides!

By now, he has tried everything ... every doctor, every potion, every quack cure, every miracle worker, every holy man, every prayer meeting, every incantation, every claim. Each new attempt tortures his heart with bright hope and black despair. And when Jesus’ own disciples can do nothing, it is just one more failure in a long miserable string of failures. No wonder he says, “Lord, if You can do anything, take pity on us and help us! I do believe, but help me to overcome my unbelief!”

Before you criticize this dad and offer him a few well-worn clichés, remember that he has prayed every kind of prayer imaginable. Sometimes he’s bold in his praying, the five-star general commanding the troops. Sometimes he’s afraid, the ragged beggar pleading for a handout. Sometimes he’s empty, and he just weeps. And sometimes he can’t even do that. He has read all the recommended books, ransacked the Internet for advice, sought counsel from pastors and prophecies from evangelists, cried at the altar and believed until his faith is raw. It’s all added up to NOTHING.

If right now you said to this man, “Take courage! Your prayers are gathering before God’s Throne as a sweet perfume!” he might have spit at you, hit you, or even cursed you. That’s the very last thing that he wants to hear!

And yet, that’s exactly the truth at this point. All those years of praying, trying and crying have made a beautiful fragrance, but not much else. Frustrating, isn’t it? UNTIL ...

Suddenly, after all these years of despair and defeat, his prayers are answered! Jesus CAN help! He commands the demon to flee, and the little boy is healed. “Why couldn’t we cast him out?” the disciples ask. Listen to the annoying, exasperating, maddening answer! “This kind can come forth by nothing but prayer and fasting.” JESUS, WHAT DO YOU THINK WE HAVE BEEN DOING?!?

Jesus didn’t give them an answer, He gave them more mystery, more frustration! That is, until you understand John’s second image of prayer from the book of Revelation ...

Revelation 8:3-5 And another angel came and stood at the altar, having a golden censer; and there was given unto him much incense, that he should offer it with the prayers of all saints upon the golden altar which was before the throne. And the smoke of the incense, which came with the prayers of the saints, ascended up before God out of the angel’s hand. And the angel took the censer, and filled it with fire of the altar, and cast it into the earth: and there were voices, and thunderings, and lightnings, and an earthquake.

SUDDENLY, THE INCENSE IS MIXED WITH THE FIRE OF GOD AND CAST INTO THE EARTH. The long wait is finally interrupted and everything is forever altered. The status quo is shaken up, split open and reordered. The demons flee, the blind see, the lame walk, the dead rise.

When we pray, the answer does come. But it comes at a point and in a way beyond our choosing, beyond our ability to predict or control or delay or hasten. That’s frustrating. But when our prayers finally hurtle back to earth, ignited with the fire of God, THAT’S POWERFUL!

It’s frustrating isn’t it, that with all this power stockpiled in Heaven, the primary discipline of prayer for us is ... WAITING! We live with the conviction that the Lord is not slow in keeping His promise, as some understand slowness. What we expect may take forever – a thousand years – can happen in a day. But more often, what we wish would happen in a day seems to take forever. The key to your attitude toward prayer is realizing that with the Lord one is exactly like the other.

After Jesus tells his disciples of His coming kingdom, they are left with one nagging question: “WHERE, LORD?” (Luke 17:37) Where is the evidence of all these things that You have promised?

Luke 18:1 And he spake a parable unto them to this end, that men ought always to pray, and not to faint;

The disciples are waiting for the incense of their prayers to be made into fire! So, to help them cope with the seemingly endless delays and diversions along the way to the answer, Jesus tells them a parable about a widow who literally nagged an unjust judge into granting her plea.

Luke 18:6-8 And the Lord said, Hear what the unjust judge saith. And shall not God avenge his own elect, which cry day and night unto him, though he bear long with them? I tell you that he will avenge them speedily. Nevertheless when the Son of man cometh, shall he find faith on the earth?

Prayer is just that – crying out day and night without seeing justice, AND CONTINUING ANYHOW. “Teach us to pray.” Okay, pray this: “Thy kingdom come, thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven.” Great, now there’s a prayer that’s not going to be answered in a day – maybe not even in a thousand years, certainly not in my lifetime. And yet, it could be answered in its fullness TODAY.

The key to successful prayer is to CONTINUE praying in spite of seeing no results! The key is to believe that God is “about to arrive!”

Isaiah 40:31 But they that wait upon the Lord shall renew their strength; they shall mount up with wings as eagles; they shall run, and not be weary; and they shall walk, and not faint.

Humanly speaking, there are two things drastically wrong with this verse. The first is that waiting is not the pathway to weariness, but to renewal. That’s how God’s upside-down, backwards, paradoxical economy works.

The second problem with Isaiah 40:31 is the sequence of Isaiah’s threefold promise to those who wait. Quite frankly, it’s backwards!

According to the rules of Hebrew poetry, the sequence of ideas should progress from the lesser to the greater. So we would expect the promises here to be reversed: walk and not faint, run and not be weary, mount up with wings as eagles. That sequence is far more dramatic and inspiring. Any of us can walk – that’s commonplace!

But God sees it otherwise. We may want wings, but what we really need is to walk without falling down ... to live for God consistently and faithfully ... to simply not faint.

Really, what is more miraculous?

- Elijah calling down fire from Heaven ... or his willingness to continue preaching in spite of death threats from wicked King Ahab and Queen Jezebel?
- David receiving the honor of an anointing from the prophet Samuel ... or keeping a right attitude toward jealous King Saul as he tried to kill him?
- Healing the lame, the blind and the sick through the gifts of the Spirit ... or caring for them with diligence and genuine love, day after day?
- The crippled man taking up his bed and walking ... or living faithfully and thankfully in his painfully immobile body year after endless year?
- The handsome Christian artist worshipping God onstage among thousands of his adoring fans ... or the senior saint with Parkinson’s disease praising God in his lonely apartment?
- The anointed preacher who receives accolades from crowds for his dynamic sermons ... or the unknown prayer warrior who has never been in a pulpit but spends untold hours in Heaven’s throne room?

Does soaring on eagle’s wings ever rank in its miraculousness with walking and not fainting? More than soaring, more than running – we need to know how to WALK with God!

If you’re doing it right ...

Prayer will always feel like WAITING ...

But you are waiting on the God who is “about to arrive!”