

# The Importance of *Tuning Up Our Prayer Life*

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Jesus proclaimed that the greatest commandment is to “love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind” (Matthew 22:37). Jesus did not give us categorical options with the great commandment as to which parts we might choose in loving God with our heart *or* soul *or* mind. There is no either/or option but the command to love the Lord with all three areas-heart, soul, *and* mind. God’s Word is clear that it is to be all the above. Loving God with our minds naturally entails finding out as much as possible about Him through His Word in Scripture. While loving God with all of our heart comes through His word, it’s forged through spending time with Him, developing a personal relationship with Him. The deepest level of relationship with God is formed through prayer. As with all relationships, including human interaction, its love that gives us the desire to want to better know what the other person is like. With God, we seek to learn how He acts within the world, and within our personal lives. Furthermore, it is through both God’s Word and through prayer that we begin to learn and understand what He *loves*, what He *desires* for our lives and life mission. Through God’s word and prayer that we also learn what offends Him morally and what delights Him. This requires our full attention, diligent study of His Word, and persistent prayer.<sup>1</sup>

This led me to look more deeply into how different religions emphasize prayer. What I discovered is that, *how* a religion emphasizes prayer is very different from *why* that religion emphasizes prayer. For example, Muslims as a whole are expected to perform *salat*, which is the Islamic ritual of offering praise to Allah five times daily: at dawn, noon, afternoon, evening, and night. In Islam, prayer is compulsory for everyone over the age of ten, and involves very specific words and a series of physical postures (standing, kneeling, hands and face on the ground among other things) all the while facing Mecca, the holy city for Muslims.<sup>2</sup>

According to the Pew Research Center on Religion & Public Life segment titled, *The World’s Muslims: Unity and Diversity*, published August 9, 2012, Muslims across six major geographic regions (the Middle East and North Africa, Southeast Asia, South Asia and sub-Saharan Africa) found that a majority of Muslims in most countries surveyed affirmed that they pray several times a day, including three-quarters or more in 12 countries who say they perform all five salat daily. By Contrast, across Central Asia and in the four countries with substantial Muslim populations surveyed in Southern and Eastern Europe, only in Azerbaijan do a majority of Muslims (70%) report praying several times a day (including 21% who say they perform all five salat). In the other countries in these two regions, far fewer Muslims, including 7% in Albania and 4% in Kazakhstan, say they pray several times a day.<sup>3</sup>

This begs the question, how often does the average Christian pray? According to the Pew Research Center’s *5 Facts About Prayer* written on May 6, 2016 by Michael Lipka, only about 55% of

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<sup>1</sup> David Horton, General Editor, *The Portable Seminary-A Master’s Level Overview In One Volume*, (Bloomington, Minnesota, Bethany House, 2006), 20-21.

<sup>2</sup> Ron Rhodes, *Reasoning From The Scriptures*, (Eugene, Oregon, Harvest House Publishers, 2002), 13-14.

<sup>3</sup> Chapter 2: *Religious Commitment*, Pew Research Center Religion & Public Life, August 9, 2012  
<http://www.pewforum.org/2012/08/09/the-worlds-muslims-unity-and-diversity-2-religious-commitment/>

Americans say they pray every day, 23% said they pray weekly or monthly and 21% said they seldom or never pray. What is interesting is that even among the religiously unaffiliated, 21% said they pray daily. Among the women surveyed, about 65% are more likely than men (46%) to pray daily. Older people (60%) are more likely than younger adults (45%) to pray daily.<sup>4</sup>

At first glance, the Christian commitment to God through prayer seems to lag as compared to the Muslim faith. Upon further observation we see something else going on. While Christians may pray less than more devout Muslims but more than less devout Muslims, they pray out of *free will* and *love*, usually through a personal relation with God-not through *submission* (Islam) or *compulsion*. This is not to say that some Christians don't pray canned prayers at times but that they pray in love as a free will offering to him through a personal relationship. Jesus tells us in the Book of Matthew, chapter 6, verse 7 and 8 that we should not keep on babbling like pagan who think that they will be heard because of their many words because God our Father knows what we need before we even ask Him. This is in great contrast to the long scripted prayers of many Christian denominations as well as the Muslim's prayer *ritual* called *Salat*. Instead, Jesus said in Matthew 6, "This, then, is how you should pray: *Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name, your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven. Give us today our daily bread. And forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors. And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from the evil one* (Matthew 6:9-13) NIV.

This is known as the *The Lord's Prayer* and is a perfect model for how we today can pray in four basic parts. It begins with adoration of God (v.9), acknowledging subjection to His will (v. 10), asks petitions of Him (vv. 11-13a), and ends with an ascription of praise (v. 13b). The Lord's prayer is a relational prayer which asks the Lord to help us during our short finite existence (life) to live better according to His will, and in a way that glorifies God and benefits us in our lives here on earth and eternal life in Heaven. The prophet Samuel regarded failure to pray as a sin against the Lord. "As for me, far be it from me that I should sin against the LORD by failing to pray for you. And I will teach you the way that is good and right" (1 Samuel 12:23). Even though Samuel knew that Israel would sin again in addition to the sin of asking God for a king outside of God-the King Himself, Samuel continued to pray for Israel. This seems as much about Samuel's own heart as to that of the Israelites.

When we spend time in prayer, we develop a faithfulness to the Lord. When we pray for others, it is often our heart that is changed. God is loyal and His love is never failing. A great example of this is seen with King Solomon offering a dedicatory prayer (2 Chronicles 6:12-21) extolling the Lord for His covenant-keeping faithfulness (vv. 144-15). The word *love* translates *hesed*, meaning God's loyal love (cf. 5:13); 7:3, 6; 20:21).<sup>5</sup> Solomon passionately states in verse 19, "Yet, Lord my God, give attention to your servant's prayer and his plea for mercy. Hear the cry and the prayer that your servant is praying in your presence (2 Chronicles 6:19). What a great role model we have in King Solomon who cried out to the Lord to hear and to hear our heart.

If prayer is a strong indicator as to one's faith in God, why do so many of us often skip prayer, or pray the one-minute fly by prayer? God gave us the freedom to seek Him, to read His word, to pray and commune with Him. Do we spend more time watching the Sunday ball game than we do in prayer? How much time do we spend reading our Bible, the Word of God? Jesus proclaimed that the greatest commandment is to "love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your

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<sup>4</sup> Michael Lipka, Pew Research Center, *5 facts about prayer*, <http://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2015/05/06/5-facts-about-prayer/>

<sup>5</sup> *The Bible Knowledge Commentary, Old Testament*, Editors John F. Walvoord and Roy B. Zuck (Chicago, IL, Victor, 2000), 625.

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When we get on our knees to meet with God on a steady basis, our lives become transformed, our hearts calmed, our life mission overflowing and our sense of being loved overflowing. The Christian’s secret weapon is *hesed*, which is God’s *loyal love*. God is the uncreated Creator of all other beings, both spiritual and physical and only God is able to move mountains and ultimately reclaim our lives for eternity in this evil world. It is our job to be on our knees, building a loving relationship with the God of the Universe, and to ask Him daily to guide and sustain us through the turbulent waters of life and mission. Only the true God of the universe can lead us to victory through the darkness and into still waters (Psalm 23:2). Isn’t that worth slowing down each morning to get on your knees in prayer and in the Word of God before the sun comes up?