



fledge: to grow the plummage necessary for flight



## Why I Pray (part 2)

Many Christians don't like to pray because it feels general, unclear and uninteresting. Our prayers go something like, "God help me today. Keep me safe. Help me do well on this test and be with such and such person. Amen."

When it comes to our own problems and the sin that we keep doing, we are often frustrated with our lack of progress. We might even be as discouraged as people who don't have Jesus' divine help, be they Buddhist, Muslim or our Godless friends.

Praying in general terms has some benefits. General prayer is short, sweet and covers a lot of areas. General prayer is also easy to mutter off.

General prayer has some disadvantages, too. It can become boring and seem

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unnecessary. We're not asking anything specific or clear.

For instance, if you asked to do well on a test, how would you know if it was God or

*How would you know if it was God or luck...?*

luck or just remembering the things you studied? How do you know if God "helped" you today? How do you know "God was with" anyone? If we only pray generally, we might start to doubt that prayer does much. We would not know if God answered us. And if he did, we probably wouldn't notice because our day would be pretty much the same as every other day.

Praying in general terms is easier and safer, but it can also become bland, like soggy cereal. Even worse, general prayers, if they become our steady diet make it easy to think that God is far away and not interested in our lives. We might even think God doesn't have time for our more specific (we might call them "small") requests. I'm not saying that this general "cover all" prayer is wrong, sometimes it's appropriate, but it's certainly not the only way to pray.



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In life, general requests, like general prayers, make it hard to know if we're being heard. When I want to share my needs with Dale, when I want him to help me with something, I usually need to get specific. I need to say something like,

*Dale, today I feel overwhelmed with unpacking the sewing room. Can you help me by breaking down all the cardboard boxes and taking them to the garbage?*

Then he can say "Yes" or "No." And if he says, "Yes" by the end of the day I will know if he really helped me with my request. The boxes either will or will not be broken down and in the garbage. Of course, I could say, "Dale, please help me out today." Then, Dale would probably be confused and want to know "How?"

This is where the analogy might break down for some of us. We think, "Oh God already knows everything I need and want, so I don't have to tell him." Do we think God doesn't want us to get specific because he can read our minds?

Of course God can read our minds. But if we don't tell him what we want we cannot grow our understanding or intimacy with God. It is only as we become aware of our requests and ask specifically



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that God can show us that he is also aware of them. Our faith grows when we see God's faithfulness. Like when I ask Dale specifically to help me with the

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boxes and he does, my faith in Dale's helpfulness and trustworthiness grows.

Prayer is one of those faith building activities. When we see God answering our requests, we get an idea that this isn't just a one-way monologue. It's a conversation. God responds to us.

Specific prayer gives us a chance to show God how we want him to be involved in our lives. If we pray for other people all the time and never for ourselves, that might indicate that we only want God to help our friends, but we really don't want his help in our lives. Or, maybe we don't believe our needs are all that important.

Specific praying is a risky way to pray. We ask God for certain things at certain times even in certain ways. And if God answers we become more amazed and delighted by his specific involvement in our lives. An answer to a specific prayer is much different than an answer to a general prayer.



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We might not like being specific in our prayers. Why do you think that is? For me it's because I'm afraid God will not answer me specifically. And if my prayer fails, well, I'll feel like a failure. I feel sort of dumb, I guess, like God is laughing at me.

It's interesting to remember Jesus' prayer life. Jesus didn't get all his prayers granted. We know because he prayed for specific things and sometimes, these specific things did not happen (see Matthew 26:39). But Jesus was not a failure. And God wasn't laughing.

*God wants you to grow into health and life.*

To pray specifically we often need something specific to bring to God. If you take a moment and ask God where he

wants to heal you today he will probably bring something to mind. When I ask him, he says, "Jonalyn, I want to heal your frantic worry."

What does he say to you? It might be something private, a sexual sin, a secret habit, a thought of resentment, anxiety or unforgiveness. It might be public, something everyone knows and something you really want God to change. When making



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specific requests, small things are just as good as big things.

Ask God, "What is polluting me today? Is this something that brings hurt or health?" Then sit quietly and see what God communicates to you. Reading Psalm 139: 23, 24 may help you begin. If something in your day-to-day living is corrupting you then God wants to help you grow into health and life. God wants to help us and not just by self-help, positive thinking, counting to 10 and holding your tongue (for more on this see [Part 1](#)). The God of the elk on the mountains, Orion in the sky, the polar bears in the snow wants to help. That's why Christ said, "The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy, I came that they might have life and have it abundantly" (John 10:10).

Prayer is one way Jesus gives us life. Specific prayers are the places that God has shown me abundant living. Let me recommend that you wipe the slate of your usual general requests clean. This week begin to ask God to help you in one or two specific ways.

In the next *fledge* we will talk about how to bring our struggle with a sin before God and how to wait for his response.



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