

How Leaders Pray

(Praying Effectively in Pivotal Moments)

BIBLICAL BASIS

“Now Jesus was telling them a parable to show that at all times they ought to pray and not to lose heart.” (Luke 18:1)

Pivotal prayers come at pivotal moments. They produce pivotal decisions and result in pivotal consequences.

Most people around the world pray. They do so because they want God's help in tough times. Sadly, most never consider how to pray what is on the heart of God, especially in those moments. Leaders understand the pivotal role of prayer and pray strategically during key times. They don't panic and simply react in fear. They seek and find God in those moments, and settle issues in prayer that lead to significant breakthroughs in their life and leadership.

It is easy to miss opportunities to pray a pivotal prayer.

How Do Leaders Seize Pivotal Moments in Prayer?

The Scripture tells us to “pray without ceasing” (1 Thessalonians 5:17). However, there are times when what we pray and how we pray are more critical because of when we pray. The moment introduces an opportunity for significant change. Leaders recognize and seize such moments.

Observations on How Leaders Pray...

KEY POINTS

- 1. Effective leaders learn to _____ like God thinks and pray those thoughts.**

Jesus demonstrated this in a pivotal moment. John 12 describes how Jesus faced the final hours of His earthly life. The reality of a painful, brutal cross loomed before Him. He was in anguish. The Scriptures tell us His emotions were so intense that He sweat “great drops of blood.”

So how did Jesus pray? Recognizing the pivotal moment, He prayed, “*Now My heart is troubled, and what shall I say, Father, save Me from this hour? No, it was for this very reason I came to this hour. Father, glorify Your name!*” (John 12:27-28)

Did you notice Jesus contemplated what kind of prayer to pray? He could have prayed a survival prayer: “Father get Me out of this mess!” That would have been natural. It might have been what we would have prayed. Instead, Jesus aligned His prayer with His Father's ultimate purposes. The result: the redemption of the world. Key moment. Key prayer. Key decision. Key results.

2. Effective leaders pray from _____, not just routine.

Pivotal prayers move past clichés and unthinking phrases to meaningful exchanges with God. It means we pray from our hearts, not just our heads. We aren't concerned with image, but substance. It's the kind of prayer experience we say we want, but seldom practice.

How often are our prayer lives reduced to meaningless, routine, monologues? Or to time constraints, or image-seeking when we pray publicly? If many of us were to get honest, we'd admit our prayer life borders on superstition. We go through the motions, speaking a few worn out phrases to make sure God is on our side before we head into our day.

3. Effective leaders learn pivotal prayer as they _____ spiritually.

We learn to pray this way over time. Pivotal praying increases as we mature spiritually. Leaders often become caught up in fulfilling their agenda. Mature leaders trade their agenda for God's. They move from simply praying what *they* want, to praying with God's larger vision in mind. This was vividly illustrated in November 2001, in the story of the three missionaries who had been kidnapped in 1993. They worked with *New Tribes Mission* (NTM) and were kidnapped near the Colombian border. Eight years later *New Tribes Mission* declared them dead. Editor Deann Alford asked Dan Germann, NTM's vice chairman, how their prayers changed for the men as the years went by. Dan responded,

“When the guys were first captured, every one of us was praying, 'Lord just bring them out safely. We know You are able.' As time went on, we started to pray, 'Lord, if they're alive, bring them home; but if they're dead, help us to know that as well.' Maybe six or eight months ago, I heard us praying things like, 'God, if we never know, You'll still be God.'”

“This was quite a difference from trusting Him to bring them out safely. In the end, God answered our prayers. We found a man in prison who had cared for them. He assured us that they were dead. This was a gift since we'd come to the place where it was all right if God chose for us to never know. Somebody looking on might think, 'How can you accept that news?' All I can say is-God moved us to the place where we could say, 'Lord, we want You to be glorified, even if we never know.’”

Learning to pray this way isn't a cop out. It doesn't mean we stop trusting God to do miracles, and leave it to fate. It means we trust Him and His purposes regardless of our understanding.

4. Effective leaders recognize _____ moments and pray strategically.

Leaders perceive key junctions in their life and pray wisely in those times. They see beyond their own personal interests. There is nothing wrong with praying for personal needs or for current circumstances. However, when we forget the ultimate, we become a slave to the immediate.

CHECK YOUR
HEART

Three Levels of Prayer

During times of war, we hear the military terms: logistical, tactical and strategic initiatives. While these terms describe three levels of military operations, they also describe three levels of prayer.

a. _____

The focus is on my own personal needs. It is prayed from a temporal perspective. If we were to pray before we lead the Sunday morning worship service, and we prayed a logistical prayer, we might say, "Lord, help us to do well this morning. Help us to finish our service on time, help the microphones to work, and help us to be calm. Amen."

b. _____

The focus is on helping others, but is still prayed from a temporal perspective. If we were to pray this kind of prayer before our Sunday morning worship service, we might say: "Lord, please bless all who participate in the service today, and bless the people who attend. May it be inspiring to everyone. Amen." This prayer is better than the first one-but still doesn't fully capture God's heart and purposes for the world.

c. _____

The focus is on God's ultimate objectives for the world. It is prayed from an eternal perspective. It captures His heart and purpose rather than mere human purposes. If we pray strategically before our worship service, we might say: "Lord, raise up disciples from this service today. Regardless of what happens to the microphones, the musicians or anyone else on the platform, use this service to glorify Yourself and bring Your Kingdom more fully to this earth. Amen."

EXAMINE
THE WORD

An Example from the Bible...

II Kings 3:5-18 tells the story of the army of Israel just before they faced the Moabites in battle. It was one more illustration of God's people missing a pivotal moment because they were caught up in themselves. Ancient Israel and two allies took their armies through the wilderness to face the Moabite army. After a week, however, they faced a crisis: they ran out of water.

They decided to go to the prophet Elisha to seek God's help. They begged for water. As the prophet sought the Lord, He responded through Elisha and said in essence, I will give you water, but this is a small thing for Me. I will also give the Moabites into your hands!

Sound familiar? In this pivotal moment, Israel asked for the wrong thing. They saw only the small picture. They sought only the solution to their immediate needs. They prayed a logistical prayer. They prayed for the water, not the war! Pivotal praying means we perceive crucial moments and how the future hinges on them.

5. Effective leaders learn to pray _____.

The fact is, most people pray, but most of us pray selfishly. In 1993 a survey was conducted among 2,000 church attendees asking questions about their prayer habits. If their answers are any reflection of the general population, we have a lot of room to grow. The top three prayer subjects of those surveyed were meals, personal and family safety, and personal blessings. The average person spent less than seven minutes a day in prayer.

I am not saying this is evil, only that it is limited in potential. God yearns to accomplish so much more through our prayers, if we can only get on the same page He's on! Based upon your prayer life today, how would you do if you faced a pivotal moment?

6. Effective leaders don't pursue eloquence, but simply _____ with God's heart.

CHECK YOUR
HEART

Pivotal prayer has more to do with the posture of your heart when you pray than the words you choose. It is the expression of your heart aligned with God's heart to fulfill His purposes in your circumstance. It may also be the difference between connecting and not connecting with God. Not all prayers connect with Him. Do you remember the Publican and the Pharisee in Luke 18:10-14? One connected with God; the other didn't, even though his words were beautiful.

7. Effective leaders learn to pray from _____, not maintenance.

Perhaps this is the top reason why leaders need to understand pivotal praying. It means staying focused on the mission, even in crisis; staying in relationship with God when it is easier to pray out of familiar routines; playing offense, not merely defense in our prayer time. Think with me for a moment about Jesus in Gethsemane. If there was ever a moment He was tempted to shift into idle and pray a logistical prayer, it was in the Garden of Gethsemane. Hours away from torture and death, Jesus considers the temptation: "My Father, if it is possible, may this cup be taken from Me." This is a normal reaction to His situation. However, He then added a strategic phrase: "Yet, not as I will, but as You will." (Matthew 26:39) It was a pivotal moment. Jesus stayed on mission in His prayer.

ACTION PLAN

ASSESSMENT: Think of a recent crisis you've experienced. What was the first request you prayed? How did your prayer reflect the heart of God and the importance of the moment?

APPLICATION: Consider that same crisis, and take a moment now to pray a pivotal prayer.