

# CAN WE PRAY TOO MUCH?



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Jesus said to pray without ceasing, but beyond early mornings and late nights of prayer, he demonstrated that prayer was integrated within his life and ministry.

In his prayer recorded in John 17 Jesus said, “I have brought you glory on

earth by finishing the work you gave me to do.” (vs. 4, NIV) Certainly his prayers on earth were included in that work. It is evident that everything Jesus said flowed from his relationship with the Father. I wonder if that communion and how Jesus lived it out was a form of prayer? Reading the Gospels, it is obvious that prayer is a moment-by-moment mindset that is to be integrated into a busy life!

Several times throughout the New Testament Paul describes the burden he carries for the churches for which he prays. We see Paul praying for guidance (Acts 13), for the elders (Acts 14) and for the sick (Acts 28), as well as admonishing us to pray (Eph 6:18; Col 4:2). But, like Jesus, these prayers were interconnected with Paul’s life, calling, ministry and work. Paul was a pretty active guy, but he prayed in the midst of it. Perhaps this tells us more about prayer than we see at first glance.

I admit I have struggled to understand the idea of someone praying as his or her only ministry. The Levites in the O.T., as those set aside for ministry, are often the model cited for this. Yet it is interesting that David, the king, is well known as one who talked with God more than anyone else. Daniel and Nehemiah were also men who prayed in the midst of their work.

We’ve all heard great quotes about prayer like, “Prayer is the real work of missions.” Martin Luther said he was “too busy not to pray.” John Wesley said, “God does nothing except in response to believing prayer.” S.D. Gordon has many quotes about prayer like, “Prayer strikes the winning blow; service is simply picking up the pieces” and “The greatest thing anyone can do for God or man is pray.” E.M. Bounds wrote, “Talking to men for God is a great thing, but talking to God for men is greater still.” And Billy Graham wisely said, “If you don’t feel like praying, it’s a probably a sign you should start praying right away!” Quotes like these used to make me feel guilty because I didn’t dedicate hours to prayer every day. But as I’ve thought, studied and prayed I’ve realized that prayer should be an integral part of my daily activities—in addition to having focused times of prayer.

One thing that helped me was Ralph Winter urging our staff to recognize that prayer should include a great deal of listening...times of quiet. I first heard him share this in the

context of the establishment of our 24-hour prayer room, where we took shifts of 4 hours 2-3 times a month. I have found that by listening well—through the Word and the Holy Spirit—God leads me to pray and focus my efforts in ways I would have otherwise never considered.

One last quote I want to share with you is from John Piper. James 4:2c says, “You have not because you ask not.” Based on this verse Piper says, “Prayer causes things to happen that would not happen if you didn’t pray.” In other words, the sovereign God is inviting us to participate with him in the running of the universe by praying “things into being.” Not taking advantage of that, according to Piper, is folly! What do you believe you should “take on” in prayer? What, in God’s purposes, is “not yet” that you can begin to bring to fruition through prayer?

Can we pray too much? Yes!...if that prayer does not include listening and communion with God in the midst of everyday life. If we can learn to pray in tune with the Spirit, we will see “things come into being” like disciples from all peoples where there are none now.

Can I get an “Amen”? Why not post your thoughts or prayers under the online version of this page. 

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<sup>1</sup> You can see Piper’s brief message on prayer on YouTube under the search: “Prayer causes things to happen....”