



Steps to More Effective Prayer

Many of us view prayer the same way we do exercise. We know exercise is good for us. It relieves stress, improves the circulation, strengthens the heart, boosts the energy level, and improves physical appearance. Some claim that exercise even enhances one's sex life!

But despite these valid and desirable benefits, many of us would rather keep lifting a fork to our mouths than lift weights. Exercise is boring, painful, and just too much trouble after a hard day sitting on our spreading posteriors down at the air-conditioned office!

Similarly, deep down in our spirits, we know that prayer is important—that it strengthens our relationship with God, relieves stress, boosts our faith, and is the source of unlimited spiritual power. But despite these benefits, many of us view prayer as boring, painful, and just too much trouble.

So how do we shake ourselves out of the doldrums and really begin to experience intimate fellowship with God in prayer?

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1. PRAY WHENEVER YOU THINK ABOUT PRAYING.

Don't make the mistake of thinking you can only pray at certain times and in certain places. Pray in your car, in a meeting, in bed when you can't sleep, as you mow the lawn or wash dishes, or while brushing your teeth.

Learn this if you learn nothing else: Because God makes His home in you,¹ *wherever you are, God is!* So learn to converse with Him all the time.

I used to—and occasionally still do—fall into the trap of telling myself “I’ll pray about that later.” While I’m mowing the lawn I’ll think of someone I need to pray for. I’ll mentally review the details of that person’s need and even rehearse what I plan to say *later*, during my “prayer time.” Then I catch myself and smile at how foolish it is for me to pray later about something I’m thinking (and actually praying) about *now!*

If you sometimes find yourself kicking yourself for forgetting to pray for people you’ve promised to pray for, learn to pray when God puts the burden on your mind—when you think about it.

2. PRAY ABOUT A VARIETY OF THINGS.

Don't pray about the same things all the time, and don't try to cover everything in one prayer. Vary your conversation. Pray today about the supervisor who is giving you grief and save the missionaries for tomorrow.

Pray different types of prayers. Try praying a prayer of praise without any petitions. Make no requests about anything. Put away the shopping list and just spend time praising God for who He is in your life.

Or sing your prayer to God. Paul admonishes us to “sing psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs with gratitude in your hearts to God.”² There are times when my family and I pray by singing favorite praise hymns such as “Great Is Thy Faithfulness” and “I Love You, Lord.”

During sung prayers, I sometimes experience the presence of God more profoundly than when I'm at my “regular” prayers.

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3. PRAY WITHOUT WORDS.

You don't always have to have something to say in order to be with God. I know this may seem odd, but sometimes it's perfectly all right "to be still, and know that [He is] God."³

One morning not long ago, I had a deeply moving encounter with God without saying a word. It was one of those extremely rare times when both the house and my spirit were quiet. I couldn't think of anything to read or anything to say. I sat in the stillness and just allowed my heart to be an open book to God.

I noted the experience in my journal later that morning:

The stillness of this morning feels good—like a warm blanket on a cold night. I seem unable—or unwilling—to think of a passage to read from the Bible. I'm not in a hurry to read anything. For now, the silence is enough. My thoughts and the quiet seem prayer enough this morning. "Be still [cease striving] and know that I am God," You've said. This is one of those rare moments when I'm content to sit still and know You. To connect with the King. Thank You for meeting me here this morning.

Learn to "be still and know." Quiet can be profound. And don't feel as if you've failed if you occasionally run out of words when you pray. Remember, there are times when "we do not know what we ought to pray for, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us with groans that words cannot express. And he who searches our hearts knows the mind of the Spirit, because the Spirit intercedes for the saints in accordance with God's will."⁴

4. PRAY ON PAPER.

Prayer journaling is simply writing your prayer in the form of a letter to God. It is also one of the best methods I know for dealing with a wandering mind. When I'm writing my thoughts to God, I find that my mind stays focused on what I'm writing. My eyes are open, and there's something in my hand that keeps me alert. And I often hear God

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speaking back to me as I write in my journal. God addresses the very issue I'm writing about—not audibly but in my mind, through a scripture, a remembered circumstance, a song.

Don't worry about proper grammar or punctuation. Your journal is for God's eyes only. It isn't meant for publication in *Signs of the Times*®! Buy a simple spiral notebook, date the top of the page, and begin to express yourself on paper.

Journaling is a powerful way to communicate with God—and, as a bonus, you'll have a permanent record of your spiritual journey with God. Years from now you'll look back at your prayer journal to see how God led you through times of struggle; it will give you courage to face the challenges of tomorrow.

5. PRAY FOR YOUR SPOUSE.

Don't pray in a general, vague way but in specific terms, claiming particular Bible promises that are tailored to your spouse's individual needs.

I like to do this for my wife, Suzette. Sometimes I'll leave her a note containing the verse that I'm claiming for her. She saved one of these notes and kept it for a time on the bathroom mirror, where she could see it every day. It read:

For you today: That your delight will be in the law of the Lord, that you will meditate on it day and night. That you will be like a tree planted by streams of water, yielding fruit in season without withering. And that whatever you do will prosper (Psalm 1:2, 3). Love ya.

Search the Word for specific verses that fit your spouse's situation and pray those verses back to God, inserting your husband's or wife's name in the appropriate place.

P.S. You can pray for your children the same way.

And singles, the lack of a spouse and children doesn't mean the lack of other individuals who love you and need your prayers. Claim promises on behalf of your best friend, co-worker, family member, or pastor,

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and let that person know that you are praying for him or her. Any relationship will be strengthened by this prayerful act of love.

So there you have it. Five suggestions for putting new passion into your personal prayer journey with God. Not an exhaustive list by any stretch. You may already be experimenting with several creative forms of prayer that aren't even mentioned here. Great. Go for it. Whatever you do, though, *pray*.

Don't just read about prayer or agree that it's important. *Pray*.
Be real. Be consistent. Be creative. But above all, *pray*.
There's so much in store for you if you do.

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1. See John 14:23; 1 Corinthians 6:19.
 2. Colossians 3:16.
 3. Psalm 46:10.
 4. Romans 8:26, 27.

This chapter is adapted from Randy's book, If My People Pray, Pacific Press® Publishing Association, Boise, Idaho, 1995.



Ways to Pray for and With Children

Recently, one of our local Christian radio stations, KTSY, had a prayer and praise day. For 12 hours straight, the phone lines were open, and listeners could call and praise God for an answered prayer and also make prayer requests. During one segment of the day, listeners were invited to call in and nominate someone for the faith hall of fame—someone whom they felt demonstrated faith by the way they lived. One little boy called in and nominated his mom. When the announcer asked this youngster why his mother should be in the faith hall of fame, he answered, “Because my mom prays for me every day.”

How I wish this was the proud boast of every child! At the risk of offending those of my own generation, I have to say that on the whole, we’ve done a lousy job of parenting. Determined not to grow up, and mired in materialistic self-indulgence, Boomers have neglected their children, spoiled them, modeled alcohol and drug use in front of them, and failed to provide the moral boundaries that teach them what is right and wrong.

I realize this is a generalization. Of course there are exceptions. Many

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of us provide computers and private-school education for our children to give them a head start on a successful adulthood. But of all the things we do for our children, prayer is most important.

Why pray for our children? Because Satan wants them. Jesus told Peter, “Satan has asked to sift you as wheat,”¹ and this is what the enemy wants to do to our children in these last days.

The evidences that our children are being “sifted” by the enemy and stand in need of our prayers more than ever are abundant. Consider the following.

- September 1995—A family makes a wrong turn down a street in Los Angeles and gets trapped in a hail of gunfire that kills their little girl. Gang members pour bullets into the car for the fun of it.
- November 1996—A teenage girl gives birth in a Delaware motel, then she and her boyfriend allegedly beat the child to death, place it in a plastic bag, and drop it in a dumpster.
- June 1997—A New Jersey teen gives birth to a baby in a bathroom stall at her high-school prom. She drops the baby in the trash, then returns to the dance floor.
- October 1997—A 16-year-old boy in Pearl, Mississippi, guns down his mother and then goes to school and shoots nine students, killing two, including his former girlfriend.
- December 1997—A young boy opens fire on a prayer meeting at Heath High School in Paducah, Kentucky, killing three and wounding five of his classmates.
- March 1998—A 13- and an 11-year-old gun down four students and a teacher in Jonesboro, Arkansas.
- April 1998—In Yonkers, New York, a 15-year-old girl, upset that her teacher called her parents about her poor academic performance, attacked the pregnant teacher with a hammer.

But we are not helpless in this struggle for the souls of our children. We must fight! Lamentations 2:19 gives us our battle plan: “Pour out

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your heart like water in the presence of the Lord. Lift up your hands to him for the lives of your children.”

At this point in our discussion, I need to say something very important. *Strive to be a praying parent, not a perfect parent.* It's not being a perfect parent that makes the difference in a child's life. None of us are perfect, so how can we be perfect parents? It's the *praying* parent that makes the difference. And that's something we *all* can be.

Here are five ways we can pray for and with our children.

1. PRAY A PRAYER OF BLESSING ON YOUR CHILDREN.²

How important it is that our children receive God's blessing! Our kids hunger to know that they are special, that there's no one else who owns the key to our hearts in exactly the same way. And they hunger to know that God is their Friend and that His smile, not His frown, is on them. We have the incredible privilege as parents and New Testament priests³ to administer blessing to our children.

Call your children to your side at least once a year—perhaps on their birthdays or on New Year's Eve. Place your hands upon their heads, representing God's hands of provision and protection. Thank God for each unique child of yours, and then, inserting his or her name in the text, repeat the words of blessing found in Numbers 6:24, 25:

“The Lord bless you and keep you; the Lord make His face shine upon you, and be gracious to you; The Lord lift up His countenance upon you, and give you peace.”⁴

Parents, don't miss out on one of your highest privileges—that of blessing your children. You don't have to do it exactly as described above, but find your way to communicate God's approval and delight in your sons and daughters, be they four, fourteen, or forty! And do you know what? God promises to put His name on your children and to bless them.⁵ What more could you want for them?

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2. MAKE PERSONALIZED PRAYER LISTS FOR EACH CHILD.

The credit for this idea goes to Stormie Omartian, author of *The Power of a Praying Parent*.⁶ Designate a time each year, perhaps at the beginning of summer vacation, to make a prayer list for each of your children. Take pencil and paper in hand, and ask God to show you how to pray for each child over the next twelve months. Claim Psalm 25:14 as you do this, believing that He will reveal your children's needs to you when you ask.

This exercise may take several days. Feel free to add to the lists as needed throughout the year.

3. PRAY, CLAIMING PROMISES FROM SCRIPTURE.

To the list you created in step two, add gifts, and claim the associated Scripture verses:

A. Protection—Psalm 17:8, 9; 91:1, 2, 9, 10-12; Isaiah 54:17.

B. Love and acceptance—Isaiah 41:9; Jeremiah 31:3; Romans 5:8.

C. Respect for parents and other authorities—Proverbs 1:8, 9; Isaiah 30:1; Ephesians 6:1-3; Colossians 3:20.

D. Godly friends and role models—Psalm 1:1; Proverbs 4:14; 12:26; 22:24, 25.

E. A hunger for the things of God—Psalm 86:11, 12; 119:2; Proverbs 14:27; Matthew 5:6.

F. Recognition of God-given gifts and talents—Proverbs 18:6; 22:29; Romans 11:29; 1 Peter 4:10.

G. Freedom from fear—Psalm 27:1; 34:4; Isaiah 41:10; 2 Timothy 1:7; 1 John 4:18.

H. A sound mind—Romans 12:2; 2 Corinthians 10:4, 5; Ephesians 4:17, 18, 22-24; Philippians 2:5; 4:8; 2 Timothy 1:7.

I. Freedom from alcohol, drugs, and other addictions—Deuteronomy 30:19; John 8:36; Romans 8:13.

J. Sexual purity—1 Corinthians 6:13, 18; 10:13; 1 Thessalonians 4:3-5; James 1:12; 1 Peter 2:11.

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K. The right mate— Psalm 127:1; Proverbs 3:5, 6; 18:22; Malachi 2:13-16; Hebrews 13:4.

4. MAKE IT REAL.

Children do what they see. If prayer is to be real to them, it must first be real to their parents. So model time alone with Jesus. Let your children “catch” you on your knees during times of private prayer and devotion. In this way, they’ll see that prayer is important to Mom or Dad.

Pray after the TV news. This will bring a sense of reality to prayer. Prayer becomes relevant when you make the real-life problems you’ve seen the subject of your talks with God.

Don’t fuss when your children don’t feel like praying. Pray for them aloud during those times, and give them space as they develop their relationship with God. A forced prayer through pouting lips and tear-streaked cheeks won’t benefit anyone. Don’t saddle prayer with negative pressure to perform.

5. MAKE IT SIMPLE AND FUN.

Keep prayer with the children simple and short. Teach them to be as specific as possible, and let them know that it is appropriate to pray anytime and anywhere. Use creative approaches to prayer, like “prayer balloons.” Write your prayer requests on slips of paper, insert them into uninflated balloons, and fill the balloons with helium. When released, the balloons become a visual object lesson teaching that our prayers ascend to God.

In our home, we enjoy creating “prayer stars.” Everyone kneels in a circle on the carpet with our folded hands touching at the fingertips. When we finish praying, we drop our still-folded-and-touching hands to the carpet, and then everyone leans back, pulling their hands apart in a v-shape along the carpet. The result is a starburst pattern on the carpet—a visible mark on the spot where we had family prayer.

Place prayer or Scripture verses in your children’s lunch pails so that when they open them around noontime, they’ll know that you’re thinking and praying about them.

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These are just a few of the ways to make prayer an important part of your children's lives. Experiment. Be bold and creative. Just remember that of all the things we do for our children, prayer is most important. It may be the thing that gets you a nomination into the "faith hall of fame" from a grateful child—and from Jesus, who prays for you without ceasing.⁷

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1. Luke 22:31.
 2. Numbers 6:22-27.
 3. 1 Peter 2:9.
 4. NKJV.
 5. See Numbers 6:27.
 6. Eugene, Oregon: Harvest House Publishers, 1995.
 7. Hebrews 7:25.



Ways to Connect With God Despite a Busy Schedule

My kids are fans of those cute, animated vegetables who star in the wildly popular VeggieTales® video series. Episode three presents The Story of Flibber-O-Loo, a creative adaptation of Jesus' parable of the good Samaritan. Larry the Cucumber encounters bullies who steal his lunch money and leave him upside down in a hole. Along comes the mayor of Flibber-O-Loo, Larry's home town. When the victimized cucumber asks for help, the mayor (an asparagus with a British accent) sings this little song:

I'm busy, busy, dreadfully busy,
you've no idea what I have to do.
Busy, busy, shockingly busy,
much, much too busy for you.

Sound familiar?

Our lives are very much like this simple song. We're all dreadfully, shockingly busy. Major life events come and go with the speed of a

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mouse click on the computer. Graduations, basketball practice, braces, business trips, doctor visits, car trouble, grocery shopping, overdue library books, church duties, shuttling kids back and forth to school, lunches to fix, shots for the dog, magazine or book deadlines, jury duty, piano lessons, unexpected house guests, unexpected illnesses, job changes, etc., etc. The demands on our time are incessant and irrational. Solitude is a fantasy.

And somewhere in the scattered mess that is our lives, there is supposed to be time for holiness. Time to get deep with God. Time to pursue and experience spiritual renewal. How? How can we—with our cell phones, web pages, Palm Pilots, pagers, and 500-channel, high-definition TV sets—ever have the time or energy to connect with God in a way that produces true spiritual growth and depth? I'm still working this out for myself, but here are five things that can help get us out of the rat race and into God's presence:

1. GET SOME SLEEP.

Recent national surveys reveal that millions of Americans are terribly sleep deprived. Forty percent of adults say that they are so sleepy during the day that it interferes with their daily activities.¹ Maybe you're like my wife. She's on the go from the time her feet hit the floor in the morning until her head hits the pillow at night (usually around midnight!). She spins and spins, never allowing herself time to stop. But the moment she sits or lays down, she's fast asleep. When you're that tired, it's nearly impossible to have a productive "quiet time" in prayer and in God's Word. Thirty seconds into your Bible reading, and the words start runningtogetherinablobandbeforeyouknowityou'reasleeeeeeee . . .

Follow Elijah's example—get some sleep. After a big day on Mt. Carmel—praying fire and rain down from heaven, killing the prophets of Baal, and running faster than Ahab's chariot all the way to Jezreel—Elijah got word that Jezebel had taken out a contract on his life. He then ran "a day's journey into the desert" to escape the queen. There, exhausted and depressed, this mighty man of God prayed for death and then "fell asleep."²

Read the story carefully, and you'll see that God didn't chastise Elijah

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for his depression or his suicidal prayer. He knew that Elijah needed rest. We need it too. Start paying attention to your sleep habits. Stick to a regular schedule for going to bed and waking up, even on weekends. Give yourself permission to lie down and get some rest. If you're refreshed and alert, your mind and spirit will be receptive to the voice of God.

2. LEARN TO SAY NO.

This is a tough one for me. However, my wife says that since I turned 40 last year, I've improved—I say No more often. (She even told me to practice saying it in front of the mirror!) I'm not advocating the wholesale abandonment of all your duties, but I am urging that you use greater discretion. How many things are you currently doing only out of fear of disappointing others or fear of not being needed? How many of your current activities do you secretly resent? Pray for and exercise discernment—that spiritual ability to choose what is best over what is merely good. Saying No is an effective means of decluttering your life. You'll have more time to slow down, to be alone, pour out your overburdened heart to God, and admit your desperate need for inner refreshment.

3. BE QUIET.

I can't say this strongly enough. *Silence is indispensable if we hope to add depth to our spiritual life.* In his book *Intimacy With the Almighty*, Charles Swindoll writes, "Noise and words and frenzied, hectic schedules dull our senses, closing our ears to His still, small voice and making us numb to His touch."³

Last summer our family spent a few hours in Utah's Zion National Park. We oohed and aahed at the magnificent red rock formations that towered above us. But it was the silence combined with the visual spectacle that made us feel God's awesome presence. Three hours down I-15 we were in Las Vegas. Talk about a contrast! It was easy to see how the still, small voice of God would be difficult to hear amid the orgy of noise, pleasure seeking, and sensory stimulation of that place.

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You can't control the noise of the world around you, but you can turn down the volume of your own inner space. Make room for quiet in your life. Unplug the phone. Shut off the TV. Turn off the radio or CD player, and spend some time every day in silence.

I won't kid you. This will be very difficult to do. As I write these words, I'm all alone in my living room, but the washing machine is chugging away in the laundry room next door, and the sounds of my kids' *Adventure in Odyssey* tapes are floating down the hall. It's hard to filter out the noise. However, we must try, for intimacy is best developed in silence where distractions are reduced and we can focus our full attention on God.

4. SEIZE THE “GOD MOMENTS.”

I heard a preacher say that when you're really hungry for God, you can hear His voice even in a conversation between two people on a bus! Here's the point: Look and listen for God in the most routine aspects of your day. He's there. Even as the disciples gathered up the fragments left over from the meal of fishes and loaves,⁴ we can gather fragments of time and use them to connect with God. Sing or pray while you drive. While brushing your teeth, memorize a scripture verse that you've written on an index card or Post-it® note and stuck on the bathroom mirror. As you pull weeds from your garden, tell your kids about the “weeds” of sin. When the alarm shatters your sleep tomorrow morning, breathe a 20-second prayer of commitment to the Lord before hitting the shower or the snooze button. Look for and encounter God throughout your day, and you'll remain connected to Him despite the busyness.

5. WORSHIP.

Take a whole day off for worship. That's right—a whole day. You may think I'm crazy for suggesting this, but it isn't my idea. It's God's. In fact, He thought it important enough to make it one of His Ten Commandments (see Exodus 20:8-11). God knew that, left to our own devices, we'd work ourselves to death and forget about Him in the process. He also knew that to grow and deepen, relationships must have *time*.

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Keeping the Sabbath holy is an amazing privilege and restorative practice that I enjoy every week. When sunset rolls around on Friday evening,⁵ the TVs and newspapers get the day off, and the Maxwell family gathers for prayer and praises to the Creator who made and redeemed us. We spend the next 24 hours in corporate worship, rest, family time, and getting out in nature without the distractions that jangle our nerves and bombard our every waking moment on the other days of the week.

Shallowness is the bane of our times. Depth of Christian experience can be ours if we will begin putting our inner worlds in order and doing things God's way. And if we do so, God will give us a new song to sing in place of the one sung by the mayor of Flibber-O-Loo.

*“In repentance and rest is your salvation, in quietness and trust is your strength.”*⁶

1. “How Sleepy Are You? 1999 U.S. Sleep Survey Shows Disturbing Trends in Daytime Sleepiness,” <www.sleepfoundation.org/PressArchives/lead.html>.

2. 1Kings 19:5.

3. Charles Swindoll, *Intimacy With the Almighty*, (Dallas, Tex.: Word, 1996), 38, 39.

4. See Mark 6:43.

5. The biblical Sabbath, established at Creation, is celebrated from sunset to sunset, or “from even unto even” (Leviticus 23:32, KJV; cp. Mark 1:32). Proclaimed “holy” by God (Genesis 2:3; Exodus 20:8; Leviticus 23:3; Isaiah 58:13, 14), the Sabbath is more than a “holiday” from work. It is sacred time set apart for humans (Mark 2:27) to worship (Luke 4:16), to bless others (Matthew 12:11,12), and to “remember” Whose we are, Who we serve, and Who enables our lives (Exodus 20:11).

6. Isaiah 30:15.



Reasons Why We Don't Need a Constitutional Amendment on Prayer

By the time you read this, years will have passed since that fateful day when two trench coat-clad teens managed to shock even this violence-hardened nation with the murders of 12 classmates, a teacher, and finally themselves. The growing list of bloody school shootings is beginning to take a toll on our national psyche. Like the USS *Arizona*, the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier, and the Vietnam War Memorial, the names Moses Lake, Pearl, Paducah, Jonesboro, Springfield, Littleton, and Conyers evoke feelings of inconsolable loss.

The violence has led to a blame game of astronomical proportions. Parents, video games, Hollywood, access to guns, music, and eroding moral values are among the most popular targets. Solutions range from gun control to armed guards in schools to a constitutional amendment returning prayer to the classroom. And here is where many people of faith become very passionate. Many of them see the schoolyard carnage as a symptom of moral decline that began with the 1962 Supreme Court *Engel* decision¹—a ruling that has prompted many Christians to accuse the high court of “kicking God out of our public schools.” For those

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who see the world through these glasses, the formula for fixing what is broken in our nation is simple:

Prayer out = violence in
Prayer in = violence out

So it came as no surprise to me the day I received the following letter:

WAKE UP AMERICA!!! Remember Jonesboro—Remember West Memphis. The children are not to blame, it is us, we the people. We let PRAYER be taken out of our schools. TV teaches violence. We need 25,000,000 (twenty-five million) signatures to have the Constitution amended to put prayer back in our schools. You may help by copying this form. Have your friends sign it and then mail it to . . .

You might expect every Christian who loves God and country to race for their ink pens to sign this petition, right? Wrong. I love my God and my country, but I'm *not* signing. Why not? Doesn't Randy Maxwell believe in prayer? Anyone who knows me knows that I believe in and encourage prayer. I conduct prayer conferences across the country and have written books on prayer and revival.² So why wouldn't I support a constitutional amendment to return prayer to our public schools? Here are my five reasons:

1. PRAYER IS ALREADY IN OUR SCHOOLS.

That's right. TV news reports the killings, but it doesn't always report the praying. Did you know that one out of every four public schools in the country has a "club" where Bible study and prayer are center stage? David Van Biema reports, " 'Once a religious scorched-earth zone, the schoolyard is suddenly fertile ground for both Vine and Branches.' "³

Van Biema says that the prayer group in West Paducah, Kentucky, which lost four of its members to automatic weapons fired by

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a fellow student while they prayed, has grown from 35 to nearly 150. He concludes, “ ‘For now the prospects for prayer clubs seem unlimited.’ ”

Contrary to popular opinion, the Supreme Court did *not* rule against voluntary prayer in public schools. The *Engel* case simply ruled that the regents of New York had no business composing an official prayer to be recited by students in its public school system. “Students could write a prayer—but they can do that under current law. So can their pastors. Nothing in the *Engel* decision precludes a clergyman writing a prayer, passing it on to his junior members, and asking them to pray it during the school day. So long as they don’t disrupt the classroom in doing so, they are free to pray away.”⁴

And praying they are. Van Biema reports on the outbreak of revival on *public school campuses* in the wake of the Columbine High shootings:

The enthusiasm caps a decade of extraordinary growth for Christian youth groups in middle and high schools. The U.S. Supreme Court in 1990 upheld a law effectively allowing prayer clubs to meet on public school property if they did so outside of class hours and without adult supervision. Since then, thousands of Bible and prayer clubs have whooshed into what their members saw as a God-shaped vacuum.⁵

We don’t need a constitutional amendment for a freedom we already have.

2. PRAYER NEEDS TO BE IN OUR CHURCHES AND HOMES FIRST.

I agree with Pastor Jim Cymbala of the renowned Brooklyn Tabernacle when he says that he’s embarrassed by religious leaders who call for prayer in public schools when they don’t even have prayer in the churches. For many, prayer meeting is a relic of a bygone era. Today, if there isn’t some superstar preacher or hot music act, people stay home and watch television.

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Baptist preacher Greg Brooks has this to say: “Calls for reinstating prayer in the public schools are an indictment of the church. *Turning to government for assistance in propagating the faith is an unconscious admission that the church has failed.* Because we have not been agents of social change, we want government (in the form of public schools) to do our job for us, even though it’s not the government’s job to convert people to Christ, nor is it the school’s job to promote religion.”⁶

The church and the family are the primary avenues for propagating the gospel of Jesus Christ. We can’t cast stones at the secular arena when our glass houses of worship are so vulnerable. If we make sure prayer is taking place in our homes and churches, we’ll succeed in passing spiritual values to the next generation—without government’s aid.

3. MANDATED PRAYER IS NOT REAL PRAYER.

Real prayer comes from the heart; it is not coerced. It is communing with God as with a friend. Mandated periods of “silence” and pre-written prayers don’t meet this criteria. They tend to trivialize rather than bolster genuine faith. Again, Pastor Brooks states:

Religion also suffers by any attempt to prop itself up through governmental sanction, the idea being that religious faith and practices are legitimized when officially recognized. What really happens, however, is that instead of being legitimized, the religious practices are trivialized. . . . Indeed, prayers designed to be ‘non-offensive’ and ‘nonsectarian’ end up being generic, bland, meaningless incantations ‘to whom it may concern’—hardly the stuff that could have the kind of impact on lives that would reverse America’s moral decline.⁷

Force-fed religion makes no one holy. Remember, fourteen-year-old Michael Carneal opened fire on a student prayer meeting. Prayer at the school didn’t stop him. Evil does exist in this world, and a generic prayer recited at the beginning of the day would not have stopped Michael or Kip or Eric or Dylan.

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4. MANDATED PRAYER CANNOT ATONE FOR UNINVOLVED PARENTS.

I recently participated as a judge in an essay contest for 7th through 12th graders on the subject of drugs, role models, and choices. The Columbine shootings were still very fresh, and that fact was reflected in the writings of these young citizens. One recurring theme emerged loud and clear from the essays—*kids want their parents' time and attention*. No government-structured prayer can make up for parental neglect.

Listen to your kids. Pray with them. Set some standards for them, and discipline them—*please*. This was the message I got over and over again as I read essay after essay. Our children are begging for loving boundaries, not Beemers. Let's give them real love.

5. MANDATED PRAYER THREATENS OUR RELIGIOUS FREEDOMS.

It was James Madison, author of the First Amendment, who said: "It is proper to take alarm at the first experiment on our liberties. . . . Who does not see that the same authority which can establish Christianity, in exclusion of all other religions, may establish with the same ease any particular sect of Christians, in exclusion of all other sects?"

Many of the readers of this column are politically conservative and oppose government intrusion into our lives. If you resist gun control, shouldn't you resist prayer control as well? Let government do what it does, and let the church of Christ do the work of preaching the gospel. We can save our children without government help. In fact, if we follow the examples of young people like Littleton martyr Cassie Bernall and countless Christian teens who are voluntarily living their faith on public school campuses, maybe our churches and then our nation will be next to experience revival.

1. The *Engel vs. Vitale* decision ruled that the State of New York, by encouraging the recitation of the Regents' prayer in its public school system, was in violation of the Establishment Clause in the First Amendment because "that prayer was composed by governmental

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officials as a part of a governmental program to further religious beliefs.”

2. Randy has authored three books on prayer and revival: *On Eagles' Wings* (Pacific Press®, 1986), *If My People Pray* (Pacific Press®, 1995), and *Bring Back the Glory* (Pacific Press®, 2000).

3. David Bryant, “Is This the Generation?” *Pray!* 8 (1998), 10.

4. “The Voluntary School Prayer Act of 1981,” *Liberty*, November/December 1981, 6.

5. David Van Biema, “A Surge of Teen Spirit,” *Time*, May 31, 1999, 58, 59.

6. Greg Brooks, “The Prayer Panacea,” *Liberty*, May/June 1997, 20, 22.

7. *Ibid.*, 20.