

## The Dynamics of Prayer: How Relationship with God Shapes Efficacy

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### ABSTRACT

Prayer is a central spiritual practice across Christian traditions, often understood not merely as a ritual act but as a dynamic engagement between the believer and God. This paper explores how the quality of a believer's relationship with God influences the efficacy of prayer. Drawing on biblical texts, theological reflections, and practical ministry experiences, the study argues that prayer's effectiveness is deeply rooted in the relational dimension rather than the mere recitation of words or adherence to formal patterns. Using a theological-qualitative approach, it examines the interplay between faith, obedience, intimacy, and divine will as determinants of answered prayer. The paper also highlights how relational barriers—such as unconfessed sin, unbelief, or spiritual indifference—can hinder prayer outcomes, while vibrant spiritual intimacy fosters alignment with God's purposes. The analysis underscores that effective prayer emerges from a covenant relationship characterized by trust, submission, and ongoing fellowship with God. By reframing prayer as both communication and communion, the study provides insights for personal spirituality, pastoral care, and discipleship training. This relational perspective challenges purely instrumental views of prayer and invites believers to deepen their intimacy with God as the foundation for a fruitful prayer life.

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## INTRODUCTION

Prayer remains one of the most profound and universal expressions of Christian faith, functioning as both communication and communion between humanity and God. Within Christian theology, prayer is not simply the articulation of requests but a relational engagement that reflects the believer's trust, dependence, and intimacy with God (Packer 192). The Bible consistently portrays effective prayer as emerging from a genuine relationship with God, rooted in covenant love and obedience (John 15:7; James 5:16). This understanding challenges purely mechanical or transactional approaches to prayer, highlighting instead its deeply relational nature.

Theologically, the efficacy of prayer is inseparable from the quality of the divine-human relationship. As Foster notes, "Prayer is the central avenue God uses to transform us" (33), suggesting that prayer's primary purpose is not merely to change circumstances but to shape the believer into deeper conformity with God's will. Relational intimacy—expressed through faith, repentance, and obedience—serves as the spiritual soil in which effective prayer grows (Stott 89). Conversely, biblical narratives illustrate that broken fellowship with God, whether through sin or unbelief, can hinder prayer outcomes (Isaiah 59:2; Psalm 66:18).

This paper examines the dynamics of prayer through the lens of relational theology, arguing that the believer's union with God is a decisive factor in prayer's efficacy. By integrating biblical teaching, theological reflection, and pastoral application, it seeks to reframe prayer not as a formula for results but as a transformative dialogue with the living God, where intimacy fuels both persistence and effectiveness.

## Conceptual Clarification of Terms

### Prayer

Prayer, in Christian theology, is both a spiritual discipline and a relational act of communication with God. It involves adoration, confession, thanksgiving, and supplication, serving as a medium through which believers express dependence on and fellowship with God (Foster 33). It is not merely verbal expression but a holistic engagement of heart, mind, and spirit aimed at communion with the divine (Murray 18).

### Dynamics

In the context of this study, dynamics refers to the underlying principles, forces, and relational interactions that influence the practice and effectiveness of prayer. This includes the interplay between faith, obedience, intimacy, and alignment with God's will, as well as the hindrances that can affect outcomes (Carson 144).

### Relationship with God

Relationship with God denotes the covenantal bond established through faith in Jesus Christ, characterized by trust, obedience, love, and ongoing fellowship (Packer 195). It is cultivated through spiritual disciplines, moral integrity, and alignment with biblical principles, forming the foundation for effective prayer. This relationship is both personal and communal, involving participation in the life of the Church (Bediako 212).

### Efficacy

Efficacy refers to the ability of prayer to achieve intended spiritual or practical outcomes in alignment with God's purposes. Within Christian thought, efficacy is not determined by human manipulation but by the believer's faith, the will of God, and the relational authenticity between God and the petitioner (Stott 91).

### Covenant

Covenant is a sacred agreement initiated by God, binding Him and His people in a relationship of mutual commitment and faithfulness. In prayer, covenant frames the believer's confidence in God's promises and responsiveness, providing a theological basis for expecting divine intervention (Wright 54).

## Biblical and Theological Framework

The biblical witness consistently affirms that the efficacy of prayer is deeply tied to the quality of one's relationship with God. In the Old Testament, God declares, "If my people, who are called by my name, will humble themselves and pray and seek my face and turn from their wicked ways, then I will hear from heaven" (2 Chron. 7:14, NIV). This text not only underscores God's willingness to answer prayer but also identifies relational conditions—humility, repentance, and devotion—as prerequisites for divine response. Similarly, the Psalms affirm that "the Lord is near to all who call on him... in truth" (Ps. 145:18), highlighting sincerity and covenantal loyalty.

In the New Testament, Jesus teaches that prayer effectiveness flows from abiding in Him: "If you remain in me and my words remain in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be done for you" (John 15:7, NIV). This abiding relationship is both the condition and context of fruitful prayer. James reinforces this by stating that "the prayer of a righteous person is powerful and effective" (James 5:16, NIV), linking righteousness to relational authenticity with God.

Theologically, this relationship is grounded in covenant. As Packer notes, covenant implies "a committed relationship of mutual obligations and trust" (195). Prayer operates within this covenantal framework, where God's promises inspire confidence and obedience fosters alignment with His will. Foster describes prayer as "the central avenue God uses to transform us" (33), suggesting that transformation—not mere petition—is the ultimate goal.

African theological perspectives also emphasize this relational nature. Bediako observes that in African Christian communities, prayer is often holistic, integrating worship, confession, and service, thereby deepening communal and personal intimacy with God (212). This aligns with biblical principles that view prayer as an outflow of the believer's ongoing fellowship with God, rather than an isolated act aimed at immediate results.

In sum, both Scripture and theology affirm that effective prayer emerges from a living, covenant-based relationship with God. This framework challenges transactional views of prayer, inviting believers into a deeper, ongoing dialogue with the divine, where intimacy fuels persistence and faith shapes outcomes.

## Practical Implications and Application

Understanding prayer as a relational engagement with God has significant implications for personal spirituality, pastoral ministry, and discipleship formation. First, on a personal level, believers are encouraged to cultivate intimacy with God through consistent spiritual disciplines such as Scripture meditation, confession of sin, worship, and obedience (Foster 39). These practices deepen the relational bond that undergirds effective prayer. In this sense, prayer becomes less of an emergency tool for crisis management and more of a daily conversation that shapes character and aligns the believer with God's purposes (Packer 201).

Second, in pastoral ministry, teaching on prayer should move beyond techniques and formulas to emphasize relationship-building with God. Pastors and church leaders can guide congregations to see prayer not as a bargaining process but as covenantal communication, rooted in love and mutual commitment. Practical strategies may include prayer retreats,

accountability partnerships, and corporate times of repentance and worship, which foster both personal and communal intimacy with God (Bediako 214).

Third, in discipleship and leadership training, this relational perspective on prayer should be integrated into mentoring programs. New believers, as well as emerging leaders, should learn that prayer's power flows from a life lived in harmony with God's will (John 15:7). By modeling relational depth and authenticity in prayer, mentors can inspire others to pursue God, not merely His blessings.

Finally, this approach challenges cultural tendencies toward transactional spirituality, where prayer is seen primarily as a means of acquiring material or immediate outcomes. Instead, it promotes a holistic vision where the aim of prayer is transformation into Christlikeness, a process that naturally leads to effective and fruitful spiritual life.

## Conclusion and Recommendations

This study has demonstrated that the efficacy of prayer is inseparably linked to the quality of the believer's relationship with God. Both biblical and theological evidence affirm that prayer is not primarily a mechanical or transactional act but a covenantal dialogue grounded in intimacy, trust, and obedience. Scripture consistently portrays answered prayer as the fruit of a vibrant spiritual relationship, where the believer's heart and will are aligned with God's purposes (John 15:7; James 5:16).

Theologically, this relationship is nurtured through faith, holiness, and a commitment to God's Word. Relational barriers—such as unconfessed sin, unbelief, or spiritual negligence—hinder prayer's effectiveness, while a life of devotion fosters confidence and persistence in prayer. African Christian perspectives reinforce this truth, showing how corporate worship, confession, and acts of service strengthen both communal and personal fellowship with God.

## Recommendations:

1. For Believers – Cultivate daily intimacy with God through Scripture, confession, worship, and obedience, making prayer a continuous lifestyle rather than a crisis response.
2. For Church Leaders – Teach and model a relational theology of prayer, emphasizing transformation and covenantal trust over mere petition.
3. For Theological Education – Integrate prayer studies into curricula in a way that combines biblical exegesis, theological reflection, and practical application.
4. For Christian Communities – Promote corporate prayer practices that foster unity, confession, and collective alignment with God's will.

In conclusion, when prayer flows from a deep and genuine relationship with God, it becomes more than a request—it becomes an avenue for transformation, communion, and participation in God's redemptive work in the world.

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