

Whose List Is It, Anyway?

One way
to cure the
prayer-list
blahs

B Y V I C B L A C K

I've struggled with prayer lists ever since I started praying, roughly 40 years ago. My early list fit on an index card. The list grew to a page and then to a notebook, with categories of requests, dates requests were answered, and so on. After a while, my "prayer time" before the Lord became strictly business, with me processing through my list while God listened. • Now,

I'm not saying prayer lists or prayer notebooks are bad things. But they weren't working for me. I began to wonder what I was communicating to God with my approach to prayer. Were the requests I consistently placed before Him anywhere near His will? • At the same time, I was discovering the satisfaction of spending time with

God with no agenda—simply enjoying His presence. I began to notice that during such times, a person or circumstance often came to my mind. It was as though God were saying, "Let's discuss this friend of yours."

That's where the idea came from that transformed my prayer life. *I gave my prayer list to God.* I relinquished control. Before this change, either I controlled what went on my list or those who asked me for prayer controlled my list. They told me what to pray, when to pray, and how long to pray (until they got an answer!). But when I gave my list to God and let Him impress prayer needs on my heart, my desire and motivation to pray escalated.

Now when someone asks me to pray for him, I try to pray on the spot or very soon thereafter. Beyond that, I trust God to burden me to continue praying for that person if He chooses. Sometimes my on-the-spot prayer completes my prayer responsibility. Other times, I may pray whenever the person comes to mind. If God directs me to, I add that person to my list. Some prayer needs are so close to my heart that I can't forget them, so no list is needed.

Once God has added a request to the list, it stays there until He removes it. I find that as God and I spent time discussing these matters face-to-face, He makes clear to me what adjustments to make to our list.

FROM BUSINESS TO PLEASURE
This process of giving God my list has enhanced my relationship with Him. When I enter His presence for conversation, I don't come immediately presenting requests. I enter for relationship. If I'm planning to spend 30 minutes with the Lord, I spend at least the first half focusing on Him alone before I start asking for anything. As I sit quietly in His presence I find out what *His* concerns are. And when He reveals a name or circumstance He wants me to pray for, I wait for His perspective instead of assuming that I know how and what to pray. After

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—OSWALD CHAMBERS

all, He introduced the subject! Often I find what to pray revealed in God's Word.

Recently, for example, I became aware of a circumstance in which a dear friend was not being cared for properly. A special burden came from the Lord as I reflected on His character revealed in Psalm 4. God listens. He relieves the distress of His children. He is aware when the honor of His child is challenged (vv. 1-3). I incorporated these and other thoughts from Psalm 4 as I prayed for my friend. At such times, I come away with a strong sense that I have discerned God's hopes, dreams, and desires for the person He has asked me to pray for.

I'm still experimenting with praying this way. I hope you will experiment too, especially if you long for your prayer life (lists included) to become more about relationship with God. Wait quietly and listen for the Lord to tell you about those issues that concern Him. Incorporate what He reveals to you into your prayer assignments. Then be prepared for the many blessings that await you as you pursue deeper intimacy with the God who is not silent. 



about the author

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