

Pneuma Praying

What Is Praying in the Spirit?

As I was finishing up my degree in seminary, I had no idea where Mary Jo and I would move next. I did not have a ministry assignment and although I had sent out a number of resumes, I wasn't getting job offers. We both knew we felt led by God to serve in an area of the United States where churches were small and Christianity wasn't widespread but that still left us with large parts of the US where we could land. What we did know was that we wanted the Spirit of God to lead us. We wanted Him to be in charge of where we served and so we prayed and prayed and prayed for the Spirit to guide us. Have you ever been in that situation where you did not know what God was planning on doing with you, but you wanted Him in charge of your life? Have you ever wanted to connect with God and be led by Him but didn't know how to do it? Today we are going to examine the sixth of the six characteristics of the faithful follower of Christ, "pneuma praying". Our big idea is this. Get in step with the Spirit of God and stay there.

Here is our key verse. **Through all prayer and supplication, praying ones, in every time in the Spirit, and into this, being vigilant ones in all perseverance and supplications concerning all the holy ones.** (Ephesians 6: 18) Here are the six characteristics of a faithful follower of Jesus Christ we have explored: Please Praying, Perseverance Praying, Pay Attention Praying, Pointed Praying, Personality Praying and now we will look at Pneuma Praying. The verse tells us that all our praying is to be done "every time in the Spirit". The Greek term translated "Spirit" is pneuma which explains our term, pneuma praying. The call in pneuma praying is for us to do as this Scripture insists, that we pray in the Spirit at all times. This is a major challenge and one many choose not to undertake. We must keep in mind that praying is always a supernatural event and as we pray to Christ, we meet God in the moment. It doesn't matter the reason for your praying, you can pray with all sorts of motivations but chief among them is that you want in some way to connect with Jesus. Without that desire, prayer is a waste of time and isn't actually prayer; it's just a daydreaming exercise, contemplative self-absorbed thinking. When prayer is pneuma praying, it stretches to God with a supernatural union. It is not the merging of you with the eternal as some religions and even theologians put it. You and God never become one, you remain you and God is still God but in prayer you become transformed with His personality becoming a part of yours. You are changed bit by bit every time you pray, regardless of the reason why you are praying and that change results in you having more and more of Jesus living in and through you.

Let's consider three very specific ways praying in the Spirit, or Pneuma Praying looks. First, in Pneuma Praying, you set your mind on what the Spirit desires. **Those who live according to the sinful nature have their minds set on what that nature desires; but those who live in accordance with the Spirit have their minds set on what the Spirit desires.** (Romans 8: 5 NIV) It is one matter to pray, asking God to give you what you want, and most praying goes that way. Pneuma praying however works the other way. You want above all for God to work out things in your life the way He chooses. You see this perfectly in Christ as He sought the Father in the Garden of Gethsemane. **Going a little farther, he fell with his face to the ground and prayed, "My Father, if it is possible, may this cup be taken from me. Yet not as I will, but as you will."** (Matthew 26: 39 NIV) Not many ever reach this level of thinking, but it is possible. You decide to let God decide for you what is best and then go along with it through the peace and joy God pours into you. Jesus certainly was not thrilled by the prospect of being beaten and then nailed to the Cross, but it brought Him joy knowing that He was perfectly aligned with the Father and that He was bringing salvation to the people He loved. If Christ is working out every part of your life for God, then Pneuma Praying is accepting God knows what is best for you and trusting Him in it.

Second, Pneuma Praying is keeping in step with the Spirit. **Since we live by the Spirit, let us keep in step with the Spirit.** (Galatians 5: 25 NIV) Have you noticed that even the Apostle Paul made plans that were not in line with God? **Paul and his companions traveled throughout the region of Phrygia and Galatia, having been kept by the Holy Spirit from preaching the word in the province of Asia. When they came to the border of Mysia, they tried to enter Bithynia, but the Spirit of Jesus would not allow them to.** (Acts 16: 6-7 NIV) So they wanted to go to Bithynia, had good reasons probably for going into Bithynia, but the Spirit gave them the stop sign. Now it is impossible to know how the Spirit did that; it could have been through a dream, a conversation they had together, a time of praying or countless other ways He might have gotten it across, but that is beside the point. Somehow the Spirit let Paul and the others know that Bithynia was out of bounds for them then and so rather than going anyway, the team stayed in step with the Spirit and followed Him elsewhere. Don't concern yourself with how God will get in touch with you, just be certain He will and then do what He says. If you are off base and you haven't heard God at all, the

Spirit will honor your faith in Him and get you back on track. Pride is the great enemy of staying in step with the Spirit. You so badly want to be right that you can't give yourself permission to be wrong. Pneuma Praying is being flexible enough to change course whenever the Spirit gets in touch with you. How many Christians have truly wrecked their lives because they were afraid to be led by God?

Third, it makes you God dependent rather than self-dependent. **Are you so foolish? After beginning with the Spirit, are you now trying to attain your goal by human effort?** (Galatians 3: 3 NIV) Paul notes that the Ephesians at first were relying on the Spirit but shifted for some reason and tried to get things done on their own effort. It reminds me of when Jehoshaphat, the king of Judah was asked by Ahab, the king of Israel to join him in fighting the nation of Aram. Jehoshaphat first agreed to align their two nations in the battle against Aram, but then paused because he wanted to know what God had to say. **But Jehoshaphat also said to the king of Israel, "First seek the counsel of the Lord."** (1 Kings 22:5 NIV) That is of course Pneuma Praying, wanting the Lord to guide you. But like the foolish Galatians, and many Christians, after seeking the Lord and gaining direction, Jehoshaphat veered away from God and went ahead and fought with Ahab, nearly losing his life and much of his army as a result. Pneuma Praying is going all the way through with God dependence, relying upon Him to not only guide you but following Him loyally. It seems Jehoshaphat learned this because later in his reign his country faced a great crisis. A vast army invaded the land, threatening the destruction of Judah. Once again he sought the Lord's counsel but this time he took it to heart. **Alarmed, Jehoshaphat resolved to inquire of the Lord, and he proclaimed a fast for all Judah.** (2 Chronicles 20: 3 NIV) The Lord, as He does for you when you seek His direction, made it clear what Jehoshaphat should do next. **You will not have to fight this battle. Take up your positions; stand firm and see the deliverance the Lord will give you, O Judah and Jerusalem. Do not be afraid; do not be discouraged. Go out to face them tomorrow, and the Lord will be with you.** (2 Chronicles 20: 17 NIV) Jehoshaphat, rather than relying upon his own instincts, followed God's direction and the results were supernatural and just what he hoped. Rather than coming up with a battle plan of his own, Jehoshaphat completely relied upon God to deliver him and the people of Jerusalem. **As they began to sing and praise, the Lord set ambushes against the men of Ammon and Moab and Mount Seir who were invading Judah, and they were defeated.** (2 Chronicles 20: 22 NIV)

Pneuma Praying is the simplest step you will take. You by faith decide you want the Spirit of God to be in charge and then pay attention to Him directing you. Prayer is a quiet confidence that the Spirit is in charge for you and He will make it clear somehow the way you should live. There is a settled assurance in the believer who practices Pneuma Praying that God is good and has things under control. If you are worried, then you know you are not practicing Pneuma Praying. If you are upset or frustrated or bent out of shape, then you are not practicing Pneuma Praying. Let me share the perfect picture of what it is like to practice Pneuma Praying. You will feel this way and it will be really how you feel. **The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not be in want. He makes me lie down in green pastures, he leads me beside quiet waters, he restores my soul. He guides me in paths of righteousness for his name's sake. Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil, for you are with me; your rod and your staff, they comfort me. You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies. You anoint my head with oil; my cup overflows. Surely goodness and love will follow me all the days of my life, and I will dwell in the house of the Lord forever.** (Psalm 23 NIV) Doesn't that sound like a great way to live? Our big idea is this. Get in step with the Spirit of God and stay there. If you want the good life, then practice Pneuma Praying and enjoy all the good God has in store for you!