Praying is difficult. And I say that as a Christian. A great many of us who know and love God through Jesus Christ still struggle to get into prayer, even when we set aside the time to do it. We hop in the car, so to speak, turn the key, and get nothing but clicks – she just won’t turn over. How do we get this old car moving? We might just as soon abandon the idea altogether. Some of us though refuse to quit, but instead of actually being carried along by the vehicle itself, we’re either standing behind the car pushing it forward, or else were sitting in the drivers seat pretending like we’re driving. We wave to cars passing by, move the wheel back and forth, and honking the horn (just like we did when we were 5). But neither of those actions (pushing or pretending) are substitutes for actually driving – but a lot of prayers become just that: self-exertion or just pretend praying.

I came across this passage the other day while reading the book of Jude. Jude is one of those one-chapter books of the Bible, so we only have verse references. This is from 20-21.

*20But you, beloved, building yourselves up in your most holy faith and praying in the Holy Spirit, 21keep yourselves in the love of God,*

Jude wants us to keep ourselves in the love of God by doing two things: building ourselves up in our most holy faith, and did you catch this, by praying *in the Holy Spirit*. He tells us to pray in the Holy Spirit. Is that just a fancy way to talk about prayer? Sometimes we just read Biblical writers like spiritual poets: they just string phrases together in a religiously artistic kind of way. The writers did have craft and skill – but their purpose is not art. They mean what they write. Jude is not alone in this thought. Paul also wrote something similar in Eph 6, verse 18. Following a full description of the Christians spiritual armor Paul adds that we must be…

*praying at all times in the Spirit*

So what does that mean? Praying in the Spirit? That’s capital S, *Holy* Spirit – as Jude so writes. The first thing that it indicates is that there is a kind of praying that is *not* in the Spirit. If it is not in the Spirit, then it can only be one other thing: praying in the flesh. This goes back to my earlier illustration. Our difficulty in getting prayer started often lies in the fact that we are relying on ourselves to get it going. That’s pushing the car – not driving it. We will just as soon give it up! Same is true for those pretending. You’re not actually praying, you’re just using prayer language and posture to make it look like praying, but once again what you’re really doing is relying on self.

We’ve failed to first acknowledge the basic truth that prayer is a *spiritual* activity – it therefore requires the *Spirit* of God to make it alive and effortless. Prayer is not meant to be your doing – it is God working in you. That means we need to begin by confessing our inability to pray. We cannot pray apart from the Holy Spirit. Beginning this way moves us to a conscious awareness of prayer as communing with the living God. It is no longer just a “thing” we’re supposed to do. You’ll know you’re praying in the Spirit when, and I quote, “*The prayer has a living quality characterized by warmth and freedom and a sense of exchange. We realize that we are in God’s presence speaking to God. The Spirit illuminates your mind, moves your heart, and grants a freedom of utterance and liberty of expression*.”[[1]](#footnote-1)

Yes, praying is difficult. But not when we begin with relying on the Spirit of God. Prayer should feel like a Sunday afternoon drive, not like pedaling with the flintstones.

1. Jason Meyer (pastor in Minneapolis) https://www.desiringgod.org/articles/how-to-pray-in-the-holy-spirit [↑](#footnote-ref-1)