

# PRAYER



## 1. WHAT IS PRAYER?

Prayer is communicating with God. Although prayer may take many forms, it basically means: 1) man talking with God, and 2) God talking with man. Thus, prayer is one aspect of a relationship. It is a two-way communication and much more than a formal religious exercise. Prayer in fact, is a time of fellowship and sharing with God Himself.

## 2. HOW IMPORTANT IS PRAYER?

### A. Jesus' example. He prayed:

1. Frequently. If God's only begotten Son felt the need of spending much time with his Father in prayer, how much more should we? "But He Himself would often slip away to the wilderness and pray." **(Luke 5:16)**
2. By Himself. Solitude and freedom from interruption are essential to meaningful prayer.  
"And in the early morning, while it was still dark, He arose and went out and departed to a lonely place, and was praying there." **(Mark 1:35) Luke 9:18**
3. Before making major decisions. In this particular case, He sought God all night for His direction before choosing the 12 disciples to be His apostles. *Do you pray earnestly about your decisions?*  
"And it was at this time that He went off to the mountain to pray, and He spent the whole night in prayer to God." **(Luke 6:12)**
4. In time of great testing. His first priority was that God's will should be done and to this end He prayed in a time of great testing and difficulty in His life. **(Matthew 26:39-44)**
5. To rejoice and give thanks to God. Thanksgiving is perhaps the most neglected aspect of prayer today.  
"At that time Jesus answered and said, 'I praise Thee, O Father, Lord of heaven and earth, that Thou didst hide these things from the wise and intelligent and didst reveal them to babes. Yes, Father, for thus it was well-pleasing in Thy sight.' **(Matthew 11:25-26) and John 11:41-42.**
6. On behalf of others. This is the true measure of our real love and concern for other people: do we pray for them? Right this moment Christ, as our great High Priest, is praying for us to the Father. **Hebrews 7:25** "Hence, also, He is able to save forever save those

who draw near to God through Him, since He always lives to make intercession for them." **Luke 22:31-32, Matthew 19:13, Romans 8:34**

7. To keep in close touch with the Father. This enables Christ to always do His Father's will and speak His Father's message. Only prayer will enable us to do the same.  
"I can do nothing on my own authority; as I hear, I judge; and my judgment is just, because I seek not my own will, but the will of Him who sent me." **(John 5:30)**

**B. Example of disciples.**

"And they continued steadfastly in the apostles' doctrine and fellowship and in breaking of bread and in prayers." **(Acts 2:42)** "And when they had prayed, the place was shaken where they were assembled together; and they were all filled with the holy Ghost, and they spoke the Word of God with boldness." **(Acts 4:31)**

**C. Present day examples:**

1. Martin Luther - "Prayer is the most important thing in my life. If I should neglect prayer for a single day, I should lose a great deal of the fire of faith."
2. John Knox - "O god, give me Scotland, or I die." Bloody Mary Queen of Scotland confessed that she feared the prayers of John Knox more than an army of soldiers.
3. John Wesley - "I have so much to do that I must spend several hours in prayer before I am able to do it."
4. Charles Spurgeon - "We may be certain that whatever God has made prominent in His Word, He intended to be conspicuous in our lives. If He has said much about prayer, it is because He knows we have much need of it. So deep are our necessities, that until we are in heaven we must not cease to pray... A prayerless soul is a Christless soul"
5. George Mueller - "When once I am persuaded that a thing is right, I go on praying for it until the end comes. I never give up! Thousands of souls have been saved in answer to my prayers...the great point is never give up until the answer comes...the great fault of the children of God is they do not continue to prayer; they do not go on praying; they do not persevere. If they desire anything for God's glory, they should pray until they get it."
6. R. A. Torrey - "Prayer can do anything that God can do, and as God can do anything, prayer is omnipotent."

7. Billy Graham - "Every man whose life has counted for the church or for the kingdom of God has been a man of prayer. You cannot afford to be too busy to pray. A prayerless Christian is a powerless Christian."

### 3. **WHAT ARE THE PRINCIPLES OF EFFECTIVE PRAYER?**

#### **A. Prayer must be made in faith.**

"And without faith it is impossible to please Him. For whoever would draw near to God must believe that He exists and that He rewards those who seek Him." (**Mark 11:6, James 1:5-7**)

Faith in prayer then simply means I accept the following facts.

1. God exists.
2. God loves me and is concerned about my needs.
3. God has made many wonderful promises which I may claim through prayer.
4. Jesus Christ has purchased for me the privilege of talking to God and knowing He will listen.
5. With God all things are possible.
6. God lives up to His promises.

#### **B. Prayer must be made in Jesus' name.**

To pray in Jesus' name is simply to recognize the fact that it is only on the basis of His work on the cross on my behalf that I may approach God in prayer and expect Him to answer. Apart from this fact, I have no right to expect God to hear my prayers.

"Whatever you ask in my name, I will do it that the Father may be glorified." (**John 14:13**)

#### **C. Prayer is only successful when in accordance with God's will.**

Prayer is not our effort to force God into doing something He is not willing to do, but rather prayer evidences our cooperation with His purposes both in us and in others.

"And this is the confidence which we have in Him, that if we ask anything according to His will He hears us. And if we know that He hears us in whatever we ask, we know that we have obtained the requests made of Him." (**I John 5:14-15**) Please read James 4:3 also.

#### **D. Prayer is effective only when the person praying has confessed and renounced sin and is attempting to live in obedience to God's Word.**

This is the case because one cannot honestly or sincerely pray in accordance with God's will while refusing to live in accordance with that will.

"Beloved, if our hearts do not condemn us, we have confidence before God, and we receive from Him whatever we ask, because we keep His commandments and do what pleases Him." (I John 3:21-22)

**E. Prayer must be made by a forgiving heart.**

God refuses to listen to the person who has the audacity and hypocrisy to take upon themselves the task of judging others, a task which He alone can justly and impartially perform.

"And wherever you stand praying, forgive, if you have anything against anyone; so that your Father also who is in heaven may forgive you your trespasses.:" (Mark 11:25-26)

**F. Prayer must be made with persistence and diligence, therefore solitude is necessary.**

Matthew 6:6. Fasting is also sometimes necessary. Acts 13:1-3. God in His infinite wisdom know both when and how to best answer our prayers. He expects us to persevere in prayer however since this action on our part is the clearest possible expression of our complete faith and trust in His Word of promise. Luke 18:1-8, Luke 11:5-10.

**G. Agreement in the home is a must.**

A husband and wife must be free from strife, with no bitterness between them.

"Likewise, you husbands, live with them according to knowledge, giving honor unto the wife, as unto the weaker vessel, and as being hers together of the grace of life; that your prayers be not hindered." (I Peter 3:7)

**H. Prayer must be in unity.**

There is great power in prayer when two or more come before God in faith.

"Again I say to you, that if two of you shall agree on earth as touching any thing that they shall ask, it shall be done for them of my Father which is in heaven." (Matthew 18:19)

**I. Prayer must be while abiding in Christ.**

To abide means to remain. As we continue in Christ and therefore in the church (which is His body, we will receive God.

"If you abide in Me and My words abide in you, you shall ask what you will and it shall be done unto you."  
(John 15:7)

**4. WHAT ABOUT FASTING IN THE PRAYER LIFE?**

Fasting will be covered in the next lesson, but yes, fasting can move mountains when done properly. Fasting by itself, will benefit us only physically. But, as we humble ourselves with fasting and earnest prayer before the Lord, we can see great spiritual results.

"Howbeit this kind goeth not out but by prayer and fasting."  
(Matthew 17:21)

## 5. ACCORDING TO THE BIBLE, WHAT SHOULD WE PRAY FOR?

### A. For all men, especially for those in authority.

"I exhort therefore, that first of all, supplications, prayers, intercessions and giving of thanks, be made for all men; For kings and for all that are in authority; that we may lead a quiet and peaceable life in all godliness and honest."

(I Timothy 2:1-2)

### B. For God's servants.

"Withal, praying also for us, that God would open unto us a door of utterance, to speak the mystery of Christ, for which I am also in bonds: that I may make it manifest, as I ought to speak." (Col. 4:3-4)

### C. For one another.

"Praying always with all prayer and supplication for all saints. (Ephesians 6:18)

### D. For wisdom.

"If any of you lack wisdom, let him ask of God, that giveth all men liberally, and upbraideth not; and it shall be given him." (James 1:5)

### E. For relief from affliction.

"Is any among you afflicted? Let him pray. Is any merry? Let him sing psalms." (James 5:13)

### F. For healing.

"Is any sick among you? Let him call for the elders of the church; and let them pray over him, anointing him with oil in the name of the Lord; and the prayer of faith shall save the sick, and the Lord shall raise him up; and if he has committed sins, they shall be forgiven him." (James 5:14-15)

### G. For consecration of God.

"For every creature of God is good, and nothing to be refused, if it be received with thanksgiving; For it is sanctified by the word of God and prayer."

**(I Timothy 4:4-5)**

## 6. HOW DOES THE BAPTISM IN THE HOLY SPIRIT AFFECT OUR PRAYER LIFE?

Scripture teaches us that we should pray in the Holy Spirit (praying in tongues). When we receive the Holy Spirit baptism, it can and should greatly empower, deepen and help our prayer life.

"For if I pray in a tongue, my spirit prays, by my mind is unfruitful. What is the outcome then? I shall pray with the spirit and I shall pray with the mind also; I shall sing with the spirit and I shall sing with the mind also." **(I Cor. 14:14-15)**

"And in the same way the Spirit also helps our weakness; for we do not know how to pray as we should, but the Spirit Himself intercedes for us with groaning too deep for words; and He who searches the hearts knows what the mind of the Spirit is, because He intercedes for the saints according to the will of God." **(Romans 8:26-27)**

"But you, beloved, building yourselves up on your most holy faith; praying in the Holy Spirit." **Jude 20**

## 7. WHAT ARE SOME HINDRANCES TO PRAYER?

### A. Asking amiss.

"You lust and do not have; so you commit murder. And you are envious and cannot obtain; so you fight and quarrel. You do not have because you do not ask. You ask and do not receive, because you ask with wrong motives, so that you may spend it on your pleasures." **(James 4:2-3)**

### B. Wrong motives.

"And when you pray, you are not to be as the hypocrites; for they love to stand and pray in the synagogues and on the street corners, in order to be seen by men. Truly I say to you, they have their reward in full. **(Matthew 6:5)**

### C. Pride.

"For although the Lord is exalted, Yet He regards the lowly; But the haughty He knows from afar." **Psalms 138:6**

### D. Iniquity.

"If I regard wickedness in my heart, The Lord will not hear"  
(Psalms 66:18)

**E. An unforgiving spirit.**

"If therefore you are presenting your offering at the altar, and there remember that your brother has something against you, leave your offering there before the altar, and go your way; first be reconciled to your brother, and then come and present your offering." **Matthew 5:23-24)**

**F. Bitterness.**

"See to it that no one comes short of the grace of God; that no root of bitterness springing up causes trouble, and by it many be defiled." **(Hebrews 12:15)**

**G. Stinginess.**

"He who shuts his ear to the cry of the poor will also cry himself and not be answered." **(Proverbs 21:13)**

**8. WHO CAN BE INVOLVED IN PRAYER?**

**A. Individuals.**

"Do not cease giving thanks for you, while making mention of you in my prayers." **(Ephesians 1:16)**

**B. Two or three people together.**

"Again I say to you, that if two of you agree on earth about anything that they may ask, it shall be done for them by My Father who is in heaven. For where two or three have gathered together in My name, there I am in their midst." **(Matthew 18:19-20)**

**C. The whole church.**

"And they were continually devoting themselves to the apostles' teaching and to fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer." **(Matthew 2:42)**

**9. WHAT ARE SOME DIFFERENT TYPES OF PRAYER?**

The Scriptures use a number of different words in referring to prayer and these can give us some guidelines as to how to pray.

**A. Worship (praise, adoration).**

"Shout joyfully to the Lord, all the earth. Serve the Lord with gladness; Come before Him with joyful singing. Know that the Lord Himself is God; It is He who has made us, and not we ourselves; we are His people and the sheep of His

pasture. Enter His gates with thanksgiving, and His courts with praise. Give thanks to Him; bless His name. For the Lord is good; His lovingkindness is everlasting, and His faithfulness to all generations." (**Psalm 100:1-5**)

"But an hour is coming, and now is, when the true worshipers shall worship the Father in spirit and truth; for such people the Father seeks to be His worshipers. God is spirit; and those who worship Him must worship in spirit and truth." (**John 4:23-24**)

When we examine some of the prayers of the new Testament we find that when the Church assembled to pray about a specific problem situation (in this case, persecution), most of the time in prayer was spent praising God. **Acts 4:24-31**.

There will no doubt be times when you go to pray and the last thing you feel like doing is praising God. This is when we may offer God what the Scripture calls the 'sacrifice of praise'.

"What shall I render to the Lord for all His benefits toward me? I shall lift up the cup of salvation, and call upon the name of the Lord. I shall pay my vows to the Lord, Oh may it be in the presence of all His people. Precious in the sight of the Lord is the death of His godly ones. O Lord, surely I am Thy servant, I am Thy servant, the son of Thy handmaid, Thou hast loosed my bonds. To Thee I shall offer a sacrifice of thanksgiving. (**Psalm 116:12-17**)

Also read **Psalm 103:1**. Praising God when we don't feel like it really is a sacrifice. At such times we praise God purely on the basis of faith, faith in the fact that God is a wonderful Father and he is worthy to be praised at all times.

"My heart is steadfast, O God, my heart is steadfast; I will sing, yes, I will sing praises! Awake, my glory; awake, harp and lyre, I will awaken the dawn! I will give thanks to Thee, O Lord, among the peoples; I will sing praises to Thee among the nations. For Thy lovingkindness is great to the heavens, and Thy truth to the clouds. Be exalted above the heavens, O God; let thy glory be above all the earth. (**Psalms 57:7-11**)

Also **Psalm 71:12** and **Psalm 71:16**. We can also praise Him for the fact that no matter how we feel, He still loves us and

"...God causes all things to work together for good to those who love God." (**Romans 8:28**)

## **B. Thanksgiving.**

(Ephesians 5:4,20; Col. 3:15; Col. 4:2; I Thess. 5:18; Hebrews 13:15)

Thanksgiving differs from worship in the sense that in worship we praise God principally for **WHO** He is whereas in giving thanks we praise God for **WHAT** He has done for us. Not taking into consideration our many spiritual blessings as Christians, we living here in North American have so much to be thankful for. When to this fact is added our salvation through the cross of Christ, our experience each day of God's love and the presence of His Holy Spirit in our lives coupled with our tremendous hope for the future as we look forward to the second coming of the Lord Jesus - *how much we have to be thankful for!*

Both worship and thanksgiving are potent factors in enabling us to maintain a positive attitude of faith towards life. Somehow as we praise God and give Him thanks, problems seem smaller and our realization of the greatness of God and His power grows until we begin to have the faith that will move mountains.

"In everything give thanks; for this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus." (**1 Thessalonians 5:18**)

"Through Him then, let us continually offer up a sacrifice of praise to God, that is, the fruit of lips that give thanks to His name." (**Hebrews 13:15**)

### **C. Confession.**

"If we say that we have fellowship with Him and yet walk in the darkness, we lie and do not practice the truth; but if we walk in the light as He Himself is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus His Son cleanses us from all sin. If we say that we have no sin, we are deceiving ourselves, and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, He is faithful and righteous to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. If we say that we have not sinned, we make Him a liar, and His word is not in us." (**I John 1:6-10**)

Confession has to do with sin in our life. Even after coming to Christ and receiving the Holy Spirit we did not all of a sudden live a perfect life, and never sin from that day forward. Rather, when we were converted, a process of growth began which will continue as long as we live. A large part of this growth involves our learning to be obedient to the Word of God by letting the Holy Spirit help us live a life pleasing to God. When sinning, we do not destroy our relationship with God and have to start all over again. However, our fellowship or sense of nearness to God is disturbed. An analogy may perhaps clarify this point. In marriage when we offend our spouse by an unkind word or action, what is needed to restore

communication and fellowship is not another marriage ceremony, but simply reconciliation by means of confession and forgiveness. Therefore, when we sin, we need to confess our failure to God and receive His forgiveness for that particular sin so that our fellowship and communication with him can be fully operational again. We do not need to re-confess all our past sins; those were looked after when we came to Christ. Now that we belong to His family it is even more true that "if we confess our sins, He is faithful and just and will forgive our sins and cleanse us from all unrighteousness."

**D. Intercession.**

"First of all, then, I urge that entreaties and prayers, petitions and thanksgiving's, be made on behalf of all men, for kings and all who are in authority, in order that we may lead a tranquil and quiet life in all godliness and dignity."

**(I Timothy 2:1-2)**

This aspect of prayer involves our speaking to God on behalf of the needs of others. The Scriptures tell us to pray on behalf of the following groups of people:

**1. Rulers, government authorities** - I Timothy 2:2

**2. Our enemies** -

"But I say to you, love your enemies, and pray for those who persecute you." **(Matthew 5:44)**

**3. Our fellow Christians (i.e. 'saints')** -

"With prayer and petition pray at all times in the Spirit, and with this in view, be on the alert with all perseverance and petition for all the saints." **(Ephesians 6:18)**

Also read **James 5:16**.

**4. Christians who are going astray** -

"If any one sees his brother committing a sin not leading to death, he shall ask and God will for him give life to those who commit sin not leading to death. There is a sin leading to death; I do not say that he should make request for this." **(I John 5:16)**

**5. Those who do not know Christ as Savior** -

"Brethren, my heart's desire and my prayer to God for them is for their salvation." **(Romans 10:1)**

There are certain things that we can do such as love our neighbor and God expects us to do these things. Read **Luke 10:25-37**. It is understood that even in these areas we must pray and learn to rely on God's power in us to enable us; for example, to genuinely love

our neighbor. There are other things, however, which only God can do and it is for these things we are to pray.

"I am the vine, you are the branches; he who abides in Me, and I in him, he bears much fruit; for apart from me you can do nothing." **(John 15:5)**

This mentioned in reference to intercession because this is the area of prayer, praying for other people, where it becomes most evident that apart from the supernatural working of God's Spirit, nothing can be accomplished.

Only God can draw the unsaved person to Jesus Christ and cause him to see his need of repentance and conversion.

"No one can come to Me, unless the Father who sent Me draws him; and I will raise him up on the last day."  
**(John 6:44)**

Only God can heal broken relationships by turning bitterness into forgiveness and hatred into love. Only God can restore peace to the innermost being of a frightened and troubled person whom we long to see comforted.

"Peace I leave with you; My peace I give to you; not as the world gives, do I give to you. Let not your heart be troubled, nor let it be fearful." (John 14:27)

These facts point out to us the importance of our praying for others.

#### **E. Petitions.**

God has committed Himself to us by means of many wonderful promises in His Word. These promises reassure us that He is able and willing to meet all our needs.

"Ask, and it shall be given to you; seek, and you shall find; knock, and it shall be opened to you. For every one who asks receives, and he who seeks finds, and to him who knock it shall be opened. Or what man is there among you, when his son shall ask him for a loaf, will give him a stone? Or if he shall ask for a fish, he will not give him a snake, will he? If you then, being evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more shall your Father who is in heaven give what is good those who ask Him!"  
**(Matthew 7:7-11)**

In prayer we may come and present our needs to Him.

"Be anxious for nothing but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your request be known to God. And the peace of God, which surpasses all

comprehension, shall guard your hearts and your mind in Christ Jesus." **(Philippians 4:6-7)**

There will be times when God doesn't not seem to heed our petitions. On these occasions He may simply be saying "*it is not best for you that I answer this request yet*", or else He may be answering us in the *negative*. The latter situation results when we ask for things with a purely selfish motive.

"You lust and do not have; so you commit murder. And you are envious and cannot obtain; so you fight and quarrel. You do not have because you do not ask. You ask, and do not receive, because you ask with wrong motives, so that you may spend it on your pleasures. **(James 4:2-3)**

A key principle to bear in mind regarding petition is the need for persistence. Read **Luke 18:1-8**.

#### **F. Communion.**

Read **John 15:1-5**. Jesus promised the disciples that His presence would go with them continually and this same truth applies to us today as His disciples. Read **Matthew 28:19-20**. Because our Lord's presence is always with us (by the indwelling of the Holy Spirit in our lives) we can experience daily, moment - by - moment communion with Him. This awareness of His presence is that part of prayer that we can take with us throughout our day to strengthen and encourage us. Practicing God's presence is something that must be learned and cultivated for the rest of our Christian life.

### **10. WHAT ARE SOME PROBLEMS IN PRAYER?**

#### **A. Discipline in prayer**

In our busy world, learning to set aside some time each day to spend alone with God can be very difficult. For this reason alone, it is all the more necessary. Nothing will give us the spiritual strength, peace of mind, freedom of worry, anxiety and tension needed to cope with our busy schedules like prayer. It must be placed at the top of the Christian's list of priorities.

#### **B. Practical considerations**

The time and place of our prayers as well as our posture in prayer are things which God has left up to us to decide. One thing, however, is absolutely necessary - and that is a place which is both quiet and private where we can be alone and undisturbed.

" And when you pray, you are not to be as the hypocrites; for they love to stand and pray in the synagogues, and on the street corners, in order to be seen by men. Truly I say to you, they have their reward in full. But you, when you pray, go into your inner room, and when you have shut your

door, pray to your Father who is in secret, and your Father who sees in secret will repay you." (Matthew 5:5-6)

This is why Jesus often went off into the desert or the mountains to pray.

The words we use in prayer should be the same we would use in talking to anyone else. Archaic phrases and flowery language impress God very little.

Repeating existing prayers can be good so long as we are really using them to express our hearts to God and not simply reciting vain repetitions. It is best in prayer to be simple, to be sincere and to be yourself.

"And when you are praying, do not use meaningless repetition, as the Gentiles do, for they suppose that they will be heard for their many words. Therefore do not be like them; for your Father knows what you need, before you ask Him." (Matthew 6:7-8)

The Bible itself contains many beautiful prayer which can help us in prayer. All we need to do is read the passage to God just as if it were our prayer. Here are some passages continuing beautiful prayers:

Psalms 43:1-5

Psalms 51:1-7

Eph. 1:16-23

Col. 1:9-12

### C. Unanswered prayers

Most unanswered prayers result from a violation of one of the principles of prayer (see Section 3 of this lesson)

In some cases, however, God does not answer our prayers **because He has a different plan in mind**, one which will bring greater glory to Himself. Such situations we must leave by faith in His capable hands.

"Commit your ways to the Lord, trust also in Him, and He will do it. And He will bring forth your righteousness as the light, and your judgment as the noonday. Rest in the Lord and wait patiently for Him." (Psalm 37:5-7)