

## PRINCIPLES FOR EFFECTIVE PRAYER

### I. What Qualifies as Prayer?

Many people mean many different things when they talk about "praying". When some talk about prayer in public school they mean by it a "moment of quiet meditation" before the busy day. Others look at prayer as deep concentration in which a person attempts to find some supernatural power within himself. And still others view prayer as a means to twist God's arm, push the right buttons, or force God to keep His promises. None of those ideas qualify for real, Biblical prayer.

Prayer is something that is supposed to come naturally to Christians. It is the first cry of a newborn believer (Galatians 4:6). No one needed to teach Paul to pray. It became natural for him as a new believer (Acts 9:11). Prayer is the expression of a child's desire to know and spend time with his father (Psalm 42:1,2). That's why Christ prayed often. When someone prays, he is admitting that he has needs that no one else can meet except God.

"In the days of His flesh, He offered up both prayers and supplications with loud crying and tears to the One able to save Him from death, and He was heard because of His piety. Although He was a Son, He learned obedience from the things which He suffered." (Hebrews 5:7,8)

In the Bible, five kinds of conversations with God qualify as real prayer:

A. **Worship:** (Rev. 5:12, Matt. 4:10, I Chron. 16:29, John 4:20-24, John 9: 30-38)

To speak or sing praise to God for who He is. To recognize and describe God's worth and his incomparable character and ability.

B. **Thanksgiving:** (Heb. 13:15, I Thess. 5:17,18, Ps. 118:1, 103:2, 100:4)

To speak or sing praises to God for what He has done. To recognize and describe God's love and acts of kindness.

C. **Confession:** (Ps. 32:5, Daniel 9:4-5, I John 1:9, Ps. 32:3-7, 53:1-9)

To say the same thing about yourself and your sins as God has said. To plead guilty to God without making any defense. To bring your sin out in the open before God and ask him to forgive and take it away.

D. **Petition:** (Heb. 4:16, Phil. 4:6, Ps. 20:1-6, I. Sam. 1:5-18, James 1:5)

To cry out to God for His help with the needs of another. To appeal to God for Him to act on your behalf for some definite need.

E. **Intercession:** (Gen. 18:23-33, Ex. 32:1-14, Rom.10:1, I Thess. 3:10-13, Acts 7:54-60)

To cry out to God for His help with the needs of another. To appeal to God for Him to act on the behalf of another whose needs you keenly identify with.

All five kinds of conversations are commanded by Scripture. Often our prayer conversations with God however, become lop-sided because one or more of the five are left out. When this occurs, the child of God misses out on real communion, real blessing, and real answers.

Memorize the five kinds and then work at making your conversations with God full, deep, and balanced.

## II. When Prayer Should Be A Priority

Almost everyone has heard I Thessalonians 5:17 quoted, "Pray without ceasing." Almost as often you have heard people try to explain what that means. Certainly it can't mean what you think it means! No one can pray without ever stopping, can they? The verse does not teach that one is to be continuously praying non-stop. Instead it teaches that one should never get out of the habit of praying. Prayer is appropriate always, and should not be a practice that is neglected.

Jesus' life is the best picture of what it means to pray without ceasing. His life illustrates when prayer should be a priority for a son or daughter of God. Prayer was not non-stop for Jesus, but Jesus never neglected prayer. He knew when to make it come before other things. Here is a brief summary of the prayer life of Jesus and when prayer became a priority to Him:

### A. Prayer was a priority at the beginning of His ministry. (Luke 3:21,22)

"Now it came about when all the people were baptized, that Jesus also was baptized, and while He was praying, heaven was opened . . ."

### B. Prayer was a priority for Jesus at the end of busy days.

#### 1. Late at night (Matt. 14:12-23)

"And after he had sent the multitudes away, He went up to the mountains by Himself to pray: and when it was evening, He was there alone."

#### 2. Early in the morning (Mark 1:35)

"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."

### C. Prayer was a priority for Jesus at times of success and popularity (Luke 5:15,16)

"But the news about Him was spreading even farther, and great multitudes were gathering to hear Him and to be healed of their sicknesses. But He Himself would often slip away to the wilderness and pray."

### D. Prayer was a priority for Jesus before important decisions. (Luke 6:12,13)

"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. And when day came, He called His disciples to Him; and chose twelve of them whom He also names as apostles."

### E. Prayer was a priority for Jesus on behalf of others - for their spiritual life. (Luke 9:18-20, 11:1, 10:20,21)

"At that very time He rejoiced greatly in the Holy Spirit 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."

### F. Prayer was a priority for Jesus following works and answers to prayer by God. (John 11:41,42)

"And so they removed the stone. And Jesus raised His eyes, and said, `Father, I thank Thee that Thou heardest Me . . .'"

G. Prayer was a priority for Himself when facing great stress.  
(John 12:27,28)

"Now, My soul has become troubled; and what shall I say, Father, save Me from this hour? But for this purpose I came to this hour. Father, glorify Thy name."

H. Prayer was a priority for Jesus on behalf of missionaries and their converts. (John 17:6-26)

"As Thou didst send Me into the world, I also have sent them into the world. And for their sakes I sanctify Myself, that they themselves also be sanctified in truth. I do not ask in behalf of these alone, but for those also who believe in Me through their word . . ."

I. Prayer was a priority for Jesus when He was anticipating death.  
(Matt. 26:36-46, Mark 14:32-43, Luke 22:40-46)

"Father, if Thou art willing, remove this cup from Me; yet not My will, but Thine be done."

J. Prayer was a priority for Jesus as He was dying - in great pain.  
(Matt. 27:46, Mark 15:34, Luke 23:46)

"Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing."

### III. More Than Just Words

Some people are embarrassed to pray because they think they might say the wrong thing, or sound dumb, or not seem "spiritual enough", or . . . When Jesus taught about prayer, He put almost no emphasis on the particular words a person uses, or how they sound. His main concern was the attitude of the person praying.

In fact, we read in the Bible, that that's the right reason God answered Jesus' prayer while He was on earth . . . because of His attitudes. "And He was heard because of His piety . . ." (Hebrews 5:7).

That word, "piety" is a strange one. But it sums up what a person's attitude should be when he prays. Jesus taught what all this attitude involves:

#### A. Right Attitudes Behind Prayer (in Jesus' life and teachings)

##### 1. A desire to get alone with God and speak only for His hearing. (Matt. 6:5,6)

"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 reward you."

This principle is not to teach that praying in groups is wrong. But, praying so that someone else will hear you and reward you is wrong. Praying in public places, like cafeterias, is wrong if you try to be conspicuous so that others will notice you. Prayer should be as private as possible.

##### 2. A goal to be yourself and use your own words. (Matt. 6:7-8)

"And when you are praying, do not use meaningless repetition, as the Gentiles do, for they suppose they will be heard for their many words. Therefore do not be like them . . ."

No prayer given in the Bible is supposed to be memorized and merely repeated back to God. It's okay to recite the "Lord's Prayer" if you use the words of that prayer to express what you're really feeling. As we will see in next week's meeting, even the Lord's prayer was not meant to be a word-for-word script to limit our prayers.

### 3.A determination to keep praying, and not get embarrassed or discouraged. (Luke 18:1)

"Now He was telling them a parable to show that at all times they ought to pray and not lose heart."

In a story of two friends at midnight (Luke 11:5-13), Jesus gave three reasons why people should not give up praying:

(a) Because you don't need to be embarrassed for asking when you're praying about something that really matters to you.

"Yet because of his shameless begging he will get up and give him as much as he needs." (11:8)

(b) Because hard work in prayer always pays off.

"For everyone who asks, receives, and he who seeks, finds; and to him who knocks, it shall be opened." (11:10).

Here Jesus indicates that real prayer is hard work because it involves asking, seeking, knocking:

1."Asking": This means that prayer should be specific. Prayer takes clear thinking because God wants you to include details in your prayers (11:5,6)

2."Seeking": This means that prayer should be urgent. Because human need and suffering is at stake, time is important. You keep praying because God offers the only relief; there's no where else to turn.

3."Knocking": This means that prayer should involve physical output. Paul especially indicates this to be the nature of the early church's prayer:

"Night and day we keep praying most intensely. . ." (I Thess. 3:10) (We keep praying with deep emotion that overflows.)

"Strive together with me in your prayers . . ." (Rom 15:30) (Agonize in prayer with me.)

"Always laboring earnestly for you in his prayers . . ." (Col. 4:12) (Wrestling for you in his prayers.)

"Prayer was being made fervently by the church . . ." (Acts 12:5) (The church was straining and stretching itself in prayer.)

(c) Because God is not reluctant to give you any good thing.

"If you then, being evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more shall your heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to those who ask Him." (Luke 11:13)

## B. Wrong Attitudes Behind Prayer (that Jesus warned against)

### 1. Praying to get back at someone (Luke 9:54,55)

"Lord do you want us to command fire to come down from heaven and consume them?" But He turned and rebuke them, "You do not know what kind of spirit you are of. For the Son of Man did not come to destroy men's lives, but to save them."

### 2. Praying to appear "spiritual" to others (Luke 20:46-47)

"Beware of the scribes . . . who for appearance's sake offer long prayers . . ."

### 3. Praying because you think you deserve it (Luke 18:11)

"The Pharisee stood and was praying thus to himself, 'God I thank Thee that I am not like other people . . .'"

## IV. What Drives You to Pray

It would probably be safe to say that most people don't pray much because they are not concerned about the same things God is concerned about. It's easy to lose interest in talking to people who have different concerns than you. However, it's fun to spend time with people that share your concerns and want to help.

God's ear is tuned to several specific concerns. It is these concerns that He delights in hearing his children lip. Intimacy in prayer with God occurs when we take concerns to him that are concerns He also shares. When people are driven to pray only for matters with which God has little concern, matters that center around their own interests and ambitions, they quickly lose interest.

Jesus clearly identifies for the disciples the matters that should drive them to pray. The real concerns of God that should be reflected in their prayers. They are mentioned in the "Lord's Prayer" and elsewhere. They are God's concerns, the things that should drive us to pray.

### A. Concerns for God's Plans for the World (A spirit of loyalty should drive us to pray)

1. For His Name: that it be given the proper place it deserves. (Matt 6:9)

2. For His Kingdom: that the places where Christ is honored and worshipped as King be multiplied until they include every place. (Matt. 6:10)

3. For His Will: that He would be obeyed by men like He is by His angels (Matt. 6:10)

### B. Concerns for Ourselves (A spirit of dependence should drive us to pray)

1. For immediate material needs to stay healthy:  
that they would be supplied daily by God (Matt. 6:11)

2. For forgiveness of sin: that God would make healthy relationships with Him and others possible (Matt. 6:12)

3. For protection from falling into sin: that God would provide a way to escape temptations (Matt 6:13) and stay healthy spiritually.

C. Concerns for Others (A spirit of compassion should drive us to pray.)

1. For those who mistreat and curse you: that they would prosper in every way (Luke 6:28)

"Bless those who curse you, pray for those who mistreat you."

2. For those who labor to bring others to God: that they would be multiplied (Matt. 9:36-38)

"And seeing the multitudes, He felt compassion for them, because they were distressed and downcast, like sheep without a shepherd. Then He said to the disciples, "The harvest is plentiful, but the workers are few. Therefore beseech the Lord of the harvest to send out workers into His harvest."