

Prayer

Introduction

There is perhaps no aspect of Spiritual life that is as easy to define as prayer. Put simply, prayer is the believer talking to His Creator. However, when we consider the immense magnitude of coming before the Almighty God of the Universe, we are humbled to the core of our being with the thought of having an audience with the One that created all things. Imagine for a moment, coming face to face and conversing with the most magnificent Being in the Universe. The ability to have such contact, is prayer at its essence. Realizing the significance of prayer, it is essential that we use the Word of God to help us to understand how we are to approach and converse with the Almighty God.

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Praying after the Example of Scripture

The question of How we should pray is certainly not new. This question was asked by the Disciples:

Luke 11:1 through Luke 11:4 (NIV)

¹One day Jesus was praying in a certain place. When he finished, one of his disciples said to him, "Lord, teach us to pray, just as John taught his disciples." He said to them, "**When you pray, say: "Father, hallowed be your name, your kingdom come. Give us each day our daily bread. Forgive us our sins, for we also forgive everyone who sins against us. And lead us not into temptation."**"

When we consider the structure of the Lord's Prayer we see an outline given for our prayers.

"Father" - Prayers in the New Testament begin addressing "God the Father".

"Hallowed be Your Name" – Praise for God should always be prominent in our prayers.

"Your Kingdom come" –Praying for Christ's return to end the dominion of sin and death should always be present in our requests to God.

"Your Will be done" (these words added in Matthew) - Praying for the will of God to be performed in our lives should be at the very center of the Christian's life.

"Give us each day our daily bread" - Thanking God for the daily provision of all our necessities is another key part of successful prayer.

"Forgive us our Sins, for we also forgive everyone who sins against us" – Asking for forgiveness and coming before God with a humble heart is essential to the Christian's prayer life.

"Lead us not into temptation" – Supernatural deliverance by the Hand of God over sin in our lives is also a key element to a successful prayer life.

The Apostle Paul also gives us excellent examples of how our prayers are to be structured.

Eph. 3:14 through Eph. 3:19 (NIV)

¹⁴For this reason I kneel before the Father, ¹⁵from whom his whole family in heaven and on earth derives its name. ¹⁶I pray that out of his glorious riches he may strengthen you with power through his Spirit in your inner being, ¹⁷so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith. And I pray that you, being rooted and established in love, ¹⁸may have power, together with all the saints, to grasp how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ, ¹⁹and to know this love that surpasses knowledge—that you may be filled to the measure of all the fullness of God.

In all of Paul's prayers we repeatedly see Paul praying for the increase in faith and knowledge in himself and the servants of God.

We see the requests of the Apostles to be centered around Spiritual knowledge increasing in the believer. This is a request that we can be certain that God will answer.

James 1:5 (NIV)

⁵If any of you lacks wisdom, he should ask God, who gives generously to all without finding fault, and it will be given to him.

Praying According to Knowledge

I was recently reading a pamphlet, "The Christian's Greatest Need" by E.W. Bullinger. This pamphlet stresses to the believer the need to base our Spiritual lives on knowledge of the Bible. This idea is clearly expressed by this prayer of Paul:

Colossians 1:9 through Colossians 1:10 (NIV)

For this reason, since the day we heard about you, we have not stopped praying for you and asking God to fill you with the knowledge of his will through all spiritual wisdom and understanding. And we pray this in order that you may live a life worthy of the Lord and may please him in every way: bearing fruit in every good work, growing in the knowledge of God

In this pamphlet, the following paragraph caused me to seriously question my prayer life.

Excerpt from "The Christian's Greatest Need" by E.W. Bullinger:

"A true knowledge of God would lead to a very different condition of things. Our prayers would be frequent indeed, but we should be so filled with a sense of God's wisdom, and power, and goodness, that we should cease to pray as though we had more compassion that he had; as though we were more concerned about sins and sinners than He is; as though we were more interested in His work than He is."

Too often as believers, we enter into God's presence with requests that we feel are more important to us than to Him. A "shopping list" approach of prayer, that tells the Almighty God, what to do and not to do, presumes much in standing before the One the sees the End from the Beginning.

Isaiah 46:9 through Isaiah 46:10 (NIV)

⁹Remember the former things, those of long ago; I am God, and there is no other; I am God, and there is none like me. ¹⁰I make known the end from the beginning, from ancient times, what is still to come. I say: My purpose will stand, and I will do all that I please.

The obvious questions arises:

What is the purpose of praying if God will do His will despite our prayers?

Why should we pray if He knows our requests before we ask?

I believe the answer lies in edification. When we witness of the Grace of God to an unbeliever, we are told by Scripture that we will not be successful in our attempt without God opening the heart of the hearer.

John 6:44 (KJV)

No man can come to me, except the Father which hath sent me draw him: and I will raise him up at the last day.

We do not have the ability to confer on anyone eternal life. However, Christ will work through us to touch the heart of the hearer and Salvation can come if they accept the free gift of God. The exhilaration that comes from having Christ work through us to save a Spirit from destruction is one of the greatest joys a Christian can experience.

In the same manner, God puts prayers on our heart that we may pray His will. In doing so, we will be blessed by seeing the miraculous Will of God performed.

1 John 5:14 (NIV)

This is the confidence we have in approaching God: that if we ask anything according to his will, he hears us.

How successful we are in our prayer lives, will directly relate to how sensitive we are to His leading through the Holy Spirit. The more we submit ourselves to God, through Prayer and Bible Study will determine how aware we are of His Will.

In contrast, the more that sin controls our lives, the more we will request things that are outside of His Will, and our prayers will go unanswered.

Psa. 66:18 through Psa. 66:19 (NIV)

If I had cherished sin in my heart, the Lord would not have listened; but God has surely listened and heard my voice in prayer.

Isa. 59:1 through Isa. 59:2 (NIV)

Surely the arm of the LORD is not too short to save, nor his ear too dull to hear. But your iniquities have separated you from your God; your sins have hidden his face from you, so that he will not hear.

James 4:3 (NIV)

³When you ask, you do not receive, because you ask with wrong motives, that you may spend what you get on your pleasures.

Consider this excerpt from the Book of James regarding the prayers of the prophet Elijah:

James 5:17 through James 5:18 (NIV)

¹⁷Elijah was a man just like us. He prayed earnestly that it would not rain, and it did not rain on the land for three and a half years. ¹⁸Again he prayed, and the heavens gave rain, and the earth produced its crops.

Elijah did not pray this prayer based on his own desires. He was clearly witnessing the Will of God in his prayer. Consider this prophecy in the book of Deuteronomy .

Deut. 11:16 through Deut. 11:17 (NIV)

¹⁶Be careful, or you will be enticed to turn away and worship other gods and bow down to them. ¹⁷Then the LORD'S anger will burn against you, and he will shut the heavens so that it will not rain and the ground will yield no produce, and you will soon perish from the good land the LORD is giving you.

Understanding the Will of God is the very foundation of successful prayer life.

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Praying with Patience and Persistence

We frequently see examples in Scripture of men making requests to God and being forced to wait on an answer. The Children of Israel were in Bondage for over four hundred years before God answered the prayers of His people.

Ex. 3:7 (KJV)

⁷And the LORD said, I have surely seen the affliction of my people which are in Egypt, and have heard their cry by reason of their taskmasters; for I know their sorrows;

Abraham earnestly desired a son, but God did not answer his prayers until he and Sarah were very old.

Heb. 6:13 through Heb. 6:15 (NIV)

¹³When God made his promise to Abraham, since there was no one greater for him to swear by, he swore by himself, ¹⁴saying, "I will surely bless you and give you many descendants." ¹⁵And so after waiting patiently, Abraham received what was promised.

When we beseech God to answer our requests, we must wait for the Lord to hear our prayers with patience.

Rom. 8:25 through Rom. 8:27 (NIV)

²⁵But if we hope for what we do not yet have, we wait for it patiently. In the same way, the Spirit helps us in our weakness. We do not know what we ought to pray for, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us with groans that words cannot express. And he who searches our hearts knows the mind of the Spirit, because the Spirit intercedes for the saints in accordance with God's will.

The world with its trials and tribulations is slowly refining us. If we trust in the Lord and wait patiently on His reply to our requests, we will be greatly strengthened.

James 1:2 through James 1:4 (NIV)

Consider it pure joy, my brothers, whenever you face trials of many kinds, because you know that the testing of your faith develops perseverance. Perseverance must finish its work so that you may be mature and complete, not lacking anything.

We must also be aware of the need for persistence in our prayers. Consider this excerpt from the Book of Colossians

Col. 4:12 (NIV)

¹²Epaphras, who is one of you and a servant of Christ Jesus, sends greetings. He is always wrestling in prayer for you, that you may stand firm in all the will of God, mature and fully assured.

The word here translated "wrestling", is the Greek word "agonizomai"

agoônizomai to struggle, fight, labor fervently, strive.

Clearly we see in this verse the passion that needs to be connected with our prayers. Too often our prayers are weak and mechanical. Success in prayer is connected with a passion for the outcome.

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Praying for Others

A large part of our prayer life should center around others. We should not only pray for our friends and family but also for our enemies.

Matt. 5:44 through Matt. 5:48 (NIV)

⁴⁴But I tell you: Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, ⁴⁵that you may be sons of your Father in heaven. He causes his sun to rise on the evil and the good, and sends rain on the righteous and the unrighteous. ⁴⁶If you love those who love you, what reward will you get? Are not even the tax collectors doing that? ⁴⁷And if you greet only your brothers, what are you doing more than others? Do not even pagans do that? ⁴⁸Be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect

We see another example of praying for others in our Lord's prayer for Simon Peter.

Luke 22:31 through Luke 22:32 (NIV)

³¹"Simon, Simon, Satan has asked to sift you as wheat. ³²But I have prayed for you, Simon, that your faith may not fail. And when you have turned back, strengthen your brothers."

The form of the word "prayed" here is the Greek "peri" and literally means to encompass or build a circle around. Literally Peter was surrounded and guarded by the prayer of Christ. It is important that we also pray for those among us who are too weak or unaware to pray for themselves.

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Conclusion

Our prayer life is nothing less than a constant sacrifice to God. Prior to Christ's redemptive work on the Cross at Calvary, atonement for sin was only accomplished through the sacrifice of animals. However, we see in this Psalm of David the true purpose of sacrifice.

Psa. 51:16 through Psa. 51:17 (NIV)

You do not delight in sacrifice, or I would bring it; you do not take pleasure in burnt offerings. The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit; a broken and contrite heart, O God, you will not despise.

When Daniel who the Bible speaks of as being "highly esteemed" in God's eyes, stood trembling in the presence of a mighty angel, he heard these words:

Dan. 10:12 (NIV)

Then he continued, "Do not be afraid, Daniel. Since the first day that you set your mind to gain understanding and to humble yourself before your God, your words were heard, and I have come in response to them.

Daniel was highly esteemed because he humbled himself before God and set his mind to gain understanding, therefore his words were heard.

Clearly the greatest value in prayer is our acknowledgment of our reliance upon God for our every provision. Our prayers should be our recognition of His might and glory. By humbling ourselves before the Almighty God and pouring out our requests with praise and thanksgiving we may not have every request fulfilled. But we will have something far more valuable:

The Peace of God, which transcends all Understanding

To Guard our Hearts and Our Minds in Christ Jesus

Phil. 4:6 through Phil. 4:7 (NIV)

⁶Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your

requests to God. ⁷And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.

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