

Prayer

In the summer of 2014, I had a series of sermons on prayer. In that series, there were four weeks (Sundays) with a sermon that dealt with some aspect of prayer. In that series, we looked at the Who of prayer. Who should pray and to whom? We looked at the What of prayer and examined the various types of prayer. We looked at the When of prayer to understand that it may be helpful to have a set time of prayer. We concluded the series with the Where and Why of prayer. Is there a special place where we go to pray and the reasons we go to God in prayer? The purpose of that series was to help us to better understand prayer and to be at ease when we approach God through prayer.

We will not get into that level of detail this morning. We will take a general look at prayer. The goal remains the same, that we may be at ease when we pray and build our time of prayer with God into a special time of drawing near to God.

Perhaps the first question we may ask ourselves is what is the purpose of prayer? After all, God knows what we need and what trials we may be facing. Why do we need to talk with Him about our situation?

We need to understand that prayer is a form of worship. We are worshipping God for who He is and what He has done.

Therefore, brethren, since we have confidence to enter the holy place by the blood of Jesus, by a new and living way which He inaugurated for us through the veil, that is, His flesh, and since *we have* a great priest over the house of God, let us draw near with a sincere heart in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled *clean* from an evil conscience and our bodies washed with pure water. (Hebrews 10:19-22 NASB)

Through prayer, we enter into the Holy place. We are not entering to offer sacrifice but to draw near to God. This is possible through the blood of Jesus. Through prayer, we approach God so that we may pay homage to the creator of the universe who has provided the means for our cleansing.

We come to talk with God because He has become our Father. He has adopted us as His children. We are children of the King and we should never lose sight of this and what it means to us.

In love He predestined us to adoption as sons through Jesus Christ to Himself, according to the kind intention of His will, to the praise of the glory of His grace, which He freely bestowed on us in the Beloved. (Ephesians 1:5-6 NASB)

The relationship we have with God should cause each of us to always speak of His glory. We should praise God for providing not only our salvation but our inclusion into the family of God. God has given us the supreme hope and we should be ready to talk with Him often.

In Him also we have obtained an inheritance, having been predestined according to His purpose who works all things after the counsel of His will, to the end that we who were the first to hope in Christ would be to the praise of His glory. (Ephesians 1:11-12 NASB)

Prayer is that opportunity to worship God, to build that relationship with our heavenly Father. It is a time to talk about the day. We share the concerns, the successes, and the disappointments. We open up every area of our life to God as a child to a loving father. Prayer is a time to make our request and, in so doing, acknowledge our faith in Him. It is a time to repent of our sins and ask for forgiveness and strength.

This brings us to the second question. How should we pray? We may look at the model prayer that Jesus shared during the sermon on the mount. It is a prayer which we are all familiar.

“Pray, then, in this way: ‘Our Father who is in heaven, Hallowed be Your name. ‘Your kingdom come. Your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven.

‘Give us this day our daily bread. ‘And forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors. ‘And do not lead us into temptation, but deliver us from evil. [For Yours is the kingdom and the power and the glory forever. Amen.>] (Matthew 6:9-13 NASB)

In this prayer, we see that Jesus acknowledges God for who He is and gives Him the honor that is due. This is done before anything else is addressed. We are to let all of our concerns and request be wrapped in the way we treat others. We are going to a loving God and making our request known to Him. Have we treated others with the same love and respect that we expect from God? Reflect on the model prayer. We are asking for God’s will be done on earth as in heaven. Are we doing our part to see that God’s will is occurring on earth? Do we forgive others in the same manner we expect God to forgive us? If we read this prayer within the context of when Jesus presented it, we will see that just a few verses earlier Jesus talks about the love God expects from us.

“You have heard that it was said, ‘YOU SHALL LOVE YOUR NEIGHBOR and hate your enemy.’ But I say to you, love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, so that you may be sons of your Father who is in heaven; for He causes His sun to rise on *the* evil and *the* good, and sends rain on *the* righteous and *the* unrighteous. (Matthew 5:43-45 NASB)

When we pray, we need to have confidence that we are praying to the all-powerful creator. We need confidence that we are asking for things that will be given by the loving father to whom we address our request and concerns.

This is the confidence which we have before 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 the requests which we have asked from Him. (1 John 5:14-15 NASB)

We all know that there are times when we ask for something in prayer and it either never happens or it is not happening the way we anticipated. Does that mean that God is not hearing or answering our prayers? Are there things which might inhibit or hinder our prayers? The short answer is yes. We may come to God in prayer while we have unforgiven sins in our life. We may not be praying from the position of a righteous person.

Therefore, confess your sins to one another, and pray for one another so that you may be healed. The effective prayer of a righteous man can accomplish much. (James 5:16 NASB)

The importance of forgiving others and not allowing unresolved issues remaining with us is stated many times in scripture. Jesus, in His teachings, underscored the need for us to forgive others and even tells us that our forgiveness is tied to our being able to forgive. Our prayers may be inhibited by our harboring unresolved issues.

Therefore, I say to you, all things for which you pray and ask, believe that you have received them, and they will be *granted* you. Whenever you stand praying, forgive, if you have anything against anyone, so that your Father who is in heaven will also forgive you your transgressions. (Mark 11:24-25 NASB)

These words of Jesus are pretty clear. There is no room misunderstanding. **Whenever you stand praying, forgive.** It is not an option.

There is another inhibitor mentioned in this same passage. It is tied to our faith. We are to believe that when we ask, we have already received. **I say to you, all things for which you pray and ask, believe that you have received them, and they will be granted you.** When we pray from a position of doubt, we are not praying with a belief that God can deliver. When we go to God in prayer, if we are uncertain about His ability to grant what we are asking, then we need not present that prayer. James, in his letter, gives us a graphic picture of people who doubt when they pray.

But he must ask in faith without any doubting, for the one who doubts is like the surf of the sea, driven and tossed by the wind. For that man ought not to expect that he will receive anything from the Lord, being a double-minded man, unstable in all his ways. (James 1:6-8 NASB)

Another inhibitor to our prayers is when we ask for the wrong motive or reason. In the 4th chapter of James, he writes about the things that cause problems for a Christian. In this passage, James is pointing out how trying to live a life that is centered on materialistic and worldly ideals will cause conflict and strife. He then tells us what separates our request to God from being in the will of God.

You ask and do not receive, because you ask with wrong motives, so that you may spend it on your pleasures. (James 4:3 NASB)

This reminds me of a song that was made popular by Janis Joplin in 1970. The first verse goes like this:

*Oh Lord, won't you buy me a Mercedes Benz
My friends all drive Porsches, I must make amends
Worked hard all my lifetime, no help from my friends
So Lord, won't you buy me a Mercedes Benz (Song by Janis Joplin)*

Clearly, asking for luxury cars, televisions, and nights on the town are not proper request which we should take before God in prayer. If we want our prayers to be answered, we must ask for the things that Jesus would ask. Our desires must align with the will and plan of God. We read this passage earlier.

This is the confidence which we have before Him, that, if we ask anything according to His will, He hears us. (1 John 5:14 NASB)

John tells us that God hears us when we ask according to His will. Asking for material blessings or worldly trappings is not in God's will. Asking for His will to be done is exactly what Jesus included in His model prayer.

Our prayers open up the line of communication between God and us. The creator of all we see and even the things which we cannot see listens to our prayers. He listens to us because He loves us (John 3:16). Peter tells us that we should take all of our cares and anxieties to God.

Therefore, humble yourselves under the mighty hand of God, that He may exalt you at the proper time, casting all your anxiety on Him, because He cares for you. (1 Peter 5:6-7 NASB)

Please notice, God's answer will be **at the propre time**. Sometimes, our impatience fails to await God's timing.

Prayer is an integral part of our life as a Christian. Our failure to avail ourselves of this time of talking with our heavenly Father is a sign that God is not as important to us as we may want to believe. We have the assurance that God listens to our prayers and will respond.

The eyes of the LORD are toward the righteous and His ears are *open* to their cry. (Psalm 34:15 NASB)

Delight yourself in the LORD; and He will give you the desires of your heart.

Commit your way to the LORD, trust also in Him, and He will do it. (Psalm 37:4-5 NASB)

If God is important to us, then prayer must be a big part of our life. We will never miss an opportunity to have our talk with a loving father.