

# PRAYER

Most Christians feel guilty about their prayer life. We neglect prayer. Often we pray only when we are in trouble. We should guard against thinking of God as some kind of cosmic butler, there just for our bidding. He is the all-glorious, majestic, sovereign king of the universe. But we must also guard against thinking of God as so great that He is not interested in the desires of our individual hearts. The Bible tells us that God is the Great Almighty, but He is very interested in and controls every detail of His creation. And that includes our dark evil little hearts (Psalms 37.4; Proverbs 21.1; John 6.44,65; Philippians 2.13).

If God controls every action of every creature in the world (and the Bible tells us that He does in Ephesians 1.11), why do we need to pray? We know that God has a special plan for each of His creatures (Jeremiah 29.11-14) but we do not know what that plan is (Deuteronomy 29.29). We need to find out as much as God allows us to about His plan so that we can do His will. God determines the means as well as the ends. Often we and our prayers are the means which God will use to accomplish His plans.

What is the definition of prayer? Prayer is talking to God; having fellowship with Him; finding out what His will is for our lives. Prayer is not so much getting man's will done in heaven as it is getting God's will done on earth. Prayer is best done in connection with reading the Bible. God speaks to us in His word, the Bible. We speak to Him in our prayer. It is a 2-way relationship.

One of the greatest privileges we as believers have, as we seek to live a godly life, is prayer. When we pray, we speak directly and personally with our Father in heaven. Nothing comes between us and our God.

In order for us to pray properly, we do not need to speak specific words or form prayers, be dressed in special clothing or use a specific posture or be in a special place or in a certain time. All that is needed is a sincere desire to bring to God the deepest feelings and desires of our hearts.

Prayer is an important part of worship. Worship is our response to God's revelation of Himself in the Bible. A helpful anagram for guidance in our prayer life is A-C-T-S (which includes four important elements of prayer):

Adoration (praising God for who He is);

Confession (confessing our sins to God and asking forgiveness from Him is a good idea on a daily basis; 1 John 1.9),

Thanksgiving (thanking God for what He has done for us),

Supplication (our prayer requests for others and for ourselves).

**1.** How important is prayer in the life of a believer? What should believers pray about? Believers should pray about everything. **Philippians 4:6-7** Be careful for nothing; but in every thing by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. And the peace of God, which passes all understanding, shall keep your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus.

**2.** In whose name should we pray? In the name of Jesus. **John 14:13-14** And whatsoever you shall ask in my name, that will I do, that the Father may be glorified in the Son. If you shall ask any thing in my name, I will do it.

**3.** Does God hear and answer the prayers of His people? Yes! **1 John 5:14**

And this is the confidence that we have in him, that, if we ask any thing according to his will, he hears us: **James 5:16b** The effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man avails much.

**4.** What promise is given to those who pray according to God's will? God will grant their requests. **Matthew 7:7** Ask, and it shall be given you; seek, and you shall find; knock, and it shall be opened to you.

**5.** Will God always give us everything we ask for? No, because there are times when we ask for things with wrong motives or with sin in our hearts. **James 4:3** You ask, and receive not, because you ask amiss, that you may consume it upon your lusts. **Psalms 66:18** If I regard iniquity in my heart, the Lord will not hear me.

**6.** Is there any other reason why God may not give us everything we ask for? Yes, because what we have asked for may not be the best for us. **2 Cor 12:7b-10** And lest I should be exalted above measure through the abundance of the revelations, there was given to me a thorn in the flesh, the messenger of Satan to buffet me, lest I should be exalted above measure. For this thing I besought the Lord three times, that it might depart from me. And he said to me, My grace is sufficient for you: for my strength is made perfect in weakness. Most gladly therefore will I rather glory in my infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon me. Therefore I take pleasure in infirmities, in reproaches, in necessities, in persecutions, in distresses for Christ's sake: for when I am weak, then am I strong.

**7.** Is prayer primarily a matter of asking God for things? No, prayer includes praise, confession, and thanksgiving, as well as requests. **Matthew 6:9-13** After this manner therefore pray: Our Father which art in heaven, Hallowed be thy name. Thy kingdom come. Thy will be done in earth, as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread. And forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive those who trespass against us. And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil: For thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory, for ever. Amen.

**8.** What warnings did Jesus give concerning prayer? We must be careful not to pray in order to be praised by men, and we should not pray with an unforgiving spirit. **Matthew 6:5a** And when you pray, you shall not be as the hypocrites are: for they love to pray standing in the public worship places and in the corners of the streets, that they may be seen by men. Verily I say unto you, They have their reward. **Mark 11:25** And when you stand praying, forgive, if you have ought against any: that your Father also which is in heaven may forgive you your trespasses.

**9.** What attitude should we have when we pray? We should be both humble and confident. **2 Chronicles 7:14** If my people, which are called by my name, shall humble themselves, and pray, and seek my face, and turn from their wicked ways; then will I hear from heaven, and will forgive their sin, and will heal their land. **Hebrews 4:16** Let us therefore come boldly unto the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy, and find grace to help in time of need.

**10.** Does God give us only those blessings we ask for? No, God often grants us far more than we ask for or could even imagine. **Ephesians 3:20** Now to him that is able to do exceeding abundantly above all that we ask or think, according to the power that works in us ...

## What do the following verses teach us about prayer?

**John 15.7** I am the vine, you are the branches: He that abides in me, and I in him, the same brings forth much fruit: for without me you can do nothing. [We cannot exist for a second; we cannot even breathe a breath or take a step without God holding us up. We cannot do anything on our own except choose sin. Even then God holds us up, as He must hold us up for us to live, even to do sin (things which are against His law: 1 John 3.4).]

**Psalms 37.4** Delight yourself in the LORD; and he shall give you the desires of your heart. [This probably refers more to the desires themselves, rather than to the objects of the desires.]

**Psalms 66.16-20** Come and hear, all you that fear God, and I will declare what he has done for my soul. I cried out to him with my mouth, and he was ex-tolled with my tongue. If I regard iniquity in my heart, the Lord will not hear me: But truly God has heard me; he has attended to the voice of my prayer. Blessed be God, which has not turned away my prayer, nor his mercy from me. [We need to tell others what God has done for us because He hears our prayers and gives us His mercy. We also need to check the sin in our hearts.]

**James 5.16** Confess your faults one to another, and pray one for another, that you may be healed. The effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man avails much. [We need to confess to others when we have wronged them, and we need to pray for others.]

**Luke 6.27-28** But I say to you which hear, Love your enemies, do good to them which hate you, Bless them that curse you, and pray for them which despite-fully use you. [We need to pray for others, especially our enemies. Loving enemies is a very ancient command of God: Exodus 23.4-5; Leviticus 19.18]

**1 Peter 3.7** Likewise, you husbands, dwell with your wife according to knowledge, giving honor to the wife, as to the weaker vessel, and as being heirs together of the grace of life; that your prayers be not hindered. [If men do not treat their wives correctly, their prayers will be hindered. If anyone does not treat others correctly, their prayers will be hindered.]

**Luke 11.5-13** And he said to them, Which of you shall have a friend, and shall go to him at midnight, and say to him, Friend, lend me three loaves; For a friend of mine in his journey is come to me, and I have nothing to set before him? And he from within shall answer and say, Trouble me not: the door is now shut, and my children are with me in bed; I cannot rise and give you. I say unto you, Though he will not rise and give him, because he is his friend, yet because of his importunity he will rise and give him as many as he needs. And I say to you, Ask, and it shall be given you; seek, and you shall find; knock, and it shall be opened to you. For every one that asks receives; and he that seeks finds; and to him that knocks it shall be opened. If a son shall ask bread of any of you that is a father, will he give him a stone? or if he ask a fish, will he for a fish give him a serpent? Or if he shall ask an egg, will he offer him a scorpion? 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 them that ask him? [We need to be persistent in prayer. We need to ask God and not be afraid to approach Him. We need to trust that God will do what is best for us, always, even though His timing is often not to our liking.]

**Hebrews 12.15** Looking diligently lest anyone fall short of the grace of God; lest any root of bitterness springing up cause trouble, and by this many become defiled. [Since bitterness defiles us and brings us trouble, God wants us to be careful not to let it take root in our hearts and lives. We may have to ask God to help us with this fairly often.]

**Matt 6.14-15** If you forgive men their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you: But if you do not forgive men their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses. [This is sometimes hard for us. If we do not forgive those who sin against us how can God forgive us our sins against Him? It is difficult. How many of us carry bitterness around in our hearts against all the people in our lives who have wronged us? All of us at one time or another. It is normal to feel some bitterness, but God wants us to let Him be God. And He wants our bitterness gone because it ruins our lives.]

**John 17** Study Jesus' wonderful prayer to the Father for all His believers.

**Also, study these important wrestling-with-God-prayers:**

**-James 5.17** (Elijah's prayer for famine!)

**-Gen 32.24-30** (Jacob's wrestling with God, where God lets Himself be overcome by Jacob)

**-Matthew 15.22-28** (where Jesus lets Himself be overcome by the humility and persistence of the Canaanite woman, which humility and persistence Jesus purposely draws out of her by treating her roughly, like God sometimes treats us, to get the same results)

**-Luke 18** (emphasizing persistence, humility, faithfulness, carefulness and willingness to do God's will, all of which are needed on our part in prayer).

**-Matthew 26.36 ff** (the Lord Jesus' prayer to the Father in the garden of Gethsemane)

**Some things to remember about God and Prayer:**

- We are as close to God as we want to be.
- If we fear a "no" from God, we are not really seeking His will.
- We should not pray about things commanded in the Bible.
- We should not pray about things forbidden in the Bible.
- The emphasis should be: what does God want, not my will, but His will (like Jesus in Gethsemane in Matthew 26). Otherwise I'm not really trusting God.
- We always want control – what we don't realize is that we actually have none.
- The seeking should not be what am I allowed? But how can my life honor and glorify God? How can what I do make God look good? I don't add anything to God, He has all He needs, but I do reflect His goodness to other men and to angels (Ephesians 3.10) when I am honoring Him (much like the moon, without any light of its own, gets its light by reflecting the light of the Sun).