

PRAYER

Pray without ceasing.—1 Thessalonians 5:17

Prayer has two basic objectives—worship and communication. These, in turn, can be divided into two categories. Prayer as worship can either take the form of praise or meditation; and prayer as communication can be in the form of either requests or thanksgiving.

Prayer as Worship

Give unto the LORD the glory due unto his name; worship the LORD in the beauty of holiness.—Psalm 29:2

In keeping with this the model prayer which Jesus taught his disciples (Matt. 6:9-13) opens with the words, *Our Father, which art in heaven, **hallowed be thy name.***

This hallowing of God's name is the essence of worship and praise. Praise is a frequent word in the book of Psalms. While thanksgiving shows appreciation for what God **does**, praise shows appreciation for what God **is**.

Praise is therefore closely linked to the thought of meditation, or reflection, upon the goodness of god. This reflection on what he has done for us brings forth a natural response of appreciation for his character.

I will meditate also of all thy work, and talk of thy doings.—Psalm 77:12

I remember the days of old; I meditate on all thy works; I muse on the work of thy hands.—Psalm 143:5

The poet has phrased it well:

*Count your blessings,
Name them one by one;
Count your blessings,
See what God hath done.*

{Ingredients for a Proper Prayer

Matthew 6:9-13

Closeness to God –Our Father

Supremacy of God –Which art in heaven

Reverence to God – Hallowed be Thy name

Pray for His kingdom – Thy kingdom come

Pray for harmony – Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven

Pray for necessities – Give us this day our daily bread

Pray for forgiveness – Forgive us our debts

Meet God's conditions – As we forgive our debtors

Pray for purity – Lead us not into temptation

Pray for deliverance – But deliver us from evil

Praise God's glory – For thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory forever.

(This phrase is not found in the most ancient manuscripts. God's kingdom is not a current reality, but is man's great future hope, and will show God's power and be to his glory.)

Intelligent assent – Amen

Thanksgiving –Although not included in this model prayer, an attitude of gratitude is elsewhere expressed throughout the Bible.}

Prayer as Communication

In the beginning of creation, prayer was unnecessary for God communicated regularly with his human creation.

And they heard the voice of the LORD God walking in the garden in the cool of the day: and Adam and his wife hid themselves from the presence of the LORD God amongst the trees of the garden.—Genesis 3:8

When man was expelled from the Garden of Eden, this direct communion with God was one of the things which he forfeited. Any communication with the spiritual realm would now have to be through prayer. The first recorded prayer is that of Abraham for Abimelech in Genesis 20:7.

{Prayers of the Ancients

Moses – Numb. 11:11-15

Hannah – 1 Sam. 1:9-11

Abraham – Gen. 18:23-33

Solomon – 2 Chron. 6:4-42

Hezekiah – 2 Kings 19:15-20, 32-37

Manasseh – 2 Chron. 20:1-24

Job – Job 42:7-10

David – Psalm 34:1-10

Jonah – Jonah 2:3-9

Habakkuk – Habakkuk 3:1-19}

There is little evidence of the use of prayer as a pure communication tool because only one side of the conversation was verbalized. God's answer to prayer was usually through his providences except for a few rare cases, such as when the Lord sent an angel to communicate with man, or as Moses with whom the Lord spoke *face to face* (Exodus 33:11).

It is precisely because prayer is verbally a one-way street that so many have difficulty with praying. For this reason the Bible advice on prayer is coupled with the strong encouragement to **watch**.

Watch and Pray

Watch and pray that ye enter not into temptation: The spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak.—Matthew 26:41

Take ye heed, watch and pray: for ye know not when the time is.—Mark 13:33

There are two aspects to this thought of watchfulness in connection with prayer. First, we are to watch to note our needs. To note our weaknesses is to be aware of our spiritual condition (2 Corinthians 13:5).

The second aspect of watchfulness is to look for the answer to our prayer. This may come in the form of some providential circumstance, or a conversation with a close friend, or a chance remembrance of a Bible verse or line of a hymn, or through some other means. These overrulings in the Christian's life are among God's ways of communicating with man, even as we commune with our heavenly Father through prayer.

Requests

Be careful for nothing; but in every thing by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known unto God.—Philippians 4:6

Many are the promises of God to give assistance and needful grace to the followers of Christ. But these are often dependant upon their being requested—for the simple reason that God desires his creature to recognize their needs and that he is the only one who can supply all they require.

When Jesus walked this earth amongst his disciples, he gave them the advice and wisdom necessary for their daily needs. *Whatsoever ye shall ask of the Father in my name, he may give it to you.*

Unfortunately, we are by fallen nature selfish and not always wise. Therefore, some of our prayer requests may be improper. God's answer in these cases may either be to deny them or to permit them to happen so that we can learn the high cost of selfish prayers.

*Ye ask, and receive not, because ye ask amiss, that ye may consume it upon your lusts.—
James 4:3*

One solution to this problem is to make regular study of God's word a routine part of our prayer life. Search the Scriptures to see if a particular prayer request is proper. Seek out the promises of the Bible and claim them in prayer, always noting whether the attached conditions to the promises are fulfilled in your life to the best of your ability. The privilege of prayer is limited to those who can call God their Father.

The more the Christian grows and learns to trust upon God's provisions for his life, the less he will make requests and the more of his prayer time will be spent in expressions of gratitude for the Lord's wisdom and leadings. As one author has well expressed, "Thanksgiving must largely take the place of requests from the time that we learn of the lengths and breadths and heights and depths of the divine provision, for both the New Creation and for our dear ones according to the flesh, and for all the families of the earth. What could we ask for more or better than God has already promised?" (*The New Creation*, pages 685,686).

*Be not rash with thy mouth, and let not thine heart be hasty to utter any thing before God: for God is in heaven and thou upon earth; therefore let thy words be few.—
Ecclesiastes 5:2*

{Prayer Changes Things

A popular motto in many Christian homes reads "Prayer Changes things." Does not God know better than we what we need? Is not his will done even if we do not correctly pray? Does he honor our prayers for something inferior to his will? Does prayer really change things?

The answer lies in our understanding as to what is the will of God. We can comprehend his will as his positive knowledge of what is best—this we might call the "express will of God." Or we can view it as that which he is willing to permit—the "permissive will of God."

Seeking to develop in the Christian the ability to discern what is his will—"the good, and acceptable, and perfect, will of God"—he permits us to ask for less than the optimum so that, through experience, we might come to appreciate what God's "express will" is in our life and why it is best.

Prayer thus becomes more than a simple exercise of supplication and thanksgiving, but a learning experience. }

Only as prayer life is accompanied by an active study regimen can one learn the beauty of prayer as a two-way street, with God's responses providing the education we need to correctly discern his will in our life.

Yes, prayer does change things; but whether for the better or for the worse is largely dependant upon our discernment of God's will through a study of his word.

Thanksgiving

By him therefore let us offer the sacrifice of praise to God continually, that is, the fruit of our lips giving thanks to his name.—Hebrews 13:15

I will offer to thee the sacrifice of thanksgiving, and will call upon the name of the LORD. I will pay my vows unto the LORD now in the presence of all his people.—Psalm 116:17, 18

Appropriately, we express appreciation for gifts received. Simple etiquette demands that we do this in daily life, how much more so when receiving of the bounty of *the giver of every good and perfect gift* (James 1:17).

Nor should these prayers of gratitude be limited only to words. In the 116th Psalm, quoted above, this *sacrifice of thanksgiving* is connected with the expression *I will pay my vows unto the Lord*. It is by rededicating our life to the service of God that our appreciation becomes a sacrifice, *a sacrifice of thanksgiving*.

Watchfulness is as much a part of prayers of thanksgiving as it is of prayers of request—supplications. Only when we note the answer to our prayers, or when we become cognizant of the blessings of God, can we express our appreciation for them.

Continue in prayer, and watch in the same with thanksgiving.—Colossians 4:2

But we need not always wait for answered prayer to express our thanks. As we more and more note God's constant goodness, we can depend upon him and even thank him in advance.

Be careful for nothing; but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known unto God.—Philippians 4:6

A good example of this principle is found in the prayer of Jesus at the tomb of Lazarus, even before he who was dead came forth; *Father, I thank thee that thou hast [already] heard me*.

{Prayer Guidelines

Take time to pray –Psa. 109:4; Acts 6:4; Luke 6:12

Pray in secret – Matt. 6:6; 14:23

Pray in God’s presence – Jas. 4:8; Mark 11:22, 24

Pray with belief –Matt. 7:7, 8; Jas. 1:5; John 14:13

Pray, having faith in God – Mark 11:22; 1 John 5:14, 15

Pray with the whole heart – Psa. 119:145; 21:2

Pray, trusting God’s faithfulness –Heb. 11:11; Deut. 7:9

Pray, trusting God’s power – Gen. 18:14; Luke 1:37

Pray, trusting God’s love – Psa. 51:1; 31:16; Dan. 9:18

Pray, pleading our need – Psa. 22:11; 142:6

Pray, pleading God’s glory – 1 Kings 18:36, 37; Psa. 31:3

Pray, pleading God’s justice – Gen. 18:25; Psa. 31:1

Pray, pleading our righteousness – 2 Kings 20:3; Neh. 5:19

Pray perseveringly –Luke 11:5-13; 18:1-8; Psa. 40:1-3

Pray with pure motives – Jas. 4:3

Pray with thanksgiving – Col. 4:2; Phil 4:6; Heb. 13:15}

Pray Without Ceasing

The thought of our theme text is not that every waking minute is exercised in prayer, but that communication with the Lord is the constant attitude of heart. Persistency in prayer, so that it becomes a habit of the Christian life, should be the goal of anyone seeking a closer relationship with God.