

What is Prayer?

Introduction

In its most basic sense, prayer is personal communication with God. What we call prayer includes requests for ourselves and for others, which has been called intercession, confession of sin, adoration, praise and thanksgiving. Prayer also involves God personally communicating his response.

Prayer is an awesome gift from God that many people choose not to open. Prayer is an invitation from the Creator of the universe, who stretched out the heavens above us, flung the stars all into place, poured the mighty oceans that rise and fall, and designated the intricate detail of a butterfly wing, to come and spend time with him.

Why do we Pray

As we have seen when we looked at God's omniscience, or all knowing attribute, God knows all things. So prayer is not a time so that God can find out what we need. **Matthew 6:8** tells us that God already knows our needs before we ask. And we also know that God is sovereign, meaning that God does all things after the counsel of his own will and purposes and that what he wants to be done will be done. So why come and pray at all? **1 Thessalonians 5:17** we find that God calls us to pray without ceasing. Why does God call us to pray if the above statements are true? Here are a few reasons.

- God wants us to pray because prayer expresses our trust in God and a means by which our trust in him can increase. Our prayer to God expresses our trust in him.
- God wants us to pray because it brings us into a deeper relationship with himself. God delights in our fellowship with him.
- God wants us to pray because he wants us to take part in activities that are eternally important. When we pray the work of the kingdom is advanced.
 - **Mark 9:29** – There are some things that God has determined to be done only through prayer.
 - **James 4:2** – You do not have because you do not ask. I see these two verses as saying that God has ordained the means by which things are done and that means according to Mark and James is through prayer.
 - **Exodus 32:9-14** - Some times God uses prayer as a means to act differently.
 - **2 Chronicles 7:14** – when speaking to the Jews and the promise land, God said if they will pray He would act.
 - **1 John 1:9** – When speaking to us about our sin, God says that if we will pray and confess he will act in forgiveness.

When do we Pray

There are a number of passages in the scripture that tell us when we should pray.

- **Hebrews 4:16** – God calls us to pray in time of need. We can come boldly into the throne of grace, so that we can receive mercy and grace in our time of need.
- **1 Corinthians 14:13** – God calls us to pray for gifts to be distributed in the body, specifically when there is a gift of tongues and there needs to be an interpreter.
- **1 Thessalonians 5:17** – Pray without ceasing. Have an attitude of prayer and constantly go before Him. **Ephesians 6:18** tells us to pray at all times. **Colossians 4:2** says to devote yourselves to prayer.

How do we Pray

Not only does the bible tell us why and when to pray but it also tells us how we should pray. Here are a number of passages that point to the manner of our prayer.

- **1 John 5:14-15** – Pray according to God’s will. How do we know what God’s will is when we pray? If the matter we are praying about is covered in a passage of Scripture in which God gives us a command or a direct declaration of his will, then the answer to this question is easy. For example **1 Thess 4:3** “This is the will of God”
 - **John 15:7** – If his words abide in us then we can pray and he will answer. Why because his words are the revelation of his will.
 - **Matthew 26:39** – Nevertheless, not my will, but yours be done. There are some times we might not have the direct understanding of his will. We ask for wisdom and pray to what that wisdom directs but we also conclude by saying nevertheless your will be done.
- **Mark 11:24** – Pray with Faith. Notice this verse says pray believing that you have received it. This comes with the trust reason that we talked about above. When we come to God in prayer, we do not come to him with wishful thinking, but a confidence that we have received what we are asking, if it be according to his will.
 - **James 1:6** – Pray without doubting. Our prayer must spring forth from trust in a personal God who wants us to take him at his word. This kind of faith could only come as God gives us a sense of assurance that he has agreed to grant our request. This comes as we ask and then wait for God’s answer.
- **James 4:3** – Pray with the right motives or in the right attitude.
 - **1 John 3:21-22** tells us that we need to pray with a clean heart. This means if we are living in sin and do not confess that but expect God to answer our prayers we are mistaken.
 - **Psalms 66:18** – David said if he held sin in his heart, the Lord would not listen.
 - **Proverb 28:9** – One who turns from the law, his prayer is an abomination.
 - **1 Peter 3:12** – He hears the prayers of the righteous.
 - There is only one prayer that God will hear from the wicked and that is the prayer of salvation.
 - **1 John 1:9** – tells us that if we have sin to confess it and God will hear. So it is not that God will never hear our prayers if we sin, but that if we do not confess them, and try to pray something else, God says pray a prayer of confession first.
 - **Matthew 4:23-24** – A right heart toward others.
- **Luke 18:11-14** Pray in humility.

Praying in Jesus Name

Another manner that we are to pray is in Jesus’ Name. **John 14:13-14**. Jesus tells us to pray in his name. What does this mean?

- It does not simply mean to add at the end of your prayers, “in Jesus name.” Jesus did not say and when you pray add these words at the end and I will do it.
- To come in the name of someone means that another person has authorized us to come on his authority, not on our own.
 - **Acts 3:6** – Peter heals on the authority of Jesus Christ.
 - **Acts 4:7** – The Sanhedrin asks the disciples by what authority do you do these things. So praying in the name of Jesus is to pray on his authorization.
- In a broader sense the name of a person in the ancient world represented the person himself and therefore all of his character. Praying in Jesus name is to pray what is consistent with his character.
- Is the use of Jesus name wrong? No but we need to realize that it is not necessary if we realize that we come with a heart of acknowledgement that we are coming based on the invitation and authority of Jesus and not on our own.

Praying to Jesus and Holy Spirit

Even though our primary manner of prayer is to God the father, there are no reason why we should not pray to God the Son or God the Holy Spirit, for they too are worthy of our communication. We also have examples in the bible were people prayed to Jesus.

- **Acts 7:59** – Stephen prays to the Lord Jesus to receive his spirit.
- **Acts 9:10-17** – Ananias has a conversation with Jesus.
- **Revelation 22:20** – John prays to Jesus asking him to come quickly.

Praying in the Spirit

The bible also calls us to pray in the Spirit.

- **Ephesians 6:18** – Pray at all times in the Spirit.
- **Jude 1:20** – Pray in the most holy faith, that is pray in the Spirit.

I do not think that these verse are expressing that we need to pray in tongues, but to pray in the power of the Spirit. That is to pray with the conscious awareness of God's presence surrounding us and empowering us to pray according to his will. Because the Holy Spirit is the Spirit of truth, we are to pray according to the truth.

- **Luke 10:21** – Rejoice in the Spirit.
- **Acts 19:21** – purposed in the Spirit.
- **Col 1:8** – Love in the Spirit.

Types of Prayer.

- **Adoration** -- the love we demonstrated to God.
- **Confession** -- of our sins and misdeeds
- **Thanksgiving** -- offered for the gifts God has provided us from our daily food to great and wonderful gifts, such as healing from disease or mental turmoil.
- **Worship** -- the highest honor to bestow upon God, the knowledge that He is the Highest of all and He alone is deserving of our adoration and praise.
- **Praise** -- the offering of love and worship to God, telling Him and others that God is God
- **Intercessions** -- This is making a petition for others, an interceding on behalf of another for God's Will to operate in their lives.
- **Petition** -- These are our requests to God **1 John 5:15**
- **Supplication** -- a request in a less demanding nature. **Philippians 4:6**

Examples of Prayer

- The Pattern Prayer – **Matthew 6:9-13**
 - Adoration 9-10
 - Petition 11-13
- The Lord's Prayer – **John 17**
- The Prayer in persecution – **Acts 4:24-30**