

What is Prayer?

Matthew 6:5-15; Luke 11:1-13

Prayer is one of the highest privileges afforded the saint, whether newborn or a veteran of many years. Since God's people are a praying people, we would do well to know what prayer is and why we pray, and then be able to share with others the "whys" of prayer.

God's house has been designated as a "house of prayer." His Word is filled with many and varied prayers, emanating from both the righteous and the wicked. God is a prayer-answering God, and His Word instructs us to offer prayers to Him. Since this is the case, the question of our lesson arises: "What is Prayer?"

Some years ago, I discovered in my studies the following poem that so aptly answers the question at hand.

WHAT IS PRAYER?

(Montgomery)

*Prayer is the soul's sincere desire
Unuttered or expressed,
The motion of a hidden fire
That trembles in the heart;
Prayer is the burden of a sigh,
The falling of a tear,
The upward gleaming of an eye
When none but God is near.
Prayer is the simplest form of speech
That infant lips can try;
Prayer, the sublimest strains that reach
The Majesty on high.
Prayer is the Christian's vital breath,
The Christian's native air,
His watchword at the gates of death.
He enters heaven by prayer. Prayer
is the contrite sinner's voice,
Returning from his ways,
While angels rejoice
And say, "Behold, he prays!"
The saints in prayer appear as one,
In word, in deed, in mind,
When with Jesus Christ
His fellowship they find.
No prayer is made on earth alone;
The Holy Spirit pleads.
And Jesus on the eternal throne,
For sinners intercedes.
O Thou, by whom we come to God!
The Life, the Truth, the Way. The
path of prayer thyself hast trod;
Lord, teach us how to pray!*

We need to explore, investigate, and discover what prayer really is. Life's greatest privilege is the right to use the name of Jesus Christ in prayer. Oh, the power that resides in the spoken name of Jesus Christ as we call upon Him in sincere prayer!

Prayer is the offering of thanksgiving, needs, and desires to God in faith, with the petition being in harmony with the teaching of God's Word concerning prayer.

Our most sincere prayer should be, "Lord, teach us to pray" (Luke 11:1).

DO WE NEED TO PRAY?

If any doubt fills your mind concerning whether or not you should pray, perhaps these verses will answer your question:

"I will therefore that men pray everywhere, lifting up holy hands, without wrath and doubting" (I Timothy 2:8).

"And he spake a parable unto them to this end, that men ought always to pray, and not to faint" (Luke 18:1).

"After this manner therefore pray ye" (Matthew 6:9; see verses 5-13).

"Pray without ceasing" (I Thessalonians 5:17).

"The effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man availeth much" (James 5:16; see verses 13-16).

"Rejoicing in hope; patient in tribulation; continuing instant in prayer" (Romans 12:12).

"But the end of all things is at hand: be ye therefore sober, and watch unto prayer" (I Peter 4:7).

"Praying always with all prayer and supplication in the Spirit, and watching thereunto with all perseverance and supplication for all saints" (Ephesians 6:18).

"Continue in prayer, and watch in the same with thanksgiving; withal praying also for us" (Colossians 4:2-3).

"But ye, beloved, building up yourselves on your most holy faith, praying in the Holy Ghost" (Jude 20).

Our Lord set an example for us in prayer. Jesus Christ did not pray as God. As a genuine man, however, He prayed to God the Father. In Jesus dwells all the fullness of the Godhead bodily (Colossians 2:9). This was not one God praying to another God, but the man Christ Jesus praying to the Spirit. What a pattern Jesus set for us in prayer! (See Matthew 14:23; 26:39-44; Luke 6:12; Hebrews 5:7.)

SPECIAL PRAYER REQUESTS

This section could be entitled "The Lord's Prayer Request," since it describes things the Lord wants us to pray about. Most of our praying is for our needs and the needs of others. Out of obedience and courtesy to our Lord, let us fulfill His requests. We will be blessed along with others when we do so.

"Pray ye therefore the Lord of the harvest, that he will send forth labourers into his harvest" (Matthew 9:38).

"Watch ye therefore, and pray always, that ye may be accounted worthy to escape all these things that shall come to pass, and to stand before the Son of man" (Luke 21:36).

"Confess your faults one to another, and pray one for another, that ye may be healed" (James 5:16).

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

"I exhort therefore, that, first of all, supplications, prayers, intercessions, and giving of thanks, be made for all men; for kings, and for

all that are in authority; that we may lead a quiet and peaceable life in all godliness and honesty” (I Timothy 2:1-2).

“But I say unto you, Love your enemies, bless them that curse you, do good to them that hate you, and pray for them which despitefully use you, and persecute you” (Matthew 5:44).

“Wherefore let him that speaketh in an unknown tongue pray that he may interpret” (I Corinthians 14:13). Anyone whom God uses in a church service through the spiritual gift of speaking with tongues to address the congregation should pray for the spiritual gift of the interpretation of tongues. For more details on this point, go to the lesson “Speaking with Tongues” in this book.

These are specific instructions on what to pray for and about. Our personal needs along with the above will keep our prayer life full and exciting.

THE EXTENT OF PRAYER

Prayer is far reaching; it enables us to go into areas impenetrable by other forces. We can scale spiritual heights through prayer.

Practice, prevail, and persevere until you achieve and attain what God has promised. Notice what prayer can do and where it can take you.

- We can come before the throne of grace and there obtain mercy and grace to help in the time of need (Hebrews 4:14-16; 10:19-22).
- Through prayer we seek first the kingdom of God, rather than other things (Matthew 6:33).
- We should persevere in our praying. (See Daniel 10:1-3; Luke 11:1-13; 18:1-7; Ephesians 6:18.)
- Repentance takes place through prayer and causes the angels of heaven to rejoice (Luke 15:7-10). Prayer does not necessarily complete our repentance, though it certainly

begins with prayer. Often we must go to individuals to ask their forgiveness if we have wronged them, but prayer is certainly essential to repentance. (See Matthew 6:12; Luke 18:13; I John 2:1-2.)

- Prayer may also include praying in an unknown tongue. (See I Corinthians 14:14-15.) Not all praying is done in this manner; some is to be done with the understanding, that is, in our native tongue. When we pray in tongues, the understanding is unfruitful, but our spirit is strengthened and edified. Praying in the Holy Ghost is a needed form of intercessory prayer among believers (Jude 20; Romans 8:26-34).
- We present our bodies a living sacrifice through prayer (Romans 12:1-2). Here we find, pursue, and understand the will of God for our individual lives.
- When taking upon the whole armor of God, we are also enjoined to pray (Ephesians 6:13-18). This armor cannot be supplied to us or appropriated to us without prayer. We can only put on, and keep on, the armor of God through prayer. In prayer we learn to walk in the Spirit and to conquer the flesh (Galatians 5:16-17; II Corinthians 10:3-5).

INDIVIDUAL WORK

Using your *Strong's Concordance* or a *Webster's Dictionary*, look up the meaning of the following words as they relate to prayer. Write the definition.

- Petition:
- Supplication:
- Prayer:
- Request:
- Thanksgiving:
- Watching:
- Intercession:

THE POWER OF PRAYER

Prayer's awesome power is inexplicable. The following examples should bolster our faith to believe God and to pray unceasingly. Prayer is effective:

- **To heal the sick** (James 5:13-16).
- **To sanctify our food** (I Timothy 4:4-5).
- **To unlock prisons** (Acts 12:1-9; 16:25-26).
- **To cast out demons** (Matthew 17:14-21).
- **To find salvation** (Acts 10:1-22, 44-48).
- **To turn back the judgment of God** (Genesis 18:22-33; 19:29; Exodus 32:7-14).
- **To give children to barren mothers** (I Samuel 1:10-28; 2:1-11).
- **To give rain after it is withheld** (James 5:17-18).
- **To help in time of problems** (I Samuel 8:1-9).
- **To extend life** (Isaiah 38:1-8).

Amazing incidents abound in God's Word on the subject of answered prayer. The Bible records at least 650. Study them, pattern your prayers after them, and God will answer you just as He did others.

Every Christian needs to develop a consistent, faithful pattern of prayer. Contrary to popular opinion, prayer does not come easy. Learn through discipline to pray lengthy prayers—not vain repetition but sincere prayers. Learning how to pray and being taught by the Word and Spirit on how to pray should be a priority. There is a secret place of the Most High (Psalm 91:1); it is found in the closet of prayer.

PRAYER AND ITS CONNECTIVES

Connective tissues bind our physical bodies together to keep them strong. There are connectives to prayer that make it strong and effective. Without

them prayer becomes powerless and weak. Offered with its connectives, prayer becomes a most powerful force in the life of a Christian. Some of these connectives are as follows.

1. Prayer and Obedience—Disobedience to God and His Word destroys the desired results of our prayers. Obedience to God is a key to answered prayer. (See Acts 9:1-20; 10:1-8, 30-33, 44-48.)

2. Prayer and the Armor of God—An inseparable bond exists between prayer and spiritual armor; the armor is effective through prayer. (See Ephesians 6:10-18.)

3. Prayer and Faith—Doubt will reduce the most sincere prayer to an ineffectual request. It is the prayer of faith that saves the sick (James 5:14-18). Faith coupled with prayer can move mountains and accomplish the impossible. (See Matthew 21:21-22; Mark 9:19-27; 11:22-24.)

4. Prayer and Persistence—So often we pray briefly and without persistence, manifesting to God the unimportance of the request. Continual asking is important and biblical. (See Daniel 10:1-14; Luke 11:1-13; 18:1-7.)

■ **Pray without Ceasing**—I Samuel 12:23; Acts 12:5; Romans 1:9; Colossians 1:9; I Thessalonians 5:17; II Timothy 1:3.

■ **Pray Repetitively**—We are forbidden to engage in *vain repetition*, that is, saying the same things over and over insincerely for the sake of making long prayers. However, Jesus prayed three times in one night and said the same thing each time (Matthew 26:36-44). Elijah prayed seven times in succession for rain (I Kings 18:41-46; James 5:18). Asking repetitively for something is not wrong if we are sincere; it is the will of God.

■ **Pray Earnestly**—Luke 22:39-46; James 5:17-18.

■ **Pray Fervently**—“The effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man availeth much” (James 5:16).

Effectual—from a Greek word meaning to be active, efficient, or be mighty in.

Fervent—from a Greek word meaning heat, zeal, and ardor.

Avaieth—from a Greek word meaning forceful, capable, having strength and power.

5. Prayer and Fasting—Fasting is a powerful ally of prayer. Special things are accomplished when these *two* are used simultaneously. (See Mark 9:29; Luke 2:37; Acts 13:1-3; 14:23.)

6. Prayer and Forgiveness—An unforgiving spirit actually hinders and stops our prayers. Forgiveness must emanate from the heart while we pray (Mark 11:25-26; Matthew 18:23-35).

Prayer is one of our highest privileges and one of the most effective forces in our lives. Applying and using the proper connectives will bring amazing results. Our generation needs men and women who know *how* to pray and who *will* pray. As people of God, may we join together in effectual, fervent prayer.