

Prayer - Intimacy with God

Introduction

The purpose of salvation is to restore lost people to relationship with God our Father. Through the cross of Jesus, the barriers to that relationship were removed. When we begin to trust God once again and turn from our sin, He comes into our lives to begin a new relationship of love with us. God is in every true Christian (Romans 8:9,10; John 14:23; Revelation 3:20; 2 Corinthians 13:5). Our faith and love towards God will lead us to recognize His presence with us, to talk with Him, to listen to Him, to sense Him. This is prayer. We express our thanks, our faith, our love, our hopes with God in prayer, and we receive from Him answers, assurance, guidance, peace, strength, power, revelation of who He is and what He wants to do. (Matthew 7:7-8; John 16:13; Philippians 4:6-7; Ephesians 1:17,18).

WHAT IS PRAYER?

For true Christians, prayer [Gk: "proseuche"] is "communion with God". Through prayer we communicate with God thus experiencing and developing our relationship with Him. The quality of our prayer life then determines the quality of our relationship with God. Prayer is talking with God. Prayer is listening to God. Prayer is enjoying the presence of God. It can take many forms - for example: worship, confession, thanksgiving, praise, petition (asking for things), waiting (silent, listening and sensing of God) and warfare (command). If we are baptized in the Spirit we can pray with the spirit, in languages unknown to us but not to God. (1 Corinthians 14:2,14).

Prayer is not simply saying words. It is not repeating formulas. God is looking for heartfelt relationship. We are told by Jesus not to make meaningless repetitions of words when we pray. (Matthew 6:7). Tongues may be meaningless to our understanding, but it is not to God. In a future lesson we will give more attention to this subject.

There is a lot of prayer that never reaches God. "The Pharisee stood and prayed thus with himself" (Luke 18:11). "One who turns away his ear from hearing the law, Even his prayer shall be an abomination." (Proverbs 28:9).

The Purpose of Prayer

1. We pray because we love God. We spend time with God in prayer and communion because we love him. Just as a man and woman in love desire to be together and communicate, so we - if we love God - will desire to be with Him and to fellowship with Him in proportion to our love for Him.

2. We pray because we depend on God. God is our source. He is our life (Colossians 3:4). Through prayer we receive the comfort, the strength and all the other resources that we need in life - both naturally and spiritually. Prayer - relationship to God - is as necessary to the spiritual life as air to the natural life.

3. We need to pray in order to resist temptation. "Watch and pray, lest you enter into temptation." (Mt. 26:41). Much sin is the result of the sin of prayerlessness. Through lack of prayer, we are weak, others are weaker and Satan gains the advantage in our lives.

4. We need to pray because it is necessary for men to invite God to act in salvation. God gave the earth to Adam and his descendants. We must invite God to work here. If no-one invites God to work here, Satan (the god of this world through man's universal rebellion -

2 Corinthians 4:4) will dominate the affairs of men and eventually the judgment of God will come. By inviting God often and specifically, multitudes can be saved that would otherwise be lost.

5. We need to pray because God commands us to pray. "Continue earnestly in prayer, being vigilant in it with thanksgiving." (Colossians 4:2). "Then he [Jesus] spoke a parable to them to this end, that men ought always to pray and not lose heart." (Luke 18:1). The need to pray is as great as the authority of God which commands us: "Pray without ceasing." (1 Thessalonians 5:17). Prayer is so vital to all that God wants to do on the earth, and so essential to us, that God commands us to do it all the time. We should even deny ourselves sleep and food at times in order to pray more and with greater power. (Matthew 6:16; Luke 6:12; Luke 21:36; Colossians 4:2; 2 Corinthians 11:27).

HOW TO BEGIN

If you are not sure how to pray, don't despair! Everyone had to begin sometime. Just talk with God respectfully but openly. Talk with Him as your Father. Jesus taught us to pray, "Our Father ...". Recognize God as a loving Father. Recognize Jesus as a Friend and a Brother. Recognize the Holy Spirit as your Comforter and Guide. Come to the Father in Jesus' name (John 14:6; Hebrews 10:19). Begin your prayer with confession of your unconfessed sins. In this way the blood of Jesus cleanses us and prepares us to really relate to God. "Enter his gates with thanksgiving..." (Psalm 100:4). Thank God for forgiving your sins, for coming into your life, for making you His child. Then just talk with God, asking Him for whatever you need. Thank Him and praise Him for His answer. Spend time also asking for His Spirit to help you to pray. Talk to the Holy Spirit. Tell Him you want to know Him. "Likewise the Spirit also helps in our weaknesses. For we do not know what we should pray for as we ought, but the Spirit Himself makes intercession for us..." (Romans 8:26). The Holy Spirit will guide you into all the truth (John 16:13) and He will teach you to pray.

PREPARATION FOR PRAYER

1. A Prepared Heart (Fellowship with God ~ Psalm 24:3-5)

- Confess known sin in your life (1 John 1:6-9; 1 John 3:21-22; Hebrews 10:19)
- Forgive all who have offended or hurt you (Mark 11:25-26)
- See yourself then as dead to sin and sinless in the eyes of God. (Romans 6:11; 2 Corinthians 5:21)

2. A Prepared Purpose

Know what you are going to pray about. It is difficult to pray fervently without knowing what you want or desire from God. We should have a clear-cut, well-defined idea about what we are asking God for.

Jesus told us to ask, seek and knock. (Matthew 7:7). In asking, we must be definite. In seeking, our goal is to know God and commune with Him. In knocking (intercession) we must understand what the Lord wants to do and pray the Word for that thing.

Sometimes we do not know what to pray for, and so we can pray in the Spirit (Romans 8:26). We can pray in tongues without understanding, even for hours, according to the will of God. However, Paul stated that he prayed with the spirit **and with the understanding** (1 Corinthians 14:15). Our whole being, including our minds, should be involved in praying. Our minds should understand what we are asking God for. However, we can pray with the spirit (in tongues) when our minds need a rest (Isaiah 28:11, 12)

The fact remains, however, that when we set ourselves to pray, especially in a group, we must be agreed about what we will pray for (Matthew 18:19).

3. A Prepared Word.

Know what the Word of God says in regards to what we are praying for. We must renew our minds with the Word so that we know God's will on the matter without a doubt. God's will is to do what He promises in the Word. By meditating on the Word and letting it transform our hearts as we renew our mind in it, we prepare ourselves to pray in faith. If we don't know what the Word says, there is a good chance that doubt will enter, and if we doubt we cannot expect to receive from God (James 1:6, 7)

The Principles of Prayer

1. Dependence on the Holy Spirit.

In prayer, you should look to the Holy Spirit to help you to pray effectively. He can give you the right words with which you can pray effectively. It's very good to ask the Holy Spirit to help you to pray. Talk to the Holy Spirit as a person, and ask Him to help you to come to the Father in Jesus' name.

Rather than rushing in to God's presence and saying many things, it is good many times to quiet your mind and wait in God's presence so you can feel God's heart and pray the things that the Holy Spirit shows you to pray for. We should realize that learning to listen to God is an important part of prayer.

We are told to "pray always with all prayer and supplication in the Spirit" (Ephesians 6:18). It is the Spirit who is to lead us in the kind of prayer we offer to God. He gives us the power to pray.

Spend at least part of your time seeking to be filled with the Holy Spirit (Ephesians 5:18). The more filled you are with the Spirit; the more effective will be your whole life with God.

2. Confidence ~ Realize who you are in Christ, and on what basis God will hear you.

We must pray to the Father in Jesus' name, not our own name (John 16:24, 26; Colossians 3:17) This means that we are basing our approach to God on Jesus' righteousness and goodness, not on our own. We receive His righteousness when we repent, confess our sins and believe that we receive His righteousness. We should know then that "we are the righteousness of God in Him" (2 Corinthians 5:21) and we can come directly to have an audience with God because of the sacrifice of Jesus in our place. We come as children of God (Galatians 3:26; John 1:12), as members of the royal family of God (Revelation 1:6), and NOT AS BEGGARS or STRANGERS. Therefore when we pray we should expect that God will grant results in response to our prayer. (1 Peter 3:12)

3. Begin prayer with thanksgiving and praise. "Enter into His gates with thanksgiving, and into His courts with praise. Be thankful to Him, and bless His name." (Psalm 100:4). Thank God for answers to prayer, for your salvation. Tell Him how great He is. It is good to use the Word of God to praise God. This is not a form of flattery in order to get God to give you things, but it is only fitting to thank Him and praise Him. Thanking God will increase your faith. Praising God will also increase your faith, since you will begin to fix your eyes on God, His goodness and faithfulness and greatness and power, and not on your problem.

4. Worship God. Many effective prayer-warriors recognize the importance of spending much time in worship, even up to 80% of prayer time. This deepens our fellowship with God,

increases our faith and pleases the Holy Spirit. We are then more likely to really hear His voice and thus pray effectively.

5. Pray the Word.

God's will is to keep His promises to us. In prayer the Word of God should be in our hearts and in our mouths (Romans 10:8). In our prayers we should use the Word of God and remind God of His promises to us. This builds our faith and it also pleases God because it is an expression of our confidence in His Word and His integrity.

For example, you can pray "Father, in your Word you say that those who seek you will not lack any good thing. I thank you that you will not lack I ask you for this in Jesus' name. Thank you for it. Amen. " (Psalm 34:10).

6. Specificity ~ Ask God for definite things that you want (Psalm 37:4)

You should pray in such a way that you will know afterwards what you prayed for and you will recognize when the answer to your prayer is manifested. Don't pray like this, "Lord, give me what you think is best. If you want this, then so be it. If not, what pleases you. Your will be done." These prayers may sound spiritual but they really express uncertainty and doubt and cannot be answered by God in a concrete way. How would you know if such a prayer was answered?

Imagine the answer and speak the answer to your prayer based on the Word. This builds faith. Don't keep speaking the problem. Constant speaking the problem magnifies fear and doubt. It makes the problem look big. Fill your mind with the solution from God's Word, not the problem.

7. Intercession ~ Allow God to lead you to pray for others in the church and their needs, national and local situations, the government, the advance of the Kingdom of God, and the growth of the church. God is looking for people who will stand in the gap with Him in intercession for situations that are beyond their own personal interests. Make God's interests your interests.

8. Thank God for the results of prayer, both before and after you see the results. (Philippians 4:6,7). Pray with thanksgiving. Thanksgiving expresses your confidence that God has heard and answered your prayer even before you see the result.

9. Follow Up.

Usually Satan will try to suggest to you that your prayers were not heard. He will encourage you to look to the problems again and get your eyes off God. He will try to get you to talk as if you are not sure if your prayer is answered. If he succeeds in getting you to express doubt it is likely that your mouth confession will cancel the effect of your prayer. Therefore guard your mind and heart, resist the temptation to talk negatively about the situations with others, especially with those with whom you are praying.

Take firm control of your thought life. Think on positive things (Philippians 4:6-9). By praising God and confessing the relevant truths of the Word, cast down every thought that is contrary to your prayer. These thoughts many times are nothing but the suggestions of the devil, who is working to negate our faith.

A. Keep speaking what the Word says on the issue at stake. "Let us hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering, for He who promised is faithful." (Hebrews 10:23; 2 Corinthians 4:13).

B. With your imagination, see your prayers as answered. Abraham was encouraged by God to imagine his descendants as the stars he saw in the sky, before there were any descendants. So God will often give us a picture for us to hold onto and encourage our faith. Speak nothing contrary to this vision.

C. Act in line with your faith and your confession(James 2:17). Prepare for the answer to be manifested. Examples of this can be found in Mark 6:39-40, where Jesus organizes the people, preparing them to receive the blessing of the multiplied loaves and fishes. Also in John 11:39, Jesus told them to take away the stone from the tomb of dead Lazarus, a preparation for the answer to the prayer for his being raised from the dead.

TYPES OF PRAYER

As mentioned before, there are different forms of prayer. The Holy Spirit wants to lead us into a balance of all these kinds of prayer.

Worship: [Heb. shachah {shaw-khaw'} = bow down, prostrate oneself]. The true worshiper God seeks worships in spirit and in truth. (John 4:23). God wants truth in the inner parts (Psalm 51:6). In true worship, there is a total bowing down of the heart to God. In worship we express love and admiration to God which is a response to the revelation of who God is revealed to us by the Holy Spirit. Worship is voluntary submission to the love, the will and the law of God. Any hypocrisy disqualifies us for true worship. In worship we hear the voice of God.

Confession: 1. In confession of sin, we tell God with our mouth our sin. We should specifically tell God what we did, or acknowledge what we failed to do that we should have done. This is necessary to restore communion with God and is a preparation for further fellowship. 2. In confession of the Word, we tell God with our mouths what He has said in His Word. We express faith and confidence in God and God's Word verbally, and it releases the blessing of God to us. Very rarely do we rise above the level of our verbal confession before God.

Thanksgiving: This is thanking God for what He has done for us. We can thank Him both for blessings seen and those as yet unseen. It is a key to faith and it is natural and right that we give thanks always to the One from whom all good things come. (1 Thessalonians 5:18)

Praise: This is declaring good things about God, both about his character (who he is) and also His actions. To say "God is good" is to praise God. There are many styles of praise. Some are noisy and exuberant, others are calm. Praise is well-expressed through music, singing, words, shouting, clapping, dancing, shouting and giving to God.

Petition: This is asking God for the things we desire. Jesus said, "Ask and you shall receive." (Matthew 7:7). We are commanded to ask.

Intercession: The ministry of intercession involves all the other types of prayer. However, the emphasis of the prayer ministry in intercession is the needs of others, and the advancement of God's interests in the world. It is not focused on praying for things for oneself, but for others.

Waiting: (Habakkuk 2:1). This is a form of prayer in which the soul is silent and waits for God to move it or speak something by His Spirit. God promises to renew the strength of those who wait on Him (Isaiah 40:31; Psalm 27:14). We are to wait patiently on God. Through this we express to God in a practical way - not my will but Yours be done. If we are always talking in prayer we will not be able to hear what God is saying.

Warfare: (Psalm 149:6-9). This is prayer directed against the powers of darkness. Our praises to God are also a weapon directed against the powers of darkness (demons, fallen angels who are at work in the affairs of the world and the church). We pronounce against them the written judgment by reading the Scriptures of judgment against them (Psalm 149:9), we command them to be bound or to leave their positions of influence or authority in the name of Jesus. (Matthew 16:19; Mark 16:17). In "praying for the sick" we should pray prayers of command ordering the bodies of people to be healed in Jesus' name. This is a form of spiritual warfare since it is part of destroying the works of the devil. (1 John 3:8; Acts 10:38).

Praying in Tongues: (1 Corinthians 14: 2,15; Jude 20) This is a method of prayer available to those baptized in the Holy Spirit through which they can pray the will of God through words given by the Spirit. Since the mind (the understanding) is not directly involved the mind has a chance to rest and wait on God and receive revelation while this praying in tongues is taking place.

Key Elements of Prayer

PRAYING THE WORD

Since God's Word commands us to give constant attention to the Word and to meditate on it night and day, (Proverbs 4:20-22; Joshua 1:8), it is clear that our praying should not be something separate from the Word, but rather, that God's Word should direct our praying. For example, Daniel found the promise of the time of deliverance for God's people and prayed according to that. (Daniel 9:2). His prayer acknowledged openly the truth of God's Word (Daniel 9:10-15). Many other examples could be given. Elijah's prayer for the heavens to be shut was based on the promise of God to do this if the people turned away to idols.

Praying the Word in a strict sense includes quoting it and using it in our prayers. God responds to his own Word. It will not return to Him void (Isaiah 55:11). We can take general promises from the Bible and using the words of Scripture pray as if we expect God will fulfill them for us personally. This is a powerful form of prayer.

DEDICATION TO PRAYER

God says, "Continue earnestly in prayer, being vigilant in it with thanksgiving." (Colossians 4:2). "Men ought always to pray and not lose heart." (Luke 18:1). "Pray without ceasing" (1 Thessalonians 5:17). "Watch therefore and pray always" (Luke 21:36).

Prayer is where our dedication to God is tested. This is where our destiny is really determined. This is a command with constant application. Either we maintain communion with God or we don't. Either we depend on God and wait on Him or we don't. Either we allow ourselves to be led by Him or we don't.

Prayer, to be effective, often requires fasting. This means denying ourselves food. A normal fast is where we do not eat (although we may drink water). This intensifies our focus on God, puts down the power of our flesh and enables us to pray more easily, with less mental effort. The only way to pray without ceasing and to have maximum results in prayer is to be willing to practice self-denial where necessary. This includes Spirit-led fasting. Fasting for a day is normal and often very necessary where we are not aware of the reason for which our communion with God is weak. The other kind of self-denial needed in the life of a person serious about prayer is "watching" or denying yourself sleep. This could mean late nights of prayer or getting up early in the morning to pray. Jesus practiced both of these in His busy ministry (Mark 1:35; Luke 6:12)

Closing

The people who make a difference for God are those who are people of prayer. Now that you know these things, you will be blessed if you do them. God is looking for people who willingly, out of gratitude, love and devotion, will devote themselves and their free time to this vital ministry.

Measure your love for God by your desire to spend time with Him in His presence, and the priority you put on this.

Assignment: Meditate much and often on 1 Thessalonians 5:17 "Pray without ceasing".

Key Scriptures On Prayer

PRAYER CONTENT : GOOD GOVERNMENT 1Tim 2.1 2.2; GOSPEL WORKERS Mt 9.38;

THE LORD'S PRAYER Mt 6.9-6.13; ALL CONCERNS Php 4.6 Eph 6.18; THE WAY PAUL PRAYED Col 1.9 Eph 1.17 1.18; WITH PRAISE AND THANKSGIVING Heb 13.15 Php 4.6; WITH TONGUES AND INTERPRETATION Jude 20 1Cor 14.13

ACCORDING TO GOD'S WILL 1Jo 5.14 5.15. **WITH NO LOVE FOR INIQUITY** Ps 66.18 Jas 5.16. **BY REMAINING IN CHRIST AND IN THE WORD** John 15.7. **IN FAITH** Mt 21.22 Jn 14.13 Mk 11.24. **WITH FORGIVENESS** Mk 11.25. **WITH ASKING** Mt 7.7. **WITH EARNESTNESS** Jas 5.16. **FOR GOD'S GLORY** 1Cor 10.31 Mt 6.13 Jas 4.3. **IN THE SPIRIT** Jud 1.20. **IN HUMILITY** Mt 6.5 2Chr 7.14. **IN LOVE** 1Cor 16.14. **IN JESUS' NAME** Jn 14.13. **WITH DETERMINATION** Lk 18.2.

PRAYING IN THE SPIRIT 1Cor 14.2 14.15 Eph 6.18; Jud 1.20 1.21; Rom 8.26 8.27

PRAYER COMMITMENT: **WITHOUT CEASING** 1The 5.17 5.18 ; **WAITING ON GOD** Hos 10.12; **WITH WATCHFULNESS** Col 3.2 Eph 6.18 Lk 21.36; **WITH ENDURANCE** Lk 18.1; **ABOUT EVERYTHING** Php 4.6 4.7; **FOR OTHERS** 1Sam 12.23.