

A Biblical Study Guide of the Spiritual Discipline of Prayer



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Prayer the Discipline of Inner Communion with God

Prayer of Assisi

Lord make me a channel of Thy peace,
That where there is hatred I may bring love,
That where there is wrong I may bring the spirit of
forgiveness,
That where there is discord I may bring harmony,
That where there is error I may bring truth,
That where there is doubt I may bring faith,
That where there is despair I may bring hope,
That where there are shadows I may bring Thy light,
That where there is sadness I may bring joy.
Lord, grant that I may seek rather to comfort than
to be comforted;
To understand than to be understood;
To love than to be loved;
For it is by giving that one receives;
It is by self-forgetting that one finds;
It is by forgiving that one is forgiven;
It is by dying that one awakens to eternal life.

St. Francis of Assisi

Introduction

In this study guide we will explore the spiritual discipline of prayer. What are spiritual disciplines? Spiritual disciplines are practices or activities that promote spiritual growth, i.e. generosity, meditation, fasting, reading Scripture, solitude, silence and discernment. Prayer is such an important spiritual discipline that we will look at prayer as it was practiced in the Old and New Testaments. We will only touch the surface of this vital spiritual discipline. We will look at several prayers in the Bible and seek an understanding of the power and potency of prayer.

Prayer is the secret to a productive and prosperous spiritual life. Through prayer we are able to commune with God and respond to God's pursuit of our lives. Prayer should be a natural and consistent part of our spiritual development. Without a consistent prayer life we can falter and fall to the lures of sin and Satan. James 1:14 reads, "But each one is tempted when he is carried away and enticed by his own lust." This is a spiritual life, hence we must live on the plane of the spiritual. Indeed as Richard Foster wrote one of the most important books on spirituality. In it he stated that, "Prayer catapults us onto the frontier of the spiritual life. Of all of the Spiritual Disciplines prayer is the most central because it ushers us into perpetual communion with the Father."¹

Prayer enables us to discover and discern God's will for our lives. Discernment is a the capacity to filter through the noise of our world and hear the voice of God speaking to us through the Scriptures. Discernment enables to separate the truth from error. As we grow in our prayer life, increase our reading of Scripture and our willingness to spend time in reflection, we are more able to discern God's will. Learning to live with silence is another vital spiritual discipline, which define as the practice of removing the mental distractions that drown out the still small voice of

God's presence (1 Kings 19:9-14). Sometimes we experience the presence of God in ways that seem mundane. How do we come know God's will? I believe we come to know God's will through the reading, reflecting, and responding to the Scriptures. As we read, reflect, and listen to the inner voice of the Holy Spirit we learn how to commune with the Lord.

Prayer is communion with God. Prayer is not a pious practice that we engage in to impress God. Jesus told a parable about two men who were praying. One of the men, a Pharisee prayed with himself, reminding God of how good he had been. The other man a tax collector was so overcome by his sin and guilt that he begged God for mercy and forgiveness (see Luke 18:9-14). God is not impressed with our shallow acts of piety. God is impressed when our hearts and attitudes are conditioned by thoughts of His goodness. Prayer is not for the purpose of remaining in the favor of God. We retain the favor of God when we are obedient to His Word. Prayer is our opportunity to come boldly before the throne of God and find help in times of need (see Hebrew 4:16).

Grant me, even me, my dearest Lord, to know Thee, and love Thee, and rejoice in Thee. And, if I cannot do these perfectly in this life, let me at least advance to higher degrees every day, till I can come to do them in perfection. Let the knowledge of Thee increase in me here, that it may be full hereafter. Let the love of Thee grow every day more and more, here that it may be perfect hereafter; that my joy may be great in itself, and full in Thee. I know, O God, that Thou art a God of truth; O make good Thy gracious promises to me, that my joy may be full. Amen.--

St Augustine (340-430).

The importance of Prayer

Prayer is the most important and potent spiritual weapon at our disposal. We are engaged in a spiritual conflict and we cannot do without the most important weapon in our spiritual arsenal. We cannot overcome the power of the devil purely on the wings of our feeble strength. Believers need and must use the weapons at their disposal for spiritual warfare as Paul pointed out in 2 Corinthians 10:3-4, “For though we walk in the flesh, we do not war according to the flesh, for the weapons of our warfare are not of the flesh, but divinely powerful for the destructions of fortresses.” Without the weapon of prayer, we will become casualties on the battlefield of life (see Ephesians 6:18).

Prayer gives us spiritual clout with God. E. M. Bounds remarked that “Praying men *women* are the only men and *women* who have influence with God, the only kind of men and *women* to whom God commits Himself and His Gospel.”² The church of Jesus Christ is strong and powerful when it recognizes that men and women of prayer are needed to serve as the spiritual manifestation of God’s presence.

We cannot expect to win the battle of faith in a world of faithless men and women without the power of prayer at our disposal. It is clear that the first century Christian church took seriously the use of prayer as a means for confronting Satan and dealing with his attacks against the church (see Acts 8:1-4).. When King Herod imprisoned Peter in an attempt to stamp out the church, rather than run in fear, the saints prayed for their spiritual leader. In Acts 12:5 we read, “So Peter was kept in prison, but prayer for him was being made fervently by the church to God.”

It was the prevailing and fervent prayers of the saints of God on Peter’s behalf that moved God’s heart. Prayer will move the heart of God. God hears and answers the prayers of the righteous (see Psalm 34:4-6; James 5:16-17). Prayer serves as the

source of the believer's peace and comfort in the midst of trial. Paul remarked in Philippians 4:6-7, "Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your request be made known to God. And the peace of God, which surpasses all comprehension, shall guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus."

Strong Son of God, who was tried and tempted to the uttermost, yet without sin, be near me now with Thy strength and give me the victory over this evil that threatens to ruin me. I am weak, O Lord, and full of doubts and fears. There are moments when I am afraid of myself, when the world and the flesh and the devil seem more powerful than the forces of good. But now I look to Thee in whom dwelleth all the fulness of grace and might and redemption. Blessed Savior! I take Thee afresh to be my Refuge, my Covert, My Defence, my strong Tower from the Enemy. Hear me and bless me now and ever. Amen.

Samuel McComb

Prayer and God

God is the heart and center of all prayer. God is the Originator of prayer. King Solomon built the first temple in Jerusalem (see 2 Chronicles 3:1–5:14). After the dedication of the temple the Lord appeared to Solomon at night and said to him that He had heard his prayer and had chosen temple as a special place of sacrifice. In 2 Chronicles 7:13-14 Israel is invited to seek God in prayer when the people face pestilence and drought.. Verse 14 reads, "And My people who are called by My name humble themselves and pray, and seek My face and turn from their wicked ways, then

will I hear from heaven, will forgive their sin, and will heal their land.” Prayer is the means by which we communicate with God and enter into fellowship with the Creator. It is not only entering into our secret place, moreover it is entering into the very throne room of God. It is in prayer that we are opened to the presence of God in our lives. Prayer is the means by which we are forced to examine our lives in light of the Word of God and His holiness. As Kenneth Leech has stated, “To know God is to know one’s own true Self, the ground of one’s being. So prayer is an intensively human experience in which our eyes are opened and we begin to see more clearly our true nature.”³

God is the One who hears and answers prayer (see 6:5; 22:23, 27; 33:17; Psalm 34:4-7; 66:17-20; Isaiah 65:24-25; Jeremiah 29:12-13; John 9:31; 1 Peter 3:12; 1 John 5:15). During the fourteenth year of the reign of King Hezekiah over Judah, Sennacherib king of Assyria attacked the cities of Judah (see 2 Kings 18:13). He demanded the Judah surrender and pay tribute (verse 14). In an effort to appease Sennacherib, Hezekiah gave him all of the silver of the Temple and he cut off the gold from the doors of the Temple (verse 15-16). The representatives of Sennacherib told the Judean leaders that there was no hope for them, Hezekiah would not be able to rescue Judah (verses 17-37). When Hezekiah received the news, he went to the house of the Lord (see 2 Kings 19:1). Hezekiah took the letter that he had received from the hands of the Assyrian representatives and spread it before the Lord (verse 14). Hezekiah prayed before the Lord (verses 15-19). The Lord told the prophet Isaiah to tell Hezekiah that his prayer had been heard and answered (verse 20). Because of his prayer, Hezekiah was able to lead the nation of Judah to victory, not with spear and sword, but rather with the help of the Lord of Hosts (see also Isaiah 37). God is concerned about the tense situations we face in life.

God yearns for us to know His goodness and to experience the joy of a bountiful life. God is the One who blesses us. It does not matter what men and women may do to harm you, God is still able to bless in spite of (see Genesis 39; 50:15-21). He blesses the fruit of our labor so that everything we do brings prosperity (see Deuteronomy 28:1-6; Psalm 1). In prayer we experience the love and mercy of God.

We beseech Thee, Lord and Master, to be our help and our succor. Save those who are in tribulation; have mercy on the lonely; lift up the fallen; show Thyself unto the needy; heal the ungodly; convert the wanderers of Thy people; feed the hungry; raise up the weak; comfort the faint-hearted. Let all the peoples know that Thou are God alone, and Jesus Christ is Thy Son, and we are Thy people and the sheep of Thy pasture; for the sake of Christ Jesus. Amen

St Clement of Rome (90 A.D.)

Prayer in the Old Testament

In the Old Testament prayer was a natural part of the life of the people of God. The Old Testament patriarchs (Abraham, Issac, and Jacob) knew God to be the Creator of the heavens and earth, hence everything that happened in the lives of people was in the context of His divine will. The Psalmist wrote in Psalm 24:1-2, “The earth is the Lord’s, and all it contains, the world, and those who dwell in it. For He has founded it upon the seas, and established it upon the rivers.” John McFadyen stated of the Hebrew concept and faith in God: “In moments of distress, perplexity, danger, sickness, farewell, and death, they lift up their eyes to One that is higher than they for the help which they do not find in themselves and cannot get from one another.”⁴ God was the One to whom the ancient Hebrew looked to for deliverance. We see this in the words expressed by the psalmist in Psalm 121.

I will lift up mine eyes unto the
 hills, from whence cometh my help.
 My help cometh from the Lord,
 which made heaven and earth.
 He will not suffer thy foot to be
 moved: he that keepeth thee will not slumber.
 Behold, he that keepeth Israel
 shall neither slumber nor sleep.
 The Lord is thy keeper: the Lord
 is thy shade upon thy right hand.
 The sun shall not smite thee by
 day nor the moon by night.
 The Lord shall preserve thee from
 all evil: he shall preserve thy soul
 The Lord shall preserve thy going out
 and thy coming in from this time forth,
 and even for evermore.

Psalm 121 (KJV)

In the Old Testament we meet the father of the Hebrew people (see Genesis 12:1-3). Prayer was a major part of the life of the patriarchs, Abraham, Issac and Jacob Within the Old Testament the Book of Psalms stands without parallel as the largest collection of prayers in the Bible. They range from prayers for deliverance, thanksgiving, and praise of God for His greatness and power (see Psalm 22; 78, 106 150). One can read any one of the psalms and hear the words of a payer being uttered. In the Old Testament prayers were uttered to God on a variety of occasions for a host of reasons. Some of the prayers were long and at other times they were instant prayers, spoken in the spirit of the moment. Listed below of some of the prayers found in the Old Testament and the occasion that they were uttered.

***Read each passage and take two minutes to reflect over what you gained from each passage. You may want to keep a journal of your thoughts.

- ◆ Abraham's prayer for Ishmael--Genesis 17:18
- ◆ Prayer was associated with going to battle--1 Samuel 14:6
- ◆ Moses asked God to scatter His enemies--Number 10:35
- ◆ Sampson's prayer in the camp of the Philistines--Judges 16:28
- ◆ Lot's prayer during his escape from Sodom--Genesis--19:19-20
- ◆ Moses' prayer for God's presence to be with Israel--Exodus 33:13-16
- ◆ Hannah's Prayer--1 Samuel 1:9-16
- ◆ Elijah's prayer for death--1 Kings 19:4
- ◆ Solomon's prayer the God give him wisdom to lead--1 Kings 3:6-9
- ◆ Solomon's prayer at the dedication of the Temple--1 Kings 8:23-53
- ◆ The prayer of Jabez--1 Chronicles 4:10
- ◆ Jeremiah's prayer for forgiveness of Judah--Jeremiah 14:19-22
- ◆ Jeremiah's prayer for his enemies to be punished--Jeremiah 18:19-23
- ◆ Prayer of lamentation over Jerusalem--Lamentations 1:20-22
- ◆ Isaiah's prayer for God's intervention--Isaiah 63:15-64:12
- ◆ David's confession of his sin--Psalm 51
- ◆ Nehemiah's prayer of grief over Jerusalem--Nehemiah 1:5-11
- ◆ Prayers of Nehemiah--Nehemiah 4:4-5; 5:19; 6:9, 14; 13:14, 22, 29, 31
- ◆ Jonah's prayer for death over Ninevah's repentance--Jonah 4:2-3
- ◆ Hezekiah's prayers--2 Kings 19:15-19; 20:1-7
- ◆ David's prayer of thanksgiving for Israel's giving--2 Chronicles 29:10-19
- ◆ Daniel's prayer of gratitude for divine revelation--Daniel 2:20-23

Prayer in the New Testament

The earliest Christians practiced many of the traditions, rituals, and disciplines used by Jews in the first century. During the time of Jesus, it was customary for Jews to pray three times a day, 9:00 a.m. 12:00 noon and 3:00 p.m. in this section we will look at the prayer life of the early Christians by first looking at the Jesus' prayer life, the Lord's Prayer and the Prayers of the apostle Paul. This brief study will in no way exhaust the study of prayer in the New Testament. It is just a beginning, but hopefully a good beginning.

Jesus and Prayer

Jesus practiced intensively the discipline of prayer. Prayer was the spark that ignited the activities of each new day. **“And early in the morning, while it was still dark, He arose and went out and departed to a lonely place, and was praying there (Mark 1:35).** Jesus spent many hours alone in prayer. It was in those precious moments of prayer that He communed with God the Father, coming to a clear understanding of His work and ministry (see John 6:15).

Jesus spent a great deal of time in prayer prior to making major decisions (see Luke 6:12-13). The decision as to who would be among His closest companions was bathed in prayer. Jesus had to make the right decision. The very salvation of the world and of unborn generations rested upon the right choice from among the massive throng of people who followed Him. They would be the men to whom the gospel would be initially entrusted. In their hands was placed the power to tread upon serpents and cast out demons (see Mark 16:17-18).

During the moments of His greatest crisis Jesus prayed. In Gethsemene Jesus talked to Father about the coming events of the next day (see Matthew 26:36-46;

Mark 14:32-42). In Gethsemane Jesus left His disciples and went a little farther and prayed. As He struggled with the agony of the moment He prayed, “Father, if Thou are willing, remove this cup from Me; yet not My will, but Thine be done” (Luke 22:42 KJV). It was during those moments of spiritual conflict that Jesus prayed for the energizing power of God.

It is obvious that men and women were amazed by the miracles and teachings of Jesus. Jesus did things that men and women had never seen done before. There was general consensus that He was someone whose life had been deeply touched by the power of God (see John 3:2). Jesus was accompanied by not only His disciples, but large crowds of people who followed Him wherever He went (see Mark 3:20; 4:1; 6:34, 53-56; 8:1; Luke 5:15-16). How could anyone so widely and publicly acclaimed remain focused and not be overcome by all of the public desires to make Him a king? Surely this was one of the major things that Jesus had to contend with. He was able to maintain His focus and concentration on His mission of redemption by finding time to spend alone with God. Luke recorded that when the people would gather around Him, Jesus would find an opportunity to slip away and commune with the Father (see Luke 5:16).

The Prayers of Jesus

- ◆ The Lord’s Prayer--Matthew 6:9-13; Luke 11:2-4
- ◆ Jesus’ thanksgiving to the Father--Matthew 11:25-26; Luke 10:21
- ◆ Blessing at the feeding of the 5,000--Matthew 14:19; Mark 6:41; Luke 9:16; John 6:11
- ◆ Jesus’ prayer on the mountain--Matthew 14:23; Mark 6:46
- ◆ Jesus prayed in the desert--Mark 1:35; Luke 5:16

- ◆ Blessing at the feeding of the 4,000--Matthew 15:36; Mark 8:6
- ◆ Prayer at the institution of the Lord's Supper--Matthew 26:26-27; Mark 14:32-42; Luke 22:17-19
- ◆ Jesus' prayer in the Garden of Gethsemene--Matthew 26:36-46; Mark 14:32-42; Luke 22:39-46
- ◆ Jesus prayed for a deaf and dumb man--Mark 7:34
- ◆ Jesus prayed at His baptism--Luke 3:21
- ◆ Jesus prayed before choosing His disciples--Luke 6:12-13
- ◆ Jesus prayed for Peter's faith to be increased--Luke 22:31-32
- ◆ Jesus prayed at the tomb of Lazarus--John 11:41-42
- ◆ Jesus prayed in Jerusalem--John 12:27-32
- ◆ Jesus prayed for His disciples and the church--John 17
- ◆ Jesus prayed on the cross--Matthew 27:46; Mark 15:34; Luke 23:46

The Teachings of Jesus on Prayer

It is clear from the Gospels that Jesus gave specific instructions on the fundamentals of prayer. Prayer was the one thing that the disciples expressly asked Jesus to teach them to do. "And it came about that while He was praying in a certain place, after He had finished, one of His disciples said to Him, 'Lord, teach us to pray just as John also taught his disciples to pray'" (Luke 11:1). According to the accounts of Matthew 6:9-13 and Luke 11:2-4, Jesus taught His disciples the model prayer. We will take a look at the basic components of that prayer in the next section.

Jesus made several statements about prayer. Prayer was at the heart of the teachings of Jesus. Jesus taught that our commitment to God the Father is developed in the arena of prayer. Spiritual power is the result of a consistent prayer life. Listed

below are some of the statements made by Jesus regarding prayer.

- ◆ Prayer should be addressed to God--Luke 11:2
- ◆ Prayer should be in His name--John 14:13-14
- ◆ Pray according to God's will--Luke 22:42
- ◆ Pray with the right attitude--Luke 18:9-14
- ◆ Pray always without losing heart--Luke 18:1
- ◆ Pray without ceasing--Luke 11:5-10
- ◆ Pray in private--Matthew 6:6
- ◆ God's house is "A House Of Prayer"--Matthew 21:12-13
- ◆ Power in ministry is linked to prayer and fasting--Matthew 17:20
- ◆ Victory of temptation is the result of prayer--Matthew 26:41
- ◆ Pray for your enemies--Matthew 5:44

The Lord's Prayer

The Lord's Prayer is the most familiar prayer found in the Bible. We learn its contents at an early age. It is taught as the model prayer that Jesus taught His disciples. There are two places in the gospels where it is found: Matthew 6:9-13 and Luke 11:2-4. In Matthew the prayer is found in the context of the Sermon on the Mount. Jesus had just finished telling His disciples that they were not to pray as the hypocrites, who loved to be seen and heard (vs. 5). Rather than make long public displays of piety, they were to go into their secret closets (vs. 6). Jesus further iterated that they should not make long pious statements with the intention of impressing men (vs. 7).

In Luke it is found in the context of Jesus being observed in prayer by His disciples, who ask Him to teach them to pray, just as John taught his disciples. In

Luke's account the prayer is shorter, which may suggest that this was the original prayer when it was first spoken. Further, it is possible that Jesus could have taught this particular lesson about prayer on several occasions, hence the mention of it in two different settings in the gospels.

Make a comparison between Matthew's version and Luke's version. What did you notice that was different between the two versions?

Matthew 6:9-13	Luke 11:2-4

As a part of our study we will take a closer look at the separate petitions in the Lord's Prayer. Using your Bible Dictionary read and article about the Lord's Prayer. Study the various petitions in the prayer and write down your thoughts regarding each of the separate petitions. Use the online link to peruse several Bible dictionaries, if you do not have access to one. <https://www.biblestudytools.com/dictionaries/>

First Petition: *Our Father.* _____

Second Petition: *Hallowed be Thy Name.* _____

Third Petition: *Thy Kingdom come.* _____

Fourth Petition: *Thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven.* _____

Fifth Petition: *Give us this day our daily bread.* _____

Sixth Petition: *And forgive us our debts, as we have also forgiven our debtors.*

Seventh Petition: *And not do lead us into temptation, but deliver us from evil.*

Paul and Prayer

The Apostle Paul was clearly a man of prayer. Prayer was an obvious key to the success that he experienced during the many years of his ministry (see Acts 16). Many of the prayers of the apostle have been preserved in his letters to the various churches that he wrote. From his writings in the New Testament we learn a great deal about Paul's prayer life and importance of prayer in our own ministry.

All of the letters of Paul begin with a word of thanksgiving, with the exception the letter to the Galatians (see Galatians 1:6-11, compare with Philippians 1:3-11). In the Letter to the Galatians Paul offered only words of rebuke for their fickleness.

The Epistles of Paul

Romans	Paul prays the he might see the Romans-- 1:8-12 Prayer for Israel's salvation--10:1 Benedictions--15:33; 16:20 Doxology--16:25-27
1 Corinthians	Thanksgiving for richness of spiritual gifts--1:4-9
2 Corinthians	Blessings of God--1:3-7 Benediction--13:14
Galatians	Benediction--6:18
Ephesians	Blessings of God for His blessings --1:3-14 Prayer for knowledge and power--1:15-21 Prayer for strength, indwelling, and understanding-3:14-19 Doxology--3:20-21 Benediction--6:23
Philippians	Prayer for understanding and love--1:2-11 Doxology--4:20 Benediction--4:23

Colossians	Prayer for growth of the gospel--1:3-6 Prayer for wisdom and understanding--1:9-12 Benediction--4:18
First Thessalonians	Thanksgiving for God's choice--1:2-5 Prayer for return visit--3:9-13 Prayer for thorough sanctification--5:23-24 Benediction--5:28
Second Thessalonians	Thanksgiving for love and faith--1:3 Prayer for worthiness of calling --1:11-12 Thanksgiving and prayer for calling and establishment--2:13-17 Prayer for peace--3:15 Benediction--3:18
1 Timothy	Thanksgiving and doxology for God's mercy--1:12-17 Benediction--6:21
2 Timothy	Thanksgiving for Timothy's faith--1:3-5 Prayer for Onesiphorus--1:16-18 Prayer for judgment on Alexander--4:14 Doxology--4:18 Benediction--3:15
Titus	Blessing--1:4 Benediction--3:15
Philemon	Benediction--vs. 25

Taken from *Chronological and Background Charts of the New Testament*, by H. Wayne House

What did you glean from your study of the content of Paul's prayers?

Hindrances to Answered Prayer

God does not hear all prayers. There are some conditions under which God will not hear nor answer our prayers. In the prophetic writings of Jeremiah God told him not pray for Judah. He would not hear their prayers. In **Jeremiah 7:16**, we read, **“As for you, do not pray for this people, and do not lift up cry or prayer for them, and do not intercede with Me; for I do not hear you.”** God said that He

would refuse to honor the prayer request of Jeremiah because His people lived without regard for the Law of God and its ethical standards (see Jeremiah 7:8-11). God asked Jeremiah

“I hate, I reject your festivals,
Nor do I delight in your solemn assemblies.
Even though you offer up to Me burnt offerings and your
grain offerings,
I will not accept them;
And I will not even look at the peace offering of our
fatlings. Take away from Me the noise of your songs; I will
not even listen to the sound of your harps. But let justice
roll down like waters and righteousness like an ever-flowing
stream.”
Amos 5:21-24

if he could see what

was going on in Jerusalem (verse 17). The people were guilty of a host sins, the most damaging being their continued practice of idolatry (verse 18). Idolatry is the worship of idols instead of worshiping the True and Living God.

When we fail to honor God in our lifestyles and worship, we run the risk of God not hearing nor answering our prayers. The Bible teaches in several places the kinds of things that hinder our prayer.

Read each of the following passages. Each one addresses one the various hindrances that prevent God from hearing and answering. Write a brief reaction statement to each of the passages.

- ◆ Domestic and marital disharmony 1 Peter 3:7

- ◆ Selfishness and wrong motives James 4:3

- ◆ Unconfessed sins Psalm 66:18

- ◆ Wilful acts of disobedience Isaiah 59:1-2

- ◆ Failure to help the poor Proverbs 21:13

◆ Self-righteousness and pride

Luke 18:10-14

◆ Hands full of blood

Isaiah 1:15

◆ Failure to forgive

Mark 11:25-26

◆ Asking in a spirit of doubt

James 1:5-6

Can you identify any other biblical passages that may suggest or point out that God does not hear our prayers under certain circumstances?

O Lord, I stand much in need of yet greater grace, if I ought to reach that pitch, where neither man nor any creature shall be a hindrance unto me. For as long as anything detains me, I can freely take my flight to thee.

Thomas A' Kempis, *The Imitation of Christ*

Types of Prayers

- ◆ **Prayers of Petition-** Genesis 24:12-14, 42-44; 1 Samuel 14:41
- ◆ **Prayers of Intercession-** Numbers 12:13; 14:17-19
- ◆ **Prayers of Thanksgiving-** Genesis 24:27; 2 Samuel 7:18-29
- ◆ **Prayers of Confession-** Ezra 9:5-15; Psalm 51
- ◆ **Prayers of Praise or Adoration-** Revelation 4:11

Prayers in Public Worship

Prayer is a vital part of public and private worship. Public prayer or congregational prayer is one of the most important aspects of worship. Prayer sets the tone of worship. Prayer can bring vibrancy and life to a cold worship service. In congregational prayer we bring the concerns of the people before God and intercede on their behalf. Therefore, a public prayer in worship is never the same as a private prayer in your own home or “secret closet.” Franklin Segler has stated that “prayer is the soul of worship.”⁵

- ◆ **Invocation Prayer.** The prayer of invocation is the first prayer of worship. It is intended to still the human heart and spirit to receive the Spirit of God. It is our invitation to the Holy Spirit to take charge of the worship. The invocation is a prayer of praise and adoration to God.

“Gracious and Merciful God, We invite Your Holy and Righteous presence into this worship service. We pray that You would grant to these Your people the joy of Your Holy Spirit. Take charge of the service; fill Your people so that when we leave this place we can go forth with renewed spiritual power. In the Name of Jesus Christ we pray. Amen.

- ◆ **Altar Prayer.** The altar prayer is the main prayer of the worship service. It is usually prayed by the pastor another minister or a designated deacon/deaconess. Anyone can pray the altar prayer of what some churches call the pastoral prayer. The altar prayer is the public prayer that brings before the presence of God all of the concerns of the congregation. It should never appear in the form of a personal prayer. The altar prayer contains all of the elements of prayer: Adoration, Intercession, Confession, Thanksgiving and Petition.

The Format for an Altar Prayer

1. **The opening Greeting and Address to God.**
“Eternal God, Our Heavenly Father.....”
2. **Statements of Praise and Adoration.**
“You are worthy of the highest glory and honor.....”
3. **Statements of Petition.**
“We beseech You that we would be filled with Your Spirit.....”
4. **Statements of Intercession.**
“Lord God, we ask that You grant those that are sick peace.....”

5. Statements of Confession and requests for Forgiveness.

“Almighty and Merciful God, look with compassion upon these Your weak and sinful creatures. Forgive us of every iniquity and sin.....”

- ◆ **Offertory Prayer.** The offertory prayer is used for the dedication of our gifts to God and His service. It can contain words of thanksgiving for the gifts given and blessings upon those who gave. The offertory prayer should only pertain to the offering and giving.

“Dear God we bring you our gifts. May they be used for the work of Kingdom building. Grant that those who have given out of their resources may receive tenfold from the Your storehouse of blessings. In the name of Jesus Christ, Our Lord. Amen.

- ◆ **Silent Prayer.** Silent prayer is used either just prior to the call of worship to center the congregation and prepare them for the invocation or it can be used just prior to the altar prayer. The purpose of the silent prayer is to allow the worshiper the time to reflect and meditate on the Lord’s presence and to open ourselves up to hear from God.

When you pray silently you should ask the Lord to make His presence felt and known throughout the worship. It should be our prayer that the power of the Holy Spirit strip each worshiper of any and all things that would hinder His free manifestation of Himself.

- ◆ **The Benediction.** The benediction is the final prayer in worship. The benediction is the final pronouncement of God’s merciful grace upon His

people as they go forth to meet the demands of Kingdom building. You should never leave church prior to the benediction. There are several very good benedictions in the New Testament (see Hebrews 13:20-21; 1 Peter 5:10-11; Jude 24-25; Revelation 22:21). One of the most commonly used benedictions is found in 2 Corinthians 13:14, “The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit, be with you all.”

The Posture for Prayer

How should we approach God for prayer? Is there a posture for praying that is more acceptable than others? When we approach God in either public or private worship, it should always be in an attitude of humility (see Psalm 95:1-7). We must first bow our hearts and minds before God if we would realize His presence during our periods of prayer.

The most commonly used posture for prayer in the Bible is “prostration” that is bowing before the Lord of heaven. “And the man bowed down his head, and worshiped the Lord” (Genesis 24:26, KJV).

- ◆ **Exodus 9:29.** “And Moses said to him, ‘As soon as I go out of the city, I will *spread out my hands to the Lord*; the thunder will cease, and there will be hail no longer, that you may know that the earth is the Lord’s.”
- ◆ **Nehemiah 8:6.** “And Ezra blessed the Lord, the great God. And all the people answered Amen, Amen, *lifting up their hands*; and they *bowed their heads*, and worshiped the Lord with their *faces to the ground*” (KJV).
- ◆ **Ezekiel 3:23.** “Then I arose, and went forth into the plain; and behold, the

glory of the Lord stood there, like the glory which I saw by the river of Chebar, and I *fell on my face.*”

- ◆ **1 Kings 8:54.** “And it was so that, when Solomon had finished praying with all this prayer and supplication unto the Lord, he arose from before the altar of the Lord, and from *kneeling on his knees with his hands spread up to heaven.*”
- ◆ **Luke 18:11.** “The Pharisee *stood* and was praying thus with himself, ‘God, I thank Thee that I am not like other people: swindlers, unjust, adulterers, or even like this tax-gatherer.’”
- ◆ **Luke 22:41.** “And He withdrew from them about a stone’s throw, and He *knelt down* and began to pray.”

Overcoming Difficulties in Prayer

Prayer is at the heart of what it means to be a Christian. As I have pointed out, it is at the core of our relationship with God. Through prayer we can change the very spiritual climate of our lives, families and churches. Through prayer God can move in such tremendous ways to save and sanctify the saints. Prayer can change entire cities. God wants to use your life to reach others with the good news of His saving grace. When we pray we ignite the flame that makes the church of the Lord Jesus Christ come alive. When you and I become inflamed by the power of the Holy Spirit, then those around will feel the effects.

Because prayer is so vital to our walk and well-being, the enemy attacks us in our prayer life. How do you overcome distractions in your prayer life? What are some things that you can do to make your prayer life more meaningful? What can ministry leaders do to heighten the significance of prayer?

- ☛ Appoint a prayer ministry coordinator.
- ☛ Conduct periodic prayer vigils within the church.
- ☛ Lead the ministry on a spiritual retreat to focus on prayer.
- ☛ Assign specific team members specific needs to pray for.
- ☛ Pastors should preach and teach about prayer periodically.
- ☛ Develop an ongoing prayer workshop to teach about prayer.

Let me share some ideas and tips with you that may be helpful in dealing with mental attacks on your prayer life.

- ◆ Set aside a special time each day for you and the Lord.
- ◆ Practice using techniques you learned in meditation to push out thoughts that want to invade your mind.
- ◆ Read a book on prayer or a book of prayers. A list will be provided at the end of the this chapter.
- ◆ Seek the advice of older Christians who have developed strong prayer lives.
- ◆ Ask your pastor to assign you a prayer partner.
- ◆ Read and study the prayers of the Bible. Practice praying and meditating them as a means of growing in your prayer life.
- ◆ Pray daily with your spouse and talk about the kinds of thoughts that come into your mind when you are meditating and praying. If you are not married do the same things with a prayer partner.

- ◆ Keep a journal record of all of the thoughts that come to your mind. Ask the Lord to take them away and pray for mental cleansing.
- ◆ Turn off your television, radio and telephone when you decide to have your quiet time.
- ◆ When you travel continue to practice your prayer life.
- ◆ Work at dealing with distractions and look for helpful ways to defeat them before they defeat your prayer life.
- ◆ Spend time preparing yourself to pray by reading the Scriptures or a book of meditations. There are a number of very helpful and meaningful books that can be used to lay the groundwork for your time of prayer. The Daily Bread is a very good meditation book. <https://ourdailybread.ca/daily-bread-devotional/>

Intercession: Praying for Others

Intercession is one of the most important aspects of your prayer life. You should spend some time each day praying for other people. I want to give you suggestions that you can use to remember others in prayer.

Family Intercessory Prayer

Prayer must be a vital part of the life of every Christian family. The family that spends time together in prayer will spend less time in the divorce court and criminal court. Family prayer does not eliminate family problems. Rather it provides an opportunity for a family to come together and talk to each other and God about their concerns. The head of the family has to take the lead in spiritual development (see Ephesians 6:4). In the case of Joshua it was clear what his intentions were regarding the place of God within his family. “And if it is disagreeable I your sight to serve the

Lord, choose for yourselves today whom you will serve: whether the gods which your fathers served which were beyond the River, or the gods of the Amorites in whose land you are living; but as for me and my house, we will serve the Lord” (Joshua 24:15).

Families today are not all the same. Some families have no members, only a lone survivor. There are other families that have just a single parent and children. Then there are families in which the children have either left home or the husband and wife have never had children. Whatever the makeup of your family, prayer should be a vital part of your daily activities.

- ◆ Pray for your children.
- ◆ Pray for your spouse’s success that day.
- ◆ Pray for each other’s safety coming and going during the day.
- ◆ Pray for spiritual strength and the courage to do the right things.
- ◆ Pray that God will keep the enemy out of your thoughts.
- ◆ Pray that God will give each member victory over temptation.
- ◆ Pray that God will strengthen the family bond.
- ◆ Pray that God will protect the grandparents and family elderly.
- ◆ Pray for the family finances that God will continue to provide.
- ◆ Pray that God will anoint the family with the Holy Spirit.
- ◆ Pray that God will keep the marriage intact.
- ◆ Ask God for guidance and direction all day long.
- ◆ Pray that each will have a good and productive day.
- ◆ Pray that God’s Word will be real in the family.
- ◆ Pray that God will enable you all to love and respect each other.
- ◆ Pray that God will grant family peace and harmony.

- ◆ Pray that you will all be honest and truthful during the day.
- ◆ Pray for all unsaved family members that the Holy Spirit will convict them of their sins and that they will be saved.

Intercessory Prayer for the Church

- ◆ Pray that the Lord will have the preeminence in the church.
- ◆ Pray that the pastor and leaders will be Spirit-filled and Spirit-led.
- ◆ Ask God to anoint each worship service with His presence.
- ◆ Seek the mind and will of God for the congregation.
- ◆ Pray that the membership will sense the vision and call of God.
- ◆ Pray that God's people will be faithful in their service and giving.
- ◆ Pray that God will empower the church for ministry in the community.
- ◆ Ask God to save the children and youth of the church and neighborhood.
- ◆ Pray that the those who work for the church will love the Lord's house.
- ◆ Ask God to bless each ministry that the church supports.
- ◆ Pray that visitors will come and be made to feel welcomed.
- ◆ Pray that God will anoint the ministries of the church.
- ◆ Pray for the choir that they will sing to God's glory and not themselves.

Praying for God's Forgiveness

All of us need the forgiveness of God. Prayer is our avenue for asking and seeking the forgiveness of God. Even after we have made a commitment to follow Jesus Christ, we may still fall into sin. God is a God of forgiveness. It is in the heart and nature of God to forgive. In fact God invites us to seek His forgiveness.

“And my people who are called by My name humble themselves and pray, and

seek My face and turn from their wicked ways, then will I hear from heaven, will forgive their sin, and will heal their land (2 Chronicles 7:14).

Sin is something that we must all deal with. And we must never run from nor try to deny our failures and faults. We can no more run from our sins than we can run out of our skin. When we deny our own sinfulness we fall into the trap of self-deception which is the worst form of deception. God would not be God if He refused to forgive us. Read the following passages on forgiveness and make them a part of your prayer life: Psalm 51; Micah 7:19-20; Hebrews 4:16; 1 John 1:9.

Sin is the refusal of spiritual life, the rejection of the inner order and peace that come from our union with the divine will. In a word, sin is the refusal of God's will and of his love. It is not only a refusal of God's will and of his love. It is not a refusal to "do" this or that thing willed by God, or a determination to do what he forbids. It is more radically a refusal to be what we are, a rejection of our mysterious, contingent, spiritual reality hidden in the very mystery of God. Sin is our refusal to be what we were created to be--sons of God, images of God. Ultimately sin, while seeming to be an assertion of freedom, is a flight from the freedom and the responsibility of divine sonship.

Thomas Merton, *Life and Holiness*.

When you pray for forgiveness include some of the following petitions in your prayers.

- ◆ Seek God's forgiveness for failing to trust Him fully.

- ◆ Ask God to forgive your unintended and intended acts of disobedience.
- ◆ Pray that God will forgive your sins against your family.
- ◆ Seek God's forgiveness for your poor stewardship.
- ◆ Ask God's forgiveness for not serving and witnessing for Him.
- ◆ Pray for the forgiveness of God for the church and its leaders.
- ◆ Pray for God's forgiveness for your acts of malice and jealousy.
- ◆ Ask God to show you where you need forgiveness.

A Survey of Your Prayer Life

- I love to spend time in prayer.
- I enjoy spending time in prayer at the church.
- I have read a book on prayer in the past year.
- During the past year I have purchased a book about prayer.
- I have thought about gathering with friends to pray.
- I have no desire to attend a prayer meeting.
- I spend a portion of each day praying for my pastor and his family.
- Each day I set aside a quiet time to pray and meditate.
- I have frequently called someone who was sick and prayed with them.
- I would like to attend a prayer vigil.
- I am not sure that I know the proper way to pray.
- I pray often for the church and its ministry.

Think of actions you can take to increase the time you spend in prayer. Look For a prayer partner, someone with whom you can pray with daily or weekly.

For Further Reading

Harold A. Carter, *The Prayer Tradition of Black People*

Richard Foster, *Prayer: Finding the Heart's True Home*

T. W. Hunt, *The Doctrine of Prayer*

_____, *Church Prayer Ministry Manual*

Kenneth Leech, *True Prayer: An Invitation to Christian Spirituality*

Glen Martin and Dian Ginter, *Power House: A Step-By-Step Guide to Building A Church That Prays*

John McFadyen, *Prayers of the Bible*

Andrew Murray, *The Ministry of Intercession*

End Notes

1. Ibid. p. 33.
2. E.M. Bounds, *The Weapon of Prayer*, (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, p. 40), 1975.
3. Kenneth Leech, *True Prayer: An Invitation To Christian Spirituality*, (San Francisco: Harper and Row, Publishers, 1980), p. 3.
4. John McFadyen, *Prayers of the Bible*, (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1906) reprinted by AMG Publishers, 1995, p. 7.
5. Franklin Segler, *Christian Worship: Its Theology and Practice*, (Nashville: Broadman Press, 1967), p. 109.