

Waiting Upon God.

Prayer is not only a privilege for a Christian – but also a real necessity. 7 days without prayer makes one weak! Prayer is just as essential as water for a fish, petrol for a car, electricity / gas for a cooker etc. It has been described as the Christians' vital breath and native air.

We have the wonder of an audience with the Eternal God. Pray, pray, pray, no help but prayer. A breath that fleets beyond this iron world and touches Him that made it!

The greatness of a man before God is not measured in the length of time that he 'blows' but the time that he 'bows in prayer. Prayer is the hardest spiritual exercise. Prayer lags – life sags. When it is hardest to pray, pray hardest!

When a person engages in this spiritual exercise evidence is given of their salvation. Acts ch:9v11. "Behold he prayeth".

Prayer is far more than just asking for things. 1st Timothy ch:2v1. "I exhort therefore that first of all supplications, prayers, intercessions and giving of thanks be made for all men".

ACTS!

A stands for adoration; C for confession; T for thanksgiving; S for supplication.

Adoration.

Peter and John were freed from prison. The prayer that followed was not one of complaint but adoration. Acts ch:4v24. "Lord, Thou art God, who hast made Heaven, and earth, and the sea, and all that in them is".

Another example is found in Jeremiah ch:32v17, 18. "Ah Lord God! Behold, Thou hast made the Heaven and the earth by Thy great power and stretched out arm and there is nothing too hard for Thee. Thou showest loving kindness unto thousands and recompensest the iniquity of the fathers into the bosom of their children after them; the great, the Mighty God, the Lord of Hosts, is His Name". The first thing in our life should be worship / praise.

Confession.

We have an encouragement towards this in 1st John ch:1v9. "If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness".

Experiencing the presence of the Lord Isaiah felt so unworthy. Isaiah ch:65v5. "Woe is me! for I am undone; because I am a man of unclean lips, and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips: for mine eyes have seen the king; the Lord of Hosts".

Have we ever confessed the sins of others (and included ourselves)? Nehemiah ch:1v6. "Confess the sins of the Children of Israel, which we have sinned against Thee, both I and my father's house have sinned". Daniel was involved in the same sort of prayer – Daniel ch:9v5.

Thanksgiving.

1st Thessalonians ch:5v18. "In everything give thanks – for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus concerning you". In Ephesians ch:5v20, one of the evidences of a Spirit filled life is thankfulness. "Giving thanks always for all things unto God and the Father in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ".

Supplication.

In Genesis ch:18 we have Abraham supplicating on behalf of the people of the cities of the plain / Lot etc. "Wilt Thou destroy the righteous with the wicked"? He asked God to spare the cities if there were 50 / 45 / 40 etc. righteous. In the end only 4 were taken out and only three of them survived (Lot's wife turned back and was changed into a pillar of salt).

Promises that encourage us to pray.

Isaiah ch:65v24. "Before they call, I will answer; and while they are speaking, I will hear".

Isaiah ch:40v31. "But they that wait upon the Lord shall renew their strength; they shall mount up with wings as eagles, they shall run and not be weary, they shall walk, and not faint". (We receive an exchange of strength, we shall rise above our circumstances and make progress).

Luke ch:18v1. "Men ought always to pray, and not to faint".

John ch:14v13. "Whatsoever ye shall ask in my name, that will I do, that the Father may be glorified in the Son". Is this a blank cheque? For our requests to be answered our Father must be glorified!

John ch:15v7. "If ye abide in me, and My words abide in you, ye shall ask what ye will, and it shall be done unto you".

James ch:5v16. "The effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man availeth much".

Philippians ch:4v6. We have the antidote to anxious care – taking everything to God in prayer. 'When in a fix, remember Philippians 4v6'.

Conditions necessary for successful prayer.

1. We must be in the 'family' and thus have the right to call God our Father.

2. There should be no unforgiven sin in our lives. Psalm 24 "Who shall ascend / stand in His holy place. He that hath clean hands and a pure heart; who hath not lifted up his soul unto vanity nor sworn deceitfully".

Psalm 66v18. "If I regard iniquity in my heart, the Lord will not hear me".

1st Timothy ch:2v8. I will that the males pray everywhere, lifting up holy hands".

We should get beyond merely saying words. Ephesians ch:6v18. "Praying always with all praying and supplication in the Spirit".

How should we pray?

a). To God the Father.

Colossians ch:3v17. "Giving thanks to God and the Father by Him". (The question could be asked – why should we pray to our Father if He already knows what we are going to ask and what we really need? There would be something wrong in the relationship if an earthly son never spoke to his earthly father. God is happy when we confide in Him.)

b). In the Name of Christ.

John ch:14v14. "If ye shall ask any thing in My name, I will do it". We have a standing through His person and work. We pray in accord with His character.

c). By the Help of the Holy Spirit.

Romans ch:8v26. "We know not what we should pray for as we ought but the Spirit Himself maketh intercession for us with groanings which cannot be uttered". He is the sole interpreter of needs of the human heart.

Note:- We have no example in scripture of anyone praying to the Holy Spirit. Jude v20 exhorts us to pray "in the Holy Ghost".

We should pray:-

Intelligently. Job ch:23v4. "I would order my cause before Him and will fill my mouth with arguments". We should present reasoned requests.
We should hold God to His promises. Elijah did this.

Trustfully. We should pray in faith. Not only that God can but that God will. James ch:1v5-8. "Ask in faith, nothing wavering...let not that man think that he shall receive any thing of the Lord"

Submissively. We should have the attitude "If the Lord will" (James ch:4v15). We do not pray to twist God's arm to carry out our wishes. 1st John ch:5v14. "If we ask anything according to his will, He heareth us".
One person summed up prayer as 'surrender'.

Secretly. Matthew ch:6v6 “enter in thy closet” – private prayer should be in secret.

Unitedly. It is important for each family to have their ‘altar’. The family that prays together, stays together.

There is value in united public prayer – Matthew ch:18v19. “If two of you shall agree on earth...it will be done for them of My Father which is in Heaven”.
Acts ch:2v42. “They continued...in prayers”.

How long for? For private pray there is no limit. Martin Luther used to spend three hours in prayer when he was busiest.

As regards public prayer the Lord’s prayer in John ch:17 is the longest in the New Testament and it would have been uttered in about 4/5 minutes.

The Longest prayer in the Old Testament was Solomon’s dedication of the Temple (1st Kings ch:8). It would have taken about 8 minutes. If someone prays for longer than that we can say, ‘a greater than Solomon is here’.

Not vainly. We should not use vain repetitions (Matthew ch:6v7). Note how the Lord prayed in John ch:17. ‘Holy Father’, ‘Righteous Father’. In addressing His Father He used different phrases.

Regularly. David prayed morning and evening. Daniel three times a day. 1st Thessalonians ch:5v17. “Pray without ceasing”. We should constantly be in an attitude of prayer. We need to keep short accounts with God.

Humbly. David mentions kneeling – Psalm 95v6. Daniel did the same (ch:6v10). It portrays an attitude of humility. We have the contrasting attitudes in Luke ch:18 of the Pharisee and the Publican. The Pharisee prayer ‘with himself’. Pride never receives anything; humility is a prerequisite for blessing.

(In John ch:11 the Lord Jesus was standing).

(We close our eyes to save distraction.)

Earnestly. There is a place for repetition. It is an evidence of our earnestness. The Lord prayer for three sessions in the Garden of Gethsemane. Paul prayed three times for his thorn in the flesh to be removed. One of the things said of the Lord that we’ll never be able to understand completely, is – Luke ch:22v44. “He prayed more earnestly”. Romans ch:15v30. “Strive together with me in your prayers”.

We have examples of fasting and prayer – Acts ch:13v3. Acts ch:14v23. “Night and day praying exceedingly”,
(1st Thessalonians 3v10). Exceedingly means – ‘above and out of measure’.

Persistently. We are taught to pray with persistency. Matthew ch:7v7. “Ask and keep on asking”. Elijah prayer seven times on Mt. Carmel.

Specifically. We’re not likely to notice any answer, which would encourage us, if we just pray ‘God bless the missionaries’.

We have the solemn and searching words of Samuel to Saul (1st Samuel ch:12v23). “God forbid that I should sin against the Lord in ceasing to pray for you”.

There are plenty of subjects for prayer – apart from our own needs. Our family, friends, neighbours, the work of God etc.

Successfully. James ch:5v18. “The effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man availeth much”.

Some find it helpful to have a prayer list.

George Muller read the scriptures first thing in the morning and found them a great help as he went to prayer.

We could use Schofield’s list of prayers in the Bible and learn from them. The Bible is the believers’ prayer guide.

No request is too big or too small. God is on 24 hour a day call (Psalm 121). “neither slumber or sleep”.

If every Christian was praying at the same time the Lord would hear them all and is able to answer all of them.

Examples of prayer.

We find many in the Acts of the Apostles. Prayer is mentioned some 58 times in 28 chapters. Acts ch:1v14. "These all continued with one accord in prayer and supplication".

Romans ch:10v1. Paul prayed for his fellow Jews despite the fact that they caused him so much pain / sorrow. "My heart's desire and prayer to God for Israel is that they might be saved".
Paul prayed primarily for the spiritual blessing of the saints – e.g. Ephesians ch:3v14-19.

Colossians ch:4v12. Epaphras. "Always labouring fervently for you in prayers, that ye may stand perfect and complete in all the will of God".

The Lord's example.

The Lord' prayer life was so significant. He even spent nights in prayer (Luke ch:5v16). He prayed in solitary places / up mountains etc.

He prayed before events. Before the Spirit of God came upon Him – Luke ch:3v21, 22; appointing His disciples – Luke ch:6v12; telling His disciples that He was going to suffer – Luke ch:9v18; transfiguration – Luke ch:9v28; raising Lazarus – John ch:11v41 & 42; teaching His disciples to pray – Luke ch:11v1. Before leaving His own we have the Lord's 7 requests in John ch:17 – v1 & 5 for Himself; v11 and 15 for His disciples; v21 and 24 for all believers including ourselves! Before the cross we have His prayers in Gethsamane.

He prayed after events. After healing – Mark ch:1v35; fame – Luke ch:5v15 & 16; feeding the multitude - Mark ch:6v46;

He prayed during His greatest trial – on the cross when we have His seven cries.

Answers to prayer.

Basically there are three. Yes / No / Wait and you'll receive the answer later.

We have the interesting example of delay in John ch:11. If the Lord had healed Lazarus we would never have had the words – "I am the resurrection and the life..." (God might not give us something that is good so that He will give us the best!)

In Daniel's experience there was a time when the answer to his prayer was delayed through the work of Satan. The last thing Satan wants to see is a believer praying. (There needs to be a good relationship between husband and wife that 'their prayers be not hindered' 1st Peter ch:3v7.)

In Acts ch:12 the church was astonished at the answer to their prayers – Peter was freed from prison. A few of the other examples of answered prayer in scripture are below.

Jacob prayed and Esau's heart was softened. Hannah was barren, she prayed and Samuel was born and given to the Lord. Elijah prayed and there was a drought for three and a half years. Once Israel had repented he prayed for rain – God could bless them once more. Elisha prayed and the child revived. Samson prayed and his strength returned. Job prayer and his captivity turned. Daniel prayed and Gabriel was sent. Paul and Silas prayed (Acts ch:16) and there was an earthquake. The result was the salvation of the jailer and his household.

When the early church prayed things happened. Acts ch:4v23-33. "The place was shaken....they were filled with the Holy Ghost and they spake the word of God with boldness.... With great power gave the apostles witness....and great grace was upon them all".

We can only advance on our knees!

In prayer we have the privilege of (1) Developing our relationship with God our Father! (2) Knowing the Saviour's support (What a friend we have in Jesus...)! (3) Knowing the constant help of the Spirit of God who is living within us!