

Prayer

Introduction:

One may ask, “Why include Prayer in with the great doctrines of salvation?” Prayer is every bit part and parcel of the privilege of being saved. When we are born again, the lines of communication — severed because of our sinfulness — are established. Just as breathing is vital to physical life, so prayer is the vital ‘breath’ of our spiritual life.

I. What is Prayer?

In its Basic sense the word ‘prayer’ simply means “asking.” To pray is to ask.

In its broader sense, prayer means the act of communication with God, and this involves many aspects of which “asking” is but one.

Prayer involves many forms. Just as we may become physically ill through an unbalanced diet, so we cannot expect spiritual health except through a balanced prayer life.

The following acrostic will help in understanding the parts of prayer:

A — adoration
C — confession
T — thanksgiving
S — supplication

A. Adoration.

This is the act of verbally worshipping God. The word ‘worship’ means to “ascribe worth’ — Revelation 5:9, 12.

This aspect of prayer — simply adoring the Lord for Who and what He is — is a lost ‘art’ amongst many Christians, usually because it involves time, meditation upon the Word of God, and aspirations of the soul and spirit (not mere words!)

See: Psalm 33:1; 103:1; 146:2-3; 150:2; Matthew 11:25-26; 6:13; I Corinthians 9:15; Ephesians 5:19; Colossians 3:16.

B. Confession.

As weeds and debris block the pipes and channels, so sin blocks the channels of communication in the heart. See: Isaiah 59:1-2; Psalm 66:18.

Before we come to the Lord, there ought to be some earnest examination of our hearts and lives, followed by confession and forsaking of sin.

See: Psalm 51:10; I John 1:9

C. Thanksgiving

Christians need to cultivate the habit of being thankful in all things.

See: Philippians 4:6; I Thessalonians 5:18; I Timothy 4:4-5

D. Supplication

Supplication is another word meaning prayer. It also means “asking.” This is the easiest part in praying for most believers. Supplication falls into 2 categories:

1. Petition

This means asking for oneself. Some areas are:

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- a) In Need of Wisdom — James 1:5
- b) In Destitute Circumstances — Psalm 102:17
- c) In Times of Suffering — James 5:13
- d) In Expression of Needs — Philippians 4:13; Matthew 6:11
- e) In Situations of Injustice — Exodus 22:22-23

2. Intercession

This means asking for others. For example:

- a) Fellow Christians — James 5:16
- b) Pastors — Hebrews 13:7
- c) The Sick — James 5:14-16
- d) Rulers — I Timothy 2:1-3 (For their salvation)
- e) Enemies — Luke 6:28
- f) The Lost — Psalm 126:6; I Timothy 2:1, 4
- g) Sons and Daughters — I Chronicles 29:19
- h) The Jews — Romans 10:1; Psalm 122:6

D. L. Moody said, "Prayer is the lifting up of the desires unto God for all things agreeable to His will in Christ's Name, with the thankful acknowledgment of His mercies, and the humble confessions of our sins."

II. The Importance of Prayer

The importance of prayer for the Christian is seen in:

A. The Prominence given to it in Scripture.

Many Bible characters are noted for their prayers. For example:

1. Abraham — Genesis 18:23-33
2. Hannah — I Samuel 1:27
3. David — Psalm 55:17
4. Solomon — I Kings 3:5-10
5. Daniel — Daniel 6:10
6. Peter — Acts 10:9

B. The Example of the Lord Jesus Christ.

See: Mark 1:35; 9:28-29; 14:38

C. The Emphasis given it in the Early Churches.

See: Acts 2:42; 4:24, 31; 12:5, 12; 13:3.

D. The Fact that it is Commanded.

See: Luke 18:1; Colossians 4:2; I Thessalonians 5:17

E. The Sin of Prayerlessness.

See: I Samuel 12:23; Isaiah 43:21-22

F. The Value of it in Victorious Christian Warfare.

See: Ephesians 6:12-18

III. How Men Ought to Pray

The Word of God gives much instruction as to how Christians should pray. There are 4 major areas to consider:

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A. The Right Attitude.

The Bible places little or no relevance upon the position of the body of one praying. We may stand — Mark 11:25, kneel — I Kings 8:54, lie prostrate — Matthew 26:39, etc.

What is necessary is the right attitude of the soul.

In Matthew 6:9-12, the Lord Jesus Christ gives us a “model prayer” (not the Lord’s Prayer!) This teaches much concerning attitude.

1. Confidence — “Our Father which art in heaven”
2. Reverence — “Hallowed be Thy Name”, See: Psalm 145:19
3. Expectancy — “Thy Kingdom come”
4. Submission — “Thy will be done”
5. Dependence — “Give us this day our daily bread”
6. Forgiveness — “Forgive us our debts”, See: Psalm 34:15
7. Love — “as we forgive our debtors”
8. Humility — “lead us not into temptation”
See also: II Chronicles 7:14; Psalm 10:17; James 4:16
9. Fatih — “deliver us from evil”
10. Unselfishness — note how the Lord uses the pronouns ‘us’ and ‘our’ — not “I”.

B. The Right Manner.

1. We pray to God our Heavenly Father.
Matthew 6:9; Luke 11:11-13; John 16:23
2. We pray in Jesus’ Name.
John 14:13-14. This means we are to ask on the basis of the merits of Jesus Christ, drawing on His account.
3. We pray in the Power of the Holy Spirit.
Ephesians 6:18; Jude 20; Romans 8:26-27

Prayer is to the Father, through the Son, in the Spirit.
4. We pray Believing.
Hebrews 11:6; James 1:5-7; I John 5:13-15.
5. We Pray Persistently.
Ephesians 6:8; Matthew 7:7.
6. We pray Earnestly.
Romans 15:30; James 5:16
7. Other Prayer Attitudes.
 - a) With delight in the Lord — Psalm 37:4-5
 - b) In Sincerity — Psalm 145:18
 - c) With Thankfulness — Philippians 4:6-7
 - d) With Wholeheartedness — Jeremiah 29:13
 - e) With Persistence — Luke 18:1
 - f) In Obedience — I John 3:22

C. The Right Place.

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There is no place where we cannot pray. Jonah prayed from the belly of a whale; Paul and Silas in a prison cell; etc. We can pray in public — Acts 27:35; in the meetings of a church — Ephesians 5:19-20; and in private — Matthew 6:6.

“The secret of success in prayer is success in secret prayer.”

The following are some essentials for secret prayer:

1. A Definite Time — “when”
2. A Definite Act — “enter”
3. A Definite Place — “thy closet”
4. A Definite Separation — “when thou hast shut the door”
5. A Definite Object — “pray to thy Father”

D. The Right Time.

God’s prayer channels are open 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, all year and every year.

We are exhorted to pray without ceasing — I Thessalonians 5:17. Yet it is extremely important for every Christians to develop the discipline of set times of prayer — Psalm 55:16-17; Daniel 6:10.

IV. Hindrances to Effective Prayer

A. Unconfessed Sin

Deuteronomy 1:43-45; Psalm 66:18; Isaiah 1:15; 59:1-2

B. Hardness of Heart

Mark 11:25-26

C. Selfish Motives

James 4:2

D. Failing to Honor One’s Wife.

I Peter 3:6-7

E. Self-satisfaction or Lack of Appreciation.

F. Idols in the Heart.

(Anything put before God.)

G. Indifference to the Things of God.

Proverbs 1:24-30

H. Neglect of Those in Need.

Proverbs 21:13

I. Despising God’s Word

Proverbs 28:9; Zechariah 7:13

J. Vain Repetitions.

Matthew 6:7

K. Spiritual Instability.

James 1:6-7

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V. The Results of Prayer

- A. God is Glorified — John 14:13
- B. Answers are Given — I John 5:14-15; John 14:13-14
- C. Great things are Wrought — James 5:16
- D. Completed Joy — John 16:24

VI. Precious Prayer Proverbs

1. Prayer avails when everything else fails.
2. "More things are wrought by prayer than this world dreams of." (Tennyson)
3. The secret of success in prayer is success in secret prayer.
4. We can do more than pray after we have prayed, but we cannot do more than pray until we have prayed.
5. Prayer makes the common man uncommon, and is able to move the highest heaven and shake the deepest hell.
6. Pray as if everything depended on God, and work as if everything depended on you.
7. We should not say, "Listen, Lord, Thy servant speaketh," but, "Speak, Lord, Thy servant heareth."
8. Do not divide your life into compartments of such exclusiveness that there is no intercommunication.
9. The saddest day in a preacher's life is when he lets his hand slip out of God's hand.
10. Prayer will either drive sin out of our lives, or sin will drive prayer out of our lives.
11. We cannot be any more effective in our testimony with men than we are in our closets with God.
12. Prayer must not be an occasional act, but a fundamental attitude of life.
13. Do not allow prayer to be relegated to the scrap heaps of piecemeal performances.
14. When in our Churches we have money, we have what money can do; when we have education, we have what education can do; when we have culture, we have what culture can do; when we have organization, we have what organization can do, when we have society, we have what society can do; when we have size, we have what size can do; — but when we have prayer, we have what God can do.
15. Prayer gets lost in the rivalry of competing interests.
16. Prayer is not overcoming God's reluctance, but laying hold of God's highest willingness.
17. Prayer is that contemplation of God which ends in resignation to His will.
18. Prayer is not an hysterical spasm, but a spiritual calm.
19. Neglect of prayer is the Delilah who clips the wing of many a ministerial Samson.
20. When God can reach down and do anything He wishes with me, then I can reach up and do anything I wish with God.
21. We are never so high as when we are on our knees.
22. We praise prayer more than we practice it.
23. Faith never blooms so beautifully as in hard, rocky places.
24. When you come to the end of your rope, tie a knot in it and hang on.
25. Remember the tea kettle; it never sings until it gets into hot water.
26. Most men of power have found that it was best to look into the face of God in the morning before looking into the face of their fellow man — thus putting God between them and their problems and assuring themselves of victory.
27. All our libraries and studies are mere emptiness compared with our closets.
28. The real man — God's man — is made in the closet.
29. Talking to man for God is great, but talking to God for man is greater.
30. We cannot be much for God unless we are much with God. The Christians who are the mightiest in their closets with God are the mightiest in their witness to men.

VII. Fasting

The subject of prayer and fasting is one of the least understood and least practiced aspects of Christian walk. Many think of fasting as medieval, monastic, or masochistic,

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Fasting has indeed been abused by many religious groups — Luke 18:12 — but cannot be rejected as a valid practice on these grounds.

A. What is Biblical Fasting?

1. In General Terms.

The term “fasting” simply means ‘abstinence.’

Usually this means going without food, and it may be done for medical reasons (prior to surgery,) health reasons (to lose weight,) or spiritual reasons.

2. In Specific Terms.

- a) Fasting usually involves abstinence from food — Esher 4:15-16
- b) Fasting can include abstinence from other things such as bathing or sleep — II Samuel 12:15-20
- c) Fasting may only involve abstinence from certain foods — Daniel 10:3
- d) Fasting can involve abstinence from other normal physical needs — I Corinthians 7:5.

Fasting is an act of subduing the flesh in order to accentuate the spirit. See: I Corinthians 9:27.

Biblical fasting is a deliberate act of physical denial for the purpose of concentrating on spiritual things.

B. Why Should Biblical Fasting Be Practiced?

1. Because we are detached from Christ’s physical presence. — Luke 5:35.
2. Because we are expected to Fast. — Matthew 6:17 “...when ye fast...” — not , “if”
3. Because we have a wonderful promise from God. — Matthew 6:18
4. Because we are in Good company.
 - a) Moses — Exodus 34:28.
 - b) Hannah — I Samuel 12:7
 - c) David — II Samuel 12:16
 - d) Elijah — I Kings 19:8
 - e) Daniel — Daniel 10:3
 - f) Esther — Esther 4:16
 - g) Ezra — Ezra 8:21
 - h) Nehemiah — Nehemiah 1:4
 - i) Anna — Luke 2:36-37
 - j) John the Baptist — Luke 5:33
 - k) The Lord Jesus Christ — Matthew 4:1-2
 - l) Paul — II Corinthians 11:27

C. When Should Biblical Fasting Be Practiced?

Obviously, fasting is special — it is not a daily thing we do. The Bible does not say, “fast without ceasing.”

There are special times when fasting is important and sometimes necessary:

1. When we face severe temptation or testing.
Matthew 4:2; II Samuel 12:16; I Kings 19:8
2. When we earnestly seek wisdom in a matter.
Ezra 8:21-23; Daniel 9:2-3. Fasting heightens spiritual perception, and as such is an aid to understanding the Word of God.

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3. When we are engaged in a spiritual battle.
Matthew 17:19-21; Mark 9:25-29; Ephesians 6:12
4. When we are faced with seemingly impossible situations.
Nehemiah 1:2-4
5. When we are undertaking new ministries or direction.
Acts 13:2-3, 14:23
6. When we are faced with great danger.
Esther 4:16
7. When we are chastened of God.
In the Old Testament, sin was often a cause for fasting. The wicked city of Ninevah was spared God's judgment in response to fasting — Jonah 3:5-10. Judgment upon king Ahab was deferred after he fasted — II Kings 21:27-29.
8. When we seek power over the flesh.
Pride and a too-full stomach are old bed-fellows. Satan most often uses the avenue of appetite in his approach to man — for example, Genesis 3:6; 9:20; 25:28, 34; 27:4; Exodus 16:3; Luke 12:19; Luke 4:3; and I Corinthians 10:6-7.

D. How Should Biblical Fasting Be Practiced?

Fasting is initiated by God, and the time, the length, and the kind of fast are all of His choosing.

1. Fasting is to be done unto the Lord.
Zechariah 7:4-6. Fasting will be unacceptable and ineffective without a right relationship with the Lord - Isaiah 58:3-5; Joel 2:12-13.
2. Fasting is to be a personal, individual matter.
It is not a religious ritual — Luke 18:9-12; it is not for outward show — Matthew 6:16-18.
3. Fasting is to be accompanied by prayer.
Most Scriptures dealing with fasting combine it with prayer.