



The Doctrine of Prayer

What Is Prayer?

I. PRAYER IS: MADE UNTO GOD

A. Our prayers ascend to God

1. First, we must understand that our prayers do not simply dissipate into the air. They are not aimless words spoken without a destination.
2. Nor are they spoken unto an unknown “higher-power” that may or may not hear us.
3. The destination of our prayer is directly to God in heaven. The scripture assures us that “their voice was heard, and their **prayer came up to his holy dwelling place, even unto heaven**” (2 Chronicles 30:27). (Consider also 2 Chronicles 32:20)
4. When we pray, we are communing directly with the Almighty, the God of all creation. The one who created everything that exists, by the word of his power, is the one to whom we pray and speak unto. What an incredible thought! (Consider Psalm 54:2, Psalm 55:1, Psalm 64:1, Psalm 75:1)
 - a. There is no other god that can hear the prayers of the worshippers. There is no other god that can receive the people’s prayers. There is no other god that has any ability to know when prayer is made.
 - b. Consider the contest between the prophets of Baal and Elijah found in 1 Kings 18:17-40. The prophets of Baal cried out to him from morning until midday. They cried aloud and cut themselves trying to get Baal’s attention but to no avail. Baal did not answer and did not show up. Regarding their prayers unto Baal, the Bible says “that there was neither voice, nor any to answer, **nor any that regarded.**” (1 Kings 18:29) Baal was wholly incapable of even regarding the prayers of his own prophets.
 - c. However, when the prophets of Baal ceased their attempts, it was Elijah’s turn. He prayed one simple prayer, “Hear me, O LORD, hear me, that this people may know that thou art the LORD God, and that thou hast turned their heart back again.” The one true God heard and immediately fire fell and consumed the altar (1 Kings 18:37-38).
 - d. Understanding and keeping in mind who it is that we are praying to and realizing just how great God is, should give us an extreme appreciation for the privilege of prayer and the power in prayer!



B. God is listening to our prayers

1. What benefit would it be if our prayers are made unto God, ascending up into heaven but he could not or would not hear our prayers?
2. The Psalmist cried unto God “Hear me when I call, O God of my righteousness: thou hast enlarged me when I was in distress; have mercy upon me, and hear my prayer.” (Psalm 4:1) How discouraging would it be if God did not have the capacity to hear us all at the same time? What if God had a limit to how many people’s prayers he could listen to at a time?
3. It is important to know that our prayers are made unto God AND he hears us.
4. The amazing truth is that God hears all the prayers of his people. Psalm 65:2 confirms this and says “**O thou that hearest prayer**, unto thee shall all flesh come.”
5. Psalm 34:15 promises that “The eyes of the LORD are upon the righteous, and **his ears are open unto their cry.**”
6. One of the incredible blessings in being a child of God is that he hears us when we pray unto him. We can confidently pray with understanding that the God of all the earth cares and his ears are open unto our cries!

II. PRAYER IS: FROM THE HEART

A. Prayer should be a heartfelt communication unto God

1. As we begin to study prayers in the Scripture, we will see a common thread between most of the prayers looked at.
2. Prayers are made unto God whilst in the midst of stress, turmoil, bitterness of soul, grief, times of great need, victories, achievements, rejoicing, and worship.
3. These are all times of great stirring of the individual’s heart, his inner man.
4. True prayer comes from the heart of an individual and is sincere. Consider this Bible verse “Arise, cry out in the night: in the beginning of the watches **pour out thine heart like water before the face of the Lord:**” (Lamentations 2:19). The source of prayer is the heart of man.
5. Words can be spoken to God without heartfelt sincerity but prayer is more than speaking heartless words unto God.
6. We speak to God because he alone is able and over all. This is the reason that we bring the deepest matters of our heart to the Lord. He is not a mere man and prayer is not a mere conversation. It is communion with the most holy God and thus we pour out our hearts to him.



7. Psalm 142:1-2 demonstrates this truth well. It says “**I cried unto the LORD** with my voice; with my voice unto the LORD did I make my supplication. **I poured out my complaint before him**; I shewed before him my trouble.” The psalmist is not simply speaking meaningless words to God but he is pouring out his heart to God.
 8. Note: Both passages referenced above say “pour out” and “poured out” indicating an emptying of their hearts before the Lord. Get alone with God and spend time pouring out your heart before him. Bring it all to him.
 9. Consider the sincerity in the following sampling of scriptural prayers:
 - a. “I prayed therefore unto the LORD, and said, O Lord GOD, destroy not thy people and thine inheritance, which thou hast redeemed through thy greatness, which thou hast brought forth out of Egypt with a mighty hand.” (Deuteronomy 9:26)
 - b. “For thou, O LORD of hosts, God of Israel, hast revealed to thy servant, saying, I will build thee an house: therefore hath thy servant found in his heart to pray this prayer unto thee. And now, O Lord GOD, thou art that God, and thy words be true, and thou hast promised this goodness unto thy servant:” (2 Samuel 7:27-28)
 - c. “And said, I beseech thee, O LORD God of heaven, the great and terrible God, that keepeth covenant and mercy for them that love him and observe his commandments:” (Nehemiah 1:5) and he continues “We have dealt very corruptly against thee, and have not kept the commandments, nor the statutes, nor the judgments, which thou commandedst thy servant Moses.” (Nehemiah 1:6)
 - d. “Then Hezekiah turned his face toward the wall, and prayed unto the LORD, And said, Remember now, O LORD, I beseech thee, how I have walked before thee in truth and with a perfect heart, and have done that which is good in thy sight. And Hezekiah wept sore.” (Isaiah 38:2-3)
 - e. “And he was withdrawn from them about a stone’s cast, and kneeled down, and prayed, Saying, Father, if thou be willing, remove this cup from me: nevertheless not my will, but thine, be done.” (Luke 22:41-42)
- B. Prayer is not to be vain
1. The scripture speaks about not using “vain repetitions” and “much speaking” (Matthew 6:7) in regards to prayer. It is not the words themselves that are vain, for words are simply a means of conveyance or communication and therefore it is the intent or heart of the individual that can be vain in their prayers.



2. We have a tendency to approach prayer as an obligation rather than a benefit and blessing as children of God. This often leads to prayers that are lacking sincerity because we are not truly communing with the Lord but rather simply putting in our time. It would be far better and effective to spend less time in prayer but have it be from our hearts and in sincerity.
3. Another tendency we have is to try to impress with our prayers. This can be to impress those listening or it can be to impress God. There is a particular pressure when praying in public to sound “spiritual” and at times to almost preach in our prayers. We want to embellish, add more beauty, show scriptural knowledge, or sound profound when praying because no one wants to sound simple or ineloquent. The truth is that all our efforts to sound “spiritual” prove that the prayer is not from our hearts but is for the applause of men. When we put more thought into how we sound and using impressive words rather than simply pouring our hearts out to God, we diminish the effectiveness of prayer. Prayer from the heart can be simple, can sound childish. It is not necessarily about the words we use but the content of our hearts.
4. Consider these passages:
 - a. In Matthew 6:5 Jesus warned his disciples not to be like the Pharisees who “pray standing in the synagogues and in the corners of the streets, that they may be seen of men.” We are quick to condemn the Pharisees but the truth is that at times we are just like the Pharisees in our prayers. We want those hearing our prayer to think highly of us and be impressed with our eloquence, faith, scriptural knowledge, etc. When we pray thus, be assured that just like the Pharisees, our prayers “have their reward.”
 - b. In Luke 18:10-14 Jesus speaks this parable of two men who went to the synagogue to pray. The Pharisee and the publican both went to pray and the Pharisee prayed his vain prayer in the pride of his heart whereas the publican, in the humility and sincerity of his heart, prayed. Speaking of the Pharisee, Jesus says that he “prayed thus **with himself.**” The Pharisee’s prayer was vain, not sincere, and this prayer went no further than to himself who heard it. When we speak words towards God but out of the vanity and insincerity of our hearts, it would seem that these “prayers” reach only unto ourselves.

III. PRAYER IS: COMMUNICATING SOMETHING TO GOD

A. Communicating Rejoicing

1. When the Lord provided Hannah with a son (Samuel) she kept her vow and brought him to the temple to live.



2. She then prayed and expressed her joy to God. “And Hannah prayed, and said, My heart rejoiceth in the LORD, mine horn is exalted in the LORD: my mouth is enlarged over mine enemies; because I rejoice in thy salvation.” (1 Samuel 2:1)
3. There was no request in this prayer but only rejoicing.
4. Prayer is communicating our rejoicing unto God.

B. Communicating Praise/Worship

1. The psalmist requests of the Lord to “Accept, I beseech thee, **the freewill offerings of my mouth**, O LORD” (Psalm 119:108).
 - a. A freewill offering was a voluntary offering of praise to the Lord. This freewill offering was “a sweet savour unto the LORD” (Numbers 15:3).
 - b. Numbers 15:3 was referring to a freewill offering made upon the altar but the psalmist was indicating that his praise to God was also a freewill offering and a sweet savour unto the Lord.
2. Hebrews 13:15 sheds further light on this matter saying “By him therefore let us offer the sacrifice of praise to God continually, that is, the fruit of our lips giving thanks to his name.”
 - a. This passage confirms that the freewill offerings of my mouth are sacrifices of praise to God.
 - b. This sacrifice or freewill offering is the “offerings of my mouth” and the “fruit of our lips”.
3. Prayer is communicating praise and worship to God.

C. Communicating Thanksgiving

1. Asaph begins his communication unto God by giving him thanks. “Unto thee, O God, **do we give thanks**, unto thee do we give thanks: for that thy name is near thy wondrous works declare.” (Psalm 75:1)
 - a. There are a vast number of reasons to give God thanks. Reasons can be for physical help or spiritual help
 - b. In this case, Asaph thanked God because his name was near them and because of his wondrous works.
2. Giving thanks unto God was so important to the psalmist that he felt compelled to disrupt his sleep, rising at midnight. “At midnight I will rise to give thanks unto thee because of thy righteous judgments.” (Psalm 119:62)



- a. The psalmist did not restrict himself to thanking the Lord to when it was convenient but rather chose to sacrifice sleep in order to rise and do so.
- b. What does this show about the sincerity in the thanks? The fact that he was willing to sacrifice what his flesh wanted indicates that he valued God above himself and understood that God was worthy.
- c. God has done more for us than we can comprehend. More than the ten lepers from Luke 17:11-19, if we are saved, but yet how often are we like the nine who failed to turn back.
- d. Instead, we need to be like the single healed leper who returned to Jesus “and with a loud voice glorified God,” (verse 15) and “giving him thanks” (verse 16). Our thanksgiving glorifies God and this should be our desire.

3. Prayer is communicating thanksgiving unto God.

D. Communicating Requests

1. At the end of Samson’s life, he called out unto the Lord and the last communication he had unto God, while yet living, was to make a request of God.
 - a. “And Samson called unto the LORD, and said, O Lord GOD, remember me, I pray thee, and strengthen me, I pray thee, only this once, O God, that I may be at once avenged of the Philistines for my two eyes.” (Judges 16:28)
 - b. Twice in this prayer did Samson say “I pray thee” which is not saying “I am speaking/praying unto you”. What pray means here is “request”.
 - c. Samson spoke his request unto God which is that God would strengthen him one last time.
2. The Apostle Paul wrote an epistle to the Philippian believers and told them that he was praying for them and that part of that was making requests of God for them. “Always in every prayer of mine for you all making request with joy” (Philippians 1:4).
3. Furthermore, the Bible admonishes to make requests of God. “Be careful for nothing; but in every thing by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known unto God.” (Philippians 4:6)
4. Prayer is communicating our requests unto God.

E. Communicating Desires

1. There is no shame in bringing our desires before the Lord if our desires are righteous and godly.



2. Psalm 10:17 says, “Lord, thou hast heard the desire of the humble: thou wilt prepare their heart, thou wilt cause thine ear to hear:”
 3. Psalm 21:2 says, “Thou hast given him his heart’s desire, and hast not withholden the request of his lips. Selah.”
 4. As a child of God, the Father loves us and cares about our desires. King David was a man after God’s own heart who loved the Lord and he made his desires known unto God.
 5. Let your godly desires be known unto God and seek his face for them.
 6. Prayer is communicating our desires unto the Lord.
- F. Communicating Cares -The Bible tells us that we are to speak to the Lord about the things in life that cause us to be full of cares. “Casting all your care upon him; for he careth for you.” (1 Peter 5:7)
1. Above in our notes we saw that the Lord wants us to “be careful for nothing” (Philippians 4:6).
 2. The Lord wants us to talk to him about anything that troubles us and causes us to be full of cares.
 3. We are not meant to carry these cares but God would have us cast them upon him.
- G. Communicating Grief
1. Hannah was in the midst of great grief and when she prayed, she expressed this grief unto God. “And Hannah answered and said, No, my lord, I am a woman of a **sorrowful spirit**: I have drunk neither wine nor strong drink, but have poured out my soul before the LORD. Count not thine handmaid for a daughter of Belial: **for out of the abundance of my complaint and grief have I spoken hitherto.** (1 Samuel 1:15-16)
 - a. God made mankind to have emotions and feelings and he does not expect us to hide our emotions from him.
 - b. Hannah was deeply grieved over her barrenness and she did not hide this from the Lord but rather expressed her pain and desire.
 - c. If God did not respect Hannah unloading her grief on him, he would likely not have answered her prayer.
 - d. Instead, God listened and acted on her behalf.
 2. David, on multiple occasions, expressed the sorrow of his heart to the Lord. “Hear my prayer, O LORD...” (Psalm 143:1) and “Therefore is my spirit overwhelmed within me; my heart within me is desolate.” (Psalm 143:4)



- a. The Lord cares for us and that which causes our hearts to sorrow.
 - b. There is comfort in knowing that the Lord desires to commune with us and would have us express our heartaches to him.
 - c. God cares for us and is ever willing to hear our sorrows. He is not a man that will be dragged down by the pain of our hearts. He can handle all our griefs and sorrows.
3. Prayer is communicating our grief unto the Lord.

H. Communicating Questions

1. King Zedekiah was in need of answers from God so he requested Jeremiah to pray and ask the Lord his question. “Enquire, I pray thee, of the LORD for us; for Nebuchadrezzar king of Babylon maketh war against us; if so be that the LORD will deal with us according to all his wondrous works, that he may go up from us.” (Jeremiah 21:2)
 - a. The best source for answers to our problems is God.
 - b. Thus, when Zedekiah had a pressing issue and needed answers he turned to the Lord.
 - c. When we have questions in our life, let us turn to God in prayer and ask him for the answers.
 2. Sometimes, we have questions about God’s workings in our life and there is plenty of biblical pattern to even question God.
 - a. Psalm 10:1 is a great example of questioning God, “Why standest thou afar off, O LORD? Why hidest thou thyself in times of trouble?”
 - b. Questioning God is not wicked but is scriptural..
 - c. In fact, the Lord told Israel to “Come now, and let us reason together, saith the LORD:” (Isaiah 1:18).
 - d. The Lord is not angry with us if we question him. The important thing to note is that it should be done out of reverence and fear.
- I. Communicating Irritation- When the psalmist was being attacked and reproached by enemies, he turned to God and expressed his irritation. “I will say unto God my rock, **Why hast thou forgotten me?** why go I mourning because of the oppression the enemy?” (Psalm 42:8-9)
- a. It would seem that the psalmist was angry and felt as though God was not intervening in his situation but rather ignoring the fact that he was being reproached.



- b. God already knew the contents of the psalmist's heart and that he was irritated toward God.
- c. The psalmist was having honest communication with God and telling him his irritation.
- d. An important note is that the psalmist was not irreverent when speaking to God. One can be honest and express anger with God to God while still being reverent. Never should one think that because he is angry with God that he can then speak to God in an irreverent manner.
- e. Likewise, we can take all our irritations to the Lord in prayer and leave them in his hands to handle and direct our minds.

IV. PRAYER IS: RECEIVING FROM GOD

- A. We pray to an Almighty God because he is higher than we are and has all power in his hands. The simple act of praying to God indicates that we believe him to be God and that he is able to hear us and answer our prayers. Prayer is an act of praise for this reason. Without voicing our hearts to God, we would not receive of him that which we so certainly stand in need of. Without voicing our hearts to God, we keep the hurt, turmoil, grief, anger, and bitterness within us. The Bible clearly states that God "is a rewarder of them that diligently seek him". (Hebrews 11:6) Prayer is receiving from God.
- B. We receive peace by casting our cares upon him
 - 1. One of the most precious things we receive from God when we go to him in prayer has nothing to do with any physical or tangible answering of our prayer.
 - 2. Rather, it is an inward gift. We receive from God something that calms and comforts our inner man. Consider how Hannah received peace after praying but before the Lord gave her conception (1 Samuel 1).
 - 3. When we go to God in prayer, we receive from God his peace. The peace of God is a gift that only Christians can know and something that the lost try to find in all the wrong places.
 - 4. This truth is clearly promised in Philippians 4:6-7 which says "Be careful for nothing; but in every thing by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known unto God. And the peace of God, which passeth all understanding, shall keep your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus." (see also Is. 26:3)
 - 5. Cares are going to come in this life. Heartache, grief, fear, anger, turmoil, and stress will touch all of us and recurrently. The choice we have is whether we will



hold it in our hearts and thereby lose our peace or whether we will pour our heart out to God and allow his peace to stay our hearts and minds.

6. This passage directs us to “Be careful for nothing” which means to not be full of cares or worries. Thankfully, God gives us the process to let go of our cares. It is only by prayer and supplications with thanksgiving and letting our requests be made known unto God.
 7. It is after we follow this process that the scripture teaches, we will then receive the peace of God. It is God’s peace that will keep our hearts and minds.
 8. This passage does not say that we are to pray and request the peace of God, although there is nothing wrong with praying that, but what happens is that we bring our cares to God and tell him all about it and we receive two blessings. One is that God hears our prayer and secondly that he gives us his peace because we have trusted in him.
 9. When we trust the Lord with our cares, he gives us his peace and this is not dependent upon God answering our prayers the way we want. In fact, the passage clearly indicates that God’s peace comes with or without him answering and providing for our requests.
 10. 1 Peter 5:6-7 gives a little more light on this process and what is taking place when we go to God in prayer. This passage states “Humble yourselves therefore under the mighty hand of God, that he may exalt you in due time: Casting all your care upon him; for he careth for you.”
 11. As previously stated, cares are going to come in our life. Our choice is whether we are going to carry those cares ourselves or give them to another.
 12. In the case of prayer, we are “casting all your care upon him”. This means that we are removing our cares from ourselves and giving them over to God.
 13. We do not have to suffer with these cares. God is able and willing to relieve us of these cares and the means of doing so is prayer. Without praying we are hopeless to suffer our cares alone and try to find peace apart from God.
 14. The greatest aspect of what we receive in prayer is immediate and within us. It is because “he careth for you.”
- C. We receive that which we pray for through faith according to his will
1. In addition to receiving the peace of God through prayer, the scripture also teaches that we can receive that which we request of God through prayer.
 2. There are several passages that convey this truth (Matthew 7:7, Matthew 21:22, Mark 11:24, 1 John 3:22, and 1 John 5:14-15.)



3. James 1:5 says “If any of you lack wisdom, let him ask of God, that giveth to all men liberally, and upbraideth not; and it shall be given him.” This passage is specifically referring to wisdom but the fact is that God gives us our requests when we “ask in faith” according to verse 6.
4. The determining factor in all of these passages to having our prayers answered is praying in faith.
5. We know that Hebrews 11:6 says “But without faith it is impossible to please him: for he that cometh to God must believe that he is, and that he is a rewarder of them that diligently seek him.” Faith is required for our prayers. We must believe that God can and maybe not necessarily that he will.
6. If we can get ahold of true biblical faith then we could very well see greater results from our prayers.
 - a. The control to this truth is praying according to the will of God. Our prayers should align with the word of God and if we are walking close to the Lord then our desires will be from God himself according to Psalm 37:4 “Delight thyself also in the LORD; and he shall give thee the desires of thine heart.”
 - b. Through a close walk with the Lord our hearts are affected and he places within us godly desires. The source of our prayer is a sincere heart and when we pray thus, we have assurance that our prayers will be answered.
 - c. A reason we do not receive from God the things we request is because we are asking out of the wickedness and lusts of our hearts rather than the godly desires he places.
 - d. James 4:3 states “Ye ask, and receive not, because ye ask amiss, that ye may consume it upon your lusts.” At times, we will not receive our requests of God because they are simply lustful and wrong requests.
 - e. Other times, we may not receive our requests of God simply because it is not his will. Jesus himself prayed and made request of God and this request God did not answer or do for Jesus.
 - f. In Luke 22:42 Jesus prayed “Father, if thou be willing, remove this cup from me:”. This prayer as we know was not granted, for, we know that Jesus suffered and died on the cross bearing the cup of God’s wrath.
 - g. In that moment Jesus expressed a desire that was different from the will of God and therefore God did not grant the request.
 - h. We must always be understanding and willing to accept that God’s will may not align with our requests and thus, like Jesus, we should pray “nevertheless not my will, but thine, be done.”



- i. 1 John 5:14 teaches us that “And this is the confidence that we have in him, that, if we ask anything according to his will, he heareth us:”. Ultimately, it is the requests that are according to his will that he grants. This is something to be thankful for because we have limited knowledge and foresight whereas he has all knowledge and knows all future and what we may think we want or need may be wrong for us. God knows this and does not grant our request which is in our best interest.
- j. We should not need to know why his will is one way or the other but we should simply trust that his will is perfect and rest in that.
- k. So, we may not receive not due to a lack of faith, or a lustful request, but because it is not the will of God to do so.



V. PRAYER IS:

- A. Speaking unto the Lord – 2 Samuel 24:17
- B. Crying unto God – Psalm 142:1, Numbers 12:13
- C. Calling upon God – Genesis 4:26
- D. Seeking God – 2 Chronicles 7:14
- E. Questioning God – Psalm 42:8-9
- F. Crying to heaven – 2 Chronicles 32:20
- G. Reasoning with God – Job 9:14
- H. Pouring out our heart to God – Lamentations 2:19
- I. Casting our cares upon God – 1 Peter 5:7
- J. Beseeking and supplicating God – 2 Chronicles 33:12-18, Jeremiah 42:2
- K. Interceding with God – Jeremiah 7:16
- L. Inquiring of God – Jeremiah 21:2
- M. Making request of God – Acts 16:9, Philippians 1:4
- N. A heartfelt intreaty – Psalm 119:158, Proverbs 18:23
- O. Praising God without requesting – 1 Samuel 2:1-10
- P. The offerings of our mouth – Psalm 119:108, Hebrews 13:15, Revelation 8:3
- Q. An odour before God – Revelation 5:8
- R. Our voice being heard in heaven – 2 Chronicles 30:27
- S. Crying to Heaven – 2 Chronicles 32:20
- T. God bowing down his ear to hear us – Psalm 34:15, Psalm 86:1
- U. God hearing us – Job 22:27, Psalm 4:1, Psalm 54:2, Psalm 65:2