

## **PRAYER...** **From a Biblical Perspective**

**2021**

As God's children, we have the Bible to instruct, guide, and inspire us to live according to our Father's will, as well as prayer to communicate with Him. Both are equally important, and vital in our walk with God. Recently, however, I realized that my prayer life needed to improve, and certain changes had to be made. No doubt, some of you can relate to that... Therefore, I was determined to find out more on the biblical perspective of prayer. To start with, I took a short trip back in biblical times, which really helped me to understand why prayer is such a great privilege for all believers in Christ.

In the Old Testament, and in Jesus' times, the holy temple in Jerusalem was the center of Jewish religious activities. In Hebrews 9:2-4, we find a detailed description of God's earthly tabernacle that occupied part of the temple, and where most of these activities took place. In brief, a curtain separated the Holy of Holies - the earthly dwelling place of God's presence - from the rest of the temple where the Jews were allowed to enter. Only the high priest was permitted to pass beyond this curtain once a year to enter into God's presence for all the nation of Israel, and make atonement for their sins. In other words, everyone else was unfit - spiritually speaking - to stand in the very presence of God. Hebrews 7:18 tells us that the law requirements of a sin offering made annually by the high priest, and countless animal sacrifices repeated daily, made no one perfect. By God's standards, they were incapable of atoning for or erasing their sins. Consequently, at God's appointed time, the prophetic message that the Messiah, a Savior, was going to come to deliver Israel through His suffering, came to pass. (Isaiah chapter 53) Jesus was born, and that changed everything...

### **What was God's purpose in sending His Son into the world?**

During His three years of ministry, Jesus spoke about His Father, of His love for humanity and how, as His children, we were to live a life that pleased Him. He also said that He was the Son of God sent on this earth not to condemn the world, but that the world through Him might be saved (John 3:17); to reconcile people to God (Romans 5:10), and to bring the good news of an eternal life in heaven for the ones who believed in Him. (John 3:16) In essence, Jesus came on this earth to set in motion a new Covenant between God and His people. Gone was the old with its sin offering, and animal sacrifices. What an amazing turn of events it must have been for the Jews!

As history goes, however, they believed Jesus' coming was to deliver them from the Roman oppression they were under at the time, and had for ultimate goal to make Him king over Israel. However, they quickly realized that their plans were not God's plans. Therefore, in the end, only a minority of true believers followed Jesus, and remained faithful to Him. The majority rejected Him. He was therefore put on trial for things He hadn't done, and the last words that could be heard from the belligerent crowd that was there at his trial were, "Crucify Him! Crucify Him!"

In the gospel of Matthew, we find remarkable details surrounding his death. "When Jesus had cried out again in a loud voice, He gave up His spirit. At that moment the curtain of the temple was torn in two from top to bottom. The earth shook, the rocks split, and the tombs broke open. The bodies of many holy people who had died were raised to life. When the centurion and those with him who were guarding Jesus saw the earthquake, and all that had happened, they were terrified, and exclaimed, 'Surely He was the Son of God!'" (Matthew 27:50-54) This is amazing to think that while a simple gentile centurion could understand this; most of the Jews refused to believe...

These events took place some two thousand years ago. However, when we focus our attention on the curtain being ripped apart, we can't deny that its significance is of the utmost importance for all believers

in Christ today. How so? Above all, it symbolized that Jesus' sacrifice, the shedding of His own blood, was a sufficient atonement for sins. It meant that the way into the Holy of Holies where God's presence resided was open for all people, both Jews and Gentile, which include all true believers in Christ from that moment on. Hebrews 4:15-16 says, "For we do not have a High Priest who is unable to empathize with our weaknesses, but we have one who has been tempted in every way, just as we are—yet He did not sin. Let us then approach God's throne of grace with confidence, so that we may receive mercy, and find grace to help us in our time of need." In other words, Jesus Christ being our High Priest, our only mediator between God and us (1 Timothy 2:5), we can now enter into the very presence of a holy God without fear. And the primary channel that opens up the communication between us is prayer.

### **What is prayer?**

In my search, I came across this interesting, and relevant definition of what prayer is all about on [gotquestions.org](http://gotquestions.org). It says, "The most basic definition of prayer is 'talking to God.' Prayer is not meditation or passive reflection; it is direct address to God. It is the communication of the human soul with the Lord who created the soul. Prayer is the primary way for the believer in Jesus Christ to communicate his emotions and desires with God, and to fellowship with God. It is us co-operating, and co-working with God to express Himself, and His desire through man, thus accomplishing His purpose in us, and through us. Prayer is described in the Word of God as seeking God's favor (Exodus 32:11), pouring out one's soul to the Lord (1 Samuel 1:15), drawing near to God (Psalms 73:28), and kneeling before the Father (Ephesians 3:14) Prayer ultimately is not seeking our own will, but seeking to align ourselves with the will of God more fully."

### **How should we pray?**

Undoubtedly, the perfect answer comes directly from the mouth of Jesus Himself. In the gospel of Luke 11:1-4 it says, "Now it came to pass, as He was praying in a certain place, when He ceased, that one of His disciples said to Him, "Lord, teach us to pray, as John [the Baptist] also taught his disciples." So He said to them, "When you pray, say: Our Father in heaven, hallowed be Your name. Your kingdom come. Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven. Give us day by day our daily bread. And forgive us our sins, as we also forgive everyone who sins against us. And do not lead us into temptation, but deliver us from the evil one."

Jesus clearly teaches us to put God first in our prayers. However, if we're being honest with ourselves, how often do we do this before we focus on our personal needs? We are therefore enjoined to come with a sincere heart where praise, and worship flow freely towards God. As believers, we should as well be more interested in His kingdom than what is going on in the world. In a broad sense, the kingdom of God is the rule of an eternal, sovereign God over all the universe. However, the kingdom of God is also a spiritual rule over the hearts, and lives of those who willingly submit to God's authority. Once, on being asked by the Pharisees about when the kingdom would come, Jesus replied, "The kingdom of God does not come with observation; nor will they say, 'See here!' or 'See there!' For indeed, the kingdom of God is within you." (Luke 17:20-21)

Furthermore, we are instructed to pray for His will to be done on this earth as it is in heaven. The world is obviously far from what God wants it to be... It is evident that we live in a world full of anger, evil and hatred. This is in total contradiction with who God is. Our desire then should be to pray for a change in people's hearts, and for us to be a testimony of God's loving presence in our lives. As more people believe in God, and live according to His rules, we will see a change in the world. Now, with these top priorities fulfilled, we can then focus on our daily needs, ask forgiveness if we've sinned against Him, *as we forgive others that hurt us in any way*. Really? Yes, if God in His mercy forgives us, sinners, we ought to forgive others... And lastly, we ask Him to protect us from any temptation that would lead us into sin.

### **Are there limitations to our prayers?**

In truth, we are enjoined to pray for everything... Our prayers may be related to work, family, relationships, financial problems, or whatever else is troubling our hearts. We are told to cast them on the Lord because He cares for us. (1 Peter 5:7) We can pray for guidance, wisdom, and discernment in every aspect of our lives, since it is our desire to live according to His will. We can bring our burdens, and requests to God, but we must admit that God is Sovereign, and ultimately knows what's best in any given situation. We should then leave the outcome to Him. The apostle Paul wrote, "Do not be anxious about anything, but in every situation, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus." (Philippians 4:6-7)

### **How often should we pray?**

The apostle Paul gives us an answer in 1 Thessalonians 5:17, "Pray continually; give thanks in all circumstances, for this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus." Paul doesn't make a suggestion; he gives us a command, and for a very good reason: it is God's will. Oh, really? Paul certainly doesn't understand how difficult it is to find the time to pray, especially with all the hustle and bustle of our everyday lives, right? Well, when we study Paul's life, we realize that he was also a very busy man. Nevertheless, his prayer life was quite exceptional! Undoubtedly, the best example to follow is Jesus. How exhausted He must have been after a long day of teaching, healing, casting out demons, and providing for those who always wanted more of Him, while being reviled and rejected by so many... However, how many times at the end of the day was He found alone praying on the mountainside or in a garden? And how often did he get up early in the morning to talk with His Father? In the gospel of Mark, we read about a particular occasion when Jesus did. He writes, "Very early in the morning, while it was still dark, Jesus got up, left the house and went off to a solitary place, where he prayed." (Mark 1:35)

Having raised three young boys, and worked for our family business for many years, I understand the challenges in pursuing an effectual, fervent, and constant prayer life. However, I've learned over the years to recognize these moments when short, but heartfelt prayers – either aloud or silent - can make quite a difference in the way my day will unfold. For example, as I walk through the day, I could be asking God for discernment, and wisdom in making certain decisions, or for the right words to say to a person that needs encouragement; asking for patience, courage, and strength especially during difficult times; praising, and thanking God for His love, and faithfulness in providing for my needs, or for having answered a special request; even asking God on a rainy day to hold back the rain until I finish unloading a cartload of groceries into the trunk of my car!☺ I am amazed to realize how these spur-of-the-moment prayers have now become as natural as breathing to me...

However, I must admit that my personal time with God in the morning needs to improve. With my mind running in every direction, it is always difficult for me to fully focus my attention on God for long periods at a time. Recently, as I was sharing with my husband about this, he told me that he had found a way to avoid this problem. Alone, he takes off on his bicycle for a forty-five to sixty minutes ride on the nature trail that runs through our little neighborhood. That does it for him! Since then, every morning I leave the busyness of my house with all the distractions, and chores that await me. I really look forward to this time when I sit on the back porch overlooking God's beautiful nature around me, and simply *invest* some quality time with my heavenly Father. And I can now say that it makes a huge difference! After all, wasn't it in nature that Jesus always went to pray alone to His Father? Obviously, not everyone has easy access to nature in their own backyard or the time in the morning to do so. However, with a little imagination, and *much determination*, one can always find a quiet place to talk to God, even if it's only for a few minutes. I remember while raising my young boys, the bathroom was the greatest place for me! They knew when I was in there, they had to leave mommy alone; unless it was for an emergency, obviously!☺

### **What is the purpose of intercessory prayer?**

Another important aspect of prayer is to pray, and intercede for others. Did it ever happen to you to face such difficult times in your life that you were unable to pray? You were so entangled in your own problems that you didn't know how to pray anymore? Or you felt that your prayers constantly hit a brick wall; and you've succeeded to convince yourself that God wasn't listening, so why keep praying? I believe every one of us have experienced, or are presently facing such overwhelming challenges to the point we feel that all hope is gone... It is especially in these critical times that we need to turn to other believers to pray, and intercede for us. And as intercessors, our role is to stand by them, and lift them up to God in prayer. They are in dire need of our spiritual, emotional or physical support. The following comments from the apostle Paul help us to understand how God works through His children, so that we may all be encouraged by each other's faith. He says, "Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of compassion and the God of all comfort, who comforts us in all our troubles, so that we can comfort those in any trouble with the comfort we ourselves receive from God." (2 Corinthians 1:3-4)

In His lifetime, Jesus showed how important is intercessory prayer. He prayed to His Father for Peter, so that his faith may not fail (Luke 22:32); for His disciples that His Father will protect them, and keep them safe when He's gone (John 17:15); for all believers to be one, and united together in Him and in His Father, so that the world may believe that He was sent by God (John 17:20-23); and even for His persecutors when He said, "Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing." (Luke 23:34). And what is so amazing is that He is still interceding for us in heaven! (Hebrews 7:25).

The apostle Paul prayed for the salvation of the lost (Romans 10:1); that the brothers would stay on the right path (2 Corinthians 13:7); that believers would be strengthened by the Spirit, rooted and grounded in love; able to comprehend God's love, and filled with the fullness of God (Ephesians 3:14-19). These are all prayers for *spiritual* blessings. They are all made "in Jesus' name", according to the Father's will, and they are guaranteed to find a "yes" in Christ. (2 Corinthians 1:20) There is nothing wrong to pray for good health, safety, healing, help in time of trouble, or for any other specific request on behalf of someone or even for ourselves. However, praying for God's will to be done in the life of that person, or in our own life, should be the primary objective of our prayers.

### **What is the role of the Holy Spirit in prayer?**

God, in His infinite wisdom, may not answer our prayers immediately. It may take days, months, and even years before our prayers are being answered, which can bring doubts, and discouragement along the way. Therefore, when that happens, what is the right attitude to have? The apostle Paul makes an important point in Romans 8:24-27. He says, "Hope that is seen is no hope at all. Who hopes for what they already have? But if we hope for what we do not yet have, we wait for it patiently. In the same way, the Spirit helps us in our weakness. We do not know what we ought to pray for, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us through wordless groans. And he who searches our hearts knows the mind of the Spirit, because the Spirit intercedes for God's people in accordance with the will of God." In other words, when we pray for others - or for ourselves -, we need to be hopeful, patient, and believe that the Holy Spirit is always present to help, and comfort us while we wait for God's answers.

### **In conclusion...**

Oh, there is so much more I could say on prayer, but my intention here is not to write a book! I will add, however, that I am convinced more than ever that it is such a great privilege for all believers in Christ to be able to come into God's presence; to open our hearts freely to Him, and to make Him part of our everyday life. And it is my hope that you feel the same way... As our loving Father, we have the assurance that He is always ready to listen, and to answer our prayers - perhaps not always as we see fit - but according to His eternal purpose for us.

On a personal note, I want to say that these messages God puts on my heart to write are actually answers to personal prayers. So, if this message has helped you look at prayer with a new perspective; if you've

realized that it is not simply a routine, a chore, or vain repetitions, but rather a heartfelt desire to communicate with God; or if this message has in some way inspired you to improve your present prayer life; then God definitely deserves credit, and the glory for it all!

In closing, there is an important question we ought to ask ourselves. "Do I take full advantage of this great privilege that God gives me through His Son, Jesus?" Perhaps we should take a moment to reflect on our personal prayer life before we answer, wouldn't you say?

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