

THE OPEN DOOR TO GOD

2025

Dear Reader,

For many people, the start of a new year is the best time to pause and reflect on their personal lives. And as they do, they may realize that they need to improve themselves in some way or another, and take the necessary steps to do so... For me, it's a recurring process when I humbly turn to God, and pray the Psalmist's prayer: "Search me, O God, and know my heart; try me, and know my anxieties; and see if there is any wicked way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting."¹ As a sinner saved by grace, it's a time for being accountable to my Savior and Lord... In addition to the Word of God and prayer, I believe it's important to regularly reflect on my personal relationship with God, and be willing to change whatever needs to be changed in me for continuous growth in my walk of faith with Him.

As God's children and followers of Christ, we have the Word of God and the Holy Spirit to instruct, guide, and inspire us, as well as prayer to communicate with our heavenly Father. They are equally important, and vital in our spiritual journey with Him. However, I realize more and more that my prayer life always needs to improve, and I'm sure I speak on behalf of many believers out there... So, to help me better understand what prayer is all about, I briefly explored certain elements of it.

To start with, what is prayer?

We all have our own definition of what prayer is, but this one particularly caught my attention. "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 Christ Jesus 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."² Even though this definition gives us great insight into what prayer is, I believe that analyzing Jesus' prayer life during His earthly ministry is the most valuable approach to understanding the very essence of prayer.

So, how should we pray?

From the heart is a good answer, but Jesus Himself provides us with a model prayer. In the gospel of Luke we read, "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 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, for we also forgive everyone who is indebted to us. And do not lead us into temptation, but deliver us from the evil one."³

Jesus clearly teaches us to put God first in our prayers. We're instructed to come with a sincere heart where praise, and worship flow freely toward God. However, if we're being honest with ourselves, how frequently do we do this? More often than not, our personal needs take precedence, don't they? But, it shouldn't be the case, for our loving God is worthy of our devotion because of who He is, and not because of what we can get from Him... As believers, we should also be more interested in God's kingdom than in the affairs of this life.⁴ 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 answered them, "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."⁵

Furthermore, we're enjoined to pray for God's 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 filled with evil, anger, and hatred, which are in complete opposition to God's character. Therefore, our desire should be to pray for all people in general, but more

specifically for our country and its leaders; 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 will, we'll see a change in the world... After addressing our top priorities, we can then focus on our daily needs, and ask forgiveness if we've sinned against Him, as we forgive others that hurt us in any way. Really? Yes. As God in His mercy forgives us, sinners, we ought to forgive others...⁶

Last but not least... Our petition to our Father not to lead us into temptation reflects our desire to avoid the dangers of sin. In essence, it's asking God to protect us and keep us safe from the evil one, who constantly aims at deceiving believers so we ultimately turn away from God. That's his only goal... I'm reminded of Jesus being led by the Spirit into the wilderness after being baptised by John the Baptist. The gospels of Matthew and Luke give a detailed account of what happened next.⁷ In brief, He spent forty days alone and fasting, when He faced the worst temptations Satan could throw at Him at the time. Jesus resisted every one of them by quoting God's written Word. Ultimately, Satan left Him and Jesus came out victorious... Jesus' example shows us how important it is to rely on God's Word to overcome temptation. It is our most powerful weapon, but are we using it? In our battle against the enemy, we also need all the encouragement we can get, and we find it in these inspirational words from the apostle Paul: "No temptation has overtaken you except such as is common to man; but God *is* faithful, who will not allow you to be tempted beyond what you are able, but with the temptation will also make the way of escape, that you may be able to bear *it*".⁸ By trusting God, abiding in His Word, and praying for strength and perseverance in times of temptation and trials, we always come out victorious.

Are there limitations to our prayers?

We are instructed to pray about everything... The apostle Paul wrote, "Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known to God, and the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus."⁹ Our prayers may be related to our family, relationships, financial problems, health issues, work or whatever else is troubling our hearts. We're told to cast all our care on the Lord because He cares for us¹⁰. We can pray for guidance, wisdom, and discernment in every aspect of our lives. We can bring our burdens, and requests to God because nothing is impossible for Him. However, God is Sovereign, and ultimately knows what's best in any given situation. We should, therefore, trust Him and leave the outcome to Him... 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.

When that happens, what is the right attitude to have?

The apostle Paul makes an important point when he said, "Likewise the Spirit also helps in our weaknesses. For we do not know what we should pray for as we ought, but the Spirit Himself makes intercession for us with groanings which cannot be uttered. Now He who searches the hearts knows what the mind of the Spirit is, because He makes intercession for the saints according to the will of God. And we know that all things work together for good to those who love God, to those who are the called according to *His* purpose."¹¹ In other words, even as mature Christians, we can become weak in our faith. However, as God's Spirit lives within us, He continually helps us in and even through our weakness. We can become so discouraged that at times we don't even know how and what to pray for. The Spirit then steps in and carries the thoughts and feelings we simply can't express. So, we need to surrender all, to trust Him, and not lose heart and hope while we wait for God's answers.

How often should we pray?

Here again, the apostle Paul gives us an answer when he wrote, "Pray without ceasing; in everything give thanks; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you."¹² We may find him overly zealous in his approach to prayer, but he had a good reason for it: it's God's will for us. Being too busy is not an excuse... When we read Paul's writings, we realize that even though he was a very busy man, he was an exceptional man of prayer. Without a doubt, however, the best example 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... Despite His hectic schedule,

how often was He found alone praying on the mountainside or in a garden at the end of the day? Many times... 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 he writes, "Now in the morning, having risen a long while before daylight, He went out and departed to a solitary place; and there He prayed."¹³

Having raised three young boys, and worked for our family business for many years, I understand the challenges in pursuing a fervent and constant prayer life. However, I've learned over the years to recognize those moments when short, but heartfelt prayers can make a difference in the way my day will unfold. For example, at any time throughout the day, I could be praising and thanking God for His love in giving me a new life in His Son, Jesus; for His faithfulness in providing for my needs or for having answered a special request. I could be praying for discernment, and wisdom when making an important decision or for the right words to say to a person that needs encouragement, or asking for patience, courage, and strength during difficult times. I remember one day, while I was loading groceries into the trunk of my car, asking God to stop the torrential rain that had just started... Well, believe it or not, God did answer my prayer!☺ Was it just a coincidence? I'm sure that this word isn't in God's vocabulary! I will venture to say, though, that He did it out of the goodness of His heart... I'm amazed to see how those short spur-of-the-moment prayers have become as natural to me as breathing. But, there's more...

Intercessory prayer. How important is it?

Have you ever faced 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? Have you felt that your prayers constantly hit a brick wall, and you've succeeded in convincing yourself that God wasn't listening, so why keep praying? I have experienced those moments, and I believe every one of us has or is presently facing such overwhelming challenges to the point when we feel that all hope is gone... It's especially in those critical times that we need to turn to other trusted 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 said, "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies and God of all comfort, who comforts us in all our tribulation, that we may be able to comfort those who are in any trouble, with the comfort with which we ourselves are comforted by God."¹⁴

In His lifetime, Jesus showed how important intercessory prayer is. He prayed to His Father for Peter, so that his faith may not fail;¹⁵ for His disciples that His Father will protect them, and keep them safe from the evil one;¹⁶ 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;¹⁷ and even for His persecutors when He said, "Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they do."¹⁸ And what's so amazing is that He's still interceding for us in heaven!¹⁹

Oh, there's much more to be said about prayer, but my intention isn't to write a book! I will add, however, that I'm convinced more than ever of the great privilege we have as believers in Christ to be able to come into God's presence, to open our hearts freely to Him, and make Him part of our everyday lives. And as a 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.

Heavenly Father, may we always have a hunger for Your presence in our lives. May You constantly be the center of our love and affection. And if for some reason, we've grown cold in our desire to spend time with You in prayer and in Your Word, may Your Holy Spirit renew our first love for You. We thank You for the privilege You've given us through Your Son, Jesus, to be in constant communion with You. And we give You all the praise and glory that You so richly deserve. Amen.

With love,
Beth☺

¹Psalms 139:23-24 ²gotquestions.org ³Luke 11:1-4 ⁴2 Timothy 2:4 ⁵Luke 17:20-21 ⁶Matthew 6:14-15 ⁷Matthew 4:1-11 & Luke 4:1-13
⁸1 Corinthians 10:13 ⁹Philippians 4:6-7 ¹⁰1 Peter 5:7 ¹¹Romans 8:27-28 ¹²1 Thessalonians 5:17-19 ¹³Mark 1:35 ¹⁴2 Corinthians 1:3-4 ¹⁵Luke 22:32 ¹⁶John 17:15 ¹⁷John 17:20-21 ¹⁸Luke 23:34 ¹⁹Hebrews 7:25