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# Prayer

What's it all about?  
How should we pray?  
What does the Bible say?



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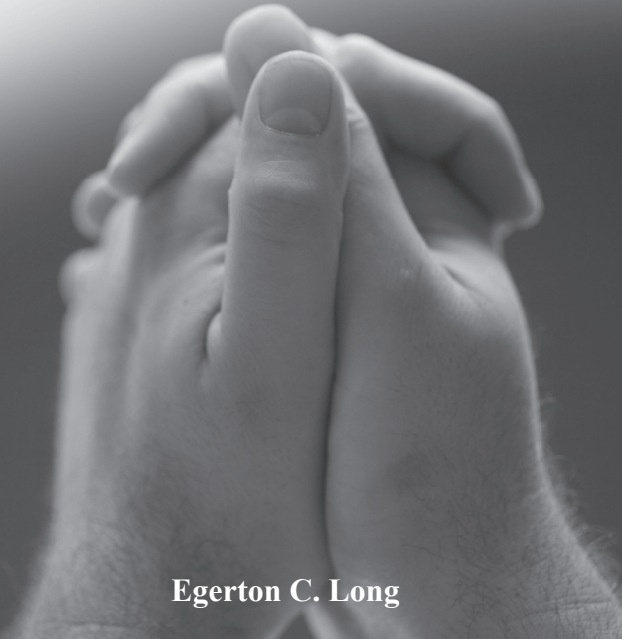
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# *Prayer*

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## **PRAYER – WHAT’S IT ALL ABOUT?**

A tall dark African tribesman was walking along a narrow path one day when he saw an unusually shaped stick lying on the ground nearby. He bent down and picked it up. He had never seen a stick like this before. He took it home and leaned it against the front of his hut, not knowing what else to do with it.

Several months passed and the stick remained where it was. One day a friend came by and saw the stick leaning against the hut. He asked the man where he had found it. He took the stick and the man and they went out hunting. A few moments later, he put something into the stick and pointed it at an animal some distance away. He then made the stick spew fire with a loud noise. The ‘stick’ the man had found beside the track was a high-powered rifle!

The tribesman who had found the rifle was absolutely astonished. His first words were, ‘To think I had this power in my hands all this time and I did not use it.’

Too often as Christians we have made the same mistake with the weapon of prayer. Somehow we do not realise its power or understand its usefulness. We know about it but do not use it. For most of us it could be said that we lack a proper understanding of what prayer is all about.

Finally we come back to this:

**Prayer must be made in humble submissive faith.** God reserves in His Sovereign hand how and when He will answer our prayers. He is our Father and knows what is best. He has a plan. It may cut across our plans but He still desires only and always our good.

**Can’t we trust a God like that?**

**TIME TO PRAY –**

**IT’S THE GREATEST POWER ON**

**EARTH!**

Holding on to sin in our life can stand in the way of God answering. Psalm 66:18 says plainly: 'If I had cherished sin in my heart, the Lord would not have listened.' Has God been putting

His finger on something in your life but each time your will has won out? And each time there has been that much less blessing? He will give you the grace to give up that sin, that act of self-will, if you ask Him.

3. We may have to recognize that we have been **disobedient to a directive He has given us** for our life. Or we may be unwilling to give up a relationship or 'idol' in our life which displeases God. Any of these problems can prevent God answering our prayers.

### **WHAT CAN WE DO ABOUT THESE HINDRANCES?**

**Good news** – these hindrances can be taken away. God Himself has told us how, very clearly. 1 John 1:9 says 'If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just and will forgive our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness.' Do you want God's blessing? Do you want answers to your prayers? Go over these 'hindrances' and put them away. You will see the difference in your relationship with the Lord and in your prayer life.

Or perhaps we have been disappointed in prayer. So many say 'I prayed once and nothing happened.' But God, the Almighty God, our Heavenly Father, does hear and does answer prayer. The Bible tells us to pray. It encourages us to do so. It even commands us to pray. Luke 18:1 says: 'Then Jesus told his disciples a parable to show them that they should always pray and not give up.'

But the Bible not only tell us to pray, it also reveals to us the purpose of prayer and it shows us that prayer is beneficial to our lives. Luke 11:13 and Hebrews 4:14-16.

### **BUT WHAT ARE WE DOING WHEN WE PRAY?**

What are we doing when we pray and what are we expressing? Prayer is communicating with God. When we pray, we are affirming that there is a God, One who is all-powerful. We are acknowledging that He is a personal, intelligent being, who hears and answers when we speak to Him. Prayer is the contact of a living soul with a living God.

When I come to God in prayer in the Name of Jesus Christ, a relationship is established. This is my Father to whom I am speaking. I am acknowledging His presence. I grasp the assurance of His love and can wait on His guidance for direction. What a privilege! How can I take advantage of this tremendous opportunity?

We need to ask as the disciples did, 'Lord, teach us to pray.' Our Teacher must be Christ Himself. The disciples asked Him to be their teacher. Let that be our attitude as we seek to learn more about prayer.

## **CONDITIONS FOR PRAYING**

Our first lesson is to look at some of the conditions for praying, as we find them in the Bible. Here are a few:

How should we begin? Why not start with praise? And why not listen as you pray? What does God say? 'Be still, and know that I am God.' (Psalm 46:10). Remember prayer is personal. It is a conversation – it's simply talking to God and listening to Him. And have a spirit of expectation – believe that God is listening too and will answer.

Then remember

- 1. We need to pray with our hearts prepared**  
God does not hear prayer from hearts where sin resides and where the conscience does not seem to be aware of what we are doing or failing to do (Psalm 66:18, Isaiah 59:1-2). Known sin must be confessed to God (1 John 1:9). Then fellowship with God needs to be maintained by continuing obedience to His Word (John 15:7, 1 John 3:24-31).

Each of the above issues demand personal decision and action, even strong discipline. They can be met and faced by the help of the very One to whom we are praying. We would do well to follow Christ's example in Mark 1:35 and spend time with God before we do anything else. We can be honest with God even telling Him we don't feel like praying and He understands how human we are. See Hebrews 4:15-16.

On God's side, as He looks at us, there can be hindrances to His answering such

as:

- 1. Defective relationships in the home.**

(1 Peter 3:7)

Discord in the home displeases the Lord.

Any man or woman whose prayers seem to be unanswered needs to look at their whole life and ask God to put His finger on anything that is displeasing in His sight. Sometimes we may need to humble ourselves and say 'I'm sorry' to someone we've wronged before God can answer our prayers.

- 2. Problems in the heart, such as unconfessed sin.**

(Isaiah 59:1-2)

God cannot condemn sin in a sinner and condone it in a saint. Christ spoke about an unforgiving spirit. See Matthew 5:23-24 and 6:12-15. Also Ephesians 4:32.

Look at Paul being delayed when he wanted to spend time in Ephesus as seen in Acts 16 and the following chapters. Then, after a number of experiences in which God

worked in Paul's life in dramatic ways, God allowed Paul to spend 3 years in Ephesus and greatly blessed his ministry there.

See his statement in 1 Corinthians 16:8. God knows best and we look back later to see His timing is always perfect.

Christ expressed it so well in Matthew 7:11 'If you, then, though you are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father in heaven give good gifts to those who ask Him!'

### **HINDRANCES TO PRAYER.**

It may be repetitious but we need to recognize that there are hindrances to the act of praying.

There can be:

- 1. External distractions**, such as the TV, the radio, the telephone, family demands, pressure of our employment or other problems.
- 2. Internal, personal distractions**, such as fatigue, procrastination, wandering thoughts, emotional upset, lack of faith, lack of persistence or even impatience with God as we have seen before. Neglect of God's Word certainly does not help our prayer life.

### **2. We need to pray with a desire for God's glory**

That He might be glorified by the answer (John 14:13). Our requests are sometimes not granted because they are desired simply for our own pleasure (James 4:3).

### **3. We must pray according to the will of God (1 John 5:14)**

We discover the will of God in His Word. Read and study the Bible and make your requests consistent with its principles. Romans 8:26-27 tells us that the Holy Spirit will pray with us and guide us into praying in the will of God.

### **4. We must pray in Jesus' Name (John 14:13 and 16:23-24)**

That means, in His authority, on the basis of His merit and in harmony with His will. Think of it – we are using the Name of the Son in the Presence of the Father! In doing so we are also recognising that our access to the Father is only through the Son. (Ephesians 2:18, 1 Timothy 2:5).

### **5. We must pray with sincere meaningful language (Matthew 6:7)**

That doesn't mean we have to use a certain form of English. Rather, prayer must come from a sincere heart which desires to be in the presence of God. I have heard illiterate people pray and they have lifted my heart to heaven. Think about what we are saying. God deserves more than trite, repetitious phrases used every time we pray. Make our

prayers personal as if we were face to face with Him. Prayer is a conscious act of the mind. We must use our intellect as we would in any serious conversation.

6. **We must pray definitely and specifically (Mark 11:24)** A prayer list of specific requests is helpful. Record the date you first asked and the date God answered. Look beyond the circumstances with the eye of faith.
7. **We must pray persistently with boldness,** We pray until God answers (Luke 11:8, 1 Thessalonians 5:17). This may be a test of faith or a test of our patience. Give God time to answer.
8. **We must pray believing that God will answer (James 1:5-7)** Faith is essential but is too often missing in our praying. God has given us wonderful promises regarding prayer and the supply of our needs. Claim these promises and claim their fulfillment, thanking Him already for the answer. Remember also that “No” is just as much an answer as “Yes.”
9. **We must pray with a submissive spirit (Luke 22:41-42)** Remember Christ’s prayer. ‘Not my will, but yours be done.’ This is not a prayer of weakness but of strength. It is the ultimate attitude to have as we pray.

## THE CONSEQUENCES TO OUR PRAYERS

When we pray as God has directed in His Word, He often answers ‘Yes’. We have no problems with that answer, only gratitude, which we ought to express to Him.

However it is when the answer appears to be in the negative, that we seem to strike trouble. Why does God say ‘No’ when we are asking earnestly asking Him to say ‘Yes’?

**God may say ‘No’ when He has something better planned for us.** See the illustration of Abraham in Genesis 17:18-19 when God said ‘No’ to him regarding Ishmael. God’s plan was for Isaac to be Abraham’s heir not Ishmael. Has God ever done this for you - said ‘No’ to your request and then later you saw how He had planned something better for you? He often works that way.

**God may say ‘No’ when it is not His will.** Look at the experience of Paul (2 Corinthian 12:7-10). His request was not granted but God assured Paul of his sustaining grace to meet this continuing trial. He will do the same for us.

**God may say ‘No’ when it is not His time.** His answer in that case is ‘not yet’ or ‘wait’. His answer may be delayed as a test of our faith. Or God may have further work to do in us before He can use us in the way we are asking Him to do (James 1:6-8, 1 Peter 1:6-7).

However, effective intercession often requires regular, even prolonged praying.

#### 4. The place of prayer

Everywhere is acceptable to God (1 Timothy 2:8). Christ spoke of seeking to be alone when spending time to be with the Father. He often did this Himself. It is wonderful to be assured and aware of His constant presence with us wherever we are.

So then posture, time, or place are not what makes prayer. What is important is the attitude of our hearts towards God. Jesus said, 'God is Spirit and worshippers must worship in spirit and in truth' (John 4:24).

A lady who did not usually pray personally was traveling home by train after visiting a terminally ill loved one. She was so burdened that she finally bowed her head and tried to pray as best she could. Her sister sitting alongside her, turned and said 'What in the world are you doing?'

'I am praying,' she replied. 'But you can't do that here' exclaimed her sister. 'Yes, I can, she said. My next door neighbours are real Christians and they told me I could pray anywhere. And we can, anywhere, anytime.

10. As difficult as it is, we must take time to **praise God and to pray** even when we least feel like it. Be honest with God. He understands.

11. **Praying with a friend**, or with a group of God's people can ease burdens and bring real encouragement.

### THE CONTENT OF OUR PRAYERS

These are five areas generally recognized as being essential parts of our prayers. They are:

#### 1. Adoration

Here we acknowledge who God is. It is the worship and praise of God by one or more of His children. It is the occupation of the heart, not with our own needs or blessings, but with God Himself. (2 Kings 19:15).

#### 2. Thanksgiving

Here we acknowledge what God has done and thank Him for doing it. This is expected of all believers. It is one area where we often fail (Psalm 50:14 & 23). Thanksgiving should be our normal response to the goodness of God, especially in answering our prayers (Philippians 4:6-8). Let us be specific in thanking God as we are praying.

#### 3. Confession

This is acknowledging what we have done. Sin breaks fellowship with God (1 John 1:5-6). Confession is agreeing with what God says about our sin. Confessing

our sin brings forgiveness and restoration of fellowship with the Father (1 John 1:9).

#### **4. Intercession**

We are to pray for others and their needs (1 Timothy 2:1). For those who do not know God personally (1 Timothy 2:4), for those ministering God's Word (Ephesians 6:19-20), for other Christians in need (James 5:16), for believers out of fellowship with God (1 John 5:16) and those who wrong us (Matthew 5:44). It is not easy to pray for those who may be unloving and we may have to ask God for His help to pray for them and then watch Him work by His grace in our own lives as well as theirs.

#### **5. Petition**

Here is where some of our deepest encounters with God can be experienced (Psalm 34:46). God has promised to do great things for us and give wonderful things to us. For example, in our times of trouble we can come to God for comfort and strength (Matthew 11:28-30, Hebrews 4:16).

Remember He is our personal God and Father to whom we can bring everything. (Philippians 4:6, Psalm 84:11). We can also ask Him to develop our spiritual life and to form the character of Christ in us. We can ask Him to increase our love for Him, for

His Word and for others (Romans 8:32). There is no limit to the things we can ask God for, provided they are within the broad scope of his will.

All of the above areas of prayer should find a frequent place in our praying. The continued absence of one or more will mean an incomplete prayer life for us.

### **THE CHARACTERISTICS OF OUR PRAYING**

#### **1. The form of prayer**

Our prayers should be addressed to the Father (Matthew 6:9) in the name of the Son (John 14:13) with the help of the Holy Spirit (Romans 8:26). The Holy Spirit's help is also seen in His interceding for us, in ways to deep even for words, but always in the will of God.

Almost every prayer in the New Testament is addressed to the Father. However, because Christ is God and the Holy Spirit is God, we may pray to them also.

#### **2. The posture of prayer**

The bible records almost every position we could think of. Standing or kneeling are predominant.

#### **3. The time of prayer**

Any time is acceptable to God (Luke 18:1). We may sometimes need instance guidance or a direction to take. Ask Him immediately.