

GOD JUST TOUCHED ME - WHAT'S IT ALL ABOUT

Chapter 14 - PRAYER

Introduction to Prayer

Prayer is one of the lesser-understood concepts within Christianity. For some people it is merely an oral version of a letter to Santa Clause; a brief list with every entry starting with "I want". At most the entire list only takes a few minutes to recite, leaving the remainder of the day available for more appealing or entertaining events. Some people take scriptures out of context and misinterpreted what it says, for example, the promise of abundant life, (John 10:10). They think abundant means "with lots of material stuff", but what the word abundant means in scripture is superior in quality, a life filled with the Joy of the Lord and the peace that passes understanding. Jesus never meant stuff (Matthew 6:31-33). When these people pray for more stuff, they get upset with God for not fulfilling their twisted version of the scripture. Others see prayer as something you do upon rising and/or retiring. Their prayers consist of a brief list of "thanks" and a longer list of "wants." Finally, there are those who only think of prayer when they run head-on into trouble. They use a one-word prayer, "HELP!" If a little child were to communicate with loving parents only for a few brief intervals at set times, and limit the communications to wants, that child would be considered strange at best. None of the above practices reflect the biblical concept of prayer. Even a secular source, The Webster's New World Dictionary, recognizes prayer as a spiritual communion with God; sharing of thoughts and emotions; an intimate relationship with deep understanding. Prayer is a conversation with God. That means to be listening as well as talking. If one is always talking and the other is only listening, the process is called a harangue, not a conversation. In prayer we share our feelings, desires, disappointments, joys, expectations, whatever we would share with any close intimate friend. We ask questions and then we need to have the courtesy to listen. We offer praise, say thank you, and sometimes have to say, "I'm sorry. Please forgive me."

Why Pray

God is self-sufficient and does not require the prayers of men. He does desire our prayers, though, because we need to be in contact with Him for our own spiritual health (Psalm 145:18). He walked in the garden and talked with Adam and Eve (Genesis 3:8). He talked with Abraham (Genesis 17:3) and Jacob (Genesis 35:13-15). God spoke to Moses as to a friend (Exodus 33:11a) and He wants to talk with us (Isaiah 1:18). In the Old Testament God was with His people in an exceptional way in the Holy of Holies, in a Temple built of stone. Jesus referred to that Temple as a house of prayer (Matthew 21:13). That stone building has been replaced by a new dwelling place for God, a Temple of flesh and blood (1 Corinthians 3:16, 1 Corinthians 6:19&20). We too should be a place of prayer. It was the practice of the early church to spend time in prayer daily (Acts 2:42) and whenever trouble appeared (Acts 12:12). Jesus told us not to be upset, but to pray (Luke 18:1). We need to keep everything that is facing us before our Heavenly Father. When we receive after asking, we know where-of it came. When we appreciate His love and care we need to say thank you. He will respond to those who go to Him (Matthew 7:7&8). There is power in numbers. If we gather together in corporate prayer He will join us and He will hear us (Matthew 18:19&20). He has a particular compassion for the righteous and responds to their prayers with power (James 5:13-16). Prayer is a mighty weapon and can ward off temptations to sin (Matthew 26:41). We need to pray about everything (Philippians 4:6&7).

Where to Pray

There are some people who give the impression that they think the only place for serious prayer is the church building. It is a good place for prayer because it has an atmosphere favorable to prayer;

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and there are no distractions or interruptions from the outside world. A place of frequent prayer seems to attain an anointing, a special peace that is associated with the presence of God. However, Jesus did not always go to the temple to pray (Luke 6:12). He did have a place He regularly prayed, either alone or with His disciples (Luke 21:37, Luke 22:39). If we are to truly have any quality time with our Heavenly Father we do have need of privacy (Psalm 46:10). It is prudent to have a place in the home free from telephone, television, and interruptions from other folks looking for casual conversation (Matthew 6:6-8). However, since our God dwells within us, there is no need to limit prayer to special places (1 Timothy 2:8).

When to Pray

Many people grew up learning to say their bedtime prayers beside their bed on their knees every evening. Ending the day with a conversation with God is a good thing. Some people start with morning prayers upon rising. Starting the day with a conversation with God is a good thing. Scripture talks about praying in the morning (Psalm 5:3), morning and evening (Psalm 88:1), and three times a day (Psalm 55:17). When Jesus walked this earth the devout Jews would pray at specific hours seven times every day (Psalm 119:164). The first Christians were those same devout Jews, and the church carried on the tradition of daily times for prayers for many years. The sincere Jew envisioned all of life as a succession of acts of prayer and worship. Rising, dressing, eating, working, preparing meals, to all intents and purposes everything that took place, was performed as in the presence of God, and constituted prayer to honor Him. There are no restrictions on when you should pray. If you are looking for quality time with God, then you will want whatever time of day you are at your best. Your best may be when you arise in the morning, but could be at any other time, depending on you. If you were a young person in the company of the object of your affection, your communication would be non-stop, and so it should be with God (1 Thessalonians 5:16-18). God is always ready to devote time to you.

How to Pray

The Lord is God (Psalm 100:5) and we should hold Him in awe with respect. At the same time He is our loving Father, and He desires that we come to Him knowing that He does love us (Hebrews 4:16). When we pray we should have trust and anticipation (Psalm 37:4&5). When we pray if we doubt we might as well not bother. We must pray believing (Matthew 21:22). Believing is having faith, knowing in your heart of hearts that God is able to do what he has promised and that he is faithful. Jesus devoted a great deal of time to prayer and he should be our example. Jesus was concerned with the Father's will, and so we should be when we pray (1 John 5:14&15). We know what the Father's will is. It is that no one be lost; that we love one another as Christ loves us; that we have within us the mind of Christ Jesus. We know that if we live in obedience to His will, He hears us (1 John 3:21-23).

In the Name of Jesus

A lot is said about acting in the name of Jesus (Colossians 3:17, John 14:13&14, John 16:23&24). When Jesus told us to ask in His name, He was giving us power of attorney to speak in His behalf. We have all learned to pray in Jesus' name, usually by ending our prayers by saying "In the Name of Jesus. Amen." Names in the Bible have a meaning and say something about the person. "Jesus" is the English version of "*Eaysooce*", which is the Greek form of the Hebrew name "*Yeshua*". When we find that name in the Old Testament the English version is "Joshua". That name means

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"Jehovah Saves". Whenever the Bible speaks of doing something in another's name it means doing it as that person would. To pray in the name of Jesus means to pray as Jesus would pray. If you are asking for something in the name of Jesus, you ask for the types of things Jesus would ask for, and you are motivated by the same things that motivated Jesus. That motivation would be only to please the Father and to be a channel of his love to our hurting neighbors around us. We need to realize that "In Jesus' Name" is not some magic incantation that will force God to grant our request. It is a direction on how to pray properly. Also, when we pray we should pray both with our understanding and in the Spirit (1 Corinthians 14:15). We come before our Father with understanding when we have needs, desires, thanksgiving, and praise. However, when we are troubled and do not know what to pray for or how to pray the Spirit will pray for us (Romans 8:26&27).

Conversational Prayer and Confession

When Christians talk about prayer they use various expressions (Ephesians 6:18, 1 Timothy 2:1), most of which have nothing to do with asking for something. One terminology that does not get a great deal of mention is conversational prayer. Conversational prayer is just talking to God. When you are with someone you care about, and someone who cares about you, you will share how your day went, your joys and your disappointments, your likes and your dislikes, the confusions, frustrations, accomplishments, and all the events. You need to share your day with your heavenly Father, remembering that He loves you and He cares about your life. Also remember that He already knows everything, so be honest. Don't try to pretend something doesn't matter when it really does. If you honestly talk things out with God, including disappointments, you just might get some new understandings and peace of mind.

Another expression that does not get a great deal of mention is confessional prayer. Confession is simply coming before the Lord admitting, "Yes, what I did is sin.", and "Yes, I did do it." It is also adding, "I do not want to do that, and with your help, I will never do it again." Sometimes the devil will blindside you and push all the right buttons to get you to react, and then you react badly. Once you calm down you will realize that your action was sin. You feel ashamed and you must seek God's forgiveness. Keeping in a right relationship with God is important to your Christian walk. A lapse is not fatal, and it happens to all of us. God understands that. Deliberately walking in sin is different, and can be fatal. God will not accept that. Once you have been redeemed and you belong to the Lord, you are clean. That is what Jesus was trying to explain to His disciples (John 13:6-10). You need to be alert and pay close attention when you are walking down life's pathways where others, and animals, walk, or you will step in something. That does not mean that you need to take a complete bath, baptism; you just need to get your feet washed, confession. If we do confess our sins the Lord will forgive us (1 John 1:9&10).

Praise

A more often heard type of prayer is praise. To praise is to commend the worth of; to glorify. When you are near one you love and admire you will have difficulty not identifying their endearing qualities, those character traits that make them what and who they are. When we know the Lord we have to praise Him (Psalm 9:1). Our God is so wondrous that heaven and earth and sea have to praise Him (Psalm 69:34), even all creation (Psalm 148:1-5). Our Father treasures the praises of His children. Thanksgiving is similar to praise. The two are frequently mentioned together (Psalm 95:2, Psalm 100:4, Psalm 147:7). Thanksgiving is an appreciation for the many blessing received because of

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the grace of God. We should always come before our Father with an attitude of appreciation. Praise and thanksgiving are directed at the Lord and are intended to bless Him.

Intercession and Supplication

Probably the most frequently used types of prayer are the request made to God. He genuinely desires us to make our requests known to Him because He loves us and He delights in giving us good things. There are two types of requesting prayers. The first of the requesting prayers is intercession, serious beseeching on behalf of someone else. Intercessory prayer is important to our God. When we are bewildered and do not know what to pray for, the Holy Spirit intercedes on our behalf (Romans 8:26&27). Our Lord and Savior lives to intercede (Hebrews 7:25) and He is constantly at the Father's side interceding for us (Romans 8:34). The devil is called the accuser because when we sin he is right there to say, "See what happened. This person is not fit to enter into your kingdom." Jesus will respond, "Not true. This person belongs to me and I already atoned for that sin. This person is fit to enter the kingdom." Our God desires that we make intercession for others (1 Timothy 2:1-4). We should intercede on behalf of governments, the body of Christ, our communities, people we know, and anyone the Lord places in front of us for us to pray for. Especially, we should pray for our nation (Ezekiel 22:30). All of us are called to intercede, but some of us are anointed for an intercessory ministry. The second of the requesting prayers is supplication, beseeching on behalf of self. Supplication, also called petition, is humbly requesting God's mercies for ourselves. Though other people could intercede for us, only God and we know the desires of our hearts.

What to Pray For

We have seen that we ought to pray for lands and governments, for others and for self. There are added conditions scripture tells us to pray about. We should desire, as Jesus desired, that the Father's will be fulfilled, and that the Father's Kingdom appear (Matthew 6:10). The Kingdom of God is not a place; it is a life in which Jesus is really Lord of all. We should pray about our daily requirements, both in the form of requests and of thanksgiving (Matthew 6:11). We should come before God daily seeking forgiveness for those things we have done that we should not have done, and for not having done those things we should have done (Matthew 6:12). We should ask daily for deliverance from evil (Matthew 6:13, John 17:15). We should seek daily to know God better (John 17:3). The enemy wants nothing more than to destroy the church, so we need to pray for unity within the body (John 17:21&22). Today there are over 34,000 denominations and splinter groups that claim to be Christians, and many of them cannot stand the others. If we are to live with all of this and survive, we need God's wisdom (James 1:5). Motivations for prayer often stem from love. We are told to love and pray for our enemies (Matthew 5:44-48). We should not pray that God get even with the dirty buggers, but that God move their hearts to become members of His family. It is much better to have them standing besides you as a brother or sister in Christ than facing you as a foe. If you can pray them into God's family there will be a big family celebration in heaven (Luke 15:7). There are no limits on matters to pray about (Philippians 4:6&7).

Impediments to Prayer

At times it may appear that our prayers are not answered. Most of God's promises to us have strings attached. These strings take the form of, "If you do this, then I will do that." People have a propensity to take these promises out of context and ignore the conditions. Then they accuse God of failing when they do not get the expected results. Instead of praying first, some people pray only as a

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last resort, after everything else has been tried. Sometime people desire that their requests be heard, and they believe that God answers prayer for other people, but they are not confident that God will respond to their requests. If you want results, you must believe (Matthew 21:22). Our Lord hears and responds when we obey Him (Isaiah 58:7-9). If you do not obey His commands don't blame Him for unanswered prayers. Look in the mirror for the culprit. Sin hinders prayer (John 9:31), and God will not even listen to wicked people (Proverbs 15:8&29). If we want to be effective in prayer we must abide in Christ (John 15:6, 7, &16). Occasionally we complain about not getting answers when we have never asked, and sometimes we ask for all the wrong reasons (James 4:2&3). Jesus never used his power and authority to improve his personal comfort, or to increase his riches or reputation. His goal was only to glorify the Father. Our requests may be selfish, or may be for something far from best for another. In any case, we are not using the goals and values of Jesus when we are asking. We are not asking as Jesus would ask. If you are a husband and your prayers seem to be of no benefit, you need to take a serious look at how you are treating your wife (1 Peter 3:7). If you are praying for a loved one, and you pray and pray and pray, and nothing seems to be happening, you need to remember that someone else's will is involved. The person may not want what you are requesting for them, and God will not violate their free will. God will work on changing what they are willing accept, but that takes time. Often God is doing an internal work that you cannot see, and you need to wait, persevere, but don't try to help.

We were created for fellowship with God.