

Adventures in prayer

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Prayer is one of those incredibly complicated activities which is essentially simple (or is it a simple thing which we complicate?). This is because it is like a diamond! It is a thing of great beauty which has many facets: all of which contribute to the value of the whole.

What is prayer?

Prayer is the way by which we have fellowship with God.



Prayer is:

Talking to God
Talking with God
Listening to God
Being with God
Focusing on God
Intimacy with God

Fellowship (koinonia):
intimacy, communication,
sharing, communion,
oneness, participation.

God wants us to *pray without ceasing* (1 Thessalonians 5:17), so prayer to a Christian is just as natural, moment by moment, as breathing.

And pray in the Spirit on all occasions with all kinds of prayers and requests...

...keep on praying.... Ephesians 6:18

Let's now explore some principles that will make our prayer more effective.

1. The practice of prayer

Who? Prayer is made to God the Father (Matthew 6:9) in the name of Jesus (John 16:23, 24).

Why in Jesus' name? Because the name of Jesus is the highest authority in the universe. (Philippians 2:9-11). God has committed the government of the earth to Jesus (Isaiah 9:6,7) and He now rules from heaven, acting on earth by the Holy Spirit (John 16:13-15). When we pray in Jesus name we are praying in the authority (*exousia*) of that name (Matthew 28:18) from our righteous position in Christ (2 Corinthians 5:21, Ephesians 2:18, 3:12). God the Father acknowledges that authority and our position in Christ and on that basis has fellowship with us.

When? "*At all times*" (Ephesians 6:18), "*without ceasing*" (1 Thessalonians 5:17) God created us for fellowship and wants us to walk in a moment by moment intimacy with Him. Prayer is a habit, cultivated by practice!

We are also called to pray at special times, individually (eg. Psalm 92:1, 2) , corporately (eg. Acts 4:23-31) and sometimes even nationally (eg. Joel 1:14).

Where?

- In the quietness of your own room (Matthew 6:5,6).
- In prayer cells (watchtowers) of two or three (Matthew 18:18-20), Isaiah 62:6,7).
- Anywhere! Everywhere!

2. Preparation for prayer

- Environment** As you come to prayer It is wise to cultivate an atmosphere which is conducive to the presence of God eg. by removing anything which might be offensive to Him. (eg. Numbers 33:52, Acts 19:18,19).
- Cleansing** Give the Holy Spirit the opportunity to convict you about any sin in your life and then confess the sin and receive God's forgiveness (1 John 1:8,9). Only when we are clean before God can we expect Him to hear and answer our prayers. (Psalm 66: 18, Psalm 139:23,24, Isaiah 1:15).
- Praise** Spend some time focusing on God and who He is. Praise will help you centre on God and whatever He wants for you. (Psalm 22:3)
- Dependence** We cannot pray effectively without the direction, support and help of the Holy Spirit. (Romans 8:26). Wait on God till He gives you the direction you need (Psalm 40:1): ask to be filled again with the Holy Spirit (Ephesians 5:18); resist the devil (James 5:7); lay aside your own desires (Proverbs 3: 5,6, 28:26, Isaiah 55:8) and open your heart to God to find the direction He would lead you in as you pray. (Matthew 6:8).

3. Motives in prayer

God answers prayer according to His will, not according to our personal desires. (Matthew 6:10). In prayer it is thus important to know what the general purposes of God are. These are His priorities!

- The purpose of the Father is to have fellowship with a vast family of children, each conformed to the image of Jesus Christ. (Revelation 4:11, Ephesians 1: 5,6).
- The purpose of the Son is to honour the Father by establishing a Body on earth, in which He is the Head and through whom He rules. (Colossians 1:15-20).
- The purpose of the Holy Spirit is to honour Jesus by building us into the Body of Christ and empowering us to carry out the will of God. (1 Peter 2:5, 1 Corinthians 3:16).



Effective prayer will always be aligned with these purposes. If our motives are different from God's purposes our prayers will be largely hot air. eg. Jesus' criticism of the Pharisees; Matthew 6:5; Isaiah 1:15; Zechariah 7:13; Psalm 66:18.

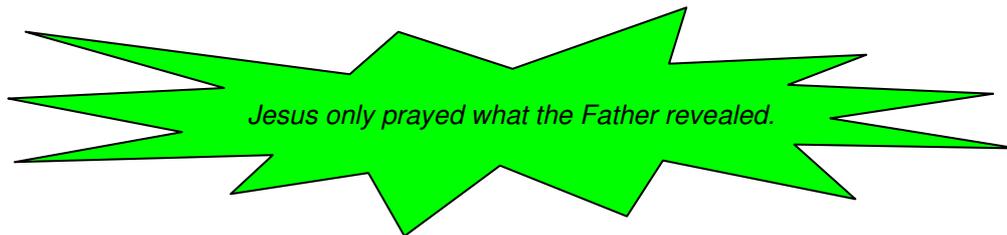
God is a jealous God and will not share His glory with any other. (Exodus 20:3-7; Joshua 24:19; Isaiah 48:11). If God answers our prayers He is to get the glory (not us!). We all have a tendency towards pride so when God does answer your prayers it's wise to boast of the Lord (2 Corinthians 10:17,18) otherwise we may imply it was our praying or our faith or our spirituality etc. which resulted in the answered prayer. This takes away the glory from the Lord and lays it on ones who can't handle it. Often it's best to remain silent eg. Luke 9:6; Luke 2:19.



Make sure your heart is right!

4. Answers to prayer

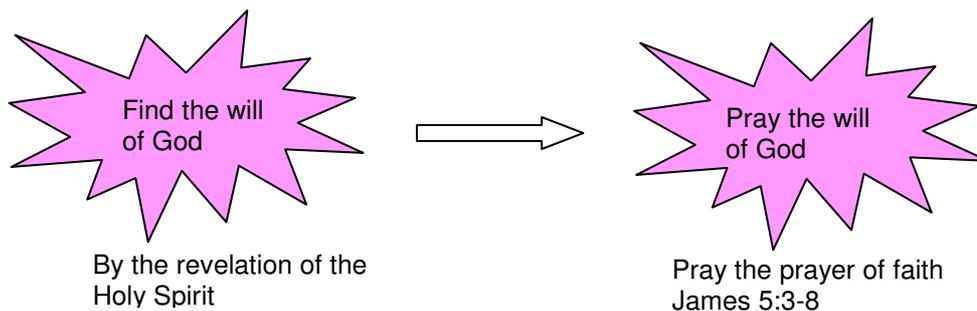
Jesus had every one of His prayers answered. What was the principle behind this amazing success?



See John 5:19; John 12:49,50; John 14:10,24.

If we want to have our prayers answered we need to do the same as Jesus: *pray in the will of God*.

- Wait for the Holy Spirit to reveal to you what He wants you to pray. (John 14:26; 15:7; 16:13).
- Hear God's word (*rhema*). This brings faith. (Romans 10:17; Mark 11:22 – *literally 'have the faith of God'*).
- Speak out whatever God has told you to say. (Mark 11:23).
- Believe that what you have said will come to pass. (Mark 11:23) and it will, because it is the will of God!



- If you don't know the will of God pray "*Thy will be done*". (Matthew 6:10).

This approach to prayer is totally dependant on God:

***He is Lord; His will must come to pass; He reveals His will;
We find His will; We pray His will; It comes to pass.***

5. God's promises about prayer

There are many places in the Bible where God promises to answer prayer. eg. Jeremiah 33:3. He delights in answering our prayers because this is one of the ways by which He is glorified.

If we are 'in Christ' we are in the will of God. That's when the promises of God are always 'YES' in Christ Jesus (2 Corinthians 1:20,21). There are no 'yes', 'no', 'later' answers here!

The promises of God are not like blank cheques which we can 'claim' indiscriminately to suit our own personal needs. Rather they have conditions attached directly or indirectly which we must fulfill.

Our task is not to 'claim' or 'stand on' the promises'. It is to fulfill the conditions.

Often Christians get excited about God's promises, but these promises don't seem to come to pass. We don't experience what the promise promised!

When we fulfill the conditions, though, we align ourselves with the will of God and God's will does come to pass. Obedience is the key to experiencing God's promises. eg. 2 Chronicles 7:14 (*If you will.....I will....*).

Here are some wonderful promises. What are the conditions we must fulfill to inherit these promises?

Promise	Conditions
Deuteronomy 4:29	
John 15:7	
John 14:13,14	
1 John 5:14,15	
Matthew 7:7,8	
Matthew 18:19	
Matthew 21:22	

6. Approaching God in prayer

God knows what is best in every situation and He knows what is the best way to bring this about. Thus in prayer we can come to Him:

- Confidently (Matthew 7:7-11)

God understands the situation so our approach to Him can be bold, confident and trusting as a child comes to a loving father. Eg. Luke 11: 5-13. In this case the petition was answered because of his boldness (*anaidea*: importunity, persistence, shamelessness, assurance). God's offer to us is to "Ask... Seek... Knock".

- Humbly (1 Peter 5:5,6)

We must always remember that "it is God with whom we have to do". He is in control, not us! Our approach to Him in prayer can only be to ask, never to command (John 16:24), no matter how bold we feel! Always be careful not to tell God what to do. (Daniel 4:34,35).



7. Directive prayer

We have no right to direct the lives of others through prayer. eg. "Lord, make Him ring me up tonight...". The Holy Spirit uses us, not we use Him.

Directive prayer is dangerous because:

- We tell God what He is to do, which violates the first commandment (Exodus 20:2,3).
- God will not violate a person's free will, and we have no right to either.
- There may be effects in the spiritual realm. If we try to be Lord over someone using prayer the Holy Spirit will not be part of the situation. This may open them up to some other spirit. Remember that occult practices are based on trying to control others by spiritual means.

It is much better to ask God to bless, lead, guide, help etc. He is Lord (not us) and will do whatever He wants in people's lives. (Psalm 37:23,24).

8. Prayer meetings

Prayer meetings are great! (Especially when everyone gets involved and when the Holy Spirit leads so that you flow in the directions He has in mind). eg. Acts 4: 23-31; Acts 12:12-17

Prayer meetings are not so great when one or two people pray and it dries up quickly due to embarrassing silences.

Prayer meetings could be improved by:

- Coming prepared (pre-prayered!)
- Waiting on God and listening for the voice of the Holy Spirit so you know the direction He wants the meeting to take
- Involving everyone and committing yourself to be involved
- Having agreed directions, prayer points etc. (Write them up so everyone can see them).
- Including scripture, prophecies, pictures, etc. which flow in with the prayer
- Flowing with themes and only moving on once all aspects of the theme have been prayed through.
- Breaking into small groups to pray through specific issues
- Praying around a group so everyone is involved
- Being sensitive to the Holy Spirit and to each other about when to move on into new directions
- Having agreed finish times (preferably after allowing plenty of time for the prayer meeting!).



9. Wandering thoughts in prayer

Many Christians have problems with wandering thoughts in prayer (or even worse, going to sleep while "praying"). Prayer is a powerful force against the enemy so it is expected that we will have problems in our prayer lives. (2 Corinthians 10:3-6).

Some practical ways of overcoming wandering thoughts are:

- Pray with others (Matthew 18:20)
- Pray aloud and listen to what you are saying
- Submit your thoughts to God and resist the devil when he tries to distract you (Romans 12:1,2; James 4:7,8)
- Pray about the thoughts that are distracting you (1 Peter 5:7-9)
- Try to remove all distractions eg. by closing your eyes (Matthew 6:6)
- Write down items for prayer: thanksgiving, intercession, supplication etc.
- Break up the prayer time with singing, Bible reading, writing etc. (Ephesians 5:19,20)



Prayer does require discipline and concentration. As we learn to pray it becomes easier, though, and moves from being a ritual or necessity to a delight. (Hebrews 4:14-16).

10. Prayer diaries

Many people keep a prayer diary which records matters which have been prayed for and the answers to those prayers. It is very encouraging to see the different ways that God answers prayer!



11. Informal prayer

Prayer doesn't have to be formal, with set times, places or ways of praying. In fact most of our prayer is likely to be informal: a natural expression of the personal fellowship we have with God each day.

You can pray :

- In silence
- When you feel like it
- Inside or outside
- At work
- On your own
- While walking
- When you don't feel like it
- Out loud or in your heart
- At play
- With others
- When singing
- When Bible reading
- While you're sleeping
- Through your actions
- etc.

See Ephesians 5:15-17.

Prayer is most real when it is a natural expression of who you are and of your relationship with God at the time.

12. Examples of prayer

Here are some great examples of prayer from throughout the Bible. You'll see many of the above principles in action!

Genesis 32:9-12; Deuteronomy 9:26-29; 2 Samuel 7:18-29; 1 Kings 3:6-9; 1 Chronicles 4:10; Ezra 9:5-15; Nehemiah 1:5-11; Job 1:20-22; most of the Psalms; Isaiah 37:14-20; Daniel 9:1-19; Jonah 2:1-9; Habakkuk 3:2-19; Matthew 6:9-13; Acts 4:24-30; Revelation 5:9-14.

Questions for discussion

- Why do we find it hard to pray?
- What can we do to improve our prayer lives, and our prayer meetings?
- Does God always answer our prayers? Is 'Yes', 'No', 'Wait' or 'Maybe' really an answer to prayer?
- How can we find God's will when we are praying?
- What happens when we tell God what to do when we are praying?
- How can we have prayer as a natural expression of a moment-by-moment fellowship with God?



“Lord, teach us to pray”

Luke 11:1