

Christian Growth

Week 9: Prayer as a Means of Grace

Introduction

John 15:7 If you remain in me and my words remain in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be given you. ⁸ This is to my Father's glory, that you bear much fruit, showing yourselves to be my disciples.

Col. 4:2* Devote yourselves to prayer, keeping alert in it with an attitude of thanksgiving. (“devote” - *proskartereo*: “continue steadfastly”)

Biblical prayer is personal communication with God, and it is a gift of God's grace.

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Ephesians 3:12 In (Christ) and through faith in Him we may approach God with freedom and confidence.

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John 14:13 And I will do whatever you ask in my name, so that the Son may bring glory to the Father. ¹⁴ You may ask me for anything in my name, and I will do it. (See also Jn. 15:7,16; 16:24,26.)

Yet prayer is difficult . . .

- Prayer is the least _____.
- Our _____ natures and _____ distract and discourage us from praying.
- God often does not answer our prayers, in the way _____.

General principles

Which extreme do you tend toward in these four areas?

Prayer should be both _____ and _____.

See examples of Nehemiah's spontaneous prayers in Neh. 1:5-11; 2:4b; 4:4,5,9; 5:19; 6:9,14; 13:14,22,29,31.

See Daniel's example of planned private prayer (Dan. 6:10). Acts 2:42 (literally: "the prayers") may refer to planned corporate prayer.

Prayer should be both _____ and _____.

See Luke's record of the early church's corporate prayer in Acts 1:14,24; 2:42; 4:24-30; 12:12; 13:2; 16:25; 20:36. Probably many of the New Testament letters' exhortations to pray mean corporate as well as private prayer.

1 Cor. 14:16 If you are praising God with your spirit, how can one who finds himself among those who do not understand say "Amen" to your thanksgiving, since he does not know what you are saying?

We need to keep cultivating regular quality times of private prayer.

Matt. 6:1 "Be careful not to do your 'acts of righteousness' before men, to be seen by them. If you do, you will have no reward from your Father in heaven . . . ⁵ "And when you pray, do not be like the hypocrites, for they love to pray standing in the synagogues and on the street corners to be seen by men. I tell you the truth, they have received their reward in full. ⁶ But when you pray, go into your room, close the door and pray to your Father, who is unseen. Then your Father, who sees what is done in secret, will reward you.

*Prayer should involve both _____ God's love and _____
God's love to others.*

Phil. 4:4 Rejoice in the Lord always. I will say it again: Rejoice!

Col. 4:12 Epaphras, who is one of you and a servant of Christ Jesus, sends greetings. He is always wrestling in prayer for you, that you may stand firm in all the will of God, mature and fully assured. ¹³ I vouch for him that he is working hard for you and for those at Laodicea and Hierapolis.

Prayer should involve both _____ and _____ to God.

Rom. 8:15 For you did not receive a spirit that makes you a slave again to fear, but you received the Spirit of sonship. And by him we cry, "Abba, Father."

Rom. 8:26* 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 with groans that words cannot express.

Prayer and God's Word

The indicatives and promises of scripture provide:

- The main basis of our _____ and _____.

Personalize passages that focus on God's provisions and promises (e.g., Eph. 1,2; Rom. 8; 2 Cor. 4; many Psalms).

Utilize scriptural songs for the same purpose.

Ephesians 5:18-20 Do not get drunk on wine, which leads to debauchery. Instead, be filled with the Spirit.¹⁹ Speak to one another with psalms, hymns and spiritual songs. Sing and make music in your heart to the Lord,²⁰ always giving thanks to God the Father for everything, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ

- The main basis of our prayer against _____.

Ephesians 6:10 Finally, be strong in the Lord and in his mighty power.¹¹ Put on the full armor of God so that you can take your stand against the devil's schemes.¹² For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms . . .¹⁸ And pray in the Spirit on all occasions with all kinds of prayers and requests. With this in mind, be alert and always keep on praying for all the saints.

Biblical imperatives and prayer priorities help us focus our prayer requests.¹

- The more we pray with the motive of _____, the more we will see God answer our prayers. Conversely, the more we pray from _____, the more vulnerable we will be to discouragement when few of our prayers are answered.

John 14:13 And I will do whatever you ask in my name, so that the Son may bring glory to the Father.

Jas. 4:2 You do not have, because you do not ask God.³ When you ask, you do not receive, because you ask with wrong motives, that you may spend what you get on your pleasures.

- The more we petition and intercede in accordance with _____, the more we will see answers to our prayers for ourselves and for others.

Jn. 15:7 If you remain in me and my words remain in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be given you.

1 Jn. 5:14,15* This is the confidence we have in approaching God: that if we ask anything according to his will, he hears us.¹⁵ And if we know that he hears us—whatever we ask—we know that we have what we asked of him.

Key scriptural priorities include:

Better understanding and appreciation of _____

Eph. 1:18 I pray that the eyes of your heart may be enlightened, so that you will know what is the hope of His calling, what are the riches of the glory of His inheritance in the saints, 19 and what is the surpassing greatness of His power toward us who believe.

¹ “Most of us . . . get bogged down with trivia: Jane’s sinus trouble, Ben’s discouragement, Mary’s problem with her mother-in-law . . . All of these may be important, but prayer, like warfare, calls for strategy. It is said of Napoleon that he would watch the development of his battles from a vantage, quietly analyzing the situation while he watched. His key general would watch him. ‘That farm,’ he once said to Marshall Ney, ‘That farm that you can see on the ridge there. Take it . . . Hold it. For if you can, the battle is won.’ In praying for the Ephesians, Paul was aware that if the key to the whole battle was won, lesser skirmishes would sort themselves out rather easily. Smaller problems are so often symptomatic of larger issues . . . Prayer must be directed at that which is the key. It concerns itself with strategy, not with tactics . . . If therefore one thinks that Paul’s prayer is spiritual and not practical, it is a sign of how blind he is to what life is all about . . .” John White, *Daring To Draw Near* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1977), p. 137.

Greater _____ for other people.

1 Thess. 3:12 May the Lord cause you to increase and abound in love for one another, and for all people . . .

Better discernment on _____.

Phil. 1:9 this I pray, that your love may abound still more and more in real knowledge and all discernment . . .

Opportunities to _____ and _____ and

_____ to make the most of these opportunities

Col. 4:3 Pray for us, too, that God may open a door for our message, so that we may proclaim the mystery of Christ, for which I am in chains. ⁴ Pray that I may proclaim it clearly, as I should.

Eph. 6:19 Pray also for me, that whenever I open my mouth, words may be given me so that I will fearlessly make known the mystery of the gospel, ²⁰ for which I am an ambassador in chains. Pray that I may declare it fearlessly, as I should.

For non-Christians to be _____.

Jn. 16:8 “And He (the Holy Spirit), when He comes, will convict the world concerning sin and righteousness and judgment . . .

Spiritual _____ and _____ and

_____ for ministry

2 Thess. 1:11 We constantly pray for you, that our God may count you worthy of his calling, and that by his power he may fulfill every good purpose of yours and every act prompted by your faith.

2 Thess. 2:16 May our Lord Jesus Christ himself and God our Father, who loved us and by his grace gave us eternal encouragement and good hope, ¹⁷ encourage your hearts and strengthen you in every good deed and word.

2 Thess. 3:1 Finally, brethren, pray for us that the word of the Lord will spread rapidly and be glorified, just as it did also with you; ² and that we will be rescued from perverse and evil men; for not all have faith.

Exposure of hidden _____

Ps. 139:23 Search me, O God, and know my heart; test me and know my anxious thoughts. ²⁴ See if there is any offensive way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting.

Wisdom to understand what God is trying to teach us through

Jas. 1:5 If any of you lacks wisdom, he should ask God, who gives generously to all without finding fault, and it will be given to him. (the context is about trials and suffering)

More _____ raised up

Matt. 9:36 When Jesus saw the crowds, he had compassion on them, because they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd. ³⁷ Then he said to his disciples, “The harvest is plentiful but the workers are few. ³⁸ Ask the Lord of the harvest, therefore, to send out workers into his harvest field.”

Practical advice for common prayer problems

There are certain problems associated with prayer that most Christians battle recurrently. Here are four common problems, along with some advice and encouragement.

“I feel bad about how much I neglect prayer.” Most of us battle with accusation and discouragement concerning our aversion to and/or weakness in prayer. In spite of our best efforts and resolutions, we drift into periods of prayerlessness. How common it is to think: “I should pray”—only to be beset with thoughts like: “It’s been so long since I last prayed” or “I feel so distant from God” or “I have been in the flesh for a long time” or “I haven’t been serving God lately,” etc.

- Remember that the fact that you are distressed about your prayerlessness is itself evidence that you are _____
- Remember that it is _____ that makes you worthy to talk to God—*never* your recent moral obedience, *never* your recent ministry performance, *never* your feelings of closeness with God.
- Pray with your Christian friends when you are with them.

“I get so distracted during private prayer.” Satan and our sin-nature will try to distract us, often by reminding us of “good” things to be done. Additionally, the inability to be mentally quiet and focused is one of the main negative effects of our fast-paced culture and excessive Information Technology usage. So we should expect this to be a battle. At the same time, we should take practical steps to help us to stay focused. We must each find our own way in this—but here is some helpful advice:

- Prioritize _____ over _____
- Find things that help you stay _____
- Pick a _____
- _____
- When you realize that your mind has wandered _____
- _____
- Expect _____

“I don’t know where to begin in praying for myself and/or for others.” What should we ask for? In a very subtle way, most of us feel like we need to counsel God on how best to meet this need in order for him to answer!

- On the one hand, _____
- On the other hand, _____

It can sometimes be helpful to use a scriptural prayer as a “template” for your prayers for people and/or situations. EXAMPLES:

Matt. 6:9-13

Lk. 22:31,32

Eph. 1:17-20

“*Why doesn’t God answer my prayers according to my expectations?*” This is a complicated issue because there are many reasons why a specific request may not be answered:

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- Your request was answered, _____
- God will answer your request, _____
- Your request was legitimate, _____
- Your request was legitimate, _____

Ps. 66:18 If I regard wickedness in my heart, the Lord will not hear.

1 Pet. 3:7 Husbands, in the same way be considerate as you live with your wives, and treat them with respect as the weaker partner and as heirs with you of the gracious gift of life, so that nothing will hinder your prayers.

Sometimes God wants us to understand why He is not answering, but at others times He just wants us to trust Him without knowing. Ask God to reveal the reason to you if you need to know it—and then try to leave it in His hands instead of obsessing over “the reason why.” Remember that God is loving and wise. His “no,” His “not yet,” and his temporary silence are motivated every bit as much by His love as His “yes.” Many of these questions get answered over time rather than immediately. And as you see more and more of God’s loving wisdom in the way He responds to our prayers, it gets easier to trust him in this area.

Memory verses

Col. 4:2* - We should pray regularly, alertly, and thankfully.

1 Jn. 5:14,15* - We can be confident that God will answer prayers that are according to His revealed will.

Rom. 8:26* - The Holy Spirit will help us to pray.

Assignment

Hallesby, “The Spirit of Prayer,” from *Prayer*

Murray, “Conquering Prayerlessness”