

# Prayer

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## WHAT IS PRAYER?

God communicates with us through His inspired word; we communicate with Him through prayer. Warning against hypocrisy, empty ritual, and meaningless repetition, Jesus taught His disciples to pray (Matt. 6:5-15; Luke 11:1-4). Prayer is the sincere outpouring of our hearts to God. The faithful come before God's throne with confidence (Heb. 4:14-16), knowing that He hears and answers the prayers of His own (Heb. 4:14-16).

Prayer is appropriate for every occasion, an essential part of our daily lives. Paul said, "Pray without ceasing" (1 Thess. 5:17). He admonished the Colossians, "Devote yourselves to prayer, keeping alert in it with an attitude of thanksgiving" (Col. 4:2). Moreover, the apostle followed the same rule that he proclaimed (Rom. 1:9-12; 2 Tim. 1:3-4).

Regular prayer is an identifying mark of New Testament Christianity. Those who were baptized on the day of Pentecost continued steadfastly in the apostles' teaching and fellowship, and in the breaking of bread and in prayer (Acts 2:41-42). Delegating certain responsibilities, the apostles devoted themselves to prayer and the ministry of the word (Acts 6:1-4, esp. vs. 4). When Peter was imprisoned, "prayer for him was being made fervently by the church to God" (Acts 12:1-5, esp. vs. 5). May we, like the Psalmist, cast our burdens upon the Lord (Psa. 55:22). Fervent prayer causes anxieties to fade and flee (Phil. 4:6-7; 1 Pet. 5:6-7).

## WILL GOD ANSWER PRAYER?

The Bible teaches that God answers prayer (Psa. 34:15-17; 1 Pet. 3:12). Elijah's example proves that the effective prayer of a righteous man can accomplish much (James 5:16-18).

God answers prayer, but certain spiritual laws must be heeded. This fact should come as no surprise. A successful farmer follows certain rules: The soil must be prepared, seed must be planted at the correct time, weeds and insects must be controlled, etc. Appropriate amounts of rain and sunshine are also essential. All are necessary if one expects to raise a crop. So also in God's vineyard. His spiritual laws must be followed if we are to receive the hoped for blessings.

## **PRINCIPLES OF ACCEPTABLE PRAYER.**

First, we must ask (Matt. 7:7-11). God knows our every need, but asking is an acknowledgement of His sovereignty, and also demonstrates our faith in Him as our protector and provider (James 1:17).

We must ask according to His will (1 John 5:14-15). Rather than merely seeking our own selfish ends, our aim should be to glorify God. Facing the agony of the cross, Jesus prayed, "Thy will be done!" (Matt. 26:36-44).

We must ask in the name of Christ (John 14:13-14; 15:16). More than ritualistic language, this involves understanding our relationship with the Redeemer: we approach the Father through Jesus Christ, our mediator and intercessor (1 Tim. 2:5; Heb. 7:25), respecting His absolute authority (Matt. 28:18-20; Col. 3:17).

We must ask in faith (James 1:5-8). Christian faith is rooted in the inspired message of truth (Rom. 10:17). We must have faith in God, His word, His power and providence. Saving faith expresses itself in obedience: we must hear and heed heaven's message (Matt. 7:24-27).

We must ask with a heart filled with thankfulness (Phil. 4:6-7; 1 Thess. 5:17-18). No occasion is so dark and desperate that we cannot give thanks. If Paul and Silas could sing praises after having been wrongly beaten and imprisoned, we can be thankful despite adverse circumstances. (Acts 16:25).

We must ask with a patient attitude. God answers prayers that are in accordance to His will. Sometimes He answers, "Yes" and sometimes He says, "No" (2 Cor. 12:7-9). At other times, He may say, "Wait awhile." A rose does not blossom in a day. Forcing petals open before they are ready will destroy the flower's beauty and fragrance. There are many questions that I cannot answer, and also many answers that I cannot question. In His time, our Heavenly Father blesses His children.

We must live accord to God's will and word. Holiness is essential (1 Pet. 3:12). Elijah was a man "with a nature like ours" yet his prayers were effective (James 5:17). Obedience is essential (1 John 3:21-22).

## **WHO HAS THE RIGHT OF PRAYER?**

God hears those who abide in Christ (John 15:7). God hears those who pray in the name of Christ (John 14:13-14; Col. 3:17). God hears the prayer of those who are forgiving (Matt. 6:12, 14-15; Mark 11:25-26). God hears those who are humble (Luke 18:9-14). God hears those who are persistent (Luke 18:1-8). God hears those who are upright (Prov. 15:8, 29; 1 Pet. 3:12; 1 John 3:21-22).

## **WHOM WILL GOD NOT HEAR?**

God will not hear those who are evil doers (Psa. 34:12-16; 66:16-20; James 4:1-3). God will not hear those who are rebellious (Prov. 1:20-31; 28:9; Isa. 1:10-20). God will not hear those who are faithless (James 1:5-8). God will not hear those who are hypocritical (Matt. 6:5-6). God will not hear those who are unforgiving (Matt. 6:12, 14-15; Mark 11:25-26). God will not hear those who are unmerciful (Prov. 21:13).

## **WHERE ARE WE TO PRAY?**

We should pray in private (Matt. 6:6; 14:22-23; Luke 6:12). We should pray in public (Acts 2:41-42; 12:5, 12).

## **WHEN SHOULD WE PRAY?**

We should pray at all times (Eph. 6:18; Phil. 4:6; Col. 4:2; 1 Thess. 5:16-18).

## **HOW SHOULD WE PRAY?**

We read of those who prayed while standing (1 Kings 8:22-24; Mark 11:25; Luke 18:13). We read of those who prayed with bowed heads (Neh. 8:6; Luke 18:13). We read of those who prayed with bended knee (Luke 22:41; Acts 20:36; Eph. 3:14). We read of those who prayed with outstretched hands (Psa. 63:4; Luke 24:50; 1 Tim. 2:8). We read of those who fell down and prayed prostrate (Job 1:20; Matt. 26:39; Rev. 5:8).

## **CONCLUSION**

Let us implement these principles in our daily lives, living in harmony with God's Word, leaning upon Him for guidance, petitioning Him regularly in prayer. May we pray to God in a time when He may be found (Psa. 32:6-7), and call upon Him while He is near (Isa. 55:6-13).