



PRAYER

Reading: Psalm 107

The privilege of prayer

The Almighty God of heaven and earth speaks to us through the Bible. Prayer is the way in which we can speak to Him. It is an important part of a believer's personal relationship with Him. To be able to pray to God in heaven is a great privilege that He has given to those who are humble and recognise His greatness:

"Thus says the LORD: 'Heaven is my throne, and the earth is my footstool... But this is the one to whom I will look: he who is humble and contrite in spirit and trembles at my word' " (Isaiah 66:1,2).

We must speak to God with the greatest respect at all times.

Why do we need to pray?

God knows everything about us. He sees all that we do and knows all that we think (Psalm 139:1-4). We do not need to tell Him anything about ourselves. Jesus said to his disciples, "... *your Father knows what you need before you ask him*" (Matthew 6:8). But God does want us to pray to Him, for Jesus continues by teaching his disciples how to pray.

Prayer helps us to see outside our own lives and consider our Maker. It raises our thoughts to a more spiritual level and helps us to see ourselves as God sees us. Prayer is part of our worship, and it gives us the opportunity to think things through in the presence of a God who loves us and wants what is best for us. Thinking and praying about the needs of other people helps us to appreciate our own blessings. So prayer is for our benefit, as well as to praise and thank the Creator for His love. One of the main reasons for prayer is that God wants people to trust and rely on Him and not on themselves, or on other people.

What should we pray about?

Matthew 6 records the model prayer that Jesus gave his disciples. He did not intend people to use these exact words every time they prayed, but provided them as a guide. Prayer should be sincere but can become meaningless with repetition (Matthew 6:7).

"Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name. Your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread, and forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors. And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil. For yours is the kingdom and the power and the glory, forever. Amen" (Matthew 6:9-13, including footnote).

The prayer starts by giving honour and praise to God. We need to remember God's greatness.

Jesus showed that we should pray for God's kingdom to be restored on this earth and for His will to be done. We should eagerly look forward to the coming kingdom when people will do God's will. But we know that we will only be part of the future kingdom if we try to accept God's will in our lives now.

Our needs should come after we have praised God and reminded ourselves of His purpose. We should be aware that "*our daily bread*" refers to our spiritual food from the Bible, as well as what we eat. We need to ask for help in understanding God's Word, the Bible, as the Psalmist did (Psalm 119:125).

This prayer reminds us that those who want forgiveness must show forgiveness to others. (But God will only forgive sins in the way He has appointed, that is, through the sacrifice of the Lord Jesus, and this requires the believer to be baptized first. After





baptism, God will only forgive believers if they are prepared to forgive others.) The prayer Jesus gave his disciples also warns about the dangers of temptation.

There are other things we can include in our prayers. The apostle Paul says:

*“Do not be anxious about anything, but **in everything** by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God”* (Philippians 4:6).

For example, before setting out on a journey, we should pray for God’s angels to keep us safe. Before he chose his twelve disciples, Jesus spent all night in prayer (Luke 6:12,13). So we should take the important decisions of our life to God in prayer. In the Garden of Gethsemane, Jesus prayed intensely to God for strength and he was comforted by an angel. We should place our worries, our joys and our sadness before God in prayer. Every part of our life will benefit from prayer.

How should we pray?

It is important to realise that we cannot expect God to hear our prayers if we do not try and follow Him. James 5:16 tells us that *“The prayer of a **righteous** person has great power as it is working”*. We have to be right with God if we want Him to hear our prayers. Proverbs 28:9 explains that God will not hear the prayers of those who ignore His Word:

“If one turns away his ear from hearing the law, even his prayer is an abomination”.

There was an occasion when God would not hear the prayers of Israel because of their wickedness:

“When you spread out your hands, I will hide my eyes from you; even though you make many prayers, I will not listen; your hands are full of blood” (Isaiah 1:15).

We need to learn to pray in the right way.

- 1. We should pray in accordance with God’s will** – We must not pray in a demanding way, expecting God to provide whatever we ask. In Gethsemane, Jesus prayed, *“not my will, but yours, be done”* (Luke 22:42). This was the principle of his life, and we should pray in the same way. We learn about God’s will by studying His Word. This will help us to stop praying for things that God will not want us to have. The apostle John wrote: *“And this is the confidence that we have towards him, that if we ask anything **according to his will** he hears us”* (1 John 5:14).
- 2. We should ask in faith** – We must believe that God hears our prayers and that He has the power to answer them. James 1:5,6 says:

*“If any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask God, who gives generously to all without reproach, and it will be given him. But **let him ask in faith**, with no doubting, for the one who doubts is like a wave of the sea that is driven and tossed by the wind”*.

However, this does not mean that God will give us everything we ask for. God does not take away all our problems in this life but He offers us a place in His kingdom. If we pray in the right way then God will hear us and He will answer in ways that help us to grow spiritually and develop more Christ-like characters, which will prepare us for that kingdom. God knows what is best for us and may not always give us what we ask for. Sometimes He grants our request after making us wait. Isaac prayed but had to wait a long time for his sons to be born (Genesis 25:20-26). Sometimes God disciplines us by the circumstances of life. But we can still ask Him to help us accept these problems and learn from them.

“And we know that for those who love God all things work together for good, for those who are called according to his purpose” (Romans 8:28).

God loves and cares for those who sincerely seek Him and we must believe that whatever happens to us now is because God is working in our lives for our good. We should therefore ask in faith, praying for God’s will to be done and not ours, knowing that only God can truly help us in our lives. Always, *“the eyes of the LORD are towards the righteous, and his ears towards their cry”* (Psalm 34:15).





God can direct believers through circumstances He has controlled. Sometimes it is only by looking back at our lives that we see how God has answered our prayers.

3. The right attitude – We need to be humble when we approach God in prayer, recognising His greatness and how small we are before Him. We need to be totally honest with ourselves, with a deep awareness of our sins and our need to be forgiven by Him. Jesus told the parable about the prayers of a tax collector and a Pharisee. The despised tax collector bowed his head and prayed, *“God, be merciful to me, a sinner!”* (Luke 18:13). Jesus said that such a man would be heard by God because he humbled himself, unlike the Pharisee who was very proud of his own efforts at living a good life. His prayer was not acceptable. Psalm 138:6 shows that God is not interested in us when we are proud:

“For though the LORD is high, he regards the lowly, but the haughty he knows from afar.”

Some people think that they will enjoy their lives without God, but turn to Him just before they die. But God knows their thoughts and motives, and knows that they are not truly repenting. Anyway their plan will be ruined if they die suddenly or remain alive until Christ returns. God cannot be fooled!

The Bible is full of prayers, like the book of Psalms where there are 150 to learn from, or the prayers of Jesus and his followers. If we read the Scriptures daily we will develop a mind pleasing to God. It will shape the way we think and therefore the way we talk to God. We will gradually realise that we need to trust Him completely and not rely on our own ideas and actions.

When should we pray?

We can pray at any time and in any situation, as often as we wish, whether we are at home or travelling or at work. Jesus liked to go somewhere quiet on his own. But we can also pray in the middle of an emergency, as Nehemiah did (Nehemiah 2:4). Many people find it helpful to have regular times for personal prayer, often to start and end the day (Psalm 92:2). The writer of Psalm 55:17 and Daniel both prayed three times a day (Daniel 6:10). Paul said, *“pray without ceasing”* (1 Thessalonians 5:17). This does not mean that we have to speak to God every minute of the day, but means that every part of our life should be lived prayerfully, talking everything through with God.

Jesus as High Priest and Mediator

When the tabernacle was built in the wilderness as a place of worship, the glory of God shone over the Ark of the Covenant. No-one was allowed to enter into the presence of God except the High Priest on one day each year, on the Day of Atonement. On that day he confessed before God all the sins of the nation of Israel. He was the mediator (‘go-between’) for the nation in their approach to God and this continued for many generations. This principle of someone who was a go-between for God and His people pointed forward to the work of the Lord Jesus as mediator for his followers. By his death he has opened up a *“new and living way”* to God (Hebrews 10:20).

God is holy and righteous, so sinful man cannot directly approach Him. But now that the Lord Jesus Christ has opened up the way for those who have been baptized to come to God, they can seek forgiveness knowing that *“If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness”* (1 John 1:9). Baptized believers must therefore pray to God through the Lord Jesus because he presents our prayers to God. This is why we start (or end) our prayers with a phrase such as *“through Jesus Christ our Lord”*, or *“in Jesus’ name”*. The Lord Jesus had human nature like us and so he understands us and can *“sympathize with our weaknesses”* (Hebrews 4:15).

The risen Lord is at the right hand of the Father, and is now a mediator – or intercessor – for those who pray to God through him:

“... Christ Jesus is the one who died—more than that, who was raised—who is at the right hand of God, who indeed is interceding (mediating) for us” (Romans 8:34).





The Lord Jesus Christ does more than simply pass on our prayers to God. Because of his love for us, and because of the authority which he has been given (Matthew 28:18), he is concerned to bring our needs and desires to the Father: *“He (Jesus) is able to save to the uttermost those who draw near to God through him, since he always lives to make intercession (plead) for them”* (Hebrews 7:25). Remember what he promised to his disciples before he died, *“Truly, truly, I say to you, whatever you ask of the Father in my name, he will give it to you”* (John 16:23). The Lord Jesus Christ is active on behalf of his followers, to help them bring their prayers to God; and works in the lives of believers in answer to their prayers.

“He who did not spare his own Son but gave him up for us all, how will he not also with him graciously give us all things?” (Romans 8:32).

**Jesus Christ is the High Priest for baptized believers.
He is the mediator or intercessor who presents the prayers of believers to God
and pleads with Him for the forgiveness of their sins.**

This special relationship with God through His Son is something for you to look forward to with joy if, in the mercy of God, you are baptized. At baptism, your sins will be forgiven – God will blot them out for ever. After that He will forgive your daily sins, if you are truly sorry for them and seek forgiveness.

Does God hear the prayers of unbaptized people today?

Although without baptism into Christ there is no forgiveness of sins, it is important to understand that God does hear the prayer of those seeking to know Him and understand His ways. For example, God heard the prayers of Cornelius and Lydia before they were baptized (Acts 10:1-6; 16:13,14). He will also be pleased when people remember to thank Him for all His blessings and want Him to guide them.

But people who refuse to accept God’s offer of salvation cannot expect God to hear them. Their sins can only be forgiven by associating themselves with the death of Jesus by baptism. This is the way God has set up and no-one can argue with God about the way He has chosen to be gracious. God is concerned for all His creatures and will hear every sincere prayer, though He may not answer it straight away, or He may respond in a way that is not expected.

Summary

1. God will hear the prayers of all who are humble and sincere.
2. We must learn to pray for the right things in the right way.
3. After we are baptized we may pray through Jesus Christ to have our sins forgiven.
4. Our prayers should include:
 - praise and honour to God and the Lord Jesus Christ
 - pleading for the Lord Jesus to return soon to restore God’s kingdom
 - asking for help in reading the Bible, serving God and preaching His Word
 - confessing our sins before God
 - thanks to God for the blessings we receive each day
 - asking for God’s help for those we know that are in need
 - asking God to look after our natural families and help them to come to Him.

Verse to learn: Philippians 4:6

... do not be anxious about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God.

Passages to read: Acts 10; Psalms 51,102; Luke 18:1-14; 1 Timothy 2:5; Hebrews 4:14, 9:24

