



Prayer

I What is prayer?

Prayer is simply an expression of our relationship with a living God. All relationships require communication to grow and mature and our relationship with God is no different!

As we talk with our Father God, we will get to know His heart and character and out of this, our trust of Him will grow. Prayer is not a task or a ritual, it is a conversation.

John 10:27

27 My sheep hear My voice, and I know them, and they follow Me.

I (i) It's not just about asking for stuff

Prayer is not just making requests to God. When we make all our prayer about asking for stuff, we totally miss the power and wonder of communicating with the living God!

God wants us to have the things we need, and He wants us to ask in faith, believing that He is our Father and that He provides, but that's not all there is.

I (ii) How not to pray

Matthew 6:5-8

5 "And when you pray, you shall not be like the hypocrites. For they love to pray standing in the synagogues and on the corners of the streets, that they may be seen by men. Assuredly, I say to you, they have their reward. 6 But you, when you pray, go into your room, and when you have shut your door, pray to your Father who is in the secret place; and your Father who sees in secret will reward you openly. 7 And when you pray, do not use vain repetitions as the heathen do. For they think that they will be heard for their many words. 8 "Therefore do not be like them. For your Father knows the things you have need of before you ask Him.

We see here that our motivation for praying is very important. Jesus himself prayed in the streets and in public, so this was not the problem. The problem was that people were being hypocrites by praying in public, not to honour God and communicate with Him, but to be seen by men. These hypocrites loved for people to see what great holy prayers they were. It was all about human reputation and not about faith in a living God.

Another problem we see is vain repetitions or praying the same prayer over and over to try get God to do something by making a lot of noise. Again, this is a lack of faith in God's goodness and His promises to provide for us.

I (iii) Different types of prayer

We will be looking and examples of different types of prayer found in the Bible to help us to communicate with God in a way that is faith filled and understands that He is our perfect Father who only wants good things for us.

The seven types of prayer we will discuss are:

- Prayer of Petition/Asking
- Prayer of Intercession/Standing in the gap
- Prayer of Praise & Thanksgiving
- Prayer of Meditation/Thinking deeply on the Word of God
- Prayer of Consecration/Submitting a thing to God
- Prayer of Agreement
- Praying in Tongues / in the Spirit

Remember that while we are separating these out to study them, they all work together as we talk to our God with honest hearts. This is not just a method, it's to create an awareness in you so that you can engage fully with all God has for you.

II Prayer of Petition/Asking

This type of prayer probably makes up about 95% plus of many Christian's prayer life, but it should probably be making up closer to 5-10%. The reason is we don't understand how to receive from God and we don't really believe that He answers us when we ask.

Mark 11:24

Therefore I say to you, whatever things you ask when you pray, believe that you receive them, and you will have them.

We see here that when we ask, we should believe at that time that we have received, and we will get what we asked for. Too many people wait to see the results with their physical eyes before they will believe that they have received. Faith is the key to the things of God. It is our faith that gives God permission to act for us in our lives! By not believing, we tie God's hands and become the obstacle to our own provision.

Luke 18:1-8

Then He spoke a parable to them, that men always ought to pray and not lose heart, 2 saying: "There was in a certain city a judge who did not fear God nor regard man. 3 Now there was a widow in that city; and she came to him, saying, 'Get justice for me from my adversary.' 4 And he would not for a while; but afterward he said within himself, 'Though I do not fear God nor regard man, 5 yet because this widow troubles me I will avenge her, lest by her continual coming she weary me.'" 6 Then the Lord said, "Hear what the unjust judge said. 7 And shall God not avenge His own elect who cry out day and night to Him, though He bears long with them? 8 I tell you that He will avenge them speedily. Nevertheless, when the Son of Man comes, will He really find faith on the earth?"

Jesus tells a story here about a corrupt judge who didn't care about God or men, he was only concerned with his own corrupt gains. A widow comes to him for help and because she can't advance his corrupt agenda, he ignores her. She persists and eventually to get rid of her noise and the constant irritation that she causes, the judge gives her what she asks for. The corrupt judge did not act out of goodness or a desire to see justice done but to rid himself of an irritant.

Many people approach God as if He is this corrupt judge, thinking they have to keep complaining until He gets tired of their prayers and does something for them. This is not what this story is teaching! Jesus is contrasting God with this judge, not comparing them. Jesus says that unlike a corrupt judge who must be coerced into helping us, God will respond to us speedily. We don't have to bombard a "reluctant" God until He does something, we need to ask once and then give thanks in the confidence that our loving Father is speedily dealing with our request.

James 4:2-3

You lust and do not have. You murder and covet and cannot obtain. You fight and war. Yet you do not have because you do not ask. 3 You ask and do not receive, because you ask amiss, that you may spend it on your pleasures.

Sometimes God does not grant our requests because we ask for things that will destroy us or pull us from the path of His perfect purpose in our lives. God is not interested in us living lives of seeking pointless pleasure without purpose, He wants us to walk in the fulness of what it means to be his sons/daughters.

Matthew 7:7

"Ask, and it will be given to you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you.

1 John 5:14

Now this is the confidence that we have in Him, that if we ask anything according to His will, He hears us.

As we ask and seek, doing so with faith and hearts that desire God's will, we can be confident that we will have what we ask for.

III Prayer of Intercession/Standing in the gap

The prayer of intercession is praying into things that are preventing God's answers to our prayers from reaching us or others. It often involves praying for others and coming against the evil spiritual forces that are attacking them (or us).

Let's look at an example in Daniel chapter 10. You should read the story for yourself to understand the background but we will look at verses 10-13.

Daniel 10:10-13

10 Suddenly, a hand touched me, which made me tremble on my knees and on the palms of my hands. 11 And he said to me, "O Daniel, man greatly beloved, understand the words that I speak to you, and stand upright, for I have now been sent to you." While he was speaking this word to me, I stood trembling. 12 Then he said to me, "Do not fear, Daniel, for from the first day that you set your heart to understand, and to humble yourself before your God, your words were heard; and I have come because of your words. 13 But the prince of the kingdom of Persia withstood me twenty-one days; and behold, Michael, one of the chief princes, came to help me, for I had been left alone there with the kings of Persia.

We see here that Daniel was praying and fasting for an answer from God. The angel tells Daniel that God heard him on the first day (immediately) and sent an answer, but it took 21 days for the angel to break through the demonic forces that were in the way.

This story gives us some insight to how the devil seeks to interfere with what God is doing on the earth.

One thing to remember is that when we look at examples in the Old Testament, we must always process them through our understanding of the New Testament. We are under a New Covenant with more power and authority than the Old One. Because of Jesus, the devil is defeated, and we have authority over Him to chase Him away (James 4:7). Daniel did not have the authority to resist the devil, so he had to wait for the angel to break through after 21 days. We have the authority and we can see our results immediately because of that!

Let's say for example I pray and ask God for a bicycle. God immediately speaks to brother Joe in the church to give me his bicycle but at the same time the devil speaks to Joe and make him fear that he'll never be able to get by without his bicycle. God answered my prayer when I prayed it but because Joe is in fear and not acting, there is a blockage in the delivery of my bicycle. The answer is not for me to keep asking God for a bicycle, we saw in the previous section that we must ask and believe we have received. I must now seek wisdom as to what is blocking my provision and pray for brother Joe. I pray and ask God that brother Joe would remember how much God loves him and provides for Him. I also rebuke the devil, telling him to stop lying to Joe and I declare that all the lies and deception of the devil would be made clear to brother Joe. This is intercession.

James 4:7

Therefore submit to God. Resist the devil and he will flee from you.

The words we speak in faith, are powerful to change the very DNA of situations. When we speak over things we can change them. Let's look at the example of the fig tree, where Jesus used faith filled words to change something in the physical realm.

Mark 11:12-14

Now the next day, when they had come out from Bethany, He was hungry. 13 And seeing from afar a fig tree having leaves, He went to see if perhaps He would find something on it. When He came to it, He found nothing but leaves, for it was not the season for figs. 14 In response Jesus said to it, "Let no one eat fruit from you ever again." And His disciples heard it.

Note: Jesus speaks directly to the fig tree, not to God about the fig tree.

Mark 11:20-24

Now in the morning, as they passed by, they saw the fig tree dried up from the roots. 21 And Peter, remembering, said to Him, "Rabbi, look! The fig tree which You cursed has withered away." 22 So Jesus answered and said to them, "Have faith in God. 23 For assuredly, I say to you, whoever says to this mountain, 'Be removed and be cast into the sea,' and does not doubt in his heart, but believes that those things he says will be done, he will have whatever he says. 24 Therefore I say to you, whatever things you ask when you pray, believe that you receive them, and you will have them.

Peter was shocked when they passed the fig tree the next day. The tree that had been green with leaves the day before was now dead and withered away. Jesus answers and says, "Have faith in God".

He then goes on and explains how we can get the same results over the physical world and situations in our lives:

- Fully believe, with no doubt that what you say will happen.
- Speak to the problem/obstacle (mountain) and command it to get out of the way.

IV Prayer of Praise & Thanksgiving

True heartfelt praise and thanksgiving is very important to God. When we are operating in the faith and confidence of who God is and how His promises are true, praise and thanksgiving will make up a large portion of our prayer time.

2 Timothy 3:1-5

But know this, that in the last days perilous times will come: 2 For men will be lovers of themselves, lovers of money, boasters, proud, blasphemers, disobedient to parents, unthankful, unholy, 3 unloving, unforgiving, slanderers, without self-control, brutal, despisers of good, 4 traitors, headstrong, haughty, lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God, 5 having a form of godliness but denying its power. And from such people turn away!

See how in this long list of terrible things that men will become when they reject God, being unthankful is right there with blasphemers, unholy, brutal and despisers of good.

Let's look at the following story in Acts to see the powerful results that praise and thankfulness produce.

Acts 16:16-34

Now it happened, as we went to prayer, that a certain slave girl possessed with a spirit of divination met us, who brought her masters much profit by fortune-telling. 17 This girl followed Paul and us, and cried out, saying, "These men are the servants of the Most High God, who proclaim to us the way of salvation." 18 And this she did for many days. But Paul, greatly annoyed, turned and said to the spirit, "I command you in the name of Jesus Christ to come out of her." And he came out that very hour. 19 But when her masters saw that their hope of profit was gone, they seized Paul and Silas and dragged them into the marketplace to the authorities. 20 And they brought them to the magistrates, and said, "These men, being Jews, exceedingly trouble our city; 21 and they teach customs which are not lawful for us, being Romans, to receive or observe." 22 Then the multitude rose up together against them; and the magistrates tore off their clothes and commanded them to be beaten with rods. 23 And when they had laid many stripes on them, they threw them into prison, commanding the jailer to keep them securely. 24 Having received such a charge, he put them into the inner prison and fastened their feet in the stocks. But at midnight Paul and Silas were praying and singing hymns to God, and the prisoners were listening to them. 26 Suddenly there was a great earthquake, so that the foundations of the prison were shaken; and immediately all the doors were opened and everyone's chains were loosed. 27 And the keeper of the prison, awaking from sleep and seeing the prison doors open, supposing the prisoners had fled, drew his sword and was about to kill himself. 28 But Paul called with a loud voice, saying, "Do yourself no harm, for we are all here."

29 Then he called for a light, ran in, and fell down trembling before Paul and Silas. 30 And he brought them out and said, "Sirs, what must I do to be saved?" 31 So they said, "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and you will be saved, you and your household." 32 Then they spoke the word of the Lord to him and to all who were in his house. 33 And he took them the same hour of the night and washed their stripes. And immediately he and all his family were baptized. 34 Now when he had brought them into his house, he set food before them; and he rejoiced, having believed in God with all his household.

After their unjust arrest, Paul and Silas weren't complaining, they were praising God. There was a great earthquake and all the prison doors were opening but they did not escape, because they weren't praising God to get their release but because of who He was. They trusted God completely that He would protect and deliver them. Through the power of praise and thanksgiving the jailer and all his household were able to believe in Jesus and be saved!

Let's look at another story of deliverance in 2 Chronicles chapter 20. You should read the whole story to understand the background but we will look at verses 20-23.

2 Chronicles 20:20-23

20 So they rose early in the morning and went out into the Wilderness of Tekoa; and as they went out, Jehoshaphat stood and said, "Hear me, O Judah and you inhabitants of Jerusalem: Believe in the Lord your God, and you shall be established; believe His prophets, and you shall prosper." 21 And when he had consulted with the people, he appointed those who should sing to the Lord, and who should praise the beauty of holiness, as they went out before the army and were saying: "Praise the Lord, For His mercy endures forever." 22 Now when they began to sing and to praise, the Lord set ambushes against the people of Ammon, Moab, and Mount Seir, who had come against Judah; and they were defeated. 23 For the people of Ammon and Moab stood up against the inhabitants of Mount Seir to utterly kill and destroy them. And when they had made an end of the inhabitants of Seir, they helped to destroy one another.

King Jehoshaphat is under attack from the armies of three peoples. He is hopelessly outnumbered and cries out to God. God tells him to place the praise singers in front of his army for the battle (a crazy thing according to human wisdom). The three enemy armies are ambushed by God and go crazy killing each other and the people of God are delivered by the power of praise and thanksgiving.

V Prayer of Meditation/Thinking deeply on the Word of God

As we meditate (think deeply) on the Word of God, we are engaging in prayer.

Psalm 5:1

Give ear to my words, O Lord, Consider my meditation.

God not only listens to our words but also to our meditations!

Joshua 1:8

This Book of the Law shall not depart from your mouth, but you shall meditate in it day and night, that you may observe to do according to all that is written in it. For then you will make your way prosperous, and then you will have good success.

God tells Joshua how to be successful as he takes over the leadership of Israel from Moses. Joshua was to meditate constantly on God's Word and keep it in his mouth (speak it out). As Joshua did this, he would be prosperous in all things and have good success.

1 Timothy 4:12-15

Let no one despise your youth, but be an example to the believers in word, in conduct, in love, in spirit, in faith, in purity. 13 Till I come, give attention to reading, to exhortation, to doctrine. 14 Do not neglect the gift that is in you, which was given to you by prophecy with the laying on of the hands of the eldership. 15 Meditate on these things: give yourself entirely to them, that your progress may be evident to all.

Paul told Timothy to meditate on all the good things of God and then his progress would be obvious to everyone. As Timothy meditated, he would grow better in manifesting the good things of God.

The parable of the sower in Mark 4:3-20, teaches us how to apply the Word of God in our hearts to get results. One of the things it tells us is that not having the Word deeply rooted in our hearts makes us unable to endure against the trouble and persecution that comes to make us doubt God's promises. We root the Word deeply in our hearts but constantly thinking (meditating) on it until it is deeply engrained within us as absolute truth. When we doubt, we move into unbelief which makes it impossible to receive from God.

Mark 4:17

and they have no root in themselves, and so endure only for a time. Afterward, when tribulation or persecution arises for the word's sake, immediately they stumble.

VI Prayer of Consecration/Submitting a thing to God

There are times in our lives when we need to make decisions on matters that are not addressed directly in scripture. E.g. should I move from city A to city B? should I take job X or job Y? You will not find a verse in the Bible telling you to take a job in marketing or move to Cape Town.

At times like this we must take these choices to God in prayer, submitting to His will and asking for His guidance.

Psalm 127:1

If the Lord doesn't build a house, the work of the builders is useless. If the Lord doesn't watch over a city, it's useless for those on guard duty to stand watch over it.

We don't want to go places or do things that God is not a part of. We must desire to live in His will.

Psalm 37:23

The Lord makes secure the footsteps of the person who delights in him,

Jeremiah 10:23

Lord, I know that a person doesn't control their own life. They don't direct their own steps.

Proverbs 19:21

A person may have many plans in their heart. But the Lord's purpose wins out in the end.

God wants to direct us and guide us. He is not hiding away making it difficult to understand, we should listen to the voice of the Holy Spirit and the peace of God to make these discussions, and it all starts with acknowledging God's Lordship and submitting our will to His.

Jeremiah 1:5

"Before I formed you in your mother's body I chose you. Before you were born I set you apart to serve me. I appointed you to be a prophet to the nations."

Acts 13:2

While they were worshiping the Lord and fasting, the Holy Spirit spoke. "Set apart Barnabas and Saul for me," he said. "I have appointed them to do special work."

God has appointed us to a purpose here on the earth and we need to seek out His wisdom to know what that is and make decisions that take us in that direction.

James 1:5

5 If any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask of God, who gives to all liberally and without reproach, and it will be given to him.

VII Prayer of Agreement

God is all about unity and agreement among His children. There is a power that is released when believers act in unity of mind and purpose.

Matthew 18:19-20

"Again, here is what I tell you. Suppose two of you on earth agree about anything you ask for. My Father in heaven will do it for you. 20 Where two or three people gather in my name, I am there with them."

Genesis 11:1-9

*The whole world had only one language, and everyone spoke it. 2 They moved to the east and found a broad valley in Babylon. There they made their home. 3 They said to one another, "Come on! Let's make bricks and bake them well." They used bricks instead of stones. They used tar to hold the bricks together. 4 Then they said, "Come on! Let's build a city for ourselves. Let's build a tower that reaches to the sky. We'll make a name for ourselves. Then we won't be scattered over the whole earth." 5 But the Lord came down to see the city and the tower the people were building. 6 **He said, "All these people are united and speak the same language. That is why they can do all this. Now they will be able to do anything they plan.** 7 Come on! Let us go down and mix up their language. Then they will not be able to understand one other." 8 So the Lord scattered them from there over the whole earth. And they stopped building the city. 9 There the Lord mixed up the language of the whole world. That's why the city was called Babel. From there the Lord scattered them over the whole earth.*

The result of unity and agreement is powerfully demonstrated at the tower of Babel. God says that the people will be able to do anything they plan! (Even the seemingly crazy plan of building a tower that reaches the sky)

Amos 3:3

Do two people walk together unless they've agreed to do so?

Without agreement, we will not be able to walk together as children of God and we won't benefit from the power of agreement in our lives.

Romans 15:5-6

5 Now may the God of patience and comfort grant you to be like-minded toward one another, according to Christ Jesus, 6 that you may with one mind and one mouth glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Psalms 133:1-3

1 Behold, how good and how pleasant it is For brethren to dwell together in unity! 2 It is like the precious oil upon the head, Running down on the beard, The beard of Aaron, Running down on the edge of his garments. 3 It is like the dew of Hermon, Descending upon the mountains of Zion; For there the Lord commanded the blessing—Life forevermore.

VIII Praying in Tongues / in the Spirit

Praying in tongues, also called praying in the Spirit is a powerful form of prayer. This is something that is sadly neglected by many Christians and in so doing they lose out on a mighty tool against the troubles and issues of this world.

Jude 1:20

20 But you, beloved, building yourselves up on your most holy faith, praying in the Holy Spirit,

1 Corinthians 14:4

4 He who speaks in a tongue edifies himself, but he who prophesies edifies the church.

When we pray in tongues we strengthen and build ourselves up and our faith grows stronger.

1 Corinthians 14:2

2 For he who speaks in a tongue does not speak to men but to God, for no one understands him; however, in the spirit he speaks mysteries.

Praying in the tongues of heaven (not a human language) is speaking directly to God without us or anyone else understanding what is being said. This is because the Holy Spirit within us is the initiator of our prayer, not our human brain. The words come directly from our spirit and we then choose to in faith speak them with our mouths.

Romans 8:26

26 Likewise the Spirit also helps in our weaknesses. For we do not know what we should pray for as we ought, but the Spirit Himself makes intercession for us with groanings which cannot be uttered.

The great advantage to this type of prayer is that it is not limited by my human understanding of a situation. Many times, we know something is wrong, but we have no idea why. This lack of understanding limits our prayers in our human language as we can't ask for or rebuke something we don't know about. Fortunately, the Holy Spirit who knows all things can then pray through us in tongues.

1 Corinthians 14:13-14

13 Therefore let him who speaks in a tongue pray that he may interpret. 14 For if I pray in a tongue, my spirit prays, but my understanding is unfruitful.

Another great thing about tongues is that we can ask for an interpretation and through that receive revelation from God about a situation. The Apostle Paul, who received much of the revelation of the New Testament said he prayed more in tongues than anyone (1 Corinthians 14:18).

IX Conclusion

I hope this short teaching on prayer has been encouraging and informative. Let's all converse with God out of love and relationship, not as a task or chore. As we spend time with God, our confidence in Him will grow and we will see His success in our lives.