

WHAT THE BIBLE SAYS ABOUT: PRAYER

Definition according to Webster's Dictionary:

1. An earnest request; entreaty; supplication
2. A humble and sincere request to God
3. An utterance to God in praise, thanksgiving or confession

Working definition: A great privilege extended by God to humanity by which we may communicate with Him.

I. WHO HAS THE RIGHT TO PRAY?

A. PRAYER IS A PRIVILEGE THAT MAY BE REVOKED.

1. Israel's king Saul lost this privilege.

- a. I Samuel 28:3-6 states:

Now Samuel was dead, and all Israel had lamented him, and buried him in Ramah, even in his own city. And Saul had put away those that had familiar spirits, and the wizards, out of the land.

And the Philistines gathered themselves together, and came and pitched in Shunem: and Saul gathered all Israel together, and they pitched in Gilboa.

And when Saul saw the host of the Philistines, he was afraid, and his heart greatly trembled.

And when Saul inquired of the Lord, the Lord answered him not, neither by dreams, nor by Urim, nor by prophets.@"

- b. This event is recorded in I Samuel 16:14 which states:

"But the Spirit of the LORD departed from Saul, and an evil spirit from the LORD troubled him."

2. King David lost this privilege.

a. Psalm 51:1-12.

"Have mercy upon me, O God, according to thy lovingkindness: according unto the multitude of thy tender mercies blot out my transgressions.

Wash me thoroughly from mine iniquity, and cleanse me from my sin.

For I acknowledge my transgressions: and my sin *is* ever before me.

Against thee, thee only, have I sinned, and done *this* evil in thy sight: that thou mightest be justified when thou speakest, and be clear when thou judgest.

Behold, I was shapen in iniquity; and in sin did my mother conceive me.

Behold, thou desirest truth in the inward parts: and in the hidden part thou shalt make me to know wisdom.

Purge me with hyssop, and I shall be clean: wash me, and I shall be whiter than snow. Make me to hear joy and gladness; *that* the bones *which* thou hast broken may rejoice. Hide thy face from my sins, and blot out all mine iniquities.

Create in me a clean heart, O God; and renew a right spirit within me.

Cast me not away from thy presence; and take not thy holy spirit from me.

Restore unto me the joy of thy salvation; and uphold me with thy free spirit.@"

3. All children of God have experienced this estrangement from God because of unconfessed sin.

- a. Psalm 66:18 states:

AIf I regard iniquity in my heart, the Lord will not hear me.®

- b. [THIS POINT INTENTIONALLY BLANK]

- c. Isaiah further emphasized this principle in Isaiah 59:1-2 which states:

ABehold, the Lord's hand is not shortened, that it cannot save; neither his ear heavy, that it cannot hear:

But your iniquities have separated between you and your God, and your sins have hid his face from you, that he will not hear.®

B. BELIEVERS HAVE A RIGHT TO PRAY.

1. If there is unconfessed sin in his life, he has the **right** to ask God for forgiveness.
2. Until sin is confessed and forgiven, the believer has **no right** to pray.
3. This is a loss of communication and fellowship, not a loss of salvation!

C. The unsaved have the right to pray.

1. According to the Bible, the unbeliever is actually an enemy of God.

- a. Paul stated in Romans 8:6-9:

AFor to be carnally minded is death; but to be spiritually minded is life and peace.

Because the carnal mind is enmity against God; for it is not subject to the law of God, neither indeed can be.

So then they that are in the flesh cannot please God.

But ye are not in the flesh, but in the Spirit, if so be that the Spirit of God

dwell in you. Now if any man have not the spirit of Christ, he is none of his."

- b. An enemy has no right to pray to God. Except for forgiveness and salvation.
2. However, a lost man has no access to God if it is not to ask Him for forgiveness and salvation.

II. REASONS WHY MEN SHOULD PRAY.

A. PRAYER ACKNOWLEDGES THE SUPREME POWER OF GOD.

1. By coming to the Lord in humility and prayer, the individual acknowledges the fact that he is not in control of his circumstances.
2. In short, humble and sincere prayer honors God.
3. James refers to this sad condition in James 4:2 which states:

AYe lust, and have not: ye kill, and desire to have, and cannot obtain: ye fight and war, yet ye have not, because ye ask not.@

B. A LOST MAN MUST ASK GOD TO SAVE HIM.

1. He may believe that Jesus died for his sin and will save him, yet he must ask for salvation or die lost.
 - a. James 2:19 states that believing that Jesus Christ will save one is not enough to effect salvation:

AThou believest that there is one God; thou doest well: the devils also believe, and tremble.@

- b. A man may starve to death while sitting before a table spread with nourishing food.
2. Paul stated this principle in Romans 10:9-13 which states:

AThat if thou shalt confess with thy mouth the Lord Jesus, and shalt believe in thine heart that

God hath raised him from the dead, thou shalt be saved.

For with the heart man believeth unto righteousness; and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation.

For the scripture saith, Whosoever believeth on him shall not be ashamed.

For there is no difference between the Jew and the Greek: for the same Lord over all is rich unto all that call upon him.

For whosoever shall call upon the name of the Lord shall be saved.@"

C. PRAYER IS HOW BELIEVERS COMMUNICATE WITH GOD.

1. It is through prayer of confession that he is forgiven of his sins that have broken fellowship with God.
 - a. I John 1:9 states:

¶If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.@"
2. Prayer should be a means of praising God for the believer.
 - a. Psalm 150:6 states:

¶Let everything that hath breath praise the Lord. Praise ye the Lord.@"
 - b. Psalm 118:1 states:

¶O give thanks unto the Lord; for he is good: because his mercy endureth for ever.@"
3. A believer lets his needs be known to God through prayer.
 - a. Salvation does not eliminate the fears and problems that are part of everyday life.

b. Hebrews 4:14-16 states:

¶Seeing then that we have a great high priest, that is passed into the heavens, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold fast our profession.

For we have not an high priest which cannot be touched with the feeling of our infirmities; but was in all points tempted like as we are, yet without sin.

Let us therefore come boldly unto the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy, and find grace to help in time of need.®

4. It should be natural for the believer to desire to communicate with his Heavenly Father.

III. THE MANNER IN WHICH MEN SHOULD PRAY TO GOD.

A. THE PRAYER OF THE UNBELIEVER.

1. He must ask God for forgiveness and salvation.
2. Jesus powerfully illustrated this principle in Luke 18:10-14 which states:

¶Two men went up into the temple to pray; the one a Pharisee, and the other a publican.

The Pharisee stood and prayed thus with himself, God, I thank thee, that I am not as other men are, extortioners, unjust, adulterers, or even as this publican.

I fast twice in the week, I give tithes of all that I possess.

And the publican, standing afar off, would not lift up so much as his eyes unto heaven, but smote upon his breast, saying, God be merciful to me a sinner.

I tell you, this man went down to his house justified rather than the other: for every one

that exalteth himself shall be abased; and he
that humbleth himself shall be exalted.@

B. THE PRAYER OF THE BELIEVER.

1. Jesus= disciples came to Him and asked Him to
teach them how to pray.

a. Luke 11:1-4 states:

And it came to pass, that, as he was
praying in a certain place, when he ceased,
one of his disciples said unto him, Lord,
teach us to pray, as John also taught his
disciples.

And he said unto them, When ye pray, say,
Our Father which art in heaven, Hallowed be
thy name. Thy kingdom come. Thy will be
done, as in heaven, so in earth.

Give us day by day our daily bread. And
forgive us our sins; for we also forgive
every one that is indebted to us. And lead
us not into temptation; but deliver us from
evil.@

b. Matthew gives the following account of this
occasion in 6:9-15 which states:

After this manner therefore pray ye: Our
Father which art in heaven, Hallowed be thy
name.

Thy kingdom come. Thy will be done in earth,
as it is I heaven.

Give us this day our daily bread.

And forgive us our debts, as we forgive our
debtors.

And lead us not into temptation, but deliver
us from evil: For thine is the kingdom, and
the power, and the glory, for ever. Amen.

For if ye forgive men their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you:

But if ye forgive not men their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses.@

2. Although this Scripture is often called "The Lord's Prayer," it must be noted that this was an **OUTLINE** given to His disciples regarding the content and purpose of their prayers. This outline was never meant to be quoted verbatim as a substitute for real prayer. A close examination of the account recorded by Matthew will prove quite beneficial.

a. **AOur Father which art in heaven.@**

- (1) This Statement establishes the knowledge of a relationship with the Father that was established at the instant of salvation.
- (2) Paul noted this fact in Romans 8:15 which states:

AFor ye have not received the spirit of bondage again to fear; but ye have received the Spirit of adoption, whereby we cry, Abba, Father.@

b. **AHallowed be thy name.@**

- (1) It is here, near the beginning of the outline of an acceptable prayer, that the believer is to recognize the majesty and splendor of his Father by giving Him praise and honor.
- (2) Far too often, not much thought is given to the majesty of God.

c. **AThy kingdom come.@**

- (1) Most often, this statement is interpreted as a desire for the return of Jesus as king and establishment of the millennial kingdom.

- (2) The subject of the "Kingdom of God" has been the subject of much controversy throughout the last two thousand years.
- (3) Indeed, if the "Kingdom of God" is to be seen today, then Jesus must be the King, and the believer must be the servant.

d. AThy will be done.@"

- (1) Now this statement requires a great deal of thought.
- (2) James 4:13-15 states:

AGo to now, ye that say, To day or to morrow we will go into such a city, and continue there a year, and buy and sell, and get gain:

Whereas ye know not what shall be on the morrow. For what is your life? It is even a vapour, that appeareth for a little time, and then vanisheth away.

For that ye ought to say, If the Lord will, we shall live, and do this, or that.@"

e. AIn earth as it is in heaven.@"

- (1) In heaven, there can be no question that the expressed will of God is obeyed instantly and without any protest.
- (2) May this part of the prayer be phrased, "Lord, help me to be submissive to your holy will."

f. AGive us this day our daily bread.@"

- (1) This statement acknowledges a day-to-day dependence upon Him.

- (2) It is generally found that the more prosperous a believer becomes, the less he recognizes this great truth.
- (3) The truth of this false hope is often reflected today in an apathetic attitude toward the work of the Lord.

g. **A**Forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors.®

- (1) This request establishes the desired basis of the forgiveness of the daily sins of the believer. The believer is here asking God to forgive him as quickly and completely as he is willing to forgive those who offend him.
- (2) Jesus stated this principle in Matthew 18:21-35 which states:

AThen came Peter to him, and said, Lord, how oft shall my brother sin against me, and I forgive him? till seven times?

Jesus saith unto him, I say not unto thee, Until seven times: but, Until seventy times seven.

Therefore is the kingdom of heaven likened unto a certain king, which would take account of his servants.

And when he had begun to reckon, one was brought unto him, which owed him ten thousand talents.

But forasmuch as he had not to pay, his lord commanded him to be sold, and his wife, and children, and all that he had, and payment to be made.

The servant therefore fell down, and worshipped him, saying, Lord, have patience with me, and I will pay thee all.

Then the Lord of that servant was moved with compassion, and loosed him, and forgave him the debt.

But the same servant went out, and found one of his fellow servants, which owed him an hundred pence: and he laid hands on him, and took him by the throat, saying, Pay me that thou owest.

And his fellow servant fell down at his feet, and besought him, saying, Have patience with me, and I will pay thee all.

And he would not: but went and cast him into prison, till he should pay the debt.

So when his fellow servants saw what was done, they were very sorry, and came and told unto their lord all that was done.

Then his lord, after that he had called him, said unto him, O thou wicked servant, I forgave thee all that debt, because thou desiredst me:

Shouldest not thou also have had compassion on thy fellow servant, even as I had pity on thee?

And his lord was wroth, and delivered him to the tormentors, till he should pay all that was due unto him.

So likewise shall my heavenly Father do also unto you, if ye from your hearts forgive not every one his brother their trespasses. @

h. **AL**ead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil.@"

(1) In this phrase, the believer asks God to intervene, on his behalf, during times of trial and temptation.

(2) I Corinthians 10:13 states:

AThere hath no temptation taken you but such as is common to man: but God is faithful, who will not suffer you to be tempted above that ye are able; but will with the temptation also make a way to escape, that ye may be able to bear it.@"

i. **AF**or thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory, for ever. Amen.@"

C. THE ROLE OF FAITH IN PRAYER.

1. While the believer has the right to approach the throne of grace in prayer, without faith, the prayers are meaningless.

a. Hebrews 11:6 states:

ABut without faith it is impossible to please him: for he that cometh to God must believe that he is, and that he is a rewarder of them that diligently seek him.@"

b. James further confirms the necessity of faith for prayer to be effective. James 1:5-7:

AIf any of you lack wisdom, let him ask of God, that giveth to all men liberally, and upbraideth not; and it shall be given him.

But let him ask in faith, nothing wavering. For he that wavereth is like a wave of the sea driven with the wind and tossed.

For let not that man think that he shall receive any thing of the Lord.@"

2. The prayers of the believer, without being energized by the power of faith, will accomplish very little.
3. However, when he humbly bows before his King and lays his petitions before Him with absolute faith that He can answer, his prayers will be very effective.

IV. HOW GOD RESPONDS TO PRAYER.

A. HIS RESPONSE TO THE PRAYER OF THE UNSAVED.

1. It must be remembered that the only prayer God will hear from the unsaved is the prayer of repentance.
2. The response to such a prayer by an unbeliever evokes an obligated response by God to give him eternal life.

a. Romans 10:13 states:

For whosoever shall call upon the name of the Lord shall be saved.@

b. John 3:16 states:

"For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life."

B. HIS RESPONSE TO THE PRAYERS OF HIS CHILDREN.

1. A firm principle established in the Word of God is the fact that God desires to bless His children and answer their prayers.
 - a. Jesus stated this principle in Matthew 7:7-11 which states:

Ask, and it shall be given you; seek, and ye shall find; knock, and it shall be opened unto you:

For every one that asketh receiveth; and he that seeketh findeth; and to him that knocketh it shall be opened.

Or what man is there of you, whom if his son ask bread, will he give him a stone?

Or if he ask a fish, will he give him a serpent?

If ye then, being evil, know how to give good gifts unto your children, how much more shall your Father which is in heaven give good things to them that ask him?@

- b. Luke records the teaching in 11:9-13 which states:

¶And I say unto you, Ask, and it shall be given you; seek, and ye shall find; knock, and it shall be opened unto you.

For every one that asketh receiveth; and he that seeketh findeth; and to him that knocketh it shall be opened.

If a son shall ask bread of any of you that is a father, will he give him a stone? or if he ask a fish, will he for a fish give him a serpent?

Or if he shall ask an egg, will he offer him a scorpion?

If ye then, being evil, know how to give good gifts unto your children: how much more shall your heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to them that ask him?@

2. Since God desires the best for His children, it follows that He will answer the prayers of His children, providing there is no unconfessed sin in their lives. Many prayers of believers are not answered because they are asked selfishly.

- a. James 4:3 states this fact:

¶Ye ask and receive not, because ye ask amiss, that ye may consume it upon your lusts.@

3. God especially delights in answering the united prayers of His "churches."

a. Jesus stated in Matthew 18:19-20:

Again I say unto you, That if two of you shall agree on earth as touching any thing that they shall ask, it shall be done for them of my Father which is in heaven.

For where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them.®

b. Acts 4:31 states:

And when they had prayed, the place was shaken where they were assembled together; and they were all filled with the Holy Ghost, and they spake the word of God with boldness.®

V. SOME COMMON MISCONCEPTIONS REGARDING PRAYER.

A. God is not impressed by the vocabulary of the believer.

1. Jesus said in Matthew 6:5-6:

And when thou prayest, thou shalt not be as the hypocrites are: for they love to pray standing in the synagogues and in the corners of the streets, that they may be seen of men. Verily I say unto you, They have their reward.

But thou, when thou prayest, enter into thy closet, and when thou has shut thy door, pray to thy Father which is in secret; and thy Father which seeth in secret shall reward thee openly.®

2. Many believers, especially preachers, seem to have forgotten this principle.

3. The child of God is speaking to his Father, not some stranger.

4. Sometimes the believer is so burdened about his circumstances that he cannot put his prayer into words, yet God still gets the message.

- a. Paul stated in Romans 8:26:

ALikewise the Spirit also helpeth our infirmities: for we know not what we should pray for as we ought: but the Spirit itself maketh intercession for us with groanings which cannot be uttered.@

B. GOD WILL NOT BE COERCED BY VAIN REPETITION.

1. Some seem to believe that God will not hear or answer their prayers unless they pray over and over again.

- a. Jesus said in Matthew 6:7-8:

ABut when ye pray, use not vain repetitions, as the heathen do: for they think that they shall be heard for their much speaking.

Be not ye therefore like unto them: for your Father knoweth what things ye have need of, before ye ask him.@

2. The Apostle Paul had a serious health problem and asked God three times to remove it, then accepted the perfect will of God.

- a. He said in II Corinthians 12:7-10:

ANd lest I should be exalted above measure through the abundance of the revelations, there was given to me a thorn in the flesh, the messenger of Satan to buffet me, lest I should be exalted above measure.

For this thing I besought the Lord thrice, that it might depart from me.

And he said unto me, My grace is sufficient for thee; for my strength is made perfect in weakness. Most gladly therefore will I rather glory in my infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon me.@

- b. God did not respond to the prayer of His servant Paul by removing his problem, but by assuring him that His grace was sufficient for his problem.
- 3. Believers are not to be disheartened by the lack of a positive response to their prayers, rather they should pray that the perfect will of God be done.

C. GOD DOES NOT HAVE TO BE BEGGED.

- 1. This attitude is born in the minds of people who think God is a mean, stingy ogre who delights in withholding good things from His children.
- 2. Jesus, Himself, stated in Luke 18:1-8:

And he spake a parable unto them to this end,
that men ought always to pray, and not to faint;

Saying, There was in a city a judge, which feared
not God, neither regarded man:

And there was a widow in that city; and she came
unto him, saying, Avenge me of mine adversary.

And he would not for a while: but afterward he
said within himself, Though I fear not God, nor
regard man;

Yet because this widow troubleth me, I will
avenge her, lest by her continual coming she
weary me.

And the Lord said, Hear what the unjust judge
saith.

And shall not God avenge his own elect, which cry
day and night unto him, though he bear long with
them? I tell you that he will avenge them
speedily. Nevertheless when the Son of man
cometh, shall he find faith on the earth?@