

# **Thoughts on Prayer**

**By Philip Venables**

## What Is Prayer?

In one word what would you say prayer is? Prayer is.....relationship (1). It is about speaking to our Father and our Saviour through the Spirit.

It is about a shared relationship. So the pattern (disciples') prayer starts, **"Our Father"** (Matt. 6:9b). And the term "Father" really matters. A truly good father cares for his children and provides for them. He also wants his children to ask him about their needs. We can speak to "Our Father" about our desires, but know that what He decrees is always best.

Listen to our LORD's words in Luke 11:9-13:

**'So I say to you: ask and it will be given to you; seek and you will find; knock and the door will be opened to you.' For everyone who asks receives; the one who seeks finds; and to the one who knocks, the door will be opened. 'Which of you fathers, if your son asks for a fish, will give him a snake instead? Or if he asks for an egg, will give him a scorpion? If you then, though you are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father in heaven give the Holy Spirit to those who ask him!'**

From this passage we realise the best gift we can get is the Holy Spirit. The more you are in His presence the more your mind is being attuned to the will of God. So the more we are in His presence asking, seeking and knocking then the more our requests are being redefined and redirected. And the ultimate biggest request is to ask for the Holy Spirit.

One view of prayer is that the more I ask and the more I fast, then the more likely it is that I will get what I want from the Father. This is a false view. No, the more we are in His presence, the more we are in touch with His mind, then the more we will get what He wants. So go to the pattern prayer as that starts with requests for what He wants.

**"Our Father in heaven,  
hallowed be your name,  
your kingdom come,  
your will be done,  
on earth as it is in heaven."**  
(Matt. 6:9b-10).

Prayer is not about us getting God to rubber stamp our will. It is about us being in touch with the God who wants to glorify Himself.

In John 12 we see the Lord heading for the cross. He knows that this is His destined appointment, but He is wondering about it all and so he prays as the perfect man.

**'Now my soul is troubled, and what shall I say? "Father, save me from this hour"? No, it was for this very reason I came to this hour. Father, glorify your name!'**

**Then a voice came from heaven, 'I have glorified it, and will glorify it again.' (John 12:27-28).**

If you want a guarantee of a positive answer to prayer then pray that prayer: **'...Father, glorify your name!'**

### Answers To Prayer.

As has been said there are three answers to prayer "Yes", "No" or "Wait". Let us look at "No". Paul received in 2 Corinthians 12:7-10:

**"Therefore, in order to keep me from becoming conceited, I was given a thorn in my flesh, a messenger of Satan, to torment me. Three times I pleaded with the Lord to take it away from me. But he said to me, 'My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness.' Therefore I will boast all the more gladly about my weaknesses, so that Christ's power may rest on me. That is why, for Christ's sake, I delight in weaknesses, in insults, in hardships, in persecutions, in difficulties. For when I am weak, then I am strong."**

From this we learn that every answer to prayer, has behind it a God who has a bigger purpose. In fact we can probably say that we are perhaps too interested in "answers to prayer". The biggest issue is knowing our God through prayer. Paul would know the strength of His God through the "no" answer he was given. And so we are back to the fact that "prayer is relationship".

### We Need To Lay All Things Always Before The Lord In Prayer.

In 2 Kings 19:14-19, we read of Sennacherib, King of Assyria, writing an intimidating letter to King Hezekiah of Judah. Then we read:

**"Hezekiah received the letter from the messengers and read it. Then he went up to the temple of the LORD and spread it out before the LORD. And Hezekiah prayed to the LORD: 'LORD, the God of Israel, enthroned between the cherubim, you alone are God over all the kingdoms of the earth. You have made heaven and earth. Give ear, LORD, and hear; open your eyes, LORD, and see; listen to the words Sennacherib has sent to ridicule the living God.**

**'It is true, LORD, that the Assyrian kings have laid waste these nations and their lands. They have thrown their gods into the fire and destroyed them, for they were not gods but only wood and stone, fashioned by**

**human hands. Now, LORD our God, deliver us from his hand, so that all the kingdoms of the earth may know that you alone, LORD, are God.”**

Like Hezekiah our first response to any issue is go to the LORD about it. Lay out your letter before the LORD. In fact, whatever it is then lay it before the LORD. In our lives we should be relentlessly turning things over to the LORD.

We need to be aware that the Lord is interested in us knowing Him right now in the midst of the circumstances of life. We see this in John 11:17-27. In this passage the LORD wants Martha to know now that He is the resurrection and the life. In John 11:24, Martha wants to push off the resurrection issue to the last day. But in v.25-26 Jesus wants her to know that He is now the living One. He wants us to live all our lives with Him, knowing His life in us now.

### So What Is The Nature Of True Prayer?

Paul says to the Philippians, **“Do not be anxious about anything, but in every situation, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus”** (Phil. 4:6-7).

Let us note the outcome here. Not only does prayer bring us into the mind of God, but into the peace of God. *“Pray and let God worry”* is what Luther said.

And, of course, do not forget the thanksgivings. As Paul mentioned it is so important to be thankful in the presence of the Lord,

### Give One Another Material For Prayer.

Paul did this. So in 2 Thessalonians 3:1-2 we read:

**“As for other matters, brothers and sisters, pray for us that the message of the Lord may spread rapidly and be honoured, just as it was with you. And pray that we may be delivered from wicked and evil people, for not everyone has faith.”**

We have e-mail, text, "facebook", and even still telephones and letters! Through these means we should be endeavouring to use whatever means to give each other material for prayer. This is one means through which we bear each other's burdens. We sometimes have this false humility which seeks not to trouble others with *“my situation”*. This is not good! We should be providing prayer material to one another so we can support each other in prayer.

Also tell others that you are praying for them. Paul seems to have been very ready to be telling others that he was praying for them. Sometimes I have heard people say “I will

be remembering you”. What does that mean!? We should tell people we are praying for them.

### Pray with one another

In Gethsemane the Lord felt deeply the fact that the three disciples, Peter, James and John did not obey His call to watch with Him. So we read in Mark 14:37-38:

**“Then He returned to his disciples and found them sleeping. ‘Simon,’ He said to Peter, ‘are you asleep? Couldn’t you keep watch for one hour? Watch and pray so that you will not fall into temptation. The spirit is willing, but the flesh is weak.’”**

One other issue to think about is how we forget to pray for others when they have asked us to pray. A good practice to get into is to pray there and then. It is great to see people praying after services about issues in each other’s lives.

It is also good when we meet up socially and informally, to make time to pray. Perhaps you meet with someone on their own or as a group. It is good to make time to pray.

### We Need To Consider For What We Are Praying.

Pray for the big issues. Look at how Paul prayed for the Colossians:

**“For this reason, since the day we heard about you, we have not stopped praying for you. We continually ask God to fill you with the knowledge of his will through all the wisdom and understanding that the Spirit gives, so that you may live a life worthy of the Lord and please him in every way: bearing fruit in every good work, growing in the knowledge of God, being strengthened with all power according to his glorious might so that you may have great endurance and patience, and giving joyful thanks to the Father.” (Col.1:9-12a).**

We need to observe how he is concentrating on the spiritual matters with a longing that they would grow in the Lord. So let us seek to be focussed in our praying. Pray about spiritual matters. Pray that:

- God would be glorified.
- People would be saved. Pray for people specifically expecting His salvation.
- About evangelism.
- About the services.
- That the preaching would be faithful to the Word and Spirit anointed.
- Brothers and sisters would be growing in the LORD.

## Develop Your Relationship.

God's great purpose for human beings is to bring them into fellowship with Himself. We see the ultimate expression of this in Revelation 21:2-3 as John records how:

**“I saw the Holy City, the new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride beautifully dressed for her husband. And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, ‘Look! God’s dwelling-place is now among the people, and He will dwell with them. They will be His people, and God Himself will be with them and be their God.’”**

Relating to God is at the heart of being God's child, of being in His kingdom. Prayer expresses the existence of this relationship and through prayer the relationship is developed. And as with all relationships we need to spend time developing ours with our Father. So we need to spend time with the LORD. We need to make time. Relationships do not grow automatically we have to invest time in them. We have to spend time with them. Whether it be a spouse, child, friend or whoever, relationships only develop through spending time with the other person. And so it is with our relationship with our Father God.

Some say if you do not get your time with the Lord then don't feel guilty. Well I understand that. But at the heart of this is the ill-conceived thought of prayer being performance. No! Prayer is not about performing a duty it is about developing a relationship. We are not earning God's favour through prayer; we have that established forever in Christ. Rather, we are wanting to know Him better. Perhaps guilt is the wrong term, but we should feel that something is wrong when we fail to keep our special time with the One we love more than all others; our LORD.

In Colossians 4:2 Paul infers that we must give time and energy to disciplined prayer when he writes, **“Devote yourselves to prayer, being watchful and thankful.”**

## You Need Leaders Who Pray.

One of the attributes we need for church leaders is for them to be praying men. The apostles who were leading the church at Jerusalem knew the priorities they must have when they said we must, **“give our attention to prayer and the ministry of the word”** (Acts 6:4).

## Activism And Prayer.

If you are too busy to pray then you are too busy. And that includes the Lord's work. We can easily fall into Satan's trap of thinking there is so much to do, I have just got to get on and do it. Such doing, alas I suggest, ends up with nothing getting done that is truly done for God. Rather that which is done, in and through its origin in prayer and seeking the Father, is that which is truly done. This is because such is done in the will

and energies of God.

## Prayer In Church.

Let us seek to be relentlessly providing each other with material for prayer. We should be expecting Him to move through our prayers and giving thanks at every opportunity.

We have prayer meetings so that the church can pray together. If you come to a prayer meeting you come to pray. Now that can be verbal or silent but you must come to pray. Particularly the men have a responsibility to be leading in verbal prayer. There is something wrong if the men sit back and allow the sisters to take the lead in prayer. In 1 Timothy 2:8 Paul says, **“I want the men everywhere to pray, lifting up holy hands without anger or disputing.”**

We can share issues for prayer all the time. I think with modern communications we have never had better opportunities to communicate. There is a sense that we should come to prayer meetings already loaded with material for prayer. This is because of what we have been sharing with one another every day, as necessary.

Prayer meetings are not sharing meetings; they are meetings for prayer. That is not to say we cannot share issues to pray about and reasons for thanksgiving. But we are there to pray.

And when you agree with a prayer say your “Amen”. We are standing together. When we say our Amen we stand with that prayer. What power there must have been at the returning of the ark when we read, **“Then all the people said ‘Amen’ and ‘Praise the Lord.’”** (1 Chron. 16:36). Let us be finished with the muttering of “Amen”. A prayer meeting is not a baby shower or pansy party; it is a war-zone where we wage warfare. We come to wage warfare on the powers of darkness. And Satan hates it when the Lord's people pray. Alas is it not the case that the demons sometime laugh at our tepidity and timidity.

Try and keep your prayers short. This helps people keep attention and keeps vibrancy. You can pray more than once but to dominate a prayer meeting is discourteous to others. Others are there to pray as well, so be careful not to dominate.

Make the prayer meeting a priority. *“The church that moves forward, moves forward on its knees”* to quote Hudson Taylor's words. Particularly if you are a church member you have committed yourself to the fellowship, surely you must give yourself to praying with others in the fellowship. Nothing is compulsory, but there is something wrong when church members do not commit to praying together. But here is a big business area for the church. So make prayer a priority. The appendix below gives a further article relating to the importance of being in church to pray.

## Prayer goes with fasting.

*“How much do you want me?”* The LORD asks. *“How much do you long to know me?”* He adds. We respond I will give up my food; I will give up my sleep. I will give up sex, (**“Do not deprive each other except perhaps by mutual consent and for a time, so that you may devote yourselves to prayer. Then come together again so that Satan will not tempt you because of your lack of self-control”** (1 Cor. 7:5)) is our reply. This is because LORD we want YOU so much.

## Pray Appropriately

We pray about different things in different realms. Not everything is to be prayed about in church prayer meetings. Pray on your own about some matters, or pray in groups or pray with one other person about certain things. There is discretion needed. Certain information may be confidential and so it is unwise to use it in the prayer meeting, but you can pray on your own about such issues.

Finally, the church that prays together stays together.

Let us pray.

## NOTE

- (1) This statement is wedged in my mind since hearing a sermon by Derek Simpson at Leominster Baptist Church in the Spring of 2003.

## APPENDIX

### Prayer in Church

They said that the church prayer times:

- were too early
- were too late
- were too long
- were too short
- prayed about the wrong things
- had the wrong people there
- had been arranged without consulting them
- were poorly led

- contained prayers that were too long
- contained prayers that were too general
- contained prayers that were too personal
- did not have enough singing
- had too much sharing and therefore not enough prayer
- did not have enough sharing and therefore people did not know what to pray.
- should not have the children there.
- were not held in the right place
- should not be divided into groups
- should be divided into groups
- never had prayer for what I was interested in
- were not arranged “in the Spirit”
- were not arranged to deal with a specific issue
- were in a room which was too hot
- were in a room which was too cold
- were in a room which had no ventilation
- were in a room which was too draughty
- should not have a fixed finishing time
- should have a fixed finishing time
- were arranged at inconvenient times
- had too much silence
- would only see me in attendance when I felt “led by the Spirit”
- did not have enough prayer for the unconverted
- did not focus enough on world mission
- had those leading in prayer speaking too softly so I could not hear them

...and therefore they did not come to pray at the church prayer times, and therefore the church died. Yes many of the churches still existed, but they had died. And the devil and the demons were all very happy and had a big party.

Brothers and sisters in Christ, the prayer meetings in your church may not be perfect, and you may have grounds for complaint, but remember that the Lord loves it when His people gather to pray to Him.

**“If my people, who are called by my name, will humble themselves and pray and seek my face and turn from their wicked ways, then I will hear from heaven, and I will forgive their sin and will heal their land” (2 Chron. 7:14).**

And when you do come together to pray with others, remember to enjoy it. It is such a blessed thing to be able to pray with others to our loving God.

(The original of this appendix is to be found at:  
<http://venabling.wordpress.com/2013/10/31/prayer-in-church>).

**Scripture quotations (unless otherwise indicated) taken from the Holy Bible,  
New International Version Anglicised Copyright © 1979, 1984, 2011 Biblica,  
Used by permission of Hodder and Stoughton Ltd,  
an Hachette UK company  
All rights reserved  
“NIV” is a registered trademark of Biblica  
UK trademark number 1448790**