

The Essence of Praying

Coming Before God,
through Christ,
by the Holy Spirit.

*Part of Hope Chapel's
Discipling Series*



"Be anxious for nothing, but in everything
by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving,
let your requests be made known to God;" (Phi 4:6)

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INTRODUCTION

When we pray, we may be involved in a number of different activities, each of them prayerful, but directed toward different ends. Prayer is not one thing. It is many things.

A Brief Word Study

In Hebrew, several words are used. The word *pawlal* means to intervene or interpose yourself with God. The word *pawgah* means to encounter, meet, reach out to, or entreat. The word *awthar* also means to entreat or beg. The word *chawlaw* means to make a supplication, asking for graciousness, favor, or pity. The word also means to become weak, grieved, or sorry before God, as in Zec 7.22. Sometimes, prayer is implied or understood by what is pleaded. For example, in Gen 32.11, "Deliver me from the hand of my brother" is in the form of begging, and "I ask or pray" is understood.

There are several words used in Greek, as well. The most common is *proseuchomai*. It means to face towards, or stretch yourself out before God – like the Hebrew word *pawgah* where we reach for God. It implies a physical act as well as an intention of our mind. The Greek word *aiteo* means to ask urgently or fervently. The word *deomai* means to bind, in the sense of pleading, begging, or laying hold of someone to obtain something. *Euchomai* as used in Jas 5.15, "the prayer of faith," means that what we ask of God is spoken aloud.

As you can see, prayer is many things. It can be public or private. It can be confession, petition, intercession, praise, thanksgiving, lament, adoration, invocation – *many* things.

First and foremost, it must be **SCRIPTURAL**. If we don't know God's intent for prayer, we won't be able to pray effectively. The content of our prayer, and our purpose for praying, would be misguided if we didn't know what or how to pray. Asking for what God has not promised, is a false expectation. It can lead us to think that God doesn't answer prayer.

Prayer, therefore, should flow from what we read in the bible. Jesus' disciples asked him how to pray. He didn't say they were wrong to ask. Instead, he gave them this example:

Our Father in heaven, Hallowed be Your name.

¹⁰ Your kingdom come. Your will be done On earth as *it is* in heaven.

¹¹ Give us this day our daily bread.

¹² And forgive us our debts, As we forgive our debtors.

¹³ And do not lead us into temptation, But deliver us from the evil one.

For Yours is the kingdom and the power and the glory forever. Amen. (Mat 6:9-13 ^{NKJ})

"Our Father, who is in heaven, may your name be kept holy..." (hallowed). Right out of the gate, a question may arise as to how to keep God's name holy – what does holiness involve? Is it something we think, something we say, or something we do that keeps it holy? How can we *fail* to keep it holy? Or, how can we *make* it holy? And so we enter into prayer, asking *as* we pray, letting our meditations spill into our supplications. We pray for wisdom, guidance, and understanding, especially before we begin to read the bible. It's OK to ask God questions, and to express our fears and doubts, even as we pray.

At its core, **prayer is asking**, even if it's not in the form of a question, or a request.

Ask of Me, and I will give *You* the nations *for* your inheritance, and the ends of the earth *for* Your possession. (Psa 2:8 ^{NKJ}) [**Who** will receive the nations *for* an inheritance?]

Ask, and it will be given to you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you. (Mat 7:7 ^{NKJ})

And yet we don't merely ask. Asking isn't a matter of words, or a wish list of things we want. Prayer must come from the heart. It is opening a conversation with God Himself. And Christ is the veil through whom we enter into God's presence, boldly, confidently, expectantly — and yet, at the same time, we approach His throne humbly and contritely. Our motives for coming to Him should always be suspect in our own minds. David said, "Examine me, O LORD, and prove me; Try my mind and my heart." (Psa 26:2 ^{NKJ}) James warned the churches to beware their motives:

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 [wrongly], that you may spend *it* on your pleasures. (Jam 4:2-3 ^{NKJ})

In Isaiah, we have an example of the severity of God's anger at His people for approaching Him sinfully, insincerely, and arrogantly — as if they did not know God at all:

² Yet they seek Me daily, And delight to know My ways, As [if they were] a nation that did righteousness, And did not forsake the ordinance of their God. They ask of Me the ordinances of justice; They take delight in approaching God.

³ 'Why have we fasted,' *they say*, 'and You have not seen? *Why* have we afflicted our souls, and You take no notice?'

[Here's why:] "In fact, in the day of your fast you find pleasure, And exploit all your laborers. ⁴ Indeed you fast for strife and debate, And to strike with the fist of wickedness. You will not fast as *you do* this day, To make your voice heard on high.

⁵ Is *this* a fast that *I* have chosen, A day for a man to afflict his soul? *Is it* to bow down his head like a bulrush, And to spread out sackcloth and ashes? Would you call this a fast, And an acceptable day to the LORD? (Isa 58:2-5 ^{NKJ})

Christ says this about such prayers, "These people draw near to Me with their mouth, And honor Me with *their* lips, But their heart is far from Me." (Mat 15:8 ^{NKJ})

Sometimes prayer is simply venting at God. David often did that in his Psalms. If we can't open up to someone else about how we feel, or if we can't confess a particular sin to anyone, we can still be perfectly open with God. He is our Creator, and the lover of our soul. He is our Father. Our relationship with him is not jeopardized by our words. When we don't know the deceit of our own heart, *he* knows.¹ We can ask him to reveal it to us.²

Prayer can be a flurry of praise and jubilation, deep-seated delight at what God has done, or who he is. We may catch a glimpse of his glory or his holiness, which can drive us to our knees or make us leap with glee. We become David dancing in abandon down the streets of Jerusalem, for he had found the Ark of the Covenant, and returned it to the City of God.

Prayer can be falling down before God in tears and agony, in all our despair and pain, seeking comfort for our soul, questioning and challenging His sovereignty in our life.

¹ Jer 17:9

² Psa 139:23

Prayer is having a conversation with God. We speak to him through prayer. He speaks to us through his word. That takes us back to bible study. We need to be drenched in God's word if we are to hear him clearly, and speak to him appropriately. He will bring to mind those passages of the bible that relate to our needs, and therefore form the content of our prayer to Him. But the Spirit cannot remind us of what we have not read. If we are ignorant of God's word, He will seem silent, when in fact he is not silent at all.

Be slow to speak and quick to listen in prayer. Never say, "Hear O God, for thy servant speaks!" Instead, ask of him, "Speak O God, for thy servant listens!"³

Don't be presumptuous in what you ask for. Even Christ prayed, "Nevertheless, not my will, but yours be done."⁴ But don't be timid either. Make your requests known to God, with thanksgiving (Phi 4.6).

What is prayer? _____

How can you prepare yourself for prayer? _____

What should your attitude be? _____

What might you ask for? _____

Is there a required *way* to pray? (a form, pose, or action; e.g. Isa 58.5; Jer 6.26) _____

Why do you think that is ? _____

We'll explore these questions and more as we continue our study of prayer, and as we pray together both publicly, and privately. On the next page you'll find TYPES of prayer, where the occasion or circumstance may govern the form and content of prayer.

³ Psa 4:4 Meditate within your heart on your bed, and be still. Psa 46:10 Be still , and know that I am God;

⁴ Luk 22:42

WHEN, HOW, AND WHY DO WE PRAY?

There are occasions for prayer, and forms of prayer; but we also need to understand the need and nature of prayer, so that we pray appropriately, according to the need. Some prayers are brief and immediate, like "Help me, Lord!" (Psa 6.4) They're spontaneous. There are other prayers that are more structured and intentional.

Types of Prayer

The two main categories of prayer, public and private. These are driven by occasion and also by purpose. There are general purposes of prayer, which we'll address later. But there are also specific purposes for the prayers we offer to God.

PUBLIC PRAYER

— invocation, conversation, ordination, dedication, investing, wedding, funeral, etc. —

Corporate prayer is often intercessory prayer, given on behalf of the congregation as a whole, as the body and Bride of Christ. It is offered up to Christ, our common Head, for our corporate needs and calling. It's a prayer to which the entire congregation can give a hearty Amen, because it applies to all equally. It is representative prayer in which one person, usually a pastor, speaks for all. Solomon prayed on behalf of all the people at the dedication of the newly constructed temple (1Kng 8.22-61; 2Chr 6.12-42).

When we pray together in a small group, we may pray individually for specific things for one another, or for the church, community, or nation, or we may pray "conversationally." In *conversational prayer*, one person begins with a short prayer, just a sentence or two; the next person (as led or in sequence around a circle) picks up on that "theme" and adds to it a sentence or two. The Spirit may begin a different theme, and then the next person might say, "I agree with that, and..." (Amen, and...), thus "building" a prayer together.

PRIVATE PRAYER

— contemplative, confessional, petitioning, empowering, forgiveness, blessing, etc. —

When Solomon became king, his prayer for wisdom was nonetheless a private prayer; it was a prayer for himself, to enable him to serve God's people. (1Kng 3.1-15) This style or purpose of prayer (to enable and empower God's people to serve Christ on earth) is very common in the New Testament. Those are intercessory prayers, contained in letters, and they are therefore "public" prayers – known and heard by all.

But then there are the prayers we say for ourselves, that we might honor God in Christ. We can say these silently, or vocally – whether someone is there to hear them or not. We have a specific instruction about it from our Lord Jesus:

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. (Mat 6:5-8 ^{NKJ})

Whether public or private, prayer should always be directed to God, from the heart – even when the prayer is prepared (considered) ahead of time. Whether a prayer is constructed or spontaneous, any prayer can either be genuine (heartfelt) or hypocritical (lips only). If we remember Who we're speaking to, and who we are in relation to Him, it is more likely to be genuine and heartfelt. So, we begin with adoration and praise, to *remind* ourselves.

The Form of Prayer

We're not going to cover all the aspects of prayer in this class. That's a good thing, since we don't want to talk *about* prayer as much as we want to *pray*. Our main focus will be *why* prayer is derived from, motivated by, and directed toward the truth of Scripture.

There are loads of books and articles telling us *how* to pray. When Jesus introduced the Lord's prayer to his disciples, he said, "Pray in this *manner*." (Mat 6.9) Some say the Lord's Prayer is a 7-step model, with worship as its beginning and end:

1. Worship (Our father who is in heaven, hallowed be your name)
2. Submission (Your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven)
3. Expectation/contentment (Give us this day our daily bread)
4. Confession (and forgive us our debts)
5. Forgiveness (as we forgive our debtors)
6. Asking (and lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from the evil one)
7. Worship (For yours is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory forever)

Others use the form "A-C-T-S" – Adoration, Confession, Thanksgiving, and Supplication. Some use P-R-A-Y as a helpful reminder: **Pray, Repent, Ask, and Yield**. The form isn't as important as the heartfelt prayer itself. The best *form* of prayer, is the one that leads us to pray. Prayer is not a formula; it's a plea. **Keep it simple, honest, and genuine!** Prayer itself is an *act of faith*, believing not only that there is a God, but that He is both willing and able to answer our prayers.

But without faith *it is impossible* to please *Him*, for he who comes to God must believe that He is, and *that* He is a rewarder of those who diligently seek Him. (Heb 11:6 ^{NKJ})

Now, there are *motivational* materials which explore the wonder and benefits of prayer. John R. Rice wrote a classic titled "Prayer – Asking and Receiving." Maybe you have a favorite. But such books must help us not just think *about* prayer, but to *pray*. Otherwise they're a distraction to prayer. E. M. Bounds wrote a classic collection. Some of his statements are disquieting: "Prayer moves men because it moves God to move men." ⁵ If God is our Creator, and we are his creatures, then you would think that we can't move God – he moves us. And yet there are times when God will not move *until* we ask him (as with Elijah and the rain – James 5:17). In other words, God has made prayer a necessary part of acting out his will in the world. That's a curious and sobering fact.

And so we're more concerned in this lesson with the "*why*" of prayer. What compels us to pray? What is the purpose of prayer? What is the proper subject of prayer? If we know the reason for doing something, we're more likely to do it in a timely and proper manner.

⁵ Bounds, E.M., *Possibilities in Prayer*, IV "Prayer – It's Possibilities."

Why do *you* pray? _____

Does the *form* of prayer matter to you? _____ Why? _____

The Nature of Prayer

As we saw at the beginning, prayer is many things. At its simplest, prayer is talking *to* the Father *through* the Son *by* the Spirit.⁶ Despite this simple definition, prayer is the most profound privilege and obligation that any Christian can have. Indeed, *prayer is our duty*.

And yet, most Christians don't pray very often. We might say grace at dinner, but not at lunch or breakfast. We receive something, whether money, gifts, healing, or comfort, but like the other nine lepers (Luk 17:15-18), we don't pray a prayer of thanksgiving *at that moment*. We have a major decision to make, but we don't ask God for wisdom and discernment. We don't **ask** God to reveal to us in His word, what course of action would most likely be an act of obedience, or a means to best glorify Him – and then **go** to His word to find the answer that He has for us there. And when we do find it, or remember it, we don't thank the Spirit for revealing it to us, or reminding us of it.

There are many opportunities for prayer — for guidance or strength or forbearance, or for endurance and steadfastness — that we simply don't take advantage of: "take *advantage* of"; make *use* of; obtain a *blessing* by. We either don't see prayer as a duty, or we see it *only* as a duty, and we miss the advantage — the blessing that comes through prayer. And so we don't draw near to God, and enjoy fellowship with Him *through* Christ, *by* the Spirit. Why is that? Perhaps it's because we don't really understand the *nature* of prayer.

Prayer is one of God's ordained means to effect his will in the world. It is one way that we "participate in the divine nature" (2Pet. 1:1-8).⁷ How prayer enables us to participate is a little complicated. God tells us to pray, and he even tells us what to pray (1Kgs 17-18; Job 42:8). If we pray what he tells us to pray, then God will fulfill our prayer, in his time.

Prayer is conditional in nature. God tells us that when we pray, we must pray in the Spirit, and according to his will (Eph 6:18; 1Joh 5:14-15).⁸ Those are the conditions. They are not restrictive conditions, but prescriptive. That is, they are not designed to limit our prayer, or to qualify our prayer, but rather to direct the content and focus of our prayer.

⁶ Eph 2:18 For through him we both have access to the Father by one Spirit.

⁷ 2 Peter 1:1-8 Simon Peter, a servant and apostle of Jesus Christ, To those who through the righteousness of our God and Savior Jesus Christ have received a faith as precious as ours: Grace and peace be yours in abundance through the knowledge of God and of Jesus our Lord. His divine power has given us everything we need for life and godliness through our knowledge of him who called us by his own glory and goodness. Through these he has given us his very great and precious promises, so that through them you may participate in the divine nature and escape the corruption in the world caused by evil desires. For this very reason, make every effort to add to your faith goodness; and to goodness, knowledge; and to knowledge, self-control; and to self-control, perseverance; and to perseverance, godliness; and to godliness, brotherly kindness; and to brotherly kindness, love. For if you possess these qualities in increasing measure, they will keep you from being ineffective and unproductive in your knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ. NIV

⁸ Eph 6:18 And pray in the Spirit on all occasions with all kinds of prayers and requests. With this in mind, be alert and always keep on praying for all the saints. 1 John 5:14-15 This is the confidence we have in approaching God: that if we ask anything according to his will, he hears us. And if we know that he hears us-whatever we ask-we know that we have what we asked of him. NIV

If God's will is to be fulfilled in this world, through His people, and by His Spirit, then what sorts of things should we be asking for, to help us fulfill His will? Let's do a little exercise in what sorts of things we might pray for, knowing the nature of prayer:

"I can of Myself do nothing. As I hear, I judge; and My judgment is righteous, because I do not seek My own will but the will of the Father who sent Me. (Joh 5:30 ^{NKJ})

If Christ could do nothing on his own, and judged only by what he heard, and did not seek his own will, but the will of the Father, then being in Christ, what might you pray for?

Do you not believe that I am in the Father, and the Father in Me? The words that I speak to you I do not speak on My own *authority*; but the Father who dwells in Me does the works. (Joh 14:10 ^{NKJ})

Knowing that Christ's authority comes from the Father because the Father is in him, and he is in the Father, and the Father does the works, what might you pray for?

Maybe you think it's presumptuous to say that the Father is in you, in the same way that he was in Christ. Or that there's no way you can do what Christ was doing in the world. Read John 14.12-13. *Do you believe that?* Every believer receives the Spirit at conversion.

And for their sakes I sanctify Myself, that they also may be sanctified by the truth. ²⁰ I do not pray for these alone, but also for those who will believe in Me through their word; ²¹ "that they all may be one, as You, Father, *are* in Me, and I in You; that they also may be one in Us, that the world may believe that You sent Me. (Joh 17:19-21 ^{NKJ})

No one has seen God at any time. If we love one another, God abides in us, and His love has been perfected in us. By this we know that we abide in Him, and He in us, because He has given us of His Spirit. (1Jo 4:12-13 ^{NKJ})

Knowing these things, and believing them, what might you pray for?

Him we preach, warning every man and teaching every man in all wisdom, that we may present every man perfect in Christ Jesus. ²⁹ To this *end* I also labor, striving according to His working which works in me mightily. (Col 1:28-1 ^{NKJ})

Knowing this is as true of you, as it was of Paul, what might you pray for?

Paul prayed specific things for the churches and for his fellow believers.

For we are glad when we are weak and you are strong. And this also we pray, that you may be *made complete*. (2Co 13:9 ^{NKJ})

For this reason we also, since the day we heard it, do not cease to pray for you, and to ask that you may be filled with the knowledge of His will in all wisdom and spiritual understanding; ¹⁰ that you may walk worthy of the Lord, fully pleasing *Him*, being fruitful in every good work and increasing in the knowledge of God; ¹¹ strengthened with all might, according to His glorious power, for all patience and longsuffering with joy; ¹² giving thanks to the Father who has qualified us to be partakers of the inheritance of the saints in the light. (Col 1:9-12 ^{NKJ})

Paul let them know what he was praying for them, so they might participate or partake in the process of becoming complete or mature. What did Paul pray for *them*, that you might pray for *yourself* and for other believers? List them from the passage:

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____
4. _____
5. _____
6. _____
7. _____
8. _____

What did this brief exercise reveal to you about the nature of prayer?

Prayer is a *craft* as well as a *gift*. That means it can be learned, and we can get better at it. Prayer requires thinking, as well as desiring. And it requires spirit, as well as thought:

What am I to do? I will pray with my spirit, but I will pray with my mind also; I will sing praise with my spirit, but I will sing with my mind also. (1Co 14:15 ^{ESV})

What in your life most needs prayer right now? _____

What most needs to change in you, for that need to be met? _____

TAKE A MOMENT to pray for that, right now.

Again, we pray *to* the Father, *through* the Son, *by* the Spirit. That means:

- We DON'T pray to preach or teach. That's not praying *to* God.
- We DON'T pray at the Father. We don't tell God what to do. We make our requests known; we express our love for Him; and we admit our great need of Him.
- We DON'T pray at other believers. We don't use prayer to castigate or educate them. We intercede **for** them, **to** God.
- We DON'T pray doctrine to God, as if He doesn't know it. That's a sign that we're either praying *at others*, or *at God*. It's one thing to acknowledge the truth of God in our prayers, and quite another to indoctrinate.
- We DON'T pray to impress. Eloquent prayers are a sure sign that we're praying *at others*, and not *to God*. He's impressed by our *heart*, not our *words*.
- We DON'T pray overly long prayers. Long prayers may indicate that prayer isn't our habit, so we try to include everything that we haven't been praying about.

Therefore, we want to pray short specific prayers. Being to the point, they tend to be more powerful than long prayers. We're better able to tell if God has answered our prayer. And in public prayer, they're easier to say AMEN to, more likely to speak for others, and less likely to cause others' minds to wander during our prayer.

Next we'll look at what our ATTITUDE towards prayer ought to be, both before, during, and *after* we pray. WE prepare for *prayer*, and PRAYER prepares us for *action*. You see, prayer requires follow-through, even when follow-through requires waiting upon God. Prayer, then, enables us to endure, by exercising our faith in Christ.

ATTITUDES OF PRAYER

from John Reisinger ⁹

- *Prayer never makes God my servant to give me everything I think I must have in order to make me happy.* God is not a “heavenly bellhop” who carries my suitcase of selfish desires any place I command.
- *Prayer never allows me to either dictate my will to God nor to make God in any way change His mind.*
- *God has a fixed plan and His plan is the best plan.* God is determined to carry out His plan, and neither our sin nor our “believing” prayers are going to derail or in any way change God's ultimate decrees (Job 23:13).
- True prayer is *a frank admission that God is sovereign.* When we really pray, we admit that the thing is in God's hands alone. We are saying that tomorrow, and all it brings, is not under our control but under His control. It is in His hands and not ours.
- Prayer is *a joyful surrender to God's sovereign purposes.* We are acknowledging that God has the right and power to do whatever seems good to Him. We are saying that regardless of what God does tomorrow, we know it is part of the “all things” in Rom 8:28.¹⁰
- Prayer is *earnestly pleading with God for grace to glorify Him regardless of what He does.* We are really saying, “Father, give me grace to trust you and act like your child whether you say yes or no.” [or wait...].

What most *comforts* or *troubles* you about these attitudes? _____

For you personally, what is the most difficult thing about entrusting yourself, your loved ones, or your circumstances, to God and then... *letting go*? Be honest.

How did you react when what you greatly feared, came upon you, as it did for Job? (3.25)

What did you learn from it? _____

⁹ Reisinger, John G., *The Sovereignty of God in Prayer*

(<http://www.monergism.com/thethreshold/articles/topic/sovereignty.html>)

¹⁰ Rom 8:28 And we know that for those who love God all things work together for good, {Some manuscripts God works all things together for good, or God works in all things for the good} for those who are called according to his purpose. ESV

How has your experience with prayer, and the outcome of what you prayed for (good or bad), changed the way you now pray? Why is that?

Is knowing that God is absolutely sovereign, and you are absolutely dependent on Him, more liberating or more constraining for you? Why?

Trusting God is a challenge for most Christians. Even when we're convinced that God is completely trustworthy, surrendering ourselves into his hands never comes quickly or easily for us, whether we're new believers or long-time believers. Each trial seems to stand on its own, as if God had never proven Himself faithful before.

That means, in every adversity, we need to intentionally and willfully recall what God has done for us in the past, counting our blessings and all those hard-learned lessons. You may think that your salvation is the only instance you have of God's tangible grace and mercy in your life, and everything else has been a long and painful struggle.

TAKE A FEW MOMENTS to thank God for what you *do* have, rather than lament what you don't have; or thank Him for who He is, rather than who you want Him to be or what you want from Him. Sing a new song in your heart to Him (Psa 96.1; Rev 5.9).

How much thought did that take? Did it change anything in your attitude? Why?

What is your biggest obstacle to trusting God completely?

"In the midst of the incessant, pressing, and active diversions of the Christian ministry, how suitable is the considerate advice of our gracious Master — 'Come aside by yourselves to a deserted place, and rest awhile.' (Mar 6.31). The spirit of prayer cannot breathe freely in the atmosphere of constant and excited employment. Not that we would seek retirement, like the contemplative monk, for the purposes of withdrawal; but to recruit our spiritual energies for renewed exercises of self-denial and perseverance." Chas. Bridges, *The Christian Ministry*, ch. 6.

RULES OF PRAYER

from John Calvin ¹¹

John Calvin called prayer a “perpetual exercise of faith.” He concluded that there are four rules of prayer, which are summarized here. Note that these rules, in fact, prescribe our *attitude*:

1. Be reverent, focusing on the will of God [*so that your desire is conformed to it*].
2. Have a sense of your want and sinfulness [*confess your sins and be forgiven*].
3. Acknowledge your need of God’s grace and mercy [*depend on God, not yourself*].
4. Be hopeful of success and confident of God’s favor [*He’s your loving Father*].

What does focusing on the will of God mean, when you're not sure of what God's will is for the circumstances that you find yourself in? How can you still pray "in God's will"?

Mar 9.24 _____

How do you determine, honestly and frankly, what your real needs and shortcomings are, or the extent of your own sin, without wallowing in self-pity and self-condemnation?

What can you do, in a practical way, to address the earthly consequences of your sin?

e.g., Mat 5.25; Jas 2.16; Luk 10.33 _____

If you haven't taken such steps, how will God address the eternal consequences of it?

Mat 6.15; 12.37; 25.41-43 _____

What might it indicate if you don't acknowledge your need for God's grace and mercy?

Why would you doubt God's favor? Or, why should you expect God's favor?

¹¹ Calvin, John, *Of Prayer* (Institutes of the Christian Religion, Book III, Chap. 20).

In the Name of Christ

Calvin observes that God may be invoked only in the name of Jesus Christ. Any attempt to bypass Christ as our Mediator and Intercessor results in God's wrath. We are not to approach God directly, but only through Christ. We are not to pray through the saints or Mary, but only through Christ. We are not to come before him on our own merits, but only because of Christ. Praying in Christ's name, therefore, is an acknowledgement of the unique role that Jesus Christ plays in our salvation and sanctification. It invests our prayer with the grace of the gospel, and with the authority of Christ.

That being said, praying in Christ's name is not a mantra. It is not part of a formula for prayer. And it is not said thoughtlessly. Matt 18:5 "And whoever welcomes a little child like this in my name welcomes me." Thus, what we do, we do in consideration of Christ, and for Christ's sake, and as ambassadors for Christ. Matt 18:20 "For where two or three come together in my name, there I am with them." Thus we acknowledge Christ as our omnipresent Witness and Judge.¹² Matt 24:5 "For many will come in my name, claiming, 'I am the Christ,' and will deceive many." Thus we are not to exercise authority when it has not been granted to us, nor draw glory to ourselves. John 14:14 "You may ask me for anything in my name, and I will do it." Thus we can expect to receive what we need from God's storehouse to accomplish *His* purposes.¹³ John 15:16 "You did not choose me, but I chose you, and appointed you to go and bear fruit – fruit that will last. *Then* the Father will give you whatever you ask in my name." Thus we may obtain whatever grace we need to produce lasting fruit. John 16:24 "*Until now* you have not asked for anything in my name. Ask and you will receive, and your joy will be complete."

Until Christ went to the cross, we could not ask for anything in his name. Thus, fulfilled prayer for a Christian, is a benefit of Christ's death and resurrection. It is granted in his name, and for his sake.¹⁴

Say you're asked to pray before Jews, atheists, and Muslims? What would you do? Why?

Why would you end a prayer, "In *your* name"? _____

¹² Christ is with us even when we're alone. We don't need "two or three" as if a quorum were required to receive the blessings of Christ. In the context of Mat 18:20, an offense has been committed requiring two witnesses so that a judgment may be assessed. "Two or three are gathered in his name" means that they all acknowledge Christ is present as their Witness and their Judge. It is a sign of submission to Christ's authority. In today's American courts, we swear to tell the truth on the Bible as a way to call upon God as our witness, as the One who sees all and knows all. Even outside of church discipline, prayer is a willful submission to his oversight as if bringing our works before him for testing (1Cor 3:12-13).

¹³ The context of this verse is John 14:12 "I tell you the truth, anyone who has faith in me will do what I have been doing." This is not a blanket promise to fulfill our fleshly desires for worldly things. If we do what Christ has been doing, then our prayers *toward that end* will be fulfilled.

¹⁴ Heb 5:7 "During the days of Jesus' life on earth, he offered up prayers and petitions with loud cries and tears to the one who could save him from death, and he was heard because of his reverent submission." That's why closing our prayers with "in *your* name" instead of "in the name of Jesus" shows a basic misconception of the godhead. We are not to confuse or equate the persons of the godhead. We pray to the Father, through the Son (in his name), by the Spirit (Eph 2:18). We do not pray to the Son, despite the current trend in the church to do so. To God [the Father] be all glory and honor (1Cor 8:6; Rom 11:36; 1Pet 4:11; 5:11).

Elements of Prayer

from Dwight L. Moody

“A comprehensive view of the subject will show that there are nine elements which are essential to true prayer...

The first is **Adoration**; we cannot meet God on a level at the start. We must approach Him as One far beyond our reach or sight.

The next is **Confession**; sin must be put out of the way. We cannot have any communion with God while there is any transgression between us. If there stands some wrong you have done, you cannot expect God's favor until you go to Him and confess the fault.

Restitution is another; we have to make good the wrong wherever possible.

Thanksgiving is the next; we must be thankful for what God has done for us already.

Then comes **Forgiveness**,

And then **Unity**;

And then, for prayer — *such as these things produce* — there must be **Faith**.

Thus influenced, we shall be ready to offer direct **Petition**. We hear a good deal of praying that is just exhorting, and if you did not see the man's eyes closed, you would suppose he was preaching. Then, much that is *called* prayer is simply finding fault. There needs to be more petition in our prayers.

After all these, there must come **Submission**. While praying, we must be ready to accept the will of God.”¹⁵

Notice these provide a form of prayer like A-C-T-S or P-R-A-Y. What is mentioned by Moody here, that perhaps you haven't included much in your own prayers?

How might it affect your attitude in prayer, the next time you come before God?

Knowing now what prayer is, and what it's for, it might be easier to assess some common practices in the *church*, that may not be biblical or beneficial. If the bible governs *what* we pray about, and *how* we pray, then surely it must govern what we are *not* to pray about, and how we are *not* to pray. If we simply stick to what the bible says, and controversy arises from it, we can be assured that we are not the cause of the controversy.

¹⁵ Moody, Dwight L., “Prevailing Prayer: What Hinders It?”

Speaking in Tongues

Is there a private prayer language?

Entire books have been written on this subject. There is no way to give it the proper attention it deserves here. Yes, it is controversial; yet Paul didn't condemn it. Instead, he regulated it. The issue is this: what does "praying in tongues" mean? Is it a *known language*, or is it *ecstatic speech*? As we examine the Scriptural text, it appears to be a known language because it's invariably linked to prophesying – so it must be understood. Maybe you don't practice it, nor have you experienced it. But a number of Charismatic brothers and sisters do. The principal passage used in support of it is 1Cor 14. It contains ambiguous text, especially verse 2. Even so, seven principles may be deduced concerning the purpose and use of tongues:

1. Tongues are unintelligible to others (v. 2), and won't edify unless interpreted (v. 5).
2. Speaking or praying in tongues should not be done publicly unless it edifies others.
3. Prophecy is to be sought and preferred over speaking in tongues, because it edifies.
4. Whenever tongues are used in the church, an interpreter must be present (to edify).
5. Whenever tongues are used in the church, limit it to two or three *prophets* at a time.
6. Whenever tongues are used in the church for *prophecy*, it is to be regulated and reviewed for content (v. 40: it must be "fitting and orderly", not with abandon).
7. And yet, tongues are not to be forbidden (v. 39).¹⁶

"Prophecy" means clearly explaining the truth of God *as presented in his word*. It is never *new* revelation. You should know that the tradition of the church since the 2nd century (as found in the writings of Eusebius c. 325 AD) is that speaking in tongues was an extraordinary gift; and all extraordinary gifts died with the Apostles' generation. They were used to certify the Apostles and their designees to the early church, not to identify or characterize all believers. However, this passage indicates a non-Apostolic practice of the gift. Charismatics say there has been a rekindling of extraordinary gifts in our time. But experience, like tradition, is not our standard of truth. *The gifts are not for private blessing; they are for the common good.* (1Cor 12:7)

The same caution applies to *this* practice, that applies to contemplative prayer (see the lesson on *Prayer and Meditation*): don't let go of your mind or the text of Scripture. If you don't know what you're praying or saying, set it aside. It provides no value to you, and it cannot edify the church. It is *not* the mark of the Spirit's presence,¹⁷ so don't fret if you don't have this "gift." Most Christians don't.

We do not permit speaking in tongues publicly at Hope Chapel, and we discourage the practice privately, for the reasons given above. For more information, read Robert Zerhusen's article, "A New Look at Tongues," or Fernand Legrand's exhaustive article, "All About Speaking in Tongues."

¹⁶ Paul writes in 1Cor 14:18 "I thank God that I speak in tongues more than all of you." The text clearly does not say, "I speak in more tongues than all of you." The phrasing might suggest ecstatic speech, since Paul spoke a number of languages. But that would be an unjustified conclusion from an ambiguous statement.

¹⁷ Verses 21-22 say that speaking in tongues is a sign for un-believers, and not for believers. Isaiah 28 (espec. v.11) indicates that when God speaks to Israel with a foreign tongue (as happened at Pentcost in Acts 2), it will be a sign to them that they have fallen from His favor, that they are behaving like drunkards, and that He will call to be His people those who were not His people, i.e. the Gentiles (Rom 9:25-26).

THE PURPOSE OF PRAYER

Prayer is the primary means by which we learn submission and obedience. Because God is unchanging, the end or outcome of prayer is necessarily to change us. It is a cooperative venture between the Spirit and us. It involves learning to take advantage of the Spirit's power, supplies, and direction by being *submissive* (Rom 8:5-14)¹⁸ and *obedient* (Joh 15:7-10).¹⁹ Being submissive and obedient are not prerequisites for prayer. They are the *outcomes* of prayer.

If prayer is *not* the primary means or inclination to submission and obedience, what is?

*Prayer is an active effort to submit to the will of God*²⁰ by intentionally coming under the teaching of his Word (Rom 12:2; 2Joh 1:9),²¹ relying on the intercession and illumination of his Spirit (Rom 8:26-27; Eph 3:5),²² and in the process, submitting to the Spirit's leading and cleansing (Rom 8:14; 1Cor 6:11; 1The 4:3-5).²³

If we don't actively strive to submit to the will of God in prayer, what does prayer become?

¹⁸ Rom 8:5-14 For those who live according to the flesh set their minds on the things of the flesh, but those who live according to the Spirit set their minds on the things of the Spirit. To set the mind on the flesh is death, but to set the mind on the Spirit is life and peace. For the mind that is set on the flesh is hostile to God, for it does not submit to God's law; indeed, it cannot. Those who are in the flesh cannot please God. You, however, are not in the flesh but in the Spirit, if in fact the Spirit of God dwells in you. Anyone who does not have the Spirit of Christ does not belong to him. But if Christ is in you, although the body is dead because of sin, the Spirit is life because of righteousness. If the Spirit of him who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, he who raised Christ Jesus from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies through his Spirit who dwells in you. So then, brothers, we are debtors, not to the flesh, to live according to the flesh. For if you live according to the flesh you will die, but if by the Spirit you put to death the deeds of the body, you will live. For all who are led by the Spirit of God are sons of God. ESV

¹⁹ John 15:7-10 If you remain in me and my words remain in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be given you. This is to my Father's glory, that you bear much fruit, showing yourselves to be my disciples. "As the Father has loved me, so have I loved you. Now remain in my love. If you obey my commands, you will remain in my love, just as I have obeyed my Father's commands and remain in his love. NIV

²⁰ Mar 3:35 Whoever does the will of God, he is my brother and sister and mother; Rom 1:10 without ceasing I mention you always in my prayers, asking that somehow by God's will I may now at last succeed in coming to you; 1Pet. 4:1 Since therefore Christ suffered in the flesh, arm yourselves with the same way of thinking, for whoever has suffered in the flesh has ceased from sin, so as to live for the rest of the time in the flesh no longer for human passions but for the will of God. ESV

²¹ Rom 12:2 Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that by testing you may discern what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect. 2Jo 1:9 Everyone who goes on ahead and does not abide in the teaching of Christ, does not have God. Whoever abides in the teaching has both the Father and the Son. ESV

²² Rom 8:26-27 Likewise the Spirit helps us in our weakness. For we do not know what to pray for as we ought, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us with groanings too deep for words. And he who searches hearts knows what is the mind of the Spirit, because the Spirit intercedes for the saints according to the will of God. Eph 3:4-5 When you read this, you can perceive my insight into the mystery of Christ, which was not made known to the sons of men in other generations as it has now been revealed to his holy apostles and prophets by the Spirit. ESV

²³ Rom 8:14 For all who are led by the Spirit of God are sons of God. 1Cor 6:11 But you were washed, you were sanctified, you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and by the Spirit of our God. 1The 4:3-5 3 For this is the will of God, your sanctification: that you abstain from sexual immorality; that each one of you know how to control his own body in holiness and honor, not in the passion of lust like the Gentiles who do not know God;

Prayer glorifies God. We can pray or not pray. God will still ensure that his will is done in this world. But if we don't pray, God won't get the glory. The chief end of man is to glorify God, and to enjoy him forever.²⁴ Prayer is one way to give him the glory and the honor due him. When we don't pray, we are refusing to acknowledge his interaction in the world, and his sovereignty over all matters. We might mistakenly think that we fulfilled our own will, or caused our own outcome, independent of God.

We might glorify God by praying *privately*. But how might *public* prayer glorify Him? In other words, is the answer to our prayer the only way in which prayer might glorify God — as if showing a cause and effect relationship?

Why would we want to submit, and obey, and adopt God's will as our own? Because *we were called according to God's purpose*. We were foreknown by God and "predestined to be conformed to the likeness of his Son" (Rom 8:28-29). It is our very reason for being.

Our Duty to Pray

We pray because we are *commanded* to pray. "And he spoke a parable to them for this purpose: *so that men should always pray, and not lose heart*" Luke 18:1. This is an imperative to pray. It isn't an optional activity. We are to pray not only when we can, but also when we should. We don't just pray when we feel like it, but when we don't feel like it. We are prone to lose heart, and so we are told to pray to overcome that weakness. This was Christ's command to the disciples in the garden (Mat 26:41).²⁵ They were falling asleep because they were disheartened, not because they were tired. That happens to all of us. That's why we need to *discipline* ourselves to pray.

We are intentional about prayer. We practice it just as we would if we were learning a craft, because praying is a spiritual CRAFT. It is a *skill* to be honed and polished. It is a *weapon* employed in the service of God, as well as a defensive *shield* in the world. We must learn to wield it well.²⁶

We pray because Christ prayed. He is our example, and we are being conformed to his likeness. If *he* prayed, then *we* must pray. The church is commanded to pray "without ceasing," or "continually" (1The 5:17). In Acts 12:5, the church prayed "earnestly." The Greek word used there is *ektenos* (NT:1618). It literally means "out of stretching forth," much like an athlete would do as he stretches for the tape at the finish line. We are reaching for the throne of God. Like Jacob, we are wrestling with God himself for our blessing (Gen. 32:24-28).

TAKE A MOMENT to pray here, in an "active effort" to submit to God.

²⁴ Westminster Larger Catechism. Question and Answer 2.

²⁵ Matt 26:41-43 "Watch and pray so that you will not fall into temptation. The spirit is willing, but the body is weak." He went away a second time and prayed, "My Father, if it is not possible for this cup to be taken away unless I drink it, may your will be done." When he came back, he again found them sleeping, because their eyes were heavy. NIV

²⁶ Study these prayers as models: Jesus' prayers in Luke 22:39-46 and John 17; Mary's *Magnificat* in Lk 1:46-55; Solomon in 2Chr 6:14-42; Jehoshaphat in 2Chr 20:5-12; Hezekiah in Isa 37:14-20; Nehemiah in Neh. 1:5-11; and Daniel in Dan 9:4-19.

What Do We Pray For?

We pray for God's people: As for me, far be it from me that I should sin against the LORD by failing to pray for you. And I will teach you the way that is good and right (1Sam 12:23). "Pray one for another" (Jas. 5:16 ^{NIV}).

We pray for our leaders, Christian and non-Christian alike. As Christians, citizens of our country, we are commanded to pray "for kings, and for all that are in authority" (1Tim 2:1-3). To fail to pray for our political and judicial leaders is a sin against our country, and a sin against them as individuals. But even more, it is a sin against God!

We pray for the lost. As we read in 1Tim. 3:3-4, "God, our Saviour; Who will have all men to be saved, and to come to the knowledge of the truth;" it is therefore imperative that we intercede for the unsaved also.

We pray for our needs. James 4:2: "You have not, because you ask not." The Lord Jesus charged Christians, "Ask, and it shall be given you" (Luk 11:9), but we do not ask! He said, "Seek, and you shall find," yet we do not seek! He continued: "Knock, and it shall be opened to you," but we do not knock! Thus we do not have!

We pray for our enemies. Christ prayed for forgiveness for His enemies as He hung on the cross (Luk 23.34); ²⁷ and Paul prayed for the Jews, as indicated in Romans 9:1-3.

Why? Because all of these duties are God's will for us. ²⁸

Which of these do you *least* pray for? _____

TAKE A MOMENT to pray for that...

Prayer, God's Will, and the Bible

Here are some verses from the Bible, concerning God's will, and prayer. As you read these, think about what they imply about your *preparation for prayer*.

John 9:31 "We know that God does not listen to sinners. He listens to the godly man who does his will." (His will is recorded in the Bible)

Acts 22:14 'The God of our fathers has chosen you to know his will, and to see the Righteous One, and to hear words from his mouth.' (His words are written in the Bible)

Eph 1:9 And he made known to us the mystery of his will according to his good pleasure, which he purposed in Christ. (The mystery of his will is revealed in the Bible)

Eph 1:11 In him we were also chosen, having been predestined according to the plan of him who works out everything in conformity with the purpose of his will. (The purpose of his will is declared in the Bible)

²⁷ Mat 5:44-48 But I say to you, Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, so that you may be sons of your Father who is in heaven. For he makes his sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the just and on the unjust. For if you love those who love you, what reward do you have? Do not even the tax collectors do the same? And if you greet only your brothers, {Or *brothers and sisters*. The plural Greek word *adelphoi* (translated "brothers") refers to siblings in a family. In New Testament usage, depending on the context, *adelphoi* may refer either to *brothers* or to *brothers and sisters*} what more are you doing than others? Do not even the Gentiles do the same? You therefore must be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect.

²⁸ Adapted from *The Shameful Sin of Prayerlessness* by Dr. Fred M. Barlow

Col 1:9 For this reason, since the day we heard about you, we have not stopped praying for you and asking God to fill you with the knowledge of his will through all spiritual wisdom and understanding. (The knowledge of his will may be obtained from the Bible)

Heb 13:20-21 May the God of peace, who through the blood of the eternal covenant brought back from the dead our Lord Jesus, that great Shepherd of the sheep, equip you with everything good for doing his will, and may he work in us what is pleasing to him, through Jesus Christ, to whom be glory for ever and ever. Amen. (Everything good and pleasing is listed in the Bible)

Eph 1:17-18 I keep asking that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the glorious Father, may give you the Spirit of wisdom and revelation, so that you may know him better. I pray also that the eyes of your heart may be enlightened in order that you may know the hope to which he has called you, the riches of his glorious inheritance in the saints. (That hope, and our inheritance, is proclaimed in the Bible)

These last three verses are *prayers for the saints*. What do you see included, that maybe you haven't been praying for or including your prayers, either for yourself or for others?

TAKE A MOMENT to pray for that, for yourself – and for those in our church.

Next time someone asks, "How can I pray for you?" surprise them by responding with something from one of these prayers – or just say, "Pray Eph 1.17-18 over me."

Consider this: *Prayer is the means by which we procure the will, the power, and the wisdom to listen attentively and fruitfully to God's instruction through his word.* That's important, because it is through God's word that we are sanctified (Joh 17:17).

We "have been born again, not of perishable seed, but of imperishable, through the living and enduring word of God" (1 Peter 1:23).

Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly as you teach and admonish one another with all wisdom (Col 3:16).

All over the world this gospel is bearing fruit and growing, just as it's been doing among you since the day you heard it and understood God's grace in all its truth (Col 1:6).

What would you conclude from these verses about the relationship between the truth of God, and the content (or even the fervency) of your prayers?

Complete this sentence: The more I know God's word, _____

PRAYER AND MEDITATION

Prayer is often linked with meditation. That's for two reasons.

- The first is that we need to gather our thoughts before approaching the throne of our Creator. We pray "in the Spirit," which means by his power and direction.²⁹ It is an act of submission which requires that our hearts be prepared. We consider the majesty and the holiness of God, and our unworthiness apart from Christ. We sink into the robe of Christ, considering his righteousness and his atoning blood. Then we approach the Throne of Grace to have the benefits of his sacrifice applied to us in the form of forgiveness and a cleansed conscience.
- The second reason is that we need to meditate on the Word of God in order to consider His truth. After all, we're required to pray according to the will of God as revealed in his word, and to pray for wisdom with regard to that. A news reporter would not approach the president of the United States without having prepared himself ahead of time. We pray with the end in mind. When we close our prayer "In the name of Christ," we are affirming that we have done everything in our power to conform to the will of God, under the authority of Christ, by the power of the Spirit. In other words, we are establishing an attitude of Christlike prayer.

Even when we launch into spontaneous prayer, we should consider our words and our ways. We are not to babble thoughtlessly, inconsiderately, hoping that our many words will impress God or vaunt our spirituality before men (Ecc. 5:7; 10:14; Mat 6:7). Yes, God is our Father; but He is also *God*. The child who interrupts his parent because he feels compelled to speak and to be heard, must learn to control himself, and to wait. Prayer is as much listening for the leading of the Spirit of His Word, as it is speaking. It responds to God's word more than it initiates a novel conversation: *sola scriptura*.

Therefore, we do not want to come before God empty-minded, prayerfully waiting for some voice to give us direction. It's true that we know God's voice because we are his children. But if we are given some spiritual direction that runs counter to God's word, it cannot be from God. *That's why we talk to God through prayer, and why he talks to us through his word*. Expecting a two-way private conversation with God during prayer is potentially dangerous, and frankly, it can be presumptuous. If we're not familiar with his word, then his Spirit cannot bring Scripture to bear as Christ brought it to bear during his temptation in the desert. In prayer, we enter into the spiritual realm where we need to wear our full armor, carrying both sword *and* shield.

²⁹ Praying "in the Spirit" does not mean praying in tongues (which was addressed earlier). To understand its meaning, it may be helpful to contrast it with praying in the flesh (based on the contrast between Spirit and flesh spoken of in Rom 8:8-9). Think, "If I were to pray in the flesh, I would be seeking to satisfy the desires of my flesh, allowing it to master me, and submitting to its every whim. By contrast, if I pray in the Spirit, I am seeking to satisfy the desires of the Spirit (to do the will of God), allowing the Spirit to govern me, and submitting to his prompting and direction. More than that, when my flesh governs me, it is out of weakness on my part. But when the Spirit governs me, it results in supernatural power rising up within me, not weakness. On my own, I lack the strength, the will, and the determination to subdue my body (1Cor 9:27). But in the Spirit, I have all the resources of heaven at my disposal, the very strength and power of Christ, who lives in me. This isn't mumbo-jumbo, or some transcendent experience. Praying in the Spirit is willfully submitting to his direction through God's Word, and intentionally setting aside my own agenda. It is opening up to his examination of my heart (Psa 139:23), and allowing his assessment to convict my conscience."

Thus, meditation is the point at which we submit to the Spirit in order to solicit from God all that we need, while relying on Christ alone as our mediator in the process. These things are intentionally considered, and rationally acknowledged in our preparatory meditation.

Caution 1: God is *not* our Inner Being

TM, transcendental meditation, has returned to the Christian scene. In a search for spirituality, many are resurrecting the monastic and mystic practices of the Roman Catholic Church. There are many books on the topic, mostly by Catholic authors. But now a number of evangelical authors are also getting on the bandwagon. You'll hear of *lectio divina*, centering prayer, and contemplative prayer, as advocated by Thomas Keating, Richard Foster, Ken Blanchard, Dallas Willard, and a number of others. It's a throwback to the Rule of Benedict in the 6th century, and the later practices of Theresa of Avila, John of the Cross, and Madame Guyon (circa 17th century). Thomas Keating popularized it in the 1970's after "rediscovering" the *Cloud of Unknowing* by a 14th c. author. It sets aside the mind, emotions, and judgment, and opens the spirit to receiving direction (direct intuition), often stimulated by the repetition of a phrase. This is also called the *Zen of Meditation* by the Benedictine monks.

Here's an assessment of the technique by Rev. John D. Dreher (a Catholic monk):

Many people assume centering prayer is compatible with Catholic tradition, but in fact the techniques of centering prayer are neither Christian nor prayer. They are at the level of human faculties and as such are an operation of man, not of God. The deception and dangers can be grave.

Centering prayer differs from Christian prayer in that the intent of the technique is to bring the practitioner to the center of his *own being*. There he is, supposedly, to experience the presence of the God who indwells him. Christian prayer, on the contrary, centers upon God in a *relational* way, as someone apart from oneself. The Christian knows a God who is personal, yet who, as Creator, infinitely transcends his creature. God is wholly other than man. It is also crucial to Christian prayer that God engages man's whole being in response, not just his interior life. In the view of centering prayer, the immanence of God somehow makes the transcendence of God available to human techniques and experience.

<http://www.saint-mike.org/Library/Occult/CenteringPrayer.html>

Here's a definition of contemplative prayer given by one of its advocates:

Christian Contemplative Prayer is the opening of mind and heart - our whole being - to God, the Ultimate Mystery, beyond thoughts, words and emotions, whom we know by faith is within us, closer than breathing, thinking, feeling and choosing; even closer than consciousness itself. The root of all prayer is interior silence. Though we think of prayer as thoughts or feelings expressed in words, this is only one expression. Contemplative Prayer is a prayer of silence, an experience of God's presence as the ground in which our being is rooted, the Source from whom our life emerges at every moment. <http://www.centeringprayer.com/>

When you hear "beyond thoughts," you are hearing something other than reformed theology. Paul says in 1Co 14:15 "What am I to do? I will pray with my spirit, but I will pray with my mind also; I will sing praise with my spirit, but I will sing with my mind

also.” When someone asks you to set your mind adrift, or let go of your reason, it is a *danger sign*. Many believe we can use Catholic practices without falling into Catholic error. That’s what the Hebrews believed when they adopted Canaanite practices. That’s what the Roman Catholics believed when they absorbed a number of pagan rites into Christianity. They thought they could substitute Christian symbols and objects for those of the pagans without contaminating their faith. They were wrong. Syncretism ³⁰ is an alluring lie. It’s a snare and a trap (Jos 23:9-16). God says to come out from among such idols (2Cor 6:16-17); he doesn’t say to adapt them for our use. And yet, we have *liberty*; we do not operate out of fear, but out of love, knowing what is true. (1Cor 8)

Caution 2: God is not our “Buddy”

One aberration of modern evangelicalism is the idea that Jesus, or God, is somehow our buddy. We can chit-chat with him as if we were at the kitchen table. When the Bible says that Abraham was a friend of God, it doesn’t mean he could give him a slap on the back and crack jokes with him. That is never the image we are given in Scripture. Consider the danger that Moses was in when God revealed Himself to him. God had to place Moses in the cleft of the rock and show him only his back lest he die (Exo 33:22). When Jesus called his disciples his friends, it wasn’t that they became his equal and were then free to rebuke him, ignore him, or give him their advice (Mat 16:22-23, “Get behind me, Satan”). We must maintain our distance, treating God with respect, caution, consideration, and humility. We approach His throne with confidence, not because we’re buddies, but because of God’s great promises, and the covering of Christ.

Calvin’s first rule of prayer is to approach God with **reverence**, not familiarity. Remember what your mother taught you: *familiarity breeds contempt*. Recall the trouble that Job got into by saying his condition was unwarranted. He demanded to have his day in court before the Maker of Heaven and Earth. When he finally got his day in the presence of God, he was in such awe and wonder that he couldn’t speak (40:4). Recall the sons of Aaron who approached the altar without permission. They were consumed (Lev. 10:1). “Fear the One who has the power to throw body and soul into hell” (Mat 10:28). We are to tremble, and yet we are also to be confident:

Tremble and sin not: think in your mind, lying down, and be still. [Selah]

Sacrifice offerings of righteousness, and have confidence in Jehovah. Psalm 4:4-5

³⁰ Syncretism is adapting your belief system to another belief system; combining or reconciling differing beliefs.

PRAYERLESSNESS

An Indicator of our Spiritual Condition

When we don't pray for extended periods of time, it is often an indicator of spiritual weakness:

- We may have become self-sufficient
- We may suffer from unbelief, wrong beliefs, or outright rebellion
- We may have stopped reading God's word, and thus have no material with which to pray, or motivation by which to pray
- We may suffer from doubt, worry, or mistrust
- We may have succumbed to habitual sin, and are embarrassed to come before God

There is a single word for all of these. It is **sin**, and we must repent of it. How? *By praying!*

It is our duty and privilege to pray to God. But we don't want to pray only out of duty. We are now in Christ, and he lives in us (Gal 2.20). We pray because we delight in our heavenly Father, and we're confident that He delights in us, because of Christ.

Delight yourself in the LORD, And He will give you the desires of your heart. (Psa 37:4)

Behold! My Servant whom I uphold, My Elect One *in whom* My soul delights! I have put My Spirit upon Him; He will bring forth justice to the Gentiles. (Isa 42:1)

SUMMARY

Prayer is necessary for *every* Christian. It should be cherished and practiced daily. It is a privilege granted to us by God Almighty. May we learn to pray according to God's will as revealed in his word, and in the power of the Spirit. May we always pray in the name of Christ, i.e., acknowledging him as the only door through which we may enter into God's presence (Joh 10:9). He tore in half the veil that formerly excluded us from the Holy of Holies, and became that veil himself (Mat 27:51; Heb 6:19; 9:3; 10:20). Because of that, we may now approach the throne of God with confidence (Heb 4:16), knowing that our Father delights in us, because he delights in the Son (Eph 3:11,12). In God, we live, and move, and have our being (Acts 17:28). He has called us into communion with Himself (1Joh 1:3). Why would we separate ourselves from Him by failing to pray, or close our ears to him by failing to read his Word (Psa 119)? Therefore, let us come into his presence with thanksgiving and into his courts with praise (Psa 95:2; 100:4).

APPENDIX: PRAYERS IN THE BIBLE

Old Testament

- Abijah's army – for victory (2Chr 13:14)
Abraham for a son (Gen 15:1-6)
Abraham for Ishmael (Gen 17:18-21)
Abraham for Sodom (Gen 18:16-33).
Abraham for Abimelech (Gen 20:17)
Abraham's servant for guidance (Gen 24:12-52)
Asa for victory (2Chr 14:11)
Cain – for mercy (Gen 4:13-15)
Daniel Confesses on Behalf of Israel (Dan 9:4-19).
Daniel for knowledge (Dan 2:17-23)
David for blessing (2Sam 7:18-29)
David for grace (Ps 25:16)
David for guidance (2Sam 2:1)
David for help (1Sam 23:10-13)
David for justice (Ps 9:17-20)
David Confession and Repentance (Psa 51; 1 Sam 11-12).
David Praise & Prayers in the Psalms (Psa 65 and others).
David Surrendering (Psa 139).
David of Thanksgiving – 2Sam 7:18-29; 1Chr 17:16-27
Elijah for widow's son to be raised into life (1Kng 17:20-23)
Elijah for triumph over Baal (1Kng 18:36-38)
Elijah for death – 1Kng 19:4
Elisha for blindness and sight (2Kng 6:17-23)
Ezekiel for undefilement (Eze 4:12-15)
Ezra for the sins of the people (Ezr 9:6-15)
Gideon for a Sign (Jdg 6:36-40).
Habakkuk for justice (Hab 1:1-4)
Habakkuk for deliverance (Hab 3:1-19)
Hagar for consolation (Gen 21:14-20)
Hannah for a son (1Sam 1:10-17)
Hezekiah for deliverance (2Kng 19:15-19)
Hezekiah for health (2Kng 20:1-11)
Hezekiah for Israel's Defense (2Kng 19:15-19)
Hezekiah for Extension of Life (2Kng 20:1-7)
Hezekiah as Egypt prepares to attack – Isa 37:14-20
Isaac for children (Gen 25:21, 24-26)
Israelites for deliverance (Exo 2:23-25; 3:7-10)
Jabez for prosperity (1Chr 4:10)
Jacob for deliverance from Esau (Gen 32:9-12)
Jacob wrestling all night (Gen 32:24-30)
Jehoahaz for victory (2Kng 13:1-5)
Jehoshaphat for defense (2Chr 20:5-12)
Jehoshaphat for victory (2Chr 18:31)
Jehoshaphat for protection (2Kng 20:5-12, 27)
Jeremiah for mercy (Jer 14:7-10)
Jeremiah for repentance (Jer 31:18-25)
Jeremiah for Judah (Jer 42:1-6)
Jews for safe journey (Ezra 8:21-23)
Job's Prayer Job 42:1-6
Jonah for deliverance from the fish (Jon 2:1-10)
Joshua for help and mercy (Josh 7:6-9)
Manasseh for deliverance (2Chr 33:12-13)
Manoah for guidance (Jdg 13:8-15)
Moses for Pharaoh (Exo 8:9-13)
Moses for water (Exo 15:24-25)
Moses for Israel (Exo 32:31-35)
Moses for Miriam (Num 12:11-14)
Moses for a successor (Num 27:15-17)
Moses to see the Promised Land (Deu 3:23-25)
Moses for Israel in the Wilderness (Exo 32:9-14; Num 14:11-24).
Nehemiah for the Jews (Neh 1:4-11)
People of Judah – for a covenant (2Chr 15:12-15)
Priests for blessing (2Chr 30:27)
Rebekah for understanding (Gen 25:22-23)
Reubenites for victory (1Chr 5:18-20)
Samuel for wisdom (1Kng 3:6-14)
Samson for water (Jdg 15:18-19)
Samson for strength (Jdg 16:29-30)
Samuel for Israel (1Sam 7:5-12)
Solomon for Wisdom (1Kng 3:1-15; 2Chr 1:1-12)
Solomon for Temple (1Kng 8:22-61; 2Chr 6:12-42)

New Testament

Centurion for his servant (Matt 8:5-13)	Jesus for forgiveness for others (Luk 23:34)
Christians for Peter (Acts 12: 5-12)	Jesus in submission (Luk 23:46)
Christians for rulers in authority (1Tim 2:1-2)	Jesus at Lazarus' tomb (Joh 11:41-42)
Corinthians for Paul (2Cor 1:9-11)	Jesus for the Father's glory (Joh 12:28)
Cornelius for enlightenment (Acts 10:1-33)	Jesus for the Church (Joh 17:1-26)
Criminal for salvation (Luk 23:42-43)	Leper for healing (Mat 8:2-3)
Disciples for boldness (Acts 4:24-31)	Paul for the healing of Publius' father (Act 28:8)
Elijah for drought and rain (James 5:17-18)	Paul for grace (2Cor 12:8-9)
Holy Spirit for Christians (Rom 8:26-27)	Paul for the Ephesians (Eph 3:14-21)
Jesus praise for revelation to babes (Mat 11:25-26)	Paul for the Ephesians (Eph 1:15-23).
Jesus in Gethsemane (Mat 26:36-46)	Peter for raising Dorcas (Acts 9:40)
Jesus – Lord's Prayer (Mat 6:5-15).	Tax Collector for mercy (Luk 18:13)
	Zechariah for a son (Luk 1:13)

Unanswered Prayers

King Saul prayed for guidance 1Sam 14:37; Ecc 5:1-7.
King Saul prayed for help and guidance. 1Sam 28:6,7.
David prayed for the life of his son. 2Sam 12:13-23.
Elijah prayed that he might die. 1Kng 19:4; 2 Kng 2:11.
Jonah prayed that God would take his life. Jon 4:3.
King Zedekiah prayed for help in defeating Nebuchadnezzar. Jer 21:2.
James and John requested the highest rank. Mar 10:34-45.
Jesus prayed, "May this cup be taken from me." Mat 26:36-46; Phi 2:5-8; Heb 2:9; 12:2,3; 13:12,13.
Paul prayed that his "thorn in the flesh" be removed. 2Cor 12:7-10.
Samuel for guidance. 1Sam 16:7

Sinner's Plea to be Heard by God

Psa 4; Psa 54; Psa 55; Psa 61; Psa 86; Psa 102; Psa 143; 1Chr 4:10

How to Pray

Mat 6:6; Mat 6:7; Mar 11:25; Phi 4:6; Luk 5:16; Dan 6:10; Rom 8:26

Topical Listing

Blessing

- Num 6:24-26 God's blessing
- 1The 5:23-24 Holiness
- 2The 2:13-17 Comfort

Commitment

- 1Kng 8:56-61 Loyalty to God and His work
- Acts 4:24-30 Loyalty to God and His work

Confession

- Psa 51:1-19 Acknowledgement of sin – Seeking God's mercy
- Neh 1:5-11 Confession of sin

Confidence

- Psa 23:1-6 God is all-sufficient

Forgiveness

- Dan 9:4-19 Seeking mercy for sin
- 1Kng 8:23-30 God to hear and forgive
- Ezr 9:6 Sorrow for sin
- Neh 9:32-33 Mercy
- Job 42:1-6 Repentance
- Isa 64:8-9 Mercy

Help

- 1Sam 1:11 Barrenness
- 1Kng 3:6-9 Understanding and discernment
- 1Kng 18:36-37 For God to be known
- Isa 25:1-5 In time of need
- Jer 32:17-19 Nothing is too hard for God
- Lam 3:18-31 When God seems silent

Intercession

- Exo 32:11-13
- Exo 32:31-32
- Phi 1:9-11 Love towards others
- Rom 1:8-10 A prayer for believers
- 2Cor 13:7-9 Spiritual growth and maturity
- Eph 1:15-19 Wisdom and spiritual growth
- Eph 3:14-19 To know Christ's love
- Col 1:3-14 Spiritual understanding
- Heb 13:20-21 Spiritual maturity

Praise

- 1Chr 29:10-13 Adoring God for who He is
- Exo 15:2 Praise for salvation
- Deu 32:3-4 God is unchanging
- 2Sam 22:2-4 Saved from enemies
- 1Chr 16:23-36 What God has done
- 1Chr 29:10-19 Guidance
- Luk 1:68-79 Relationship with God

Thanksgiving

- Psa 105:1-7 For what God has done
- 1Sam 2:1-10 Answered prayer
- 2Sam 7:18-29 For God's blessings
- Dan 2:20-23 Wisdom and strength
- Luk 2:29-32 Salvation
- 1Cor 1:4-9 For others' gifts