

## How to Pray

### Introduction

Before we consider how to pray, we should first consider some other questions:

#### **What is prayer?**

Prayer in its most general sense is communication with God. Like human-to-human communication, it can take many different forms. The form is less important than the openness and honesty of the communication.

#### **Can I pray?**

God is spirit and humans are made in the image of God. This means that as humans we have the capacity to communicate with God, so yes, you can pray! Whatever the outward form we may use (e.g. written or graphic, or audible or silent), the real thing is our spirit in touch with God as spirit.

#### **Why pray?**

There are two key reasons to pray:

- 1) *To develop our Relationship with our Heavenly Father* – Through Christ, you are a child of God, but all relationships thrive on communication, and this is no exception. In a relationship, we influence each other, and the reality is that, in prayer, we are influenced by God more than he is by us!
- 2) *To exercise the Father's will in this world* – prayer has power and effect as God has chosen this means.

These two reasons help us understand how to pray on the following pages.

**"Prayer can do anything God can do." EM Bounds**

## 1) Develop our Relationship with our Heavenly Father

Prayer is about living a beautiful and complete relationship with God. Take regular time out for it and always chat on the go. Here are some guidelines:

- **Be Yourself** - The style of communication between two people is dependent on both of their characters. Chill out, you are his child: God knows you, so don't try to be someone else. Share your desires, feelings, thoughts and situation. Don't be hypocritical!
- **Experiment to Find what Works** – Try a whole range of different means to express your thoughts to God and hear from him, and major on what connects best. For example:
  - Spontaneous prayer
  - Passages from the Bible
  - Songs, Music
  - Written prayers (yours or another's)
  - Arts and Expression of all kinds
  - The gift of tongues
- **Cover all Areas** – Discuss the whole of your life with him. As you do so, it is helpful to follow the aspects of prayer remembered by the acronym ACTS:
  - **Adoration** – Let's get our perspective right by declaring the greatness and goodness of God. *Why not use a psalm or a worship song? E.g. Psalm 100*
  - **Confession** – Let's get the deck cleared between us! Sin gets in the way of our relationship with God, but Jesus came so that "if we confess our sin, ... he will forgive us and cleanse us from all unrighteousness" (1 John 1v8-9). Ask the Holy Spirit to reveal areas of concern, confess the sin, and receive his forgiveness available through Christ's death. *Why not use Psalm 51?*
  - **Thanks** – You have just received God's forgiveness – made available in Jesus. Give him thanks for Jesus. God has given you all good things – give him thanks until your heart is truly thankful! (Phil 4v4-7) *Have a look at Psalm 107!*
  - **Supplication** – ("Asking") – Nothing is impossible with God, so you can come to him and ask for anything. Ask for all types of things in life – material, emotional, relational, spiritual; they are all in God's hands. Ask for yourself and others. *Have a look at Psalm 43!*

## 2) To exercise the Father's Will in the World

God has chosen to act in response to our prayers for the exercise of his will.

- **Attain victory in spiritual battle.** I can do a bit in this world, but God can do all things (Ephesians 3v20). The fundamental issue we are facing in this world is a spiritual one (Ephesians 6v12) and one of the ways in which we do battle in this is to pray (Ephesians 6v18-19). We can have a huge spiritual impact through our prayer.
- **Faith-filled prayer by a righteous person is effective** (James 5v13-18). In the passage, Elijah's prayer changes the weather and climate. The passage states two conditions: (i) be righteous and (ii) pray in faith. Being righteous is to be in a right relationship with God (see previous section), praying in faith is to trust that God is both able and willing to answer.
- **United Prayer is effective** (Matthew 18v19). Where people agree in prayer together, God answers. Do not be afraid to speak out your prayers in front of others: you are talking to God, not them. Do pray prayers which others can join in with and say "Amen" to. Agree with others in prayer if you can.
- **Prayer in the Name of Jesus is effective** ( John 14v13-14, 15v7,16 and 16v23-26). This is not calling for a word formula, "in the name of Jesus," but an underlying attitude of wanting things which Jesus would want. The context in the verses is doing God's work, being connected to God and loving one another. *A good question to ask is, "What would Jesus most want in this situation?" Then pray.*
- **Persistent prayer is effective** (Luke 18v1-8). Sometimes the Lord delays in his answer, maybe testing our determination. Jesus teaches that God responds to persistence. *A good idea is to have something to remind you to pray for an issue – e.g. a prayer list or diary or set aside a day to pray.*
- **Arrow prayers are effective** (Nehemiah 2v4) Pray on the spot! But note that he had already prayed persistently in Nehemiah 1v4-11.
- **Praying in the Holy Spirit** (Ephesians 6v18-19) Always allow the Holy Spirit to guide you and empower you in prayer. We can expect this to include not just words but other expressions including tongues! (Romans 8v26-27)

## 3) Suggestions for further study

**There are many books on prayer.** Below are a few suggestions:

- EM Bounds "Power through Prayer" – a classic (1910) call to pray.
- T Chester, "The Message of Prayer" – a study of prayers in the Bible.
- R Dunn "Don't just stand there ... Pray something" – a challenge to intercessory prayer.
- PY Cho "Prayer: the key to Revival" – challenge to pray.

**The New Testament records several prayers of Jesus and Paul.** They ask that the believers would know more of the love, unity and power of God. That is a fantastic way to pray for yourself and others. See:

- John 17v1-26
- Ephesians 1v15-23 and 3v14-21
- Philippians 1v3-11
- Colossians 1v3-14
- 2 Thessalonians 1v11-12

**The Lord's Prayer.** Jesus teaches his disciples to pray in Matthew 6v9-13.

**We are also instructed in the New Testament to pray for:** governments and those in authority (1 Tim 2v1-3); opportunities to share the gospel with boldness, clarity and wisdom (Col 4v2-5); anything that concerns you (Phil 4v4-7); relieving of suffering (Mark 13v18); healing (James 5v13-16); help to overcome temptation (Luke 22v40); forgiveness, daily provision, God's rule (Matthew 6v9-13); those who hurt you (Luke 6v28); all Christians (Eph 6v18); the Holy Spirit (Luke 11v13). That should give us a bit to go for!

- So:**
- Be yourself and try different methods;*
  - Include Adoration, Confession, Thanks and Supplication;*
  - Pray about anything and everything;*
  - Pray in the Holy Spirit, with faith and with others;*
  - Be persistent and pray on the spot;*
  - Think: "What would Jesus want?"*