

Prayer
Dick Wakeman

I. Communication with God

A. Psalm 119:71

B. Communication from the heart vs. clichés from the head

C. Listening – Be still and know that I am God

C. Philippians 4:6-7

C. Psalm 62; Psalm 112

II. Value of the individual

A. Malachi 3:16

III. Zephaniah 3:17-18

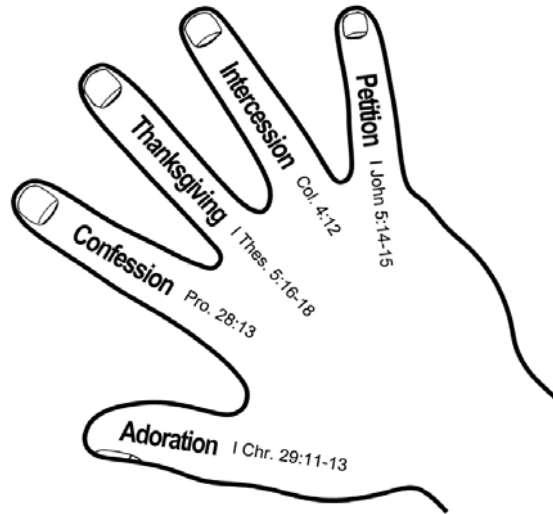
IV. Intimacy with God requires time talking, communicating, with Him

The Prayer Hand Illustration

LeRoy Eims

God speaks to you through His Word. Your part of the conversation is prayer. You will find as you grow up in the Lord that prayer is more than just a comforting psychological experience. It is conversation and communion with God. Your daily schedule is full. You have a job to think about. You are a working person, or a busy housewife with children to think about. You are a student with assignments to do and your courses are tough. You consider most of your activities important or you wouldn't do them.

But prayer is more than just important; it is a matter of life or death as far as spiritual growth is concerned. As you don't really get to know your Father till you let Him speak to you through His Word, so the father-child relationship cannot deepen unless you converse with Him, and share your problems, your burdens, your worries, and your joys. Children often complain that their parents never listen to them. Well, you'll never have that problem with your heavenly Father - He wants you to talk to Him



Adoration

The Bible teaches five different kinds of prayer ("ACTS"). The first is *adoration, or praise*. God says, "Whoso offereth praise glorifieth Me" (Psalm 50:23). The prophet said, "O Lord, Thou art my God; I will exalt Thee; I will praise Thy name" (Isaiah 25:1). There have been times in my life when the situation seemed so hopeless that I just couldn't pray. So I would stop and begin praising the Lord. I would praise Him for who He is, the creator of Heaven and earth; I would praise Him for His matchless power and amazing grace, for His love and mercy and goodness. Soon the cloud would lift, my spirits would soar, and I would be on top again. When things get too tough even for prayer, try praise.

If you and I reflect frequently on the nature of God, His power, righteousness, and love, and then think that in love He would stoop to die on a cross for our sins, this should cause us to exclaim: "Oh, God, who am I to be so blessed!" This should cause us to cast ourselves at His feet in thanksgiving and praise, in a spirit of true humility.

Humility is one of the crowning virtues of the Christian. It should be a natural fruit of praise. Its opposite, pride, is that sin which changed angels into devils. Satan, a powerful and glorious member of the heavenly host, one day was cast forth from the presence of God because pride had entered his heart and he had said, "I will be exalted." Pride, then, is a sin that bears bitter fruit. Pride causes us to become insensitive of others. We think only about ourselves, not of others. It hinders our ministry because it detracts from the glory of God. "I am the Lord; that is My name; and My glory will I not give to another, neither My praise to graven images" (Isaiah 42:8). We find ourselves being resisted rather than blessed by the Lord. The Bible says, "God resisteth the proud, and giveth grace to the humble" (I Peter 5:5).

The desire of God's heart for us is to have us live before Him in beautiful fellowship, full of devotion and praise. A life of praise, then, is a life occupied with God Himself, not His gifts, not what He has done for us, but who He is as we stand in awe at the splendor of His person. "Whoso offereth praise glorifieth Me; and to him that ordereth his [conduct] aright will I show the salvation of God" (Psalm 50:23).

Confession

The second kind of prayer is *confession*: "If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness" (I John 1:9). The word *confess* in the Greek is *homologeō*, combining *homoios*, "the same," with *legō*, "I speak." So to confess is to say the same thing about sin that God says. It is to have the same attitude toward sin that He has.

I served with the Marines in the South Pacific during World War II. One day I saw some large flat rocks on the beach of a tropical island. I turned one of them over and to my amazement saw hundreds of strange-looking, slimy, crawling things dart for another hiding place. They didn't want the light to shine on them; they enjoyed living in the dark. Confession is like turning over the rocks in our hearts and exposing our sins to the light of God, so that He may deal with them.

The Bible says, "He that covereth his sins shall not prosper, but whoso confesseth and forsaketh them shall have mercy" (Proverbs 28:13).

Thanksgiving

Thanksgiving is the third kind of prayer. The Bible says, "Offer unto God thanksgiving, and pay thy vows unto the Most High. And call upon Me in the day of trouble; I will deliver thee, and thou shalt glorify Me" (Psalm 50:14-15). Paul says, "All things are for your sakes, that the abundant grace might through the thanksgiving of many redound to the glory of God" (II Corinthians 4:15). " - - - In everything give thanks, for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus concerning you" (I Thessalonians 5:16-18).

"Be careful for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be known unto God. And the peace of God which passeth all understanding, shall keep your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus" (Philippians 4:6-7). Thanksgiving as a consistent way of life is an exciting and rewarding life-style to fill our days here on earth. It's not easy, but it's the best.

Let's distinguish between thanksgiving and praise. Thanksgiving is necessary for the Christian. An unthankful heart is an abomination to the Lord. Do you remember the story of the 10 lepers who were healed by Jesus? "And one of them, when he saw that he was healed, turned back, and

with a loud voice glorified God, and fell down on his face at His feet, giving Him thanks; and he was a Samaritan. And Jesus answering said, "Were there not 10 cleansed? "But where are the nine?" (Luke 17:15-17) In Paul's letter to the Romans, along with their worship of idols and uncleanness of life ungodly people are characterized as: "Neither were thankful" (Romans 1:21). Thankfulness must be the life-style of the Christian.

Praise has to do with an overflow of our hearts in response to who God is; we extol His majesty, love, power, grace, longsuffering, kindness, and the splendor of His Person. The psalmist says, "I will praise Thee with uprightness of heart, when I shall have learned Thy righteous judgments" (Psalm 119:7). One of the chief values of living a life of praise is that it sets us into the life-style of the angels of God. They surround the throne of God and constantly praise, "Holy, Holy, Holy, Lord God Almighty" (Revelation 4:8). Praise, then, calls to mind the character and power of God. When we think on God's holiness and power, we are reminded of our own sinfulness and weakness. That should cast us completely on the Lord.

Supplication: Intercession

The next kind of prayer is *intercession*. We read of Paul's testimony to his friend: "Epaphras, who is one of you, a servant of Christ, saluteth you, always laboring fervently for you in prayers, that ye may stand perfect and complete in all the will of God" (Colossians 4:12). Praying for others is a powerful means of living a life that has impact and significance.

If a person is hungry, give him food. If the person is thirsty, give him a glass of water. If the person is cold, invite him in by the stove or give him a coat. If he is unemployed, try to help him find work. If he has no place to live, help him find shelter. And so the list goes on. But the most meaningful help you can give a person is largely overlooked in this materialistic and secular age: prayer - intercessory prayer.

People promise to do many things for others in need that does absolutely no good. I heard of a fellow who needed a job and was on his way to an interview. The man's friend heard about it and said, "I sure hope you get the job. I'll keep my fingers crossed." The man did get the job, came back to his friend, and said, "That's the best answer to crossed fingers I ever heard of!"

Unfortunately, there are those who put prayer in the same category. Just a nice little expression of concern, a way to tell a person you are involved and interested. But don't you believe it. Prayer is power, for behind believing prayer stand the immutable arid unchangeable promises of God. The Prophet Samuel, who came to comfort the people of Israel, warned them not to turn to things which could not profit nor deliver, "For they are vain," he said. Then he made this powerful and dramatic statement: "Moreover as for me, God forbid that I should sin against the Lord in ceasing to pray for you" (I Samuel 12:21, 23). Immediately after Samuel's warning, he assured them of his unceasing prayers. Prayer is profitable. Intercession can help.

I read of a missionary who was serving the Lord among people of a wild and dangerous tribe. The fiercest men of the tribe had determined to kill him, and came to his house one night to murder him. They were approaching the place when all at once they turned and ran. They had seen something that had gripped them with terror. Later, when these men were converted to Christ, they told the missionary about it. They had seen eight shining men with drawn swords standing guard around his home. Naturally, the missionary was surprised by the story, only to learn later that on the very night of the attack eight men in America had gathered to pray for the missionary's

safety and protection. Think of that in light of the psalmist's declaration: "He orders His angels to protect you wherever you go" (Psalm 91:11 LB).

The New Testament speaks often of prayer for others, and some of the most helpful passages are the prayers of the Apostle Paul. In them we catch a glimpse of his great heart and his concern for others. "For this cause we also, since the day we heard it, do not cease to pray for you, and to desire that ye might be filled with the knowledge of His will in all wisdom and spiritual understanding; that ye might walk worthy of the Lord unto all pleasing, being fruitful in every good work, and increasing in the knowledge of God" (Colossians 1:9-10). The entire prayer, along with those recorded in his other writings, provide us with a great source of inspiration and instruction in praying for others.

Supplication: Petition

The last kind of prayer is *petition*, praying things for yourself. A well-known example is in the Lord's Prayer: "Give us this day our daily bread" (Matthew 6:11).

Like many young Christians, I really had a desire to follow the Lord. The preacher had spoken on the subject of prayer and given the challenge for us to become men and women who learned to pour out our hearts to God. I read books on the subject and was inspired by the lives of men such as Martin Luther and George Mueller, who spent hours every day on their knees. So, armed with a head full of information and a heart full of good intentions. I went to my knees. I prayed about everything I could think of with all the fervency I could muster, and arose from my place of prayer feeling that God must have taken note of a new prayer giant in the earth. I glanced at my watch and almost collapsed from surprise. About three minutes had elapsed.

The Bible gives us direction as to what we should pray for ourselves. The question of praying for ourselves arose when I was a young college worker in a program of evangelism and follow-up at a large Eastern university. We had seen a number of young men come to Christ and were in the process of helping them become established in a meaningful prayer life when the chaplain asked me to drop by his office. The next morning I went in to see him and after a brief chat he came to the point.

"Young man," he said, "I understand you are teaching students at the university that they should pray and ask God for things for themselves." Well, though that hadn't been the primary thrust of our study together, I had to admit that it was true. He looked at me with his sternest professional glare and said, "I want that stopped. I believe we should never pray for ourselves but only for others. To pray for yourself is a selfish and self-centered attitude in prayer."

I thought to myself that he certainly had a good emphasis and admired him for his sacrificial spirit and concern for others, but there was just one thing wrong. It was not scriptural. So I smiled and said, "Chaplain, would you mind if we read a verse of Scripture together?" "Certainly not," he replied. So I opened my Bible and read Matthew 6:11, "Give us this day our daily bread." I closed my Bible and waited for his reply.

He looked a bit startled, smiled, and said, "OK." And that was that. We eventually became good friends; in fact he became the faculty sponsor for our Bible study group on campus.

The Bible is very clear. We are called on to share our hearts with the Lord, to call on Him for our needs: "Casting all your care upon Him; for He careth for you" (I Peter 5:7). Never be afraid to

get before God and share your needs, personal concerns, family concerns, things that are often too deep to share with anyone else.

These are the things that God as your loving heavenly Father wants to hear from you. He delights to have His children call on His name and share their hurts, telling Him all about their scars and bruises. And constantly He promises to hear and answer. "Whatsoever ye shall ask in My name, that will I do, that the Father may be glorified in the Son. If ye shall ask anything in My name, I will do it" (John 14:13-14).

These assurances of answered prayer provide great motivation to seek the Lord's face continually.

He has promised to hear and answer. Daily needs, the difficulties of life that face us, the wisdom we need for decisions that demand attention should all be brought before the Lord on our knees. Prayer is the greatest way I know to demonstrate my dependence on God. My greatest declaration of independence would be to stop praying.

CONDITIONS FOR ANSWERED PRAYER

Prayers are answered only on the basis of Christ's saving work on the cross, and not because of anything we can do. Yet, the Bible reveals that there are certain *conditions* that we must meet in order to pray effectively. Despite God's grace and the work of Christ, there are certain acts which God has chosen not to do for us except as we meet the conditions that He has laid down for us. God hears our prayers as we pray on His terms laid down in Scripture.

In His Name

The first condition is to pray *in Jesus' name*. Jesus told His disciples, "Hitherto have ye asked nothing in My name; ask, and ye shall receive, that your joy may be full" (John 16:24). To pray in His name means to recognize and honor Him as the One who has purchased us. His mediation through sacrifice was the reason why petition for pardon and life should be heard by God. His name is the reason we should find favor with God the Father. We can enter into the very presence of God by a new and living way, Jesus, who said, "I am the way" (John 14:6). Paul emphasized this truth by stating, "There is one God, and one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus" (I Timothy 2:5). If we want God to hear and answer our prayers, we must pray in Jesus' name.

According to His Will

Second, we are to pray *in God's will*. John says, "This is the confidence that we have in Him, that, if we ask anything according to His will, He heareth us; and if we know that He hear us, whatsoever we ask, we know that we have the petitions that we desired of Him" (I John 5:14-15). Jesus prayed, "Not My will, but Thine, be done" (Luke 22:42), and this should be our attitude as well. God is our loving heavenly Father, and He knows what is best for us. It is by prayer that we seek God's will, embrace it, and align ourselves with it. Every prayer is a variation on the theme "Thy will be done." My children have asked me for things that I knew would be wrong for them. Because I loved them, and wanted the best for them, I had to say no. God responds in the same way. He says, yes, no, or wait.

Trusting in His Power

Third, prayer should be *in accordance with God's power*. The Lord spoke to Jeremiah and said, "Call unto Me, and I will answer thee, and show thee great and mighty things which thou knowest not" (Jeremiah 33:3). As a young Christian, I was challenged by Dawson Trotman, founder of The Navigators, when he asked, "Are you praying for continents or for toys?" We rarely give God a chance to demonstrate His power because of our small prayers.

Being Specific

Fourth, prayer should be *specific*. The great promise of Jesus Christ is: "Whatsoever ye shall ask in My name, that will I do, that the Father may be glorified in the Son. If ye shall ask anything in My name, I will do it" (John 14:1.3-14).

Ask great things of God. Expect great things from God. Pray about everything. Note Paul's words; "Be careful for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known unto God. And the peace of God, which passeth all understanding, shall keep your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus" (Philippians 4:6-7).

Being Persistent

Fifth, we must be *persistent*. The Bible says we ought always to pray and not lose heart. God hears the earnest, fervent prayer of the person who lays hold on God and cries out, "I will not let Thee go, except Thou bless me" (Genesis 32:26).

HINDRANCES TO PRAYER

Un-confessed Sin

The Bible also tells of three hindrances to prayer. The first is *un-confessed sin* in the life of a Christian. "If I regard iniquity in my heart," the psalmist said, "the Lord will not hear me" (Psalm 66:18). John reminds us: "Whatsoever we ask, we receive of Him, because we keep His commandments, and do those things that are pleasing in His sight" (I John 3:22). It is difficult to talk to God in prayer if we are out of fellowship with Him. Sin must be confessed and forsaken (see I John 1:9).

Unbelief

A second hindrance is *unbelief*. "All things, whatsoever ye shall ask in prayer, believing, ye shall receive" (Matthew 21:22). And James tells us: "Let him ask in faith, nothing wavering. For he that wavereth is like a wave of the sea driven with the wind and tossed. Let not that man think he shall receive anything of the Lord" (James 1:6-7). God delights to answer the prayer of faith.

Neglecting God's Word

A third hindrance to prayer is *neglecting the Word of God*. "He that turneth away his ear from hearing the law, even his, prayer shall be abomination" (Proverbs 28:9). And Jesus reminds His disciples, "If ye abide in Me, and My words abide in you, ye shall ask what ye will, and it will be done unto you" (John 15:7).

These principles, warnings, and directions for prayer are not meant to be obstacles to our prayer lives, but stepping-stones to power through prayer. God wants us to pray. He waits for us to pray. Thus the plea of the writer to the Hebrews: "Let us therefore come boldly unto the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy, and find grace to help in time of need" (Hebrews 4:16).

CHRIST IS OUR EXAMPLE

The Lord Jesus is the best example we will ever have of how to pray, as He is an example to us in all aspects of life. If we really want to learn to pray we should study how He spoke to His Father.

Alone with God

He prayed *alone*. Mark records this significant fact about Jesus: "And in the morning, rising up a great while before day, He went out, and departed into a solitary place, and there prayed" (Mark 1:35).

It is also important to remember that men who have been mightily used of God through the ages have maintained this time alone with Him. The Old Testament tells us that: "Abraham got up early in the morning to the place where he stood before the Lord" (Genesis 19:27). David said, "My voice shalt Thou hear in the morning, O Lord; in the morning will I direct my prayer unto Thee, and will look up" (Psalm 5:3). If the outlook is grim, look to God in daily prayer. Daniel also is a challenge to our prayer lives. The king had signed a decree saying that if anyone prayed to any God or man other than the king, he would be thrown to the lions. "Now when Daniel knew that the writing was signed . . . he kneeled upon his knees . . . and prayed and gave thanks before his God" (Daniel 6:10). Daniel was a man who would rather die than miss his time alone with the Lord.

An important lesson to learn is to get ready the night before for the time alone with God in the morning. Hours that could be spent in productive sleep are often wasted in unproductive chatter or staring at the television. Note what the Lord told Moses: "Be ready in the morning, and come up in the morning unto Mount Sinai, and present thyself there to Me" (Exodus 34:2).

You might ask, "Why should we spend time alone with God?" Paul answers the question: "God is faithful, by whom ye were called unto the fellowship of His Son Jesus Christ our Lord" (I Corinthians 1:9). God made us for fellowship with Himself! He walked with Adam in the cool of the day in a warm and loving fellowship in antiquity. And Jesus Christ died in order that we might have intimate, personal fellowship with God.

The spirit of God uses this daily fellowship to transform us more and more into the likeness of Jesus. The Bible says that

God wants us to be conformed to the image of His Son (Romans 8:29). Many people have asked, "Just what do you do during this time?" Well, I've done a number of things, but by and large, I spend time in simple conversation with God. I read His word, through which God speaks to my heart, and then I pray and share my heart with God. It is important to remember that God really listens to us. He hears the cry of our hearts.

The Bible urges us to "pray without ceasing" (I Thessalonians 5:17). On our knees, alone before God, our lives can have an effect around the world. Prayer changes things, prayer changes people, and prayer changes the person who prays. There is merit in group praying, public prayers, even family devotions and prayers. But, nothing should take the place of our praying alone.

Before Major Decisions

Second, Jesus prayed *before major decisions*. "It came to pass in those days, that He went out into a mountain to pray, and continued all night in prayer to God; and when it was day, He called unto Him His disciples, and of them He chose twelve whom He also named apostles" (Luke 6:12-13). Such a choice we would consider a major decision, and Jesus prayed all night before He made it. When we face things that are too much for us, and when we have decisions too hard for us, we know where we can turn for help. There is a need for regular times of prayer, but special decisions call for special times of prayer.

During Daily Activities

Third, He prayed *in the midst of a busy schedule*. "But so much the more went there a fame abroad of Him, and great multitudes came together to hear, and to be healed by Him of their infirmities. And He withdrew Himself into the wilderness, and prayed" (Luke 5:15-16). Jesus knew how to do the important, the priority thing, in the midst of secondary things that were pressing. Often being too busy is merely another excuse not to pray.

Prayer works, but prayer is work. It's hard to pray. Our flesh resists entering the presence of a Holy God. But we must pray, and we must pray without ceasing.