

The ABC's of Prayer

By Bill Scheidler

Everyone agrees that prayer is important to the spiritual life of the believer.

Prayer is invading the impossible. It is essentially a partnership of the redeemed child of God working hand in hand with God toward the realization of His redemptive purposes on earth. –Jack Hayford

All the Christian virtues are locked up in the word “prayer.” –Charles H. Spurgeon

Those who have left the deepest impression on this sin-cursed earth have been men and women of prayer. You will find that prayer has been the mighty power that had moved not only God, but man. –Dwight L. Moody

Prayer does not fit us for the greater works; prayer is the greater work. –Oswald Chambers

Prayer is weakness leaning on omnipotence. –W.S. Bowden

Everyone knows that God promises to respond to the prayers of His people.

Proverbs 15:29

The LORD is far from the wicked, but He hears the prayer of the righteous.

Jeremiah 29:12-13

Then you will call upon Me and go and pray to Me, and I will listen to you. And you will seek Me and find Me, when you search for Me with all your heart.

Jeremiah 33:2-3

Thus says the LORD who made it, the LORD who formed it to establish it (the LORD is His name): “Call to Me, and I will answer you, and show you great and mighty things, which you do not know.”

Everyone who reads the Bible can see Jesus' example of prayer and dependence on the Father.

Jesus often withdrew from the multitudes to spend time alone with the Father.

Luke 5:15-16

However, the report went around concerning Him all the more; and great multitudes came together to hear, and to be healed by Him of their infirmities. So He Himself often withdrew into the wilderness and prayed.

Jesus liked to pray early in the morning.

Mark 1:35

Now in the morning, having risen a long while before daylight, He went out and departed to a solitary place; and there He prayed.

At times Jesus spent all night in prayer especially when He had important decisions to make.

Luke 6:12-13

Now it came to pass in those days that He went out to the mountain to pray, and continued all night in prayer to God. And when it was day, He called His disciples to Himself; and from them He chose twelve whom He also named apostles.

Jesus' prayer life aroused the desire for prayer among the disciples. This is what led them to ask Him to teach them to pray.

In spite of this all of this knowledge concerning prayer, however, very few people are proud of their prayer life. Why?

Someone has said that prayer is the most preached and least practiced doctrine in the Bible.

There are many reasons why people do not pray as they know they should.

Sometimes the problem is spiritual in nature. These reasons include:

- Lukewarmness in their relationship to the Lord.
- Lack of forgiveness toward others.
- A disobedient lifestyle that hides from God.
- Over confidence in self.

The way that we deal with these spiritual problems is through repentance and change.

More often than not we have structural problems.

- We struggle with issues related to the busyness and pace of modern life.

Those who lived in previous centuries operated by the calendar and the sun dial. We live in a time when things are measured in nanoseconds. This creates two problems for us.

1. We have difficulty in finding a daily period of time that is immune to interruption.
2. We have difficulty quieting our minds that are so full of all of the pressures and demands that are placed upon us and the hurried pace with which we live our lives.
3. We struggle with the issue that the disciples had of "how to pray."

Luke 11:1

Now it came to pass, as He was praying in a certain place, when He ceased, that one of His disciples said to Him, "Lord, teach us to pray, as John also taught his disciples."

This is really what most of us are after. We know the importance of praying. We know that it was a key to Jesus' relationship with the Father. We know that it was the power of the Early Church. But how? How do you continue steadfast in prayer?

Acts 2:42

And they continued steadfastly in the apostles' doctrine and fellowship, in the breaking of bread, and in prayers.

To continue steadfastly is "to persevere; to give constant attention to a thing; to adhere to; be devoted to; not to faint; to show oneself courageous; to be in constant readiness for; to wait on continually."

Jesus said to His disciples, "Could you not watch with Me for one hour?" (Mt. 26:40). The truth is that many believers have difficulty filling 15 minutes with prayer. How do you pray for an hour?

There are three things that we must find in order to deal with the busyness and pace of modern life. We must find...

A Quiet Place

For Jesus it was the wilderness (Luke 5:15-16), a mountain (Luke 6:12-13) or any solitary place (Mark 1:35).

For the men of old it was a personal altar.

As believers who have a passion for prayer and communion with the Lord we need to have our secret place of communion.

Matthew 6:6

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.

An attic, garage, closet, car, under a tree, apron over head (?)

Second, we must find...

A Quiet Time

The most common time in the Bible for prayer is the first part of the day. Someone has once said, "Hem in both ends of your day with prayer and it won't be so likely to unravel."

Jesus prayed early in the morning.

Mark 1:35

Now in the morning, having risen a long while before daylight, He went out and departed to a solitary place; and there He prayed.

The Psalmist encouraged an early morning encounter with God (Ps. 5: 3; 55:17; 88:13; 119:147).

Psalm 5:1-3

Give ear to my words, O LORD, consider my meditation. Give heed to the voice of my cry, My King and my God, for to You I will pray. My voice You shall hear in the morning, O LORD; in the morning I will direct it to You, and I will look up.

Psalm 88:13

But to You I have cried out, O LORD, and in the morning my prayer comes before You.

Psalm 119:147

I rise before the dawning of the morning, and cry for help.

The important thing is to develop a daily routine of prayer.

There is a price to pay for this. The more you can build a habit, the harder it will be for you to miss the time. This time should be seen as your “appointment with God.”

Third, we must find...

A Quiet Mind

Psalm 131

LORD, my heart is not haughty, nor my eyes lofty. Neither do I concern myself with great matters, nor with things too profound for me. 2 Surely I have calmed and quieted my soul, like a weaned child with his mother; like a weaned child is my soul within me. 3 O Israel, hope in the LORD from this time forth and forever.

This will involve a certain amount of thought control. If we are going to hear from God we must shut out the other voices that are clamoring for our attention. Having certain tools to assist us in prayer can help here (Praying the Bible, Using a prayer list, etc.).

There are three things that can help us learn how to pray.

The three things include understanding what prayer is not, understanding what prayer is and understanding the key components of prayer.

1. Understanding what prayer is not.

- **Prayer is not a magic formula.**

Acts 19:13-16

Then some of the itinerant Jewish exorcists took it upon themselves to call the name of the Lord Jesus over those who had evil spirits, saying, “We exorcise you by the Jesus whom Paul preaches.” 14 Also there were seven sons of Sceva, a Jewish chief priest, who did so. 15 And the evil spirit answered and said, “Jesus I know, and Paul I know; but who are you?” 16 Then the man in whom the evil spirit was leaped on them, overpowered them, and prevailed against them, so that they fled out of that house naked and wounded.

Prayer works because it is based on relationship, not a certain way of saying the prayer or the words used. Sometimes prayers from prayer books can be such a formula. The prayer in the book was the genuine cry of someone's heart to the Lord, but it is not your cry or your words. God would rather have a stumbling prayer from our hearts than an eloquent prayer read out of a book.

- **Prayer is not vain or empty repetitions.**

Matthew 6:7

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.

Even what is commonly referred to as the Lord's Prayer can be said in this manner. We can say it without even thinking. Many grace prayers said before meals are nothing more than vain repetitions.

Martin Luther once challenged a man that he could not say the Lord's Prayer and concentrate on what he was saying for the whole prayer. He said, "If you can do this I will give you this horse." The man accepted the challenge. As soon as he said the "Amen" to his prayer he said to Luther, "Does the bridle come with it?" Obviously he was thinking about the horse and not the prayer. In our day this would have been a car not a horse.

- **Prayer is not wearing God down with long speaking (Mt. 6:7; 23:14).**

Matthew 23:14

Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you devour widows' houses, and for a pretense make long prayers.

- **Prayer is not a superficial routine.**

It involves sincere asking, continued seeking, and persistent knocking.

Luke 11:9-13

So I say to you, ask, and it will be given to you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you. 10 For everyone who asks receives, and he who seeks finds, and to him who knocks it will be opened. 11 If a son asks for bread from any father among you, will he give him a stone? Or if he asks for a fish, will he give him a serpent instead of a fish? 12 Or if he asks for an egg, will he offer him a scorpion? 13 If you then, being evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to those who ask Him!

Jesus said that true asking involved three things, asking, seeking and knocking:

A sk
S eek
K nock

- **Prayer is not a religious form or show.**

It is not about how you hold your head or if you fold your hands; it is about the posture of your heart. It is not cultivating a religious sounding voice; it is the cry of your heart. It is not something that is done to impress men; it is something done to touch the heart of God.

Luke 18:9-14

Also He spoke this parable to some who trusted in themselves that they were righteous, and despised others: 10 "Two men went up to the temple to pray, one a Pharisee and the other a tax collector. 11 The Pharisee stood and prayed thus with himself, 'God, I thank You that I am not like other men--extortioners, unjust, adulterers, or even as this tax collector. 12 I fast twice a week; I give tithes of all that I possess.' 13 And the tax collector, standing afar off, would not so much as raise his eyes to heaven, but beat his breast, saying, 'God, be merciful to me a sinner!' 14 I tell you, this man went down to his house justified rather than the other; for everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, and he who humbles himself will be exalted."

- **Prayer is not dictating to or making demands of God but submitting oneself to His will and purpose (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. –NIV

2. Understanding what prayer actually is.

- **Prayer is talking with God.**

As such prayer is communicating with God in much the same way that you would communicate to a person. Can you imagine using "prayer formulas" when talking to a friend or relative?

When you communicate or fellowship with another person there are certain areas that are commonly covered.

1. You tell them what you appreciate about them.
2. You acknowledge their contribution to your life.
3. You make them aware of your personal needs and the needs of those close to you.
4. You make sure that you settle any offenses that may affect your relationship with them.
5. You share your personal plans and goals with them and seek their input.
6. You listen to what they may want to say to you.

- **Prayer is listening to God.**

Isaiah 55:3a

Incline your ear, and come to Me. Hear, and your soul shall live...

Come to me with your ears wide open. Listen, for the life of your soul is at stake.
–NLT

When you communicate with others it is meant to be a two-way experience. When you communicate with others you do not simply talk at them, you let them talk to you as well. When you spend time with the Lord, some of that time should be spent in listening to His communication to you and simply waiting on Him basking in His presence.

3. Understanding the key components of prayer.

Based on the above understanding of communication, it is easy to see the most common components of prayer. There are five principle components of prayer. The Book of Psalms is a great tutorial in prayer—the prayers of David, a man after God’s heart.

- **Praising God for Who He is.**

This is where we rehearse back to God His awesome attributes—His excellent greatness (Ps. 150:2; Ps. 145:1-3).

Psalm 145:1-3

I will extol You, my God, O King; and I will bless Your name forever and ever. Every day I will bless You, and I will praise Your name forever and ever. Great is the LORD, and greatly to be praised; and His greatness is unsearchable.

- **Thanking God for what He has done.**

This is where we acknowledge the fact that everything we have comes from God and show appreciation even for the seemingly small things (I Th. 5:18; Ps. 100:4-5).

I Thessalonians 5:16-18

Rejoice always, pray without ceasing, in everything give thanks; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you.

Psalm 100:4-5

Enter into His gates with thanksgiving, and into His courts with praise. Be thankful to Him, and bless His name. For the LORD is good; His mercy is everlasting, and His truth endures to all generations.

- **Asking God for things that we need.**

This is when we petition God to come to our aid and give us those things that are consistent with His promises and His will for our lives.

Philippians 4:6

Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known to God...

- **Confessing our sins to God and asking for His mercy.**

This is where we acknowledge our shortcomings and failures before the God that we have offended (Ps. 32:5-6; I John 1:9). It also involves reinforcing our desire to live a life that is pleasing to the Lord.

Psalm 32:5-6

I acknowledged my sin to You, and my iniquity I have not hidden. I said, "I will confess my transgressions to the LORD," and You forgave the iniquity of my sin. 6 For this cause everyone who is godly shall pray to You in a time when You may be found; surely in a flood of great waters they shall not come near him.

- **Sharing our heart with God concerning our destiny and our innermost desires.**

This is where we share our dreams, our visions, our desires, our longings, our goals, our plans and lay them all before the Lord.

Psalm 27:4

One thing I have desired of the LORD, that will I seek: that I may dwell in the house of the LORD all the days of my life, to behold the beauty of the LORD, and to inquire in His temple.

Jesus had all of these components in the prayer that He taught His disciples.