

# What Should We Know About Prayer?

*Now these are the gifts Christ gave to the church: **the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, and the pastors and teachers.** Their responsibility is to equip God's people to do His work and build up the church, the body of Christ. **This will continue until we all come to such unity in our faith and knowledge of God's Son that we will be mature in the Lord, measuring up to the full and complete standard of Christ.***  
Ephesians 4:11, 12 NLT: (Emphasis added is mine).

This study is one of a five part series of teachings regarding the foundational work of the fivefold ministry as given in the Ephesians reference presented above. It is the work of the five-fold ministry, as executed by the various members of the body of Jesus, to build up the other believers into a complete maturity in **Christ**. Each of these ministries is related to a foundational area of study for the disciple. This second study will introduce the disciple to some important concepts and ideas that they will find helpful when considering prayer as the portion of the five-fold ministry concerning the prophetic voice and its effect on disciples.

Prayer, as we will be studying it, is consider an overall communication with **GOD** and from **GOD**, to affect His will in the lives of people. Many believers see prayer as a one-way communication to **GOD**, but they underestimate the quality and quantity of responses that they receive from **GOD** and on behalf of **GOD**. Why should we pray at all if we do not respect a result of that prayer? Therefore we should be open to experiencing all manner of responses to our prayers. To aid in this experience, we shall outline some important concepts in this teaching to help you realize the full impact of **GOD's** communication with us.

We first need to define what prayer is. A common dictionary definition of prayer is 'a spiritual communion with **GOD**.' This definition works to describe part of the definition of prayer, but we need much more information to develop a full definition for prayer. If prayer is a communion with **GOD**, then there are a variety of ways that we can participate in this communion. The more common thought regarding prayer is what is involved in petitioning or supplication, which involves asking **GOD** for the things that we need or want. While petitioning **GOD** is perhaps the most common form of communion, especially when we are in deep trouble, there are numerous other options as well. We can intercede for the needs of others 1 Timothy 2:1; we can offer up thanksgiving to **GOD** for who He is and what He has done, Psalms 100:4; we can come before **GOD** to confess our failures and to receive His cleansing, 1 John 1:9; we can spend time praising **GOD** for who He is and what He has done, Ephesians 1:6.

Another word that is helpful to look at is worship, which is defined as giving honor and reverence to **GOD**. Based on our descriptions of the various ways that we can commune with **GOD**, we can see that prayer and worship are synonymous. We tend to think of worship as something we do and prayer as something we say, but in both cases we are showing honor and reverence to **GOD**. So based in this analysis, I am going to state that worship is an essential element of prayer.

When we humbly come before our **Father** and petition Him for our needs we are bringing honor to His name. **Jesus** tells us, in what is referred to as the **LORD's** Prayer, to ask for our daily bread. When we allow ourselves to be dependent on His provision and we cease from our own efforts to provide for ourselves, then we start to worship Him with our lives. How many times do people make decisions based on their pocketbook rather than on their need for spiritual growth?

We have all heard of the saying, '**GOD** helps those that help themselves.' Unfortunately, this saying is not found in the Bible. We do find the admonition that **GOD** honors the humble and resists the proud, James 4:6. It can be easy to become prideful in our own self-sufficiency when we have a good job and finances are looking good. But all it takes is a major crisis in life and our castle of self-sufficiency can come crumbling down. We must always honor the fact that it is our **Father** that provides the real prosperity in our life. Our acts of petition before Him will keep our hearts and minds focused on Him and not ourselves. We can witness the truth of this provision in the words of **Jesus**, Matthew 6:25-30 NLT, emphasis added is mine:

*That is why I **tell you not to worry about everyday life**—whether you have enough food and drink, or enough clothes to wear. **Isn't life more than food, and your body more than clothing?** Look at the birds. They don't plant or harvest or store food in barns, for **your heavenly Father feeds them**. And aren't you far more valuable to Him than they are? Can all your worries add a single moment to your life? **"And why worry about your clothing?** Look at the lilies of the field and how they grow. They don't work or make their clothing, yet Solomon in all his glory was not dressed as beautifully as they are. **And if God cares so wonderfully for wildflowers that are here today and thrown into the fire tomorrow, He will certainly care for you.** Why do you have so little faith?*

Similarly, when we come to Him in confession, we humble ourselves before Him and acknowledge His sovereignty in our lives. Life is not about doing what we want but rather it is about doing what the **Father** desires us to do. The following references highlight this point:

- 🕯 **Matthew 7:21 NLT:** *Not everyone who calls out to Me, 'Lord! Lord!' will enter the Kingdom of Heaven. Only those who actually do the will of My Father in heaven will enter.*
- 🕯 **Matthew 12:50 NLT:** *Anyone who does the will of My Father in heaven is My brother and sister and mother!*
- 🕯 **John 14:15 NLT:** *If you love Me, obey My commandments.*
- 🕯 **John 14:23 NLT:** *Jesus replied, "All who love Me will do what I say. My Father will love them, and We will come and make Our home with each of them.*

Submitting to the will of the **Father** was a priority in the life of **Jesus**, John 4:34; it was the reason that **Jesus** left Heaven, Philippians 2:6-8; and it was the primary instruction that **Jesus** gave to his disciples before ascending into Heaven, Matthew 28:18-20 NLT, emphasis added is mine:

*Jesus came and told His disciples, "I have been given all authority in heaven and on earth. Therefore, go and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit. **Teach these new disciples to obey all the commands I have given you.** And be sure of this: I am with you always, even to the end of the age."*

It is important that we understand that prayer is about submitting our will to the will of the **Father**. **Jesus** told us that we must lose our life (our own desires, goals, and ambitions) in order to gain His life (life in the Kingdom of GOD), Luke 9:24. This was the exact attitude that **Jesus** was alluding to in the **LORD's** Prayer, Matthew 6:10 NLT:

*May Your Kingdom come soon. May Your will be done on earth, as it is in heaven.*

When we resist submitting to the will of **GOD**, we are hindering the work of the Kingdom, but when we submit our lives to our Father's will, we are actually assisting in spreading the Kingdom authority of **GOD** to the world around us. We shall see more of the effect of obedience when we cover the portion of the study relating to the Kingdom of **GOD**.

Prayer is the crucial link in learning how to submit our will to the will of the **Father**. When we realize our own insufficiency, we can then trust **GOD** to fill that need, making us more fruitful in our efforts. The prophet Zechariah and the apostle Paul spoke of this attitude in the following references:

- 🏆 **Zechariah 4:6 NLT:** *Then he said to me, "This is what the LORD says to Zerubbabel: It is not by force nor by strength, but by My Spirit, says the LORD of Heaven's Armies.*
- 🏆 **2 Corinthians 12:9 NLT:** *Each time He said, "My grace is all you need. My power works best in weakness." So now I am glad to boast about my weaknesses, so that the power of Christ can work through me.*

Every time we try to walk according our own strength and abilities, we will fall short of **GOD's** plan for us. It is only by coming to Him for His power and guidance, can we then fulfill the purposes for which we were called. This is the reason that the body of **Christ** must be submitted to each other as they submit to **GOD's** will. Walking in unity is very important for the prayer life of the individual believer and well as for the corporate body of believers. **Jesus** stressed this need to be dependent on each other when He gave the instruction for prayer in unity in Matthew 18:19, 20 NLT:

*"I also tell you this: If two of you agree here on earth concerning anything you ask, My Father in heaven will do it for you. For where two or three gather together as My followers, I am there among them."*

It is impossible to maintain unity in the body of believers unless everyone is walking in humility to one another. Our prayers will build this humility and it will serve to allow our **Father** to execute His will through us. This is why **Jesus** kept stressing that He was here to do the **Father's** will and not his own will. Our dependency on our **Father** for what we need is the active agent that will foster humility within us. Take our need for food, which we mentioned above. **Jesus** tells us that our **Father** knows that we need food in order to survive but yet He instructs us to ask daily for our food. Why do we need to pray for something that we already need, Matthew 6:8? The answer comes a few verses latter when Jesus tells us that as a good father, He desires to give us good gifts, Matthew 7:11. The problem comes when we feel that we can provide our own 'good gifts.' As long as we try to be self-sufficient, we limit the ability of our **Father** to bless us. It is when we humble ourselves in prayer that He can then open the windows of Heaven to bless us. Humility will prompt great rewards and is a far better way to live than when we try to do it our way. We have limited resources while our **Father** has unlimited resources.

Another aspect of humility is when we pray for the needs of others. This type of prayer is referred to as intercession. The definition for intercession has two very important aspects. One to plead the case of a person that is in trouble and the other is to reconcile two parties. When we look at humanity in general, we see the world is in

deep trouble because they do not have a relationship with the **Father**. Our role as intercessors is to bring the needs of the people, both spiritual and physical, before the **LORD** so that the people can witness the manner in which **GOD** provides the answers to these prayers; then the people will be open to be reconciled to the **Father**.

We have been provided with a wonderful example of intercession by Jesus. Paul described His intercession for us in Romans 8:34 NLT, emphasis added is mine:

*Who then will condemn us? No one—for Christ Jesus died for us and was raised to life for us, and He is sitting in the place of honor at God's right hand, pleading (interceding) for us.*

The implication is that **Jesus** is ever vigilant to plead our case before the **Father**. He does this even when we may not be aware of His actions. That is the beauty of intercession for we can act for the welfare of others when they may not be aware of our actions. The essential element of intercession is compassion for the people that we pray for. The problem sometimes arises when we do not know what to pray for. **GOD** has provided a wonderful provision in the **Holy Spirit** to pray for us when we do not know how to pray. This provision of the **Holy Spirit** is found in Romans 8:26, 27 NLT, emphasis added is mine:

*And the Holy Spirit helps us in our weakness. For example, we don't know what God wants us to pray for. But **the Holy Spirit prays for us** with groanings that cannot be expressed in words. And the Father who knows all hearts knows what the Spirit is saying, for **the Spirit pleads for us believers in harmony with God's own will.***

The **Holy Spirit** will pray for us whether we choose to allow silent prayer or audible prayer, and what the **Holy Spirit** prays for will be in accordance with what the **Father's** will is for us. Sometimes our prayers are not answered because we pray for the wrong thing or for the wrong motive. The **Holy Spirit** always prays for the right thing for us and for others, so we need to learn how to trust the **Holy Spirit** when we pray. It is important to remember that **GOD** cannot honor prayers that will go against His instructions or His will. Things that we pray for that might be bad for us or for others, will not be answered, so that we will not hinder the plan of **GOD**. How can we know what to pray for? Learn about the things that are close to **GOD's** heart, which are delineated in the Torah and expounded upon in the teaching of **Jesus** and the Apostles.

The next aspect of prayer is that of thanksgiving. We shall look at four references that relate the special nature of the giving of thanks to our **Father**. These references are as follows, emphasis added is mine:

- 🕯 **Ephesians 5:20 NLT:** And **give thanks for everything** to God the Father in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ.
- 🕯 **Colossians 3:17 NLT:** And whatever you do or say, do it as a representative of the Lord Jesus, **giving thanks through Him** to God the Father.
- 🕯 **Psalms 50:23 NLT:** But **giving thanks is a sacrifice that truly honors Me**. If you keep to My path, I will reveal to you the salvation of God."
- 🕯 **Hebrew 13:15 KJV:** By him therefore let us offer the sacrifice of praise to God continually, that is, the **fruit of our lips giving thanks** to his name.

The first aspect of our prayers that we will look at regarding giving thanks to our **Father** is that it is required of us. The Apostle Paul affirms an ancient Hebrew requirement to give thanks to the **LORD** for all that is done. In 1Chronocles 16:4 we see that King David appointed Levites that were to give thanks to the **LORD**. In Daniel 6:10, we see the prophet Daniel going before the **LORD** three times a day to give thanks to the **LORD**. In this particular instance, Daniel was defying the decree of the king and faced being cast into the lion's den. Daniel did remain faithful to the **LORD** and continued to offer his prayers to the **LORD**. After realizing that we have a rich tradition in our faith for the giving of thanks to the **Almighty One**, we should not hesitate to offer our thanks to the **Father** for any perceived blessing.

The second aspect of giving thanks is that it should be immediate. It is to be a sacrifice that flows from our lips as easily as breathing is to us. We need not wait for a special time or day to thank our **Father** for His goodness to us, but it should be a reoccurring activity throughout the day. There will be times when it is difficult to see the blessing or we may not 'feel' happy, but these are the moments when being thankful to **GOD** is the most important and the most beneficial for our souls. The mention of thanks will transform our mindset and lift our spirits, not mention that it will bring glory to the **LORD**.

The third aspect of offering thanksgiving in our prayers is that we are representatives of **Christ**, the holy **Messiah** of **GOD**, who came to this world to represent the **Father** to a lost and dying world. We do represent **Jesus** in a favorable light when we can be thankful for all things, even when we do not 'feel' like it. Nothing will grab the attention of the world as much as a joyful believer that is voicing praise and thanksgiving to the **LORD**.

A final type of prayer is praise, which is a close cousin to giving thanks. While the giving of thanks relates to specific actions or blessings, praise relates directly to the person of the **Father**. We praise the **Father** for who He is and not so much for what he does for us. The following selected references will illustrate the role of praise, emphasis added is mine:

- 🕯 **Deuteronomy 10:21 NLT:** *He alone is your God, **the only One who is worthy of your praise**, the One who has done these mighty miracles that you have seen with your own eyes.*
- 🕯 **1 Chronicles 23:5, 30 NLT:** *Another 4,000 will work as gatekeepers, and 4,000 will praise the LORD with the musical instruments I have made." And **each morning and evening they stood before the LORD to sing songs of thanks and praise to Him.***
- 🕯 **Psalms 7:17 NLT:** *I will thank the LORD because **He is just**; I will sing praise to the name of the LORD Most High.*
- 🕯 **Psalms 21:13 NLT:** *Rise up, O LORD, in all Your power. **With music and singing we celebrate** (praise) Your mighty acts.*
- 🕯 **Psalms 63:3 NLT:** *Your **unfailing love** is better than life itself; how I praise You!*
- 🕯 **Isaiah 25:1 NLT:** *O LORD, **I will honor and praise Your name**, for You are my God. You do such wonderful things! You planned them long ago, and now You have accomplished them.*
- 🕯 **Jeremiah 20:13 NLT:** *Sing to the LORD! Praise the LORD! For though I was poor and needy, **He rescued me from my oppressors.***
- 🕯 **Luke 18:43 NLT:** *Instantly the man could see, and he followed Jesus, praising God. And **all who saw it praised God**, too.*
- 🕯 **Hebrews 13:15 NLT:** *Therefore, let us offer through Jesus a continual sacrifice of praise to God, **proclaiming our allegiance to His name.***

We see from the first reference that **GOD** is worthy because of whom He is, the **Mighty One** of Israel. The great deeds that **GOD** performed were as a result of His holy nature. That is why it is important to offer praise as our prayer to Him as the **Almighty One**; the **One** that has provided for us in every way imaginable.

The second reference illustrates the importance that King David placed on praise. King David dedicated 4000 Levites to the task of offering morning and evening praises to the **LORD**. The **LORD** was very pleased with this level of dedication from the people. It also illustrates the need for corporate praise as well as individual praise.

The third reference mentions the attribute of justice as a praise worthy characteristic of the **Father**. The need for justice and acting in a just manner was mentioned numerous times in the Torah instructions. The **Lord** chose to emphasize the importance of justice for the people so that they might live in spiritual prosperity. The **Lord's** concern for us is also illustrated in the fifth reference regarding the unfailing love of **GOD** for us. It was this very unfailing love that sent **Jesus** to the world and that drew us to Him when we were walking in rebellion to Him.

Because of the great character of the **Lord**, we need to constantly celebrate His kindness to us. The fourth reference demonstrated the vitality that we need to express in our praise to Him. This praise can be in the form of a heart felt prayer, in the playing of musical instruments, as did David, or in the mode of singing. We need to remember to celebrate the goodness of **GOD** in all that we do.

The sixth and seventh references are from two of the most powerful prophets of the Tanakh or Old Testament period. These were men that experienced great duress in the performance of their prophetic duties, yet they were instantly prepared to praise **GOD** for His goodness to them. They are a great reminder of why we need to emphasize praise in our prayer life.

The eighth reference results from a miracle that Jesus performed. When the people saw the powerful act of mercy that was performed on the blind man and witnessed the praise that he offered to **God**, they were quick to praise **GOD** as well. We need to use praise as means of showing gratitude for the things that **GOD** has already done, is currently doing, and the things that He will do in the future.

The final reference is a reminder to continually praise our **Savior** for the work that He has accomplish for our lives. Our gratitude for this sacrificial work should be the uttering of praise from our lips as a way of showing our allegiance to His work. As people, we can often get complacent about the things of **GOD** but when we praise as a constant aspect of our life, we will not fall into complacency, but rather we will be energized to perform acts of kindness on behalf of our **LORD**.

Now that we have covered the basic aspect of prayer, we need to understand how to prayer. We have listed some helpful suggestions for you to incorporate into your prayer life:

- 🕯 A good way to learn how to pray is to use a simple three part format to give you some structure on which to base your prayers. This structure is only a guideline and you can and should deviate from them as you feel comfortable to do so.

You want to make prayer alive and exciting so don't get stuck doing it the same way all the time. You should practice different ways in which to use this format. The three part format is as follows:

1. Start with praise. Allow yourself some significant time to just offer praise to **GOD**. It may be awkward at first but with consistent practice you will find it easier with time and it will add real emotions to your prayers
2. Then proceed with the goal of your prayer whether it is petition, intercession, or confession. You may even use several or all of these types of prayer in your session. Try to be as specific as you can be when in private but be respectful of the person you may be praying over in public. If the details of the prayer are not something that they would feel comfortable exposing before the public, then withdraw into a private place to continue the prayer.
3. Lastly, spend some time thanking **GOD** for the answer that will come from your prayer or any other thing that you can think of to thank **GOD** for. Spending time in thanksgiving will keep our hearts reverent to **GOD** and we will not just be coming before Him to get what we want. We need the constant reminder that prayer is about **GOD** and not about ourselves. It is His will that needs to be done not our own.

✠ Never make prayer a way to show off your spirituality. **Jesus** rebuked the religious leaders because they made showy prayers that impressed the people but did not impress **GOD**. **GOD** wants sincere, honest prayer that honors Him and focuses the attention on Him. Therefore, simple prayers with simple words can be just as effective if not more so than the more formalized prayer that one may offer. Remember it is what is in the heart that matters and not so much in the words.

✠ Take time to pray in privacy as did our **LORD**. He would often withdraw to a secluded place to spend time communing with His **Father**. We need to follow this example. The **Father** has a special appreciation for the time we set aside to merely commune with Him. It is often in these secluded moments that we can hear Him the best. So while public prayer is necessary to meet the needs of others, private prayer is more important to meet the needs of the individual person in their prayer life. **Jesus** tells us to pray in private and the **Father** will hear us and answer our prayer, Matthew 6:6.

- ✠ Learning to rely on the **Holy Spirit** is a great benefit for being an effective person in prayer. We will find ourselves in situations that we do not know how to pray. In these situations, it is helpful to remain silent before the **LORD** and to allow the **Holy Spirit** to pray from within us. There will be times that you will then feel an urge to speak and the **Spirit** will give you utterance. This can be an intimidating practice but if you will place your trust in the **Lord**, you will see Him work in your life.
- ✠ A final point to remember is to pray without ceasing. As you mature in your spiritual life you will find your mind automatically focusing on the things of **GOD**. You will see situation where you can pray whether in your heart or vocally. You will see situations that will evoke praise in your heart. There will be times when you will need to confess a shortcoming to the **LORD**. And there will be the times when you will feel in your heart a need to thank **GOD** for whatever circumstance that He has you in. We need to be actively eliminating the influences of the world that well take our mind off Him. It may mean not watching TV or going to certain movies. There may be other activities that are not helpful for your spiritual life. But the sacrifice of these earthly pleasures pale in comparison of the rich rewards of communion with our **Father**.

In conclusion, it is necessary to realize that praying in the will of the **Father** is actually uttering prophetic words. Prophetic words are words that express the heart and mind of **GOD**. When we pray according to the issues that are close to the heart of **GOD**, we are speaking words that will bring His will to pass on the Earth. This is why **Jesus** prayed in the following manner, Matthew 6:5, 6 NLT:

*Pray like this: Our Father in heaven, may Your name be kept holy. May Your Kingdom come soon. May Your will be done on earth, as it is in heaven.*

The power of our prayer words is that they do work to bring His will to pass. It is exciting to realize that the **King of the Universe** is using us to bring His will to pass. When we look at the heroes of the Bible, we see **GOD** using ordinary people to do supernatural things by the power of His **Spirit**. We should be encouraged by this prospect to partner with **GOD** to help the Kingdom of **GOD** become evident on the Earth. Remember this the next time you are tempted to not pray.