

PRAYER: REAL-IZING THE KINGDOM OF GOD

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Real-izing the Kingdom of God: cooperating with God to accomplish his purposes in the world.

Oswald Chambers said prayer is not preparation for the work; prayer *is* the work. The work of and for God.

I'm sure he got that from Jesus, who said: "Truly, truly I say to you, he who believes in me, the works that I do, he will do also; and greater works than these he will do; because I go to my Father. Whatever you ask in my name, that will I do, so that the Father may be glorified in the Son. If you ask me anything in my name, I will do it" (John 14:12-14).

The apostle Paul often requested prayer of the churches to whom he wrote. He and his missionary team trusted God to deliver them from death, which he had done. And Paul told the Corinthians that his hope was in God to continue to deliver them, "you also joining in helping us through your prayers" (2 Corinthians 1:11).

Prayer is the work of God.

So then, if prayer is the work of God, it must be mighty important. Every Christian is supposed to know about and practice prayer. Yet, many of us feel inadequate when it comes to praying.

Describe your feelings about prayer.

The reality is, we aren't born (or born again) with a complete understanding of prayer. For the most part, we learn how to pray by:

- observing other Christians pray,
- hearing them talk about prayer,
- reading the prayers in the Bible (Old and New Testaments),

- reading what is taught about prayer in the New Testament.
- Finally, we learn to pray by praying.

Simply put, in prayer we communicate with God. He speaks to us in his Word and by his Spirit; we speak to him in prayer. Prayer is conversation with God.

Though words are important in the communication process, prayer is more than words.

1. Read John 4:23–24

What does Jesus teach us about God the Father? (v. 24a)

What does Jesus say about how we are to worship God? (v. 24b)

How are true worshipers described, the ones our heavenly Father seeks? (v. 23)

God doesn't seek worshipers who give only lip service, that is, people who say the right words but don't live them or mean them from the heart. Jesus quoted the prophet Isaiah (Is. 29:13-14) to the Pharisees who loved to pray: "This people honors Me with their lips, *but their heart is far away from Me*" (Mark 7:6, emphasis added).

In this passage, Jesus called the Pharisees hypocrites because, like the Israelites of old, they said they loved God but they disobeyed his Word. Their hearts were not set to worship God in spirit and in truth.

Our heart attitude is as important as, or more important than, our words.

Regardless of how eloquent, or how stumbling, our words in prayer are, the omniscient (all-knowing) *God hears and responds to what is in our hearts and our spirits*. It is through our spirits that we communicate with God, who is Spirit.

Prayer as relationship with God. Excerpts from *Brokenness to Beauty*, chapter 12.

Write down these Scripture references and look them up in your own study time:

Faith: Hebrews 11:1, 5-6; Mark 6:5-6; 9:14-22, **23-24**, 25-27; John 14:1, 10-13

How not to pray: James 1:5-8; 4:1-3; Isaiah 58:1-5

How do we approach God and what do we ultimately seek in prayer?

2. Read Micah 6:8 and Matthew 18:4.

What is the appropriate approach to God in order to worship and pray in spirit and in truth?

3. Read Matthew 6:9–15.

In what way does the opening of the Lord’s prayer, “Our Father, who is in heaven, hallowed be Your name,” reflect humility on the part of the one praying?¹

a) Who is the focus of attention in this opening?

b) List the things we can learn about God from each of the phrases from this opening to prayer.

Our Father:

Who is in heaven:

Hallowed be Your name:

¹ *Hallowed* means “holy or blessed.” Merriam-Webster Online Dictionary, copyright © 2015 by Merriam-Webster, Incorporated. All rights reserved. <http://www.merriam-webster.com/>.

Your kingdom come:

Your will be done:

On earth as it is in heaven:

- c) Whose will do we declare we want to be done through our prayers?

In prayer we:

- a) approach God in humility,
- b) worship him from our hearts as our heavenly Father and sovereign King,
- c) seek only his will as the people of his Kingdom.

So how do we put these truths about God and prayer into practical use in our prayer life? The Lord's Prayer gives us a pattern. So, too, does a prayer tool, called the ACTS in prayer, which I have found helpful when I pray. Note the elements that correspond to the Lord's pattern for prayer.

ACTS in prayer. Excerpt from *Brokenness to Beauty*, chapter 11.

On your own, read the verses below under each component of the ACTS in prayer.

Adoration (Psalm 93:1-2; 99:1-3; Luke 11:2)

Confession (Psalm 19:12-13; Proverbs 28:13; Isaiah 59:2; Matthew 6:12, 14-15; 1 John 1:8-9)

Thanksgiving (Psalm 92:1-2; Psalm 50:14-15, 23; Hebrews 13:15; Philippians 4:6-7)

Supplication (Luke 11:9-10; John 14:11-15; Philippians 4:6) This is the “asking” part of prayer. It can be for another person(s) or for yourself. This is where you present your request to the Father. You would have already declared that you ultimately desire his will to be done, aligning your heart with his purposes. Now you make known your desire and let go of it, leaving it in the hands of your Father, who can be trusted.

**There are two kinds of people: those who say to God,
'Thy will be done,' and those to whom God says, 'All
right, then, have it your way.'**

C. S. Lewis

Types of Prayer: Intercession and Personal Petition. Excerpts from *Brokenness to Beauty*, chapter 10.

Jesus our Intercessor: 1 Timothy 2:5; Hebrews 4:14-16; 5:7-10; 7:24-25; 1 John 2:1

Holy Spirit our Intercessor: Romans 8:26-27; John 14:16-18, 26; 16:5-15

Remember what Jesus said: “Truly, truly I say to you, he who believes in me, *the works that I do, he will do also; and greater works than these he will do; because I go to my Father*. Whatever you ask in my name, that will I do, *so that* the Father may be glorified in the Son. If you ask me anything in my name, I will do it” (John 14:12-14, emphases added).

Jesus went away to heaven but sent his Spirit to live in us. It is through the power of the Spirit of God that we will accomplish the works Jesus did and those “greater works.” He acts in response to our prayers. All work of and for God must originate and be carried out in prayer.

Because Jesus rose from the grave, ascended to God's throne, and sent his Holy Spirit to live in us, we may enter the presence of God the Father because of (and only because of) Jesus. Therefore, "in his name" we ask of the Father those things that will bring glory to him through Jesus.

And Jesus promises to answer the "whatever" and "anything" we ask in his name *that brings glory to the Father through the Son*. This is why it is crucial to seek God's will in every matter for prayer.

Now to the work. Prayer is the work.

Find a quiet place alone. Please, no talking. Focus your mind and heart on the Lord and spend the next several minutes in prayer. This is the work of God you are engaging in.

First, *Intercede* for a person or group that is in need of prayer.

Second, go before the Lord in *Personal Petition* about a need for yourself.

Put into practice the things you learned about prayer:

Approach God in humility, adoration, and worship.

Confess known sins; receive his cleansing so that there will be no blockage or separation between you and God.

Offer thanksgiving to God. Pray in an attitude and with words of gratitude.

Seek God's will for the need at hand, remembering that prayer is doing the work of God. Ask him to do *his work and will* when you intercede for another person and when you pray about your own need.

Leave the burdens at his feet in prayer. Trust him for the outcome.

As you go to prayer, spend some time in these passages, using them to guide your prayers:

James 5:13-16

Psalms 86

**"You can do more than pray after you have prayed;
but you can never do more than pray until you have
prayed."**

A.J. Gordon

Additional reading for contemplation:

Isaiah 58

Matthew 6:5-15

Matthew 28:18-20

John 13:34-35

Philippians 2:12-13

1 Thessalonians 4:1-8

1 Timothy 2:1-4

Titus 2

Read prayers in the Old Testament and New Testament

Scriptures used are from the New American Standard Bible.