

The Practice Of Prayer

Introduction. One of the blessings as well as an important responsibility for the Christian is the practice of assembling regularly with other Christians. We have an example of Christians assembling in Acts 20:7 and we have an explicit command not to forsake our assembling together in Hebrews 10:25.

The purpose of our assembling is threefold: (1) to express praise and devotion to God and Christ; (2) to exhort and encourage our brethren to greater service; and, (3) to receive such encouragement ourselves.

One of the greatest blessings enjoyed by Christians in this life is the privilege of prayer, by which we can approach God for forgiveness of sins, peace, and strength (1 John 1:9; Philippians 4:6-7; Ephesians 3:14-16). For such reasons, Paul frequently exhorted Christians to be diligent in their prayers (Ephesians 6:18; Colossians 4:2; 1 Thessalonians 5:17).

Yet Jesus knew that people would tend to become slack in their prayers (Luke 18:1). It is out of a similar concern that prompts this lesson concerning prayer. It is hoped that you will be encouraged to be more diligent in prayer and that you will better appreciate prayer in the worship service.

I. ***Characteristics Of Acceptable Prayer***

A. It must be offered "in faith."

1. We must believe in prayer (Matthew 21:22).
2. We must have faith in God, and in His ability to answer (Hebrews 11:6).
3. Otherwise, prayer will not be answered (James 1:5-8).
4. Is our faith weak? Then increase it with the help of God's word (Romans 10:17).

B. It must be offered "in the spirit of humility."

1. Notice the example of the Pharisee and the publican (Luke 18:9-14).
2. Remember, "The Lord is nigh unto them that are of a broken heart; and saveth such as be of a contrite spirit" (Psalm 34:18).
3. As quoted by James: "God resisteth the proud, but giveth grace unto the humble" (James 4:6).

C. It must be offered "in harmony with God's will."

1. God answers prayer that is offered "according to His will" (1 John 5:14).
2. Jesus provided the example for us in His prayers at Gethsemane (Luke 22:42).
3. Too often, prayers are unanswered because they are more concerned with our will, rather than God's will (James 4:3).

- D. It must be offered "by those righteous before God."
 - 1. The prayers of the righteous person are effective (James 5:16-18; 1 Peter 3:12).
 - 2. But those continuing in sin He will not hear (Proverbs 28:9; Isaiah 59:1-2).
 - 3. To be righteous before God requires that we submit to the "righteousness of God" offered in Christ (Romans 10:1-4).
- E. It must be offered "in the spirit of thanksgiving."
 - 1. Ephesians 5:20.
 - 2. Philippians 4:6.
 - 3. Colossians 4:2.
 - 4. 1 Thessalonians 5:17-18.
 - 5. Do we think God will help us with our present burdens if we do not take the time to thank Him for past blessings?
- F. It must be offered "with persistence."
 - 1. Jesus illustrated this aspect of prayer through two parables:
 - a) The parable of the persistent friend (Luke 11:5-10).
 - b) The parable of the persistent widow (Luke 18:1-8).
 - 2. The virtue of persistence is demonstrated in the prayers of:
 - a) Jesus at Gethsemane (Matthew 26:44).
 - b) Paul, pertaining to his "thorn in the flesh" (2 Corinthians 12:7-8).
 - c) The early church (Acts 2:42).
- G. It must be offered "in the name of Jesus."
 - 1. Ephesians 5:20.
 - 2. This means much more than simply adding a little phrase "in Jesus' name" at the end of our prayers.
 - a) We must realize that Jesus is the only way by which we can approach God (John 14:6).
 - b) We must view Him as our high priest who intercedes for us (Hebrews 7:24-25; John 14:13).
 - 3. Appealing to God in the name of His Son can give us great confidence that God will give us what we need (Hebrews 4:14-16).

II. ***When Should We Pray?***

- A. Having "set times" to pray can help to create the habit of praying.
 - 1. For example, consider the practice of:
 - a) David, whom God described as "a man after My own heart" (Psalm 55:17).
 - b) Daniel, whom the angel described as "O man greatly beloved" (Daniel 6:10).
 - 2. These great men of God made it a habit to pray at set times throughout the day; we would do well to imitate their example.

3. At the very least, find some time each day to be alone with God in prayer; i.e., early morning or late at night. Make it a special time to be alone with God.
- B. Yet prayers should not be limited to "set times."
1. Special needs call for special times of praying.
 2. Consider the examples of:
 - a) Jesus, praying on important occasions (Luke 6:12-13).
 - b) Paul, praying in trying circumstances (Acts 16:25).
 - c) Nehemiah, praying on the spur of the moment (Nehemiah 2:4-5).
- C. The goal is to pray without ceasing.
1. Having "set times" will help develop the experience in praying.
 2. Praying as needs arise will develop the disposition to pray in every circumstance.

III. ***With Whom Should We Pray?***

- A. Jesus exhorted us to pray "in secret" (Matthew 6:5-6).
1. Private prayer should occupy the largest portion of our time in prayer.
 2. Consider the value of "secret prayer:"
 - a) It forms a close union, communion, and fellowship with God.
 - b) It is a true test of your sincerity and devotion.
 - (1) You cannot do it to please men (they cannot see you).
 - (2) You cannot be trying to falsely impress God (He will see right through you).
 - c) Your Father will reward you "openly" (Matthew 6:6).
- B. Jesus also spoke of praying with "two or three" (Matthew 18:19-20).
1. The early Christians prayed together often.
 - a) They prayed in times of trouble (Acts 4:23-24; 12:5, 12; 16:25).
 - b) They prayed in times of departure (Acts 20:36; 21:5).
 2. Fellowship and sense of strength comes when God's people pray together.

IV. ***For What Should We Pray?***

- A. We should pray for ourselves.
1. For physical daily needs (Matthew 6:11).
 2. For personal growth in Christlikeness and devotion to God (Colossians 1:9-12).
- B. We should pray for our family.
1. For spouse, children, parents, siblings, etc.
 2. For their nurture and growth in the teaching of the Lord (Ephesians 6:4).

- C. We should pray for our community.
 1. For peace to prevail (Jeremiah 29:7).
 2. For godly and moral standards and righteous living.
- D. We should pray for the church.
 1. For love and unity to prevail (John 13:35; 17:20-21).
 2. For the spiritual growth of each member (Philippians 1:9-11).
 3. For the gospel to have free course (2 Thessalonians 3:1).
- E. We should pray for our nation.
 1. For national repentance and consciousness of God (Psalm 33:12; Proverbs 14:34).
 2. For leaders to rule wisely (1 Timothy 2:2).
- F. We should pray for unbelievers.
 1. For their salvation (Romans 10:1).
 2. For the effort of those involved in teaching them (Ephesians 6:18-20).
- G. We should pray for the sick.
 1. For their restoration to health (James 5:14-15).
 2. For spiritual strength and peace of mind (James 5:16).
- H. We should pray for the poor and oppressed.
 1. Such as the homeless, fatherless, and unborn children (Proverbs 29:7).
 2. Those in other nations oppressed by their own rulers or outside influences.

V. ***Obstacles To Prayer***

- A. Unconfessed sin.
 1. Psalm 66:18.
 2. The basis for prayer rests upon our being in fellowship with Him; such fellowship is broken if we do not confess our sins.
- B. Improper treatment of others.
 1. How we treat others has a bearing upon whether God will hear our prayers.
 - a) E.g., how we treat the poor (Psalm 41:1-3).
 - b) E.g., how one treats his friend (Matthew 5:23-24).
 - c) E.g., how a husband treats his wife (1 Peter 3:7).
 2. We must correct our relationships with others (if possible) before we can expect God to hear our prayers.
 3. Especially if we desire to receive forgiveness (Matthew 6:14-15; 18:21-23).

Conclusion. Do you find it easy or difficult to pray? Are you spending time every day devoted to prayer? The ability to pray to God and receive answers in our lives is truly one of the greatest blessings we can have as

children of God! Hopefully, understanding and applying the principles discussed in this lesson will assure greater success in having our prayers answered.

In order to benefit from our assemblies, one must first keep in mind who is present. First, our brethren in Christ are present. They are people like you, who appreciate the presence and encouragement of other Christians. So take the time to visit with them before and after the assembly. Second, visitors are frequently present. They draw conclusions about the congregation during their visit. So take the time to visit with them. Third, our Lord is present. Do we act as we would if He were bodily present?

You get out of the assembly what you put into it. Praying about what you are going to do and planning what you can do (such as welcoming and visiting) can make a truly edifying assembly. Come to serve, not to be served and you will be blessed in return. The more you attend and the more interest you show, the more you will grow. "How often do I have to come?" is indicative of grave spiritual immaturity. It displays a lack of true love for Christ and it shows that one is selfishly concerned with how little they can do to save themselves.