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What You Need to Know About Prayer: Part 3

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WHAT YOU NEED TO KNOW ABOUT PRAYER (PART THREE)

Part three will deal with questions 6 and 7.

"And he spake a parable unto them [to this end], that men ought always to pray, and not to faint"(luke 18:1).

This is part three in a series of four during which time twelve questions on prayer are being considered. These are:

1. What is the meaning of prayer?
2. What eight relationships are seen in the model prayer of Jesus?
3. What kind of person is unable to pray the Lord's Prayer?
4. What are some reasons for prayer? Why should you pray?
5. What are the ground rules of effective prayer?
6. What about the direction and objects of prayer?
7. What about positions in prayer and time of prayer?
8. What are some hindrances to prayer?
9. What are some problems associated with and some divine responses to prayer?
10. What are some practical approaches to prayer?
11. Does God ever hear the prayers of an unsaved person?
12. Who was probably Scripture's greatest prayer warrior?

6. What about the direction and objects of prayer?

Direction of prayer—

To whom should we pray? To the Father? Son? Spirit? The basic New Testament rule is this: Prayer should be made *to* the Father, *through* the Spirit, *in the name* of Jesus. (See Rom. 8:15-16, 26-27.)

This of course does not mean we are forbidden to pray to Jesus, for Stephen and others did indeed do this (Acts 7:59). The above statement simply spells out the norm of prayer direction.

Objects of prayer—

For whom should we pray?

For ourselves—In the scriptures Abraham's servant, Peter, and the dying thief prayed for themselves. The first prayer was for guidance, the second for survival from drowning, and the third for salvation.

Abraham's servant—*"And he said O LORD God of my master Abraham, I pray thee, send me good speed this day, and shew kindness unto my master Abraham"* (Gen. 24:12).

Peter—*"But when he saw the wind boisterous, he was afraid; and beginning to sink, he cried, saying, Lord, save me"* (Matt. 14:30).

The dying thief—*"And he said unto Jesus, Lord, remember me when thou comest into thy kingdom"* (Luke 23:42).

At first glance this might seem to be the ultimate in selfishness, that is, to begin by praying for ourselves. But not so. The reason is we must often ask God to do His needed work in us, that He might then do His intended work through us. Personal confession usually must precede effective intercession.

To illustrate:

Prior to lift off the flight attendant instructs the passengers what to do in case of the loss of cabin pressure when airborne. She then shows how to use the oxygen masks, and reminds those mothers with small children to place the mask on her face first before that of her children. The reason is obvious—if she is indeed unconscious, there will be no one to help them.

For one another—*"Confess your faults one to another, and pray one for another, that ye may be healed. The effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man availeth much"* (James 5:16).

"For God is my witness, whom I serve with my spirit in the gospel of his Son, that without ceasing I make mention of you always in my prayers" (Rom. 1:9).

For pastors—The apostle Paul requested prayer for himself from both Ephesian and Colosian believers. *"And for me, that utterance may be given unto me, that I may open my mouth boldly, to make known the mystery of the gospel, For which I am an ambassador in bonds: that therein I may speak boldly, as I ought to speak"* (Eph. 6:19-20).

"Withal praying also for us, that God would open unto us a door of utterance, to speak the mystery of Christ, for which I am also in bonds" (Col. 4:3).

For sick believers—*"Is any sick among you? let him call for the elders of the church; and let them pray over him, anointing him with oil in the name of the Lord: And the prayer of faith shall save the sick, and the Lord shall raise him up; and if he have committed sins, they shall be forgiven him"* (James 5:14-15).

For rulers—*"I exhort therefore, that, first of all, supplications, prayers, intercessions, and giving of thanks, be made for all men; For kings, and for all that are in authority; that we may lead a quiet and peaceable life in all godliness and honesty. For this is good and acceptable in the sight of God our Saviour"*(1 Tim. 2:1-3).

How easy it is (and how sinful) to criticize our leaders but never remember to pray for them. Many Christians apparently did this very thing concerning two former U. S. Presidents, one a Republican, the other a Democrat, both of which grievously defamed the Oval Office, by referring to them as "Tricky Dick," or, "Slick Willie."

For our enemies—*"But I say unto you, Love your enemies, bless them that curse you, do good to them that hate you, and pray for them which despitefully use you, and persecute you"*(Matt. 5:44).

"Bless them that curse you, and pray for them which despitefully use you"(Luke 6:28).

"And they stoned Stephen, calling upon God, and saying, Lord Jesus, receive my spirit. And he kneeled down, and cried with a loud voice, Lord, lay not this sin to their charge. And when he had said this, he fell asleep"(Acts 7:59-60).

The suffering Job realized the blessing resulting from making prayer for his false friends. *"And the LORD turned the captivity of Job, when he prayed for his friends: also the LORD gave Job twice as much as he had before"*(Job 42:10).

For Israel—*"Pray for the peace of Jerusalem: they shall prosper that love thee"*(Psa. 122:6).

"I have set watchmen upon thy walls, O Jerusalem, which shall never hold their peace day nor night: ye that make mention of the LORD, keep not silence, And give him no rest, till he establish, and till he make Jerusalem a praise in the earth"(Isa. 62:6-7).

For all men—See 1 Timothy 2:1.

7. **What about positions in prayer and time of prayer?**

In regards to the position—

Note the various positions as described in the Bible.

Standing (suggested by Jesus)—*"And when ye stand praying, forgive, if ye have ought against any: that your Father also which is in heaven may forgive you your trespasses"*(Mark 11:25).

Sitting (done by David)—*"And David the king came and sat before the LORD, and said, Who am I, O LORD God, and what is mine house, that thou hast brought me hitherto?"*(1 Chron. 17:16). (See 1 Chron. 17:16-27.)

Bowing (Moses)—*"And Moses made haste, and bowed his head toward the earth, and worshipped"*(Exod. 34:8).

Lying (David)—*"I am weary with my groaning; all the night make I my bed to swim; I water my couch with my tears"*(Psa. 6:6).

With lifted hands (David)— *"Hear the voice of my supplications, when I cry unto thee, when I lift up my hands toward thy holy oracle"* (Psa. 28:2).

On one's face (Jesus)— *"And he went a little farther, and fell on his face, and prayed, saying, O my Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from me: nevertheless not as I will, but as thou wilt"* (Matt. 26:39).

On one's knees (Solomon, Daniel, Jesus, Paul)

Solomon— *"And it was so, that when Solomon had made an end of praying all this prayer and supplication unto the LORD, he arose from before the altar of the LORD, from kneeling on his knees with his hands spread up to heaven"* (1 Kings 8:54).

Daniel— *"Now when Daniel knew that the writing was signed, he went into his house; and his windows being open in his chamber toward Jerusalem, he kneeled upon his knees three times a day, and prayed, and gave thanks before his God, as he did aforetime"* (Dan. 6:10).

Jesus— *"And he was withdrawn from them about a stone's cast, and kneeled down, and prayed"* (Luke 22:41).

Paul— *"And when he had thus spoken, he kneeled down, and prayed with them all"* (Acts 20:36).

With the face between the knees (Elijah)— *"So Ahab went up to eat and to drink. And Elijah went up to the top of Carmel; and he cast himself down upon the earth, and put his face between his knees"* (1 Kings 18:42).

The following amusing poem aptly summarizes this subject the best—

"The proper way for a man to pray,"
Said Deacon Lemuel Keyes,
"And the only proper attitude
Is down upon his knees."

"No, I should say the way to pray,"
Said Reverend Doctor Wise,
"Is standing straight with outstretched arms
And rapt and upturned eyes."

"Oh, no, no, no," said Elder Slow,
"Such posture is too proud.
A man should pray with eyes fast-closed
And head contritely bowed."

"It seems to me his hands should be
Austerely clasped in front
With both thumbs pointing toward the ground,"
Said Reverend Doctor Blunt.

"Well, I pray while resting
Every day," said Mr. Henry Pack,

"So I should think you say your prayers
While lying on your back."

"Last year I fell in Murphy's well
Headfirst," said Cyrus Brown,
"With both my heels a-stickin' up
And my head a-pointin' down."

"And I made a prayer right then and there,
The best prayer I ever said,
The prayingest prayer I ever prayed,
A-standin' on my head."

"So, if your prayers come from
Mouth and not from soul
God may just someday let you
Fall into a hole!"

Bottom line: In matters of true prayer, it is not the position of the body but rather the condition of the heart that counts!

In regards to the time—

Various "time slots" for prayer can be found in the Bible—

Early in the morning— *"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).

At noon— *"Evening, and morning, and at noon, will I pray, and cry aloud: and he shall hear my voice"* (Psa. 55:17).

Late in the afternoon— *"Now Peter and John went up together into the temple at the hour of prayer, being the ninth hour"* (Acts 3:1).

In the evening— *"Let my prayer be set forth before thee as incense; and the lifting up of my hands as the evening sacrifice"* (Psa. 141:2).

At midnight— *"And at midnight Paul and Silas prayed, and sang praises unto God: and the prisoners heard them"* (Acts 16:25).

Bottom line: Prayer can and should be made ANYTIME, ALL THE TIME!

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