

New Testament Prayer

(Compiled by Paul R. Blake)

Introduction:

- A. Jesus is the master teacher, especially in regard to prayer.
 - 1. Many assume He had a hotline to God, or some sort of special communication to which we have no access, like a Divine cell phone or a celestial form of IM
 - 2. He used the same means we have today, prayer. And God answered His prayers the same way He answers ours.
 - 3. How else could Jesus truly experience the life of a man?
- B. What did He teach us about prayer?
 - 1. He taught us how to pray, with: Sincerity, fervency, diligence, humility, patience, reverence, gratitude and love
 - a. Relevance - making the prayer fit the occasion; refraining from including matters in prayer out of habit
 - 2. He taught us the form prayer should take: Addressing the Father in heaven, praising God, offering thanks, making petitions, seeking forgiveness, by Jesus authority, closing with Amen.
 - 3. He taught us the frequency of prayer: daily, any time of day, and any length of time
 - a. Bible reading, prayer, and Providence constitute a scriptural conversation between God and man.
 - b. He speaks to us in His word; we speak to Him in our prayers; He responds to our prayers according to His will and by His means

I. WHAT IS PRAYER?

- A. Rom. 1:9-10 - Making requests of God
- B. 1Cor. 14:14-17 - Expressing thankfulness to God and edifying brethren
- C. Phil. 4:6 - Offering requests and thanks to God
- D. 1Peter 5:7 - Communicating our sorrows and fears to God

II. CULTIVATING OUR ABILITY TO GROW IN PRAYER

- A. The process of developing in prayer is similar to the processes of growing in knowledge and increasing in faith, i.e., it comes with study, focus, and application
 - 1. Regardless of the fact that God is in all places at all times and knows all things, He still asks us to pray... why?
 - 2. Our practice of prayer is an acknowledgement (confession) of our conviction in His power to answer our prayers and of our dependency on Him.
 - 3. Jesus, who know all outcomes before His advent into this world, still prayed for those outcomes - Read and review John 17
 - 4. Jesus used prayer in the same manner expected of us.

III. WITH WHOM TO PRAY

A. Pray alone

1. Jesus encouraged the practice of praying in secret - Matt. 6:5-6
2. Private prayer cultivates our spiritual nature through regular exercise
 - a. "Prayer is the spiritual gymnasium in which we exercise and practice godliness." - V. L. Crawford
 - b. "...Prayer is educative. The man who prays grows; and the muscles of the soul swell from this whipcord to iron bands." - Frederick B. Meyer
 - c. The opposite is also true: "Seven days without prayer makes one weak." - Allan E. Bartlette
3. Private prayer forms a close union and fellowship with our Father
 - a. Time spent together strengthens the bond of fellowship
4. Private prayer is a true test of your sincerity and devotion
 - a. You certainly are not doing it to please men (they can't see you)
 - b. You can't falsely impress God (He sees right through you)
5. Private prayer will be rewarded "openly" - Matt. 6:6
 - a. The answers to our prayers will be seen by others, both here and in the hereafter
 - b. Private prayer should be our primary practice of prayer
 - c. Soldier caught praying while on guard duty: "If you had not spent time in drill, you would not have done so well in review."

B. Pray with others

1. Jesus also spoke of praying with others - Matt. 18:19-20
2. Early Christians prayed together often
 - a. In times of trouble - Acts 4:23-24, 12:5, 12, 16:25
 - b. In times of separation - Acts 20:36, 21:5
3. Immediate blessings when God's people pray together
 - a. A sweetness of fellowship and sharing
 - b. A sense of strength in numbers
4. Praying with others should be done whenever possible

IV. FOR WHOM TO PRAY

A. As revealed in scripture

1. Self
 - a. For physical daily needs - Matt. 6:11
 - b. For personal, spiritual growth - Col. 1:9-12
2. Family
 - a. For spouse, children, parents, siblings, etc.
 - b. For their nurture in the teaching of the Lord - Eph. 6:4
3. Church
 - a. For love and unity to prevail - John 13:35, 17:20-21
 - b. For the spiritual growth of each member - Phil. 1:9-11
 - c. For the gospel to have free course - 2Thes. 3:1
4. Community - For peace to prevail - Jer. 29:7

5. Nation
 - a. For national repentance and consciousness of God and His will
 - b. Psalm 33:12; Prov. 14:34
 - c. For leaders to rule wisely - 1Tim 2:2
6. Nonbelievers
 - a. For their salvation - Rom. 10:1
 - b. For the effort of those involved in teaching them - Eph. 6:18-20
7. The sick - For their restoration to health - James 5:14-15
8. For erring brethren - James 5:16
 - a. Four types of prayer for brethren: 1) for their prosperity, 2) for their health, 3) for their spiritual growth, 4) for their spiritual security (note that these are in ascending order of importance)
 - b. Imagine if you said more than the grossly inadequate "I pray for all of the brethren who need our prayers."
 - c. How long would it take to address all of these needs for all of the brethren you know in need of prayer?
 - d. In fact, all of the persons who need our prayers in this list have multiple needs. How long would it take to address all of the needs of each one individually?
 - e. No wonder the Lord stayed up all night in prayer. Illustration: (Question asked by a dedicated, sincere Christian) "Can I whisper my prayers or speak them aloud in my mind, because after praying for an hour, I lose my voice?"
9. The poor and oppressed
 - a. Such as the homeless, fatherless, unborn children - Prov. 29:7
 - b. Those in other nations oppressed by their own rulers or outside influences like militant Moslems or assorted rebel causes
10. To pray like Jesus, pray: always, about everything, earnestly, vigilantly, without ceasing - Col. 4:2

V. WHEN SHOULD WE PRAY?

- A. 1Thes. 5:17 - Paul says to "pray without ceasing"
 1. Many take this to mean we should be praying in some form 24/7/365
 2. To pray without ceasing means that we never cease the practice of prayer; we pray consistently and often, and maintain the frequent habit
- B. How often is "without ceasing"?
 1. The Bible gives no specific definition; however,
 2. Jesus, the Apostles, and early Christians were constantly in prayer
 3. Luke 5:16; Acts 1:14, 2:42, 12:5, 13:3, 14:23, 16:25
 4. They prayed when together, when apart, in difficult circumstances, when giving thanks in good times; they found reasons to pray in all circumstances
 5. Regardless of how often we are in the habit of praying, there are no doubt other opportunities we all can find to pray more
 6. 1Thes. 5:16-18 - Prayer is sandwiched in between rejoicing and thanksgiving for a reason

VI. CIRCUMSTANCES OF PRAYER

- A. As with all communication, there are different times for different types of speaking. Public and private conversations tend to be different in terms of intimacy and depth. So it is with prayer
- B. Private Prayer
 - 1. Done in a solitary place of some form, usually - Matt. 6:6
 - 2. It represents intimate conversation between a believer and God
 - a. Confession of personal sins - 1John 1:9
 - b. Casting care and anxieties upon God - 1Peter 5:7
 - c. Giving God thanks for all things 1Thes. 5:17-18
 - d. Petitions for personal needs - Matt. 6:11
 - e. Petitions for needs of dear ones - Col. 1:3, 4:3
 - f. Requests for wisdom, strength - Luke 21:36, James 1:5
- B. Occasions for private prayer
 - 1. In the morning or evening, to begin or end the day
 - 2. Before a stressful situation
 - 3. For safety before, during travel
 - 4. As a response to news
 - 5. If eating alone, before the meal
 - 6. These prayers would be made specific and appropriate to the setting
- C. Public Prayer
 - 1. Matt. 6:5-7 is not a denunciation of public prayer, but marks prayer done for pretense and show
 - 2. Public prayer tends to involve one man speaking the prayer while everyone else participating in the prayer directs their minds to God by the words of the prayer - 1Tim. 2:12
 - 3. When that prayer is completed with Amen, the participants affirm their participation and approval of the prayer with their Amen - 1Cor. 14:16
 - 4. Such prayers should be designed not just to thank God and make requests for the needs of some or all of the group, but also to build up those who are participating - 1Cor. 14:16-17, 26
- D. Occasions for public prayer
 - 1. The assembly - prayer of thanksgiving, for the functions of the assembly, the needs of those within it
 - 2. A shared meal - prayer of thanksgiving, blessing of food - Matt. 26:26
 - 3. An invocation for a meeting or some other function
 - 4. Family prayer, with and without children, for strengthening of family
 - a. Eph. 5:22 - 6:4
- E. In all prayer, thanksgiving should be offered and petitions made to God, but the content will vary based upon the setting and needs - Psalm 5:1-3