

## **BASIC BIBLE KNOWLEDGE**

### **10. PRAYER**

#### **WHAT IS PRAYER?**

##### **Prayer is speaking to God**

It is the seeking soul in search of God, calling out to Him. This is the simplest form of prayer. When Saul the terror of the Church met Christ on the Damascus Road, God's light from heaven felled him to the ground, and he cried out, "Who art thou, Lord? What wilt thou have me to do?" (Acts 9:5,6). This was Paul the Apostle's first prayer. It was a prayer from the heart.

##### **Prayer is the privilege of Sons**

Every child has access to the father. The believer is a child of God. "And because ye are sons, God hath sent forth the Spirit of His Son into your hearts, crying, Abba, Father" (Galatians 4:6). As believers, we have "received the Spirit of adoption, whereby we cry, Abba, Father" (Romans 8:15).

##### **Prayer is a means of grace**

God has unlimited blessings - gifts for the asking. Prayer is our means of grace. James tells us that "every good gift and every perfect gift is from above and cometh down from the Father ..." (James 1:17)

"Let us therefore come boldly unto the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy, and find grace to help in time of need" (Hebrews 4:16).

##### **Prayer is Communion with God**

Some Christians treat prayer only as a convenient means of presenting God with a string of requests, like a shopping list, "Lord, here are my needs. Kindly supply!" This is an unbalanced and selfish approach to prayer.

True prayer is communion with God, in much the same way as a child converses with his father. There is a closeness and intimacy as that which exists between father and son. While we speak with Him, we must also listen to Him speak to us. "Draw nigh to God, and He will draw nigh to you" (James 4:8).

If prayer is communion, then it takes time. It must not be hurried or haphazard. Are you prepared to devote time to prayer?

#### **WHY PRAY?**

Prayer requires not only time but discipline also. Some Christians take the easy way out by neglecting to pray, hoping that God being a loving and caring Father will somehow not forsake or forget them. After all, our Heavenly Father knows what we have need of, before we ask Him (Matthew 6:8). So why pray? Can we not just leave it to Him?

Nothing can be further from the truth.

Our Lord's teaching and example must be our guide in this. In His sermon on the mount, Jesus said, "Ask, and it shall be given you; ... If ye then being evil, know how to give good gifts unto your children, how much more shall your Father which is in heaven give good things to them that ask him?" (Matthew 7:7, 11). If we are to receive blessing, we must ask!

Our Lord Himself set us the example of prayer. He prayed often and long. In Luke 6:12, it is recorded that "He went out into a mountain to pray, and continued all night in prayer to God". "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). In His agony in the Garden of Gethsemane, Jesus prayed a mighty prayer and His sweat was as it were great drops of blood falling down to the ground (Luke 22:44).

If Jesus, the Son of God, found the need to pray thus for strength as He faced the task in hand, how much more do we frail creatures of dust need to follow in His steps. To us, His followers His words come down through the ages, still ringing true and fresh: "Watch and pray, that ye enter not into temptation: the spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak" (Matthew 26:41).

### **HOW SHOULD WE PRAY?**

If praying is speaking and communing with God, the Almighty and All-knowing Spirit, then we must do so in an appropriate manner, and not carelessly or haphazardly or ignorantly. There must be proper spiritual preparation and a right attitude of heart. Our Lord taught His disciples to pray. We do well to learn from His teaching.

Matthew 6:5-15 and Luke 18:1-4 have the relevant teachings. Briefly they are these:

1. **Pray in Secret.** For personal prayer and communing with God, we should find a quiet and private place. It is a person-to-person meeting. The meeting place must be appropriate and conducive. The Publicity or showmanship is hypocrisy and must be avoided.
2. **Pray simply, sincerely from the heart.** Avoid vain or unnecessary and monotonous repetition. God knows our needs even before we ask Him, so what need is there for reciting our requests over and over again? Our Lord says, "Use not vain repetition as the heathen do" (Matthew 6:7). They will not be heard because of much speaking.

It is therefore futile and vain to repeat certain set pieces or prayers or names or "magic" words. Repeating the rosary or "Hail Mary" or any other prayer formula is superstition. Our Lord says to us, "Be not ye therefore like unto them" (Matthew 6:8).

3. **Say, “Our Father which art in Heaven”.** We approach God as a child approaches the father. This sets the relationship right. Our God knows His children’s needs even better than they themselves, and He graciously awaits their calls. God is pleased when we His children address Him as “Our Father”.

Our prayer must be directed to the Father only. This is the teaching of God’s Word. There is no scriptural basis for directing prayers to the virgin Mary, or to angels or to any saint. To do so is superstition.

4. **Approach God with due reverence.** Our God is holy, we are sinful. He is in Heaven, we on earth. We must therefore give our utmost respect as we seek Him in prayer. Careless and wanton approach cannot please Him.
5. **“Hallowed by thy Name”.** God’s name is high, above every name. When we seek Him, let us give Him due honour and glory. Let His holy name be praised!
6. **“Thy Kingdom Come”.** This should be our earnest desire in every prayer. Our Lord has declared, “The Kingdom of God is at hand.” Every prayer should echo the glad tidings that indeed Christ may soon set up His Kingdom on earth.
7. **“Thy Will be done”.** This must be the final objective of our prayers. Whatever we ask must be in accord with His will. He is the Sovereign God who rules with justice and equity over all. His ways are perfect. His will is the best for us. May we always pray for it.
8. **Pray for “Daily Bread”.** This request comes only after God’s glory, kingdom and will - in that order. God cares for His children’s physical and material needs. He is pleased to supply our necessary means of bodily support and comfort, to ensure a proper livelihood.

In this request, we acknowledge His providential care. All good things come from Him. He sends the sunshine and the rain. He gives us our physical and mental capacities to think, plan and work. It is only by His mercies that we are able to acquire wealth and to enjoy this earthly life. All this is embodied in the “daily bread” we ask for.

9. **Pray for forgiveness and for a forgiving Spirit.** Our sins are our debts, debts we owe the Heavenly Father. We have no means of paying those debts, except that He in mercy cancel them, for Jesus’ sake. For Christ has paid that debt for us on Calvary’s cross. By His merit, God forgives us who put our trust in Him.

If we plead with God to forgive us, we must on our part be willing also to forgive others. For, by comparison, our debt to God is far greater than any man’s debt to us.

Therefore, in our approach to God, our hearts must have that forbearance and compassion for others, even as we request the same from God. If we will not forgive others for their minor offences, how can we hope for God to forgive us for our great transgressions?

May we therefore approach God with a humble and forgiving heart.

10. **Pray for strength** not to fall into sin again. **“Lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil”**. We ask for forgiveness of sins. This request should be made with the desire and willingness to be kept from repeated sinning. We should resolve and ask God to give us the strength to resist and conquer temptation.

It is only by the Spirit indwelling in our hearts that we may be kept or delivered from the attacks of the evil one.

11. **Praise and thank Him**. “Thine is Kingdom, the power and the glory”. When we acknowledge Him and give Him all praise, thanks and glory, He is pleased. God does not need our praise, but He deserves all of it! When we praise Him, He is glorified and we are blessed.
12. **“In the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, Amen”**. This should be the conclusion of every prayer. Our Lord’s promise: “And whatsoever ye shall ask **in my name**, that will I do, that the Father may be glorified in the Son” (John 14:13). “Verily, verily, I say unto you, Whatsoever ye shall ask the Father **in my name**, He will give it to you” (John 16:23).

Therefore, our prayers to God must not go through any other name, neither Mary nor any saint.

Amen: this is our true and firm request, so be it! It brings a prayer to a formal and fervent conclusion.

## **FURTHER TEACHING ON PRAYER**

1. **Pray “in everything”** (Philippians 4:6,7). We are to pray “in everything” with thanksgiving. We are to commit all our cares and desires to God in prayer, and not to bear these burdens ourselves, and become anxious or disturbed! Then, God’s peace that passes all understanding shall keep our hearts and minds in Christ Jesus.

What a precious promise to every believer.

2. **Pray “without ceasing”** (1 Thessalonians 5:17). This means that we are to pray at all times. On all available and needful occasions when we should pray, let nothing hinder us! Above all, may we have a prevailing mood and attitude of prayer, maintaining unbroken communion with God in our thoughts and innermost longings. Let us also persist and persevere in prayer. Don’t easily give up!
3. **Pray “believing”**. Our Lord’s promise, “And all things, whatsoever ye shall ask in prayer, believing, ye shall receive” (Matthew 21:22). Our God is able to do exceeding abundantly above all that we ask or think (Ephesians 3:20). Let us therefore have faith when we pray, and doubt not.
4. **Ask “not amiss”**. “Ye ask, and receive not, because ye ask amiss” (James 4:3). Prayers for the wrong things will not be answered ! Let us always pray for God’s will to be done.

5. **Pray “one for another”** (James 5:16). How wonderful it is that God has given us the blessed ministry and privilege of praying not only for ourselves, but also for others. Hence we should learn the lesson of intercessory prayer, praying for one another. In this way, believers are drawn closer together in fellowship, the Church is strengthened and God is glorified.
6. **Pray “with spirit and with understanding”** (1 Corinthians 14:15). The Apostle Paul here instructs us how to pray in public. Our prayer should be from our hearts, sincere and intelligible, so that others might understand and join with us.

This injunction was given to the Corinthian Church which has been troubled by an outbreak of tongues. The Corinthians were much taken up with this phenomenon and some “went overboard” with it. Those who spoke in tongues or prayed in tongues were regarded as more spiritual and gifted. All this was quite wrong. So the Apostle Paul had to put them right. Why pray in tongues? Paul himself said that he had rather speak five words with understanding than 10,000 words in an unknown tongue (1 Corinthians 14:19). Therefore, when we pray, let us do so with understanding!

## **TYPES OR METHODS OF PRAYER**

1. **Private prayer** by yourself, at home or in some other place. We may pray silently or audibly.
2. **Public prayer** e.g. in Church or at Prayer Meeting or some other gathering. Vocal corporate prayer is commonly practised in our B-P Churches as well as in Chinese-speaking congregations. It has certain benefits:
  - (a) all may pray at the same time.
  - (b) Christians, especially new believers, soon learn to pray. There is no shyness when all pray aloud together.
  - (c) within a given time, many items for prayer can be covered, more than individual prayers.
  - (d) a more fervent spirit of prayer is fostered, but it takes a little practice to achieve this.

The success of this method of prayer depends on the spiritual condition of the people and the prayer leader, and the circumstances of the meeting.

## **ATTITUDES IN PRAYER**

During formal prayer, we may sit, stand or kneel. The physical attitude is not all-important, but it should be appropriate to the occasion.

The outward attitude of body must reflect an inward reverence of heart for God.

Whenever possible head should be bowed and eyes closed so as to shut out one’s visual attention from outside distractions. This may not be practical e.g. in the road or while engaged in some task. One should then “whisper a prayer in the heart”.

Whatever one's attitude in prayer, remember again what our Lord said of the hypocrites who make a show of praying in public "that they may be seen of men". We must never make praying an occasion to show off our spirituality.

### **HOW OFTEN TO PRAY?**

Christians, when asked this question, give various answers: once, twice, five times, etc. How many times should a believer pray? If prayer is like breathing, then it should be an unceasing activity. And so it should be. Every child of God should have that constant consciousness of His presence and an ever ready spirit of communion with Him.

For example, one's first thought on waking is, Lord, thank you for a restful night. At meal time, Thank you for food. Before setting out for work or school, Thank you for life and its opportunities. Please guide me through this day, dear Lord. And so on, through the day.

We should all learn to pray often, five or ten or more times each day. Learn the blessedness of unceasing silent heart prayer throughout the day and during all waking hours. The blessing is ours! Yours!

### **CONTENT OF PRAYER**

The contents of prayer should be appropriate to the occasion. Generally, these headings should be remembered:

1. Thanksgiving and praise.
2. Confession of sins.
3. Petition of wants.
4. Request for spiritual blessings.
5. Intercession for others.
6. Special items.

### **HOW MUCH TIME TO SPEND IN PRAYER**

The answer is "The more the better".

While in a particular prayer it is not the actual physical time that counts, nevertheless our spiritual life cannot grow if our prayers are hurried and perfunctory. Christians who spend little time in the school of prayer generally remain weak, immature and ill fitted for the Master's use.

So, if it is your ambition to be useful and mighty for God, take time to pray and commune with Him. Learn also to feed daily on the Word. Make your Quiet Time truly meaningful - if you mean business with God.

Start with 10 minutes a day. Like exercise, gradually work it up until you will not be satisfied with less than 20 or 30 minutes a day. Then see God change your life.

More things are accomplished through prayer than we realize.