

PRAYER

There are four primary nouns translated as “prayer” or “prayers.”

- *Deesis* (1162) which refers to a petition, probably in relation primarily to oneself
- *Enteuxis* (1783) which also refers to a petition, but probably in relation primarily to others
- *Euche* (2171) which refers to a wish
- *Proseuche* (4335) which refers to prayer in general, especially in relation to worship

There are also five verbs translated as “pray,” “praying,” or “prayed.”

- *Deomai* (1189) which means to beg
- *Erotao* (2065) which means to ask
- *Euchomai* (2172) which means to wish
- *Parakaleo* (3870) which means to invoke
- *Proseuchomai* (4336) which means to pray in general, especially in relation to worship

Summing up the meanings of these various synonyms, we might say that prayer, on account of a wish or desire in one’s heart, is an invoking, primarily of the Heavenly Father, for a fulfillment of that wish or desire either through a simple request or even a begging.

Based on Hebrews 4:16 where Paul exhorted us to “come boldly to the throne of grace,” an fellow once told me that he thought it was improper for us to use the word “please” when praying for God to fulfill a wish. However, it seems that he should perhaps look at the word “boldly” in the sense of “confidently”; in other words, it appears to me that Paul was encouraging those Christians who were in danger of falling away due to persecution to take heart in the knowledge that, because Jesus was their High Priest, God would hear them so that they, as the verse continues to say, “may obtain mercy and find grace to help in time of need.”

In this study and with the Scriptures, of course, I want to answer the five questions of “When?,” “Where?,” “Why?,” “What?,” and “How?” concerning prayer.

When Should Christians Pray?

We should pray, not continuously, but continually. (“Continuous” is like an

uninterrupted waterfall, while “continual” is like an intermittent, but steady, busy signal.)

Luke 18:1 reads, “Men ought always to pray and not lose heart.” First Thessalonians 5:17 reads, “Pray without ceasing,” which simply means to have a prayerful mind. There are at least three good examples of men who conformed to this philosophy. Daniel 6:10 tells us that even though Daniel knew that king Darius issued a decree one day that no one should pray to anyone except king Darius himself for 30 days, Daniel “knelt down on his knees three times that day and prayed and gave thanks before his God as was his custom since early days.” David wrote, “As for me, I will call upon God.... Evening and morning and at noon, I will pray and cry aloud, and He shall hear my voice” (Psalm 55:16-17). Even Jesus, who was Himself God, “went to the Mount of Olives [to pray] as He was accustomed” (Luke 22:39).

There are habits which are good and scriptural, and this is certainly one of them! It’s also a good discipline!

We should pray whenever the need is felt. Acts 4 tells us that once the Jewish rulers had finished threatening Peter and John, “they went to their companions and reported all that the chief priests and elders had said to them. So when they heard that, they raised their voice to God with one accord...” (verses 23-24).

Acts 12:5 tells us that while Peter was in prison, “constant prayer was offered to God for him by the church.”

Jesus felt the need to pray at various significant periods in His life. Luke 3:21 informs us that He prayed after His baptism. Luke 6:12 informs us that He prayed before selecting the twelve apostles. John 17:20-21 informs us that He prayed when He earnestly desired unity among His disciples. Matthew 26:36-44 informs us that He prayed before His death. Luke 23:34 informs us that He prayed when He was on the cross.

So when should we pray? At two primary times: whenever we feel the need to and regularly or continually. However...

Before we leave this point, someone wrote about when not want to pray.

If we don't love anyone and don't want anyone to love us ... don't pray.

If we are completely and utterly sinless and we can handle the world all by ourselves ... don't pray.

If we don't need any guidance in the world of darkness or in times of trouble and trial ... don't pray.

If we have all the wisdom we need to meet each of life's many changes, and if we have the power to direct our own steps ... don't pray.

If we don't need any help keeping our families safe, sound, well, fed, clothed, sheltered, and provided for in all the ways God expects folks to provide for their own ... don't pray.

If we can rely on our own strength to control our futures, and we can make the forces of nature work to our advantage, and we can manufacture the air we breathe and keep the earth spinning and the sun shining ... don't pray. Otherwise...

We ought to get down on our knees and pray!

Where Should Christians Pray?

We should pray in private. In Matthew 6:6, when He was preaching concerning prayer, Jesus said, "When you pray, go into your room, close the door and pray to your Father who is unseen" (NIV).

Speaking of Jesus as our example again, Mark 1:35 tells us that "In the morning, having risen a long while before daylight, He went out and departed to a solitary place, and there He prayed."

People like Peter and Jesus ended up in some very unusual places to pray, at least in our modern-day estimation. In Acts 10:9, Luke wrote that around noon, "Peter went up on the housetop to pray." In Matthew 14:23, Matthew wrote of how Jesus "went up on a mountain by Himself to pray." In Luke 5:16, he also wrote about how Jesus "withdrew into the wilderness and prayed." (The word "wilderness" here refers to a desert, perhaps primarily termed such because it was deserted of people.)

We should pray in public. Since much of our eating today is done in public, perhaps we ought to recall First Timothy 4:3-5 where Paul wrote concerning "foods which God created to be received with thanksgiving.... For every creature of God is good, and nothing is to be refused if it is received with thanksgiving, for it is sanctified by the Word of God and prayer."

In Acts 2:42, Luke informed us that it became the custom of the church to pray when its members met together in a public place. In First Corinthians 14, Paul spoke of prayer in the public assembly of the church (verses 13-17).

So where should we pray? Well, speaking of silent prayer, we all should pray everywhere. However...

Speaking of audible prayer, Paul said, "I desire that the men pray everywhere" (First Timothy 2:8)—in public and private, while of women he went on to say, "I do not permit a woman to teach" (verse 12) or "discourse publicly"; what was allowed of the man was and is not allowed of the woman. In First Corinthians 14:34 Paul said concerning women individual speaking in the church, "Let [them] keep silent in the churches, for they are not permitted to speak."

Why Should Christians Pray?

We should pray because we are commanded to. As noted earlier, Paul said, "Pray without ceasing" (First Thessalonians 4:17). There were no "ifs" or "buts" in that statement. In Colossians 4:2, he also wrote, "Continue earnestly in prayer."

We should pray because it can change the mind of God. A great example of the truth of this statement may be found in Exodus 32:9-14. I've heard that there's a preacher who doesn't believe that prayer can change the mind of God, and when asked about Exodus 32, his response was that that was during the Old Testament times when God dealt differently with man than He does now. However, one of my questions is, "Does the part in James 5:14 concerning praying over the sick apply today? If so, why pray for the sick if such could never have an effect on God?"

We should pray because it can relieve anxiety. In First Peter 5:7, Peter attempted to cheer the recipients of this letter by telling them to cast all their care on God because of His care for them. In Philippians 4:6-7, Paul exhorted those Christians to "Be anxious for (concerning) nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known to God."

We should pray because it rewards. In Matthew 6:6, Jesus said that "Your Father who sees what is done in secret will reward you" (NIV). Likewise, Jesus said in Matthew 7:7, "Ask, and it will be given to you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you."

We should pray because it strengthens us. To the Ephesians in 3:14-19, it was Paul who spoke of how he prayed that those Christians would be strengthened with might in the inner man as well as rooted and grounded. To the Colossians in 1:9-11, it was Paul again who spoke of how he prayed that those Christians would, among many other related things, be strengthened with all might.

It's said that one day a little boy was trying very hard to lift a heavy stone, and his father, happening by, noticed his son's failure and said to him, "Are you using all your strength?" "Yes, I am!" the boy exclaimed impatiently. "No," the father replied, "you're not. You haven't asked me for help."

Someone once wrote, "Prayer is ever profitable: at night it is our covering; in the morning it is our armor. Prayer should be the key of the day and the lock of the night."

Someone else wrote, "Until a Christian has prayed, the most important thing he can do is pray!"

So why should we pray? Because it is commanded, it can change the mind of God, it can relieve worry, it rewards, and it can strengthen us.

What and/or Who Should Christians Pray For?

We should pray for people of the world.

- **We should pray for alien sinners:** Paul set a wonderful example when he wrote in Romans 10:1, saying of his Jewish brethren who would not accept Jesus as the Messiah, "My heart's desire and prayer to God for Israel is that they may be saved"; this would, of course, include the concept of praying for the success of the Gospel: In 2nd Thessalonians 3:1, Paul petitioned the brethren, saying, "Pray for us, that the Word of the Lord may have free course and be glorified."
- **We should pray for the sick in the world:** Paul did such (Acts 28:8).
- **We should pray for rulers:** In First Timothy 2:2, Paul told Timothy to pray "for kings and all who are in authority."

We should pray for people of the church.

- **We should pray for erring brethren:** James 5:16 reads, "Confess your trespasses to one another, and pray for one another, that you may be healed. The effective, fervent prayer of a righteous man avails much."
- **We should pray for sick brethren:** James also said in verse 14, "Is anyone among you sick? ... pray over him...."
- **We should pray for more laborers to go into the field:** It was Jesus in Matthew 9:38 who demanded, "Pray the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into His harvest."
- **We should pray for the faithfulness of brethren:** In First Corinthians 13:7, Paul told those Christians, "I pray to God that you do no evil...."
- **We should pray for the wisdom, knowledge, and understanding of brethren to be increased:** In Colossians 1:9, Paul said, "We also ... do not cease to pray for you, and to ask that you may be filled with the knowledge of His will in all wisdom and spiritual understanding."
- **We should pray for the success of preachers:** In First Thessalonians 5:25, Paul wrote, "Brethren, pray for us."

We should pray for ourselves.

- **We should pray for our physical needs:** In Jesus' model prayer, He said, "Give us this day our daily bread."
- **We should pray for our spiritual needs.** (a) We should pray for the forgiveness of sins: In First John 1:9, John wrote, "If we confess our sins, [God]

is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.” (b) We should pray for wisdom: In James 1:5, James said, “If any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask of God, who gives to all liberally and without reproach, and it will be given to him.”

- **So what and who should we pray for? In First Timothy 2:1 Paul summed it all up by saying that “supplications, prayers, intercessions, and giving of thanks [should] be made for all men.”** The only exception to that is found in First John 5:16: “There is a sin leading to death. I do not say that [you] should pray about that.”

How Should Christians Pray?

When the disciples of Jesus requested Him to teach them how to pray, He gave them a simple outline of a prayer (Luke 11:1-4), but we’re going to go to many other places in the Scriptures to discover how we should pray.

- **We should pray with humility.** (a) We should pray with spiritual or mental humility: In First Peter 5:6-7, Peter said, “Humble yourselves under the mighty hand of God, that He may exalt you in due time, casting all your care upon Him, for he cares for you.” (b) We should pray with physical humility, which is a result of mental humility: for example, Paul “knelt down and prayed” (Acts 20:36 & 21:5); and, in Jesus’ story in Luke 18:10-14 of the two men who went to the temple to pray, recall the posture of the man who went home justified: “he would not so much as raise his eyes to Heaven.”
- **We should pray in belief.** In Matthew 21:22, Jesus said, “Whatever you ask in prayer, believing, you will receive.” In James 1:6-7, after encouraging those who needed wisdom to pray for it, he went on to say, “Let him ask in faith, with no doubting, for he who doubts is like a wave of the sea driven and tossed by the wind. For let not that man suppose that he will receive anything from the Lord.”
- **We should pray in gratitude.** In the 100th Psalm and verse 4, David once wrote about approaching God: “Enter into His gates with thanksgiving, and into His courts with praise. Be thankful to Him and bless His name.”

It's said that in a sea-coast town where great ships sail the mighty ocean stood a small church building. The preacher was accustomed to printing an annual statistical report for the congregation. One year the members noted an unusual entry: among the records indicating facts and figures about the membership was the notation, “Missing at sea, 9.” The members didn’t know of any of their number who had been lost at sea, so someone asked the preacher what he meant. “Well,” he said, “during the year eleven of you either prayed in church or had the church pray for family members who were going out to sea. Since I only heard two of you ever thank God for their safe return, I assumed the others are still missing.”

Paul spoke of a people that God had given up to a reprobate mind partially because "they did not glorify Him as God, nor were thankful" (Romans 1:21-28). That's how serious God is about our being grateful!

It's also said that a young woman once boarded a crowded bus. A little, tired, old man arose and gave her his seat. After an embarrassing silence, he said, "I beg your pardon?" "I didn't say anything," she said. "Oh, I'm sorry," said the old-timer, "I thought I heard you say, 'Thank you.'" Now with that little story in mind, can you imagine how God must feel when we fail to thank Him for His blessings? Jesus set the example when He once said, "Father, I thank you..." (John 11:41).

- **We should pray with the specified sign of authority.** In First Corinthians 11:4-5, Paul wrote, "Every man praying ... having his head covered, dishonors his head. But every woman who prays ... with her head uncovered, dishonors her head...." Then in verses 13-15 he clarified this by writing, "Judge among yourselves. Is it proper for a woman to pray to God with her head uncovered? Does not even nature itself teach you that if a man has long hair, it is a dishonor to him? But, if a woman has long hair, it is a glory to her, for her hair is given to her for a covering."
- **We should pray in acceptance of God's will.** In the model prayer (Matthew 6:10), Jesus said, speaking of God, "Your will be done on Earth as it is in Heaven.'" And Jesus even exemplified this for us in the Garden of Gethsemane in Matthew 26:39 when He prayed, "My Father, if it is possible, let this cup pass from Me, nevertheless, not as I will, but as You will.'"

The story is told of a man whose son was in the hospital with a deadly disease. He continually prayed to God that his son would be healed; and he prayed that God's will be done. But, alas, his son died. He slid back into the world. When a brother asked him why he didn't come to church anymore, he said it was because God let his son die. When he was asked if he prayed that God's will be done, he replied, "Yes." He was then asked, "Well, didn't you mean what you said?"

- **We should pray in unity.** In Acts 1:14, Luke spoke of those who "continued with one accord in prayer and supplication." In Second Corinthians 1:11, Paul wrote of these Christians: "You also helping together in prayer for us, that thanks may be given by many persons on our behalf for the gift granted to us through many."
- **We should pray with praise.** Nehemiah once wrote, "Stand up and bless the Lord your God forever and ever! Blessed be Your glorious name, which is exalted above all blessing and praise! You alone are the Lord. You have made Heaven, the Heaven of heavens with all their host, the Earth and everything on it, the seas and all that is in them. And You preserve them all. The host of heaven worships You'" (9:5-6). Similarly...

Daniel once "Blessed the God of Heaven ... [saying], 'Blessed be the name of God forever and ever. For wisdom and might are His. And He changes the times and the seasons. He removes kings and raises up kings. He gives wisdom to the wise and knowledge to those who have understanding. He reveals deep and secret things. He knows what is in the darkness. And light dwells with Him. I thank You and praise You'" (2:19-23).

- **We, if we're married, should pray amidst a life that honors our spouses, or our prayers may be hindered** (First Peter 3:7).
- **There are some ways in which we should not pray.** Jesus said, "Do not use vain repetitions" (Matthew 6:7).

Paul taught that when we lead public prayer, we must be loud enough and clear enough to be heard and understood: "If you bless with the spirit, how will he who occupies the place of the uninformed say 'Amen' at your giving of thanks, since he does not understand what you say" (First Corinthians 14:16)?

Prayer is not a place for rebuking or teaching others: it's a speech to God, not the audience. And words from the heart are far more important to God than eloquence of speech.

Conclusion

So every Christian should speak to God everyday, any and everywhere (if silent in nature), for everyone (except the incorrigible) and at any time, for such is commanded by God. This will humble us, change God's mind, relieve us of worry, give us strength, and reward us.

We should pray with humility, in gratitude, in belief, with the specified sign of authority, in an attitude of acceptance of God's will, in unity, with praise, with loudness and clarity, and, if we're married, remember to give honor to our spouses that our prayers may not be hindered.

We should not teach and/or rebuke in prayer, nor attempt to be eloquent, nor should we pray with vain repetitions. (A few seconds of silence between sentences to think is far better than slipping in a vain repetition.)

Keeping all this in mind when we pray helps our prayers to be in harmony with God's will: John wrote, "This is the confidence that we have in Him, that if we ask anything according to His Will, He hears us" (First John 5:14).

The Difference...

*I got up early one morning
And rushed right into the day;
I had so much to accomplish*

That I didn't have time to pray.

*Problems just tumbled about me
And heavier came each task.
"Why doesn't He help me?" I wondered.
He said, "But, you didn't ask."*

*I wanted to see joy and beauty,
But the day toiled on gray and bleak;
I wondered why God didn't show me.
He said, "But, you didn't seek."*

*I tried to come into God's presence;
I used all my keys at the lock.
God gently and lovingly chided,
"My child, you didn't knock."*

*I woke up early this morning,
And paused before entering the day;
I had so much to accomplish
That I had to take time to pray!*

- by Grace L. Naessens

A bumper sticker reads, "Life is fragile; handle with prayer!"

[Tony E. Denton, August 1987.]