

PRAYER

- When to pray

Daniel 6:10b 'Three times a day he got down on his knees and prayed, giving thanks to his God, just as he had done before.'

Daniel is a dynamic example of what it means to lead a life of prayer. Even in the midst of great danger and against all odds, his faith was unshaken. God heard his prayers and saved him from certain death.

The command to 'pray continually' in 1 Thessalonians 5:17 shows us, that prayer is, among other things, an attitude. It's obviously not possible to be speaking to God all the time, but like Daniel our lives should be rooted in prayer, always in touch with God.

- Unanswered prayer

Matthew 7:11 'If you, then, though you are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father in heaven give good gifts to those who ask Him.'

There's no such thing as unanswered prayer, even when God does not answer our prayers in the way we would like or expect. For example, a child sees a knife on the table and asks his father to give it to him. The loving father answers that request by putting the knife out of the way. It is fortunate God knows what we need, whereas we only think we know what we want. Philippians 4:19 tells us 'my God will supply all my needs'. It is said that God answers prayer in 3 ways, 'Yes' 'No' or 'Wait'. We can trust God who desires to give good gifts to His children. Therefore, we can **ask** with expectancy, **seek** with persistence, and **knock** with assurance.

- The Lord's prayer

Matthew 6:9a 'This, then, is how you should pray.'

'Our Father.' The supreme example of prayer opens with the words that emphasises God as a loving Father and us as His children. He is enthroned in glory in Heaven and yet we have access to Him at any moment. Hebrews 4:16 'Approach the throne of grace...to help us in our time of need.'

The sequence of the Lord's prayer teaches us to begin with worship, that the interests of the kingdom come before merely personal interests, that we must accept the Father's will, whether to grant or to withhold, that personal petitions should mainly concern present needs, leaving the future to the Father's care and love.

We cannot pray 'Your will be done' unless we mean to apply it to our lives. We are guilty if we add (perhaps unconsciously) 'provided Your will is the same as my will'. The will of God is not an evil to be endured but a blessing to be acquired.

- Hindrance to prayer - sin

Psalms 66:18 'If I had cherished sin in my heart the Lord would not have listened.'

Prayer is like radio communication; we can only transmit and receive if we are tuned in to God's 'frequency' and our equipment is in order.

Barriers to real prayer are not only 'sin' but also the 'cherishing' of sin. Also an unforgiving spirit, the harbouring of a grudge, the subtle wish for another's harm, the envy that corrupts the heart – these attitudes always prove impassable barriers to spontaneous prayer and break the circuit.

Isaiah 59:2-3 states, 'Your iniquities have separated you from your God...so that He will not hear.'

- **Hindrance to prayer – anxiety**

Philippians 4:6 'Do not be anxious about anything, but in every situation, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God.'

The sense of the first part of this verse is 'do not be full of care for anything.' We must, of course, be careful, but the trouble is when our care turns into anxiety. We can gain encouragement from Romans 8:28, 'And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love Him, who have been called according to His purpose.' So we can confidentially trust God rather than being left worried or anxious. If you worry, you do not trust; if you trust you do not worry.

- **Hindrance to prayer – lack of thought control**

Philippians 4:8 'Finally, brothers and sisters, whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable – if anything is excellent or praiseworthy – think about such things.'

Augustine said, 'An evil thought passes your door first as a stranger. Then it enters as a guest. Then it installs itself as a master.' As we think so we live.

In prayer we need to 'take captive every thought' (2 Corinthians 10:5). In the matter of concentration, some may find it helpful to pray aloud, if tired to stand up or make a note of things to pray about later.

Sometimes distracting thoughts are a spiritual attack. If they are temptations, pray that you will be protected and guarded from sin; if irrelevancies, that the Lord would grant you clear thinking; if they are responsibilities that you have, pray that you will be conscientious and efficient. In this way you can turn distractions into prayerful victories.

- **Hindrance to prayer – lack of sincerity**

Mark 6: 7-8 'And when you pray, do not keep on babbling like pagans, for they think they will be heard because of their many words. Do not be like them, for your Father knows what you need before you ask Him.'

Jesus taught that our prayers do not need to be long and 'impressive'. He is more interested in quality not quantity.

Our sincerity can be judged by the effort we put into prayer. We get an insight into what prayer meant to the Lord when we read how much it cost Him, 'He prayed more earnestly and His sweat was like drops of blood falling to the ground.' (Luke 22:44)

Lack of faith is a hindrance to prayer. We read in James 1:6-7 'But when you ask Him, be sure that your faith is in God alone. Do not waver, for a person with divided loyalty is as unsettled as a wave in the ocean that is blown and tossed by the wind. Such people should not expect to receive anything from the Lord.'

Hints on prayer

- Think of a prayer as cooperation with God
- Realise the importance of prayer
- Before praying wait in silence, realising the wonder of what you are about to do
- Prayer is simply talking to God, you can be absolutely natural and share everything with Him
- Prayer is not trying to get God to do our will, but aligning our will to God's
- Read the Bible and pray first thing each day

Nehemiah's prayer (Nehemiah 4:1-11) is a great example of what to include in your prayers

- Meditation – Reflecting on God His majesty and love (verse 5)
- Adoration – The worship of God (verse 5)
- Confession – Telling God about our sin (verses 6-7)
- Intercession – praying for others (verses 8-10)
- Petition – Personal requests (verse 11)

Father God,

You know us so well. You know our thoughts and words before they are even formed on our lips. You even know how hard it is for us sometimes to simply sit and pray when there seems so much we need to do. Please forgive us for this and help us to rest in Your presence and experience Your closeness when we come to You in prayer. And please help us to wrestle in prayer and to be persistent, trusting in You alone.

In Jesus name, Amen