

Patterns for Prayer

Introduction:

We have been looking at prayer for four weeks and have noticed that it is not the key to unlocking the door to health, wealth and prosperity.

And it certainly isn't something we do through another person such as Mary, the mother of Jesus, man appointed Saints, dead relatives or as claimed in this Christmas song that is getting a big play this year

Little alter boy could you pray for me

Could you tell the Lord I'm going to change today

What must I do to be holy like you

Little alter boy, let me hear you pray

Prayer is an active communication between created children and their father, the Creator God. We desire this on going relationship with God because He not only created us, but He loved us so much that He gave

His Own Son as a substitute sacrifice for our sin.

We have considered the purpose, preparation, and prerequisites for prayer and would like to believe we will have a more effective prayer life.

However, whenever I think I might have prayer mastered and feel that I finally know how to guarantee my prayers will be heard and answered I remember a story a pastor once told me. I quote:

The flight had been long and bumpy and my heart sank as the pilot announced that there was snow and fog at Chicago's O'Hare Airport and that, unless the weather cleared quickly we would be landing in Detroit.

Another pastor sitting next to me closed his eyes and mouthed a silent prayer. A few minutes later we were asked to fasten our seat belts for a landing at O'Hare. Turning to my neighbor, I congratulated him on his successful appeal to "headquarters." *On the contrary," he sighed, "I live in Detroit."*

With that humbling story in mind, I would like to move us into another area of prayer, "Patterns For Prayer."

I. TECHNICAL PATTERN

One of the things that often bothers me is when people talk about "saying their prayers." Praying isn't verbalizing learned prayers we have memorized by rote to make sure we get it right. Prayer isn't so many "our Fathers" or "vain repetitions" or mystic "mantras."

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Prayer is a conversation with the Lord that I love.

John Calvin said, "*Christ does not enjoin his people to pray in a prepared form of words or to adhere scrupulously to certain words, but only points out what ought to be the object of all our wishes our and prayers.*"

A. No Specific Posture

When I see the current news coverage of the followers of Islam, facing east, bowing to the ground, and repeating their memorized prayers. I am so grateful we are encouraged to pray with out ceasing, wherever we are, whenever we want or need, in any and all situations.

In Scripture we see people praying while standing, sitting, kneeling, prostrate, walking, with eyes lifted, heads bowed, while working, while fighting, while worshiping. Some find their most effective prayer time when they drive, wash dishes, garden, work on their house, or sip tea.

B. No Specific Place

Since we are to "pray always" it's obvious we can pray anywhere. Indoors, outdoors, at home, at work, in church, on a boat, in a car, in the desert, in the mountains, wherever you are.

C. No Specific Time

Since prayer is communicating with our Lord and since He is with us 24/7 we can talk to Him any time. Early if you're a morning person, late if you're a night owl, at noon if you need a break, whenever you want to talk.

I will say one thing though. There is something to be said for purposed prayed. Getting into a habit of praying at a regular uninterrupted time is helpful, though you would benefit by talking to God all day long.

D. No Specific Emotion

Pray when you're sad, when you happy, when you're in trouble, when you're bored, when you're excited, when you win or lose, when things are calm or crazy. Talk, sing, cry, whisper, shout, beg, quote Scripture, just pray.

There is no technical pattern for prayer because praying is a way of life, a communication with the Lord whom you love and who loves you!

II. PASTOR'S PATTERN

Years ago a pastor introduced me to a familiar pattern for prayer that most of you know very well—A.C.T.S.

It is just a tool to help you balance you prayer time, especially if you tend to have problems concentrating on things other than your own personal needs. Since it is familiar I'll deal with it briefly.

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A. Adoration

Adoration is giving glory to God because He is worthy (or worth it).

Webster says it is, *"the act of paying honors, as to a divine being; the worship paid to God. . . . External homage with the highest reverence (respect, love, awe, esteem)."*

For examples of adoration look at the Book of Psalms:

Psalms 104:1, *"BLESS the LORD, O my soul! O LORD my God, Thou art very great; Thou art clothed with splendor and majesty,"*

Psalms 104:33 and 34, *"I will sing to the LORD as long as I live; I will sing praise to my God while I have my being. Let my meditation be pleasing to Him; As for me, I shall be glad in the LORD."*

Psalms 103:1-6, *"BLESS the LORD, O my soul; And all that is within me, {bless} His holy name. Bless the LORD, O my soul, And forget none of His benefits; Who pardons all your iniquities; Who heals all your diseases; Who redeems your life from the pit; Who crowns you with lovingkindness and compassion; Who satisfies your years with good things, {So that} your youth is renewed like the eagle. The LORD performs righteous deeds, And judgments for all who are oppressed."*

Revelation 4:11, *"Worthy art Thou, our Lord and our God, to receive glory and honor and power; for Thou didst create all things, and because of Thy will they existed, and were created."*

When we truly know God we realize that he is worthy of our worship and it brings us to a proper state of humility as we come before Him to pray.

B. Confession

Confession in the context of prayer has to do with agreeing with God that we have transgressed His will and seeking to change that behavior. This brings us back into right living and thus we are willing and able to fellowship with God.

How do we know what to confess? Psalms 139:23, *"Search me, O God, and know my heart; Try me and know my anxious thoughts; and see if there be any hurtful way in me, and lead me in the everlasting way."* Notice this included leading us into righteous a life style.

What is the result of confession? 1John 1:9, *"If we confess our sins, He is faithful and righteous to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness."*

The context of this verse is fellowship with the apostles, with other believers, and ultimately with God and Christ. All our sins are forgiven when we receive the substitute sacrifice of Jesus for our salvation as explained in chapter 2, verses 1 and 2.

Colossians 2:13 says, *"And when you were dead in your transgressions and the uncircumcision of your flesh, He made you alive together with Him, **having forgiven us all our transgressions,**"*

But sin is still a reality in our lives as stated in verses 8 and 10 and that sin tends to break the love relationship and communication among the members of God's family and between us and God.

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Forgiveness and fellowship within the family of God is restored when we confess. John is not insisting that we must confess every individual sin but wants us to recognize that we are sinners saved by grace.

When we look at God's holiness it drives us to admit our ongoing sin and brings a desire to cleanse that sin from our lives and be holy as he is holy.

C. Thanksgiving

In this series we have considered much Scripture regarding prayer. One additional thing to consider is the place of giving thanks in the communication process.

In Paul's teaching on being filled with the Spirit he instructs us to do several things: Ephesians 5:18-20, *"And do not get drunk with wine, for that is dissipation, but be filled with the Spirit, speaking to one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody with your heart to the Lord; **always giving thanks for all things** in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ to God, even the Father;"*

In his teaching on living like Christ Paul's say: Philippians 4:6 and 7, "Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication **with thanksgiving** let your requests be made known to God. And the peace of God, which surpasses comprehension, shall guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus"

In Colossians 4:2 Paul speaks directly about prayer: "Devote yourselves to prayer, keeping alert in **it with {an attitude of} thanksgiving.**"

If you can't think of things to be thankful for just keep a running list as you read and study Scripture. This list is endless beginning with your Salvation, including all the blessings God richly pours out upon you every day, all the way to His involvement in the controlling of the universe.

Acknowledging and adoring God drives us to our knees in true repentance and confession which leads us to be truly thankful for who God is and what He is doing in our lives and in our world.

D. Supplication

I don't know about you, but this is the easy part. In fact I often find myself jumping right into this. Do not pass go, do not adore, do not confess, do not thank, just ask for your \$200.

Perhaps Timothy can help: 1Timothy 2:1-4, *"First of all, then, I urge that **entreaties {and} prayers, petitions {and} thanksgivings, be made on behalf of all men**, for kings and all who are in authority, in order that we may lead a tranquil and quiet life in all godliness and dignity.*

Why is this prayer so good? Because a tranquil and quiet life is good for evangelism. *This is good and acceptable in the sight of God our Savior, who desires **all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth.**"*

Paul suggests we pray for members of the body: Colossians 1:3, "We give thanks to God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, **praying always for you**, and in verses 9 and 10, "For this reason also, since the day we heard {of it} , **we have not ceased to pray for you** and to ask that you may be filled with the knowledge of His will in all spiritual wisdom and understanding, so that you may

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walk in a manner worthy of the Lord, to please {Him} in all respects, bearing fruit in every good work and increasing in the knowledge of God;

The Word also clearly instructs that we pray for our daily needs, for God's guidance and blessing, and for holiness.

1John 5:14, *"And this is the confidence which we have before Him, that, if we ask anything according to His will, He hears us."*

Prayer is talking to our Father and He is eager to give us good things both spiritual and physical as they fulfill his will for us.

III. CHRIST'S PATTERN

In Matthew six Jesus was teaching His disciples about prayer. In verse 5 He tells them "Don't be proud." In verse 6, "Don't be public," in verse 7, "don't be repetitious" and in verse 8, "Don't be like the heathen."

Then in verse 9 He says, ***"Pray, then, in this way:***

A. God's Paternity—"Our Father who is in heaven,"

1. He is our Father

God has appointed Himself to be a personal Father to believers.

Romans 8:15, *"For you have not received a spirit of slavery leading to fear again, but you have received a spirit of adoption as sons by which we cry out, "Abba! Father!"*

God is eager to hear, act, and bless in response to the prayer of His children and to fulfill His plan for our best and his glory. That is a comforting statement but we must remember . . .

2. He is in heaven

That means He isn't one of us. He is above us in a sphere by Himself. He is transcendent.

Psalms 115:3 answers the question, "Where is your God?" with this simple potent statement, *"our God is in the heavens; He does whatever He pleases.* So our personal love and enthusiasm for entering His presence must be tempered with awe and respect.

B. God's Priority—"Hallowed by Your Name."

1. What does hallowed mean?

Revelation 4:11 explains it clearly, *"Worthy art Thou, our Lord and our God, to receive glory and honor and power; for Thou didst create all things, and because of Thy will they existed, and were created."*

The Greek root word means to treat as Holy, set apart, lift to a different level, make extra ordinary.

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2. How do we hallow His name?

We prove our view of God by doing what He says.

Hebrew 11:6, "... *without faith it is impossible to please {Him}, for he who comes to God must believe that He is, and {that} He is a rewarder of those who seek Him.*

Our obedience to God in every area of our lives is the strongest witness of the truth of His existence.

C. God's Program—"Your kingdom come"

1. What is God's kingdom?

To pray "Your kingdom come" is to ask that the kingdom over which God reigns as King of Kings and Lord of Lords have an effect on earth even now. We long to see God's will done supernaturally in this world that is temporarily ruled by Satan.

2. How does it come?

His influence comes into the present world every time a new soul is taken from "*the domain of darkness, and transferred us to the kingdom of His beloved Son,*" as stated in Colossians 1:13.

His influence is felt every time we commit ourselves to his rule in our lives. Every time we obey His word we bring the kingdom of God into this beat up sinful world and bring him glory.

Frank Gabeline put it this way, "*We pray that God will exert His power, both by His Word and His Spirit so that the world might willingly submit to Him. And if the world doesn't submit willingly, then do it anyway, by His power.*"

D. God's Plan—"Your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven."

1. God is sovereign

God can and will do what He wants to do and yet He asks us to pray and considers those prayers in the carrying out of his will. We pray that God's desires will be our desires and we pray that His desires will prevail all over the earth. Moreover we pray that His will be done now as it is done in heaven.

2. How is his will done in heaven?

Just look at Scripture: God's will is done without wavering with no argument; willingly in its entirety; swiftly without procrastination; and constantly without question.

So far this pattern prayer has focused on God. His name is hallowed, his kingdom is extended, His will is being done in heaven and now the focus shifts to the here-and-now, to His will and care for us.

John Hanna wrote in his little book on prayer, "*The end of prayer is not so much about answers as it is about deepening our life dependence.*"

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J. I. Packer said, *"The prayer of a Christian is not an attempt to force God's hand, but a humble acknowledgement of helplessness and total dependence."*

E. God's Provision—*"Give us this day our daily bread"*

1. God takes responsibility

John MacArthur said, *"It is marvelous to understand that the God who created the entire universe, who is the God of all space and time and eternity, who is infinitely holy and completely self-sufficient, should care about supplying out physical needs . . . **God obliges Himself to supply our needs.**"*

Philippians 4:19 *"And my God shall supply all your needs according to His riches in glory in Christ Jesus."*

2. What does that imply?

We are reliant on God for everything and we need to acknowledge it. More than once I come face to face with the fact that I don't supply for the needs of my family and myself. If God didn't provide the job, the health, even the breath we would have nothing.

Moreover, God provides for our physical necessities so we can put our emphasis building our character. Matthew 6:33 puts it this way, *"But seek first His kingdom and His righteousness; and all these things shall be added to you."*

F. God's Pardon—*"And forgive us our debts as we have forgiven our debtors."*

1. Dealing with sin

The debt referred to here is obviously a moral and spiritual debt. We owe a debt of sin that we could never repay but God provided payment for that unpayable sin debt when Jesus died for us. That debt is paid in full and we are declared righteous before God.

But do we stop sinning when we come to faith? No! Therefore God's forgiveness must be extended continually to us and it is.

Why then ask for forgiveness? When we who are parents watch our children sin does that cause our relationship with them as parents to end? Of course not! However, it does cause our children to draw away from us and we lose intimacy with them.

When they come to us and ask forgiveness they renew the joy of the relationship. Look at I John 1 3-9 and you will see it clearly.

Why does God allow us to come again and again and again to Him for forgiveness? He shows His grace to us because the exercise of His mercy toward us brings glory to Him. That is why John Newton, Slave Trader and by his own estimation the greatest of sinners, could write the song,

"Amazing Grace how sweet the sound that saved a wretch like me."

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2. What does it mean?

As we noted in our study on forgiveness as a prerequisite for prayer, the very nature of God's unfailing forgiveness to us demands that we forgive those who sin against us.

G. God's Protection—*"And do not lead us into temptation but deliver us from evil."*

1. Our reaction to God's forgiveness

If we truly receive forgiveness of all our sin, and we do, we will strive to avoid continued sinning. Not only that, in the light of Romans 7 we know we are in a battle and need to pray for help.

But how does this verse square with James 1:13 which says clearly, *"Let no one say when he is tempted, 'I am being tempted by God'; for God cannot be tempted by evil, and He Himself does not tempt anyone."*

This is answered several ways:

1. The word "temptation" is basically a neutral word in Greek having no connotation of good or evil and so could refer to testing or proving as referred to in James 1 and 2, *"Consider it all joy, my brethren, when you encounter various trials, knowing that the testing of your faith produces endurance."* But why then did James use temptation in verse 13 and trial in verse 2.
2. God does not tempt us but allows us to be tempted. James 1:14 says, *"But each one is tempted when he is carried away and enticed by his own lust."* After all, God allowed Satan to tempt Job and even Jesus.
3. Another possibility presents itself with an alternative rendering that is possible from the Greek text, *"That we may not be lead into temptation, deliver us from evil."* This acknowledges that we are in danger from Satan and sin if God does not deliver us.

Which ever of these three answer you accept, the bottom line is the same. We need God's supernatural deliverance from the from evil as it assails us day by day.

2. God's reaction to us.

In a cursed world of sin and evil we are eager to confess our weaknesses and excited to watch as God brings deliverance.

I hope these patterns for Prayer will be useful in drawing you into regular, meaningful and purposed pray. Please communicate to the one who loves you more than the whole world.

Next week we will look briefly at some problems that confront us when we pray and then I will present a short study on the best selling book, "The Prayer of Jabez" by Bruce Wilkinson.