

## **PREPARATION FOR PRAYER**

### *Introduction:*

Prayer is not a religious duty but is communicating with the one with whom we have a love relationship. Our Creator God is a personal God who desires to have an on-going relationship with His created persons.

Prayer is communication that involves a person, *God's child*, speaking to his perfect father, *God*, who is more than willing to hear and is able to respond through an advocate mediator, *Jesus*, who presents us as righteous people indwelt by the *Holy Spirit* who helps us speak even when we won't or can't.

We pray because God commanded us to, because Jesus taught and modeled it in His own life, because God hears, responds and acts in answer to it, and because we have a love relationship that is based on His giving His life for us. All these factors demand our relationship response.

We have seen what prayer is and why it is vital. The logical next step is to consider how can we be heard? What are the prerequisites for effective prayer? Are there things we must do to be heard? Are there things we must avoid to keep the lines of communication open?

Visualize a chain of power poles or communications relay towers carrying power or communication lines from the source to your home.

### **Prayer Dilemma 1: Keeping the Lines Up and Open**

*If any one of these towers were to fall it would break the communication.*

In our Christian lives these poles or towers could illustrate the prerequisites for an effective communication between you and God in prayer:

S	B	M	P
A	E	O	U
L	L	T	R
V	I	I	I
A	E	V	T
T	F	E	Y
I		S	
O			
N			

We must study these prerequisites because the Scriptures teach that if we don't do certain things or we do certain things "God will not hear us!"

It is much like what happened to me when I was Director of Graphic Services at USC. We had a number of state of the art typesetting computers and several really fine operators. One day one of the machines went down and we tried everything but couldn't get it working.

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We had to call a repairman from San Francisco. When he answered the phone the first thing the company computer technician asked was, "Is it plugged in?" Sometimes we have serious spiritual or sin problems that disrupt our communication, but often it is simple carelessness or neglect that causes our prayer life to become ineffective and our communication to fail.

Here's another way to view of the prayer.

### **Prayer Dilemma 2: Building the Superstructure--TWO VIEWS OF LIFE**

**1. The General View:** Imagine your life as a pyramid, broad at the base and narrow at the top.

We are building our lives and moving from complexity to simplicity. We prepare and work hard to move from working slob to manager. We raise our families from crying pooping creatures into mature thinking individuals. We advance from week to week payments of mortgages and credit cards to homes, equity and financial responsibility. We move from hectic schedules and responsibilities toward maturity, control, freedom and simplicity (Possibly even retirement).

**2. The Realistic View:** Now, realize that you life is really more like an inverted pyramid, broad at the top and narrowing to a very small base.

In reality as time goes on we add more responsibilities, develop more ties, increase our involvement and find we have less and less control over our own lives. Our lives require a more effective prayer life as we grow and mature, not a less effective one.

How can we hold this mess together and survive this chaos. We need to build a strong **superstructure** and **add supports** so that this top heavy structure can stand.

That superstructure is made up of the "PREREQUISITES OF PRAYER" lives so lived so that our prayer life is effective and our prayers are heard.

But before we look at that . . . What are missing in these two pictures? How can these towers stand under the winds of change and storms of experience? How can this unwieldy structure of our lives survive?

They need a **strong foundation** placed on **bedrock**, a "Preparation for Prayer." What are the two foundational truths about communication with God that permeate the teaching of Scripture?

1. **FOUNDATION: OBEDIENCE** God expects obedient children.
2. **BEDROCK: KNOWLEDGE** God provides a reason for our obedience.

## **PREPARATION FOR PRAYER**

### **I. FOUNDATION: OBEDIENCE (Knowing God)**

#### **A. DEFINING IT**

There has always been some difficulty in defining sin and deciding how to classify or grade it. Are there "seven deadly sins" as the historical church has claimed? Or is there a standard that changes from time-to-time, culture-to-culture, or even church-to-church?

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Are all sins equal in intensity, importance, and consequence? Is there a sliding scale in heinousness and punishment? Or is it truly like one Jewish Rabbi claimed in a recent article, "Only two persons inhabit hell, Hitler and Stalin."

One problem we have is that there is a difference between the word translated "sin" and the several words translated "sins."

### 1. What is sin?

Sins are **acts of disobedience**. We "do" sins and since these are clearly defined in Scripture, we can attack them in our lives.

They may be acts of commission, as in the case of the healed man that Jesus instructed, "*do not sin anymore, so that nothing worse may befall you*" (John 5) or the episode of the woman caught in the act of adultery who Jesus told, "*Neither do I condemn you; go your way. From now on sin no more.*" (John 8) Or they may be acts of omission as described in James 4:17, "*Therefore, to one who knows {the} right thing to do, and does not do it, to him it is sin.*"

But just in case we should think we can live up to not sinning we have a much broader definition as explained in Romans 3:23, "*for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God,*" This has to do with sin rather than sins.

Sin (*hamartano*) is **shortfallness, missing the mark**. God's goal for us is perfection and no one can come up to that standard without God's help and that is why we needed a Savior.

### 2. What is obedience?

Since sin is disobedience and missing the mark, the opposite must be obedience and hitting the mark. Romans 5:19 explains, "For as through the one man's **disobedience** the many were made sinners, even so through the **obedience** of the One the many will be made righteous."

Or Romans 6:16, "*Do you not know that when you present yourselves to someone {as} slaves for obedience, you are slaves of the one whom you obey, either of sin resulting in death, or of obedience resulting in righteousness?*"

Obedience may then be defined as subjection to the authority of another. Or as that is explained in I Peter 2:16, "*{Act} as free men, and do not use your freedom as a covering for evil, but {use it} as bondslaves of God.*"

Everyday we face a choice, over and over, will we be obedient and follow Christ or disobedient and go our own way.

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### B. DIRECTING IT

#### 1. What kind of obedience?

Absolute!

In Andrew Murray's classic book *The Prayer Life* he writes, "Just as a servant knows that he must first obey his master in all things, to the surrender to an implicit and unquestionable obedience must become the essential characteristic of our lives."

We follow the example of Jesus who, when He faced His greatest challenge said, "Not my will but yours" and "I came to do the will of the father."

Psalms 139:23 and 24 says, "Search me, O God, and know my heart; Try me and know my anxious thoughts; and see if there be **any hurtful way [any sin]** in me, and lead me in the everlasting way."

Even our thoughts have to be brought under absolute control. 2 Corinthians 10:5, "{We are} destroying speculations and every lofty thing raised up against the knowledge of God, and {we are} **taking every thought captive to the obedience of Christ,**".

#### 2. Is it possible?

This seems like such a lofty and impossible goal but Jesus said to us in John 14:15, "If you love Me, you will keep My commandments." How do we do that? Look at verses 16, "And I will ask the Father, and He will give you another Helper, that He may be with you forever;"

Absolute obedience is possible for the person who relies on the Holy Spirit to fill him daily and conform him to the image of Christ.

1Pet. 1:14-16 puts it this way, "As **obedient** children, do not be conformed to the former lusts {which were yours} in your ignorance, but like the Holy One who called you, be holy yourselves also in all {your} behavior; because it is written, "YOU SHALL **BE HOLY, FOR I AM HOLY.**"

### C. DOING IT

OK, so we want to be obedient and not sin; now how do we do it?

#### 1. New awareness of sin.

Romans 7 says it so clearly starting as verse 18, "For I know that nothing good dwells in me, that is, in my flesh; for the wishing is present in me, but the doing of the good {is} not. For the good that I wish, I do not do; but I practice the very evil that I do not wish. But if I am doing the very thing I do not wish, I am no longer the one doing it, but sin which dwells in me. I find then the principle that evil is present in me, the one who wishes to do good.

*For I joyfully concur with the law of God in the inner man, but I see a different law in the members of my body, waging war against the law of my mind, and making me a prisoner of the law of sin which is in my members.*

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Romans 7:24 continues, *"Wretched man that I am! Who will set me free from the body of this death? And then the answer starting in verse 25 **"Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ our Lord! So then, on the one hand I myself with my mind am serving the law of God, but on the other, with my flesh the law of sin.***

Moving on into Romans 8, ***"There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus. For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus has set you free from the law of sin and of death. For what the Law could not do, weak as it was through the flesh, God {did:} sending His own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh and {as an offering} for sin, He condemned sin in the flesh, in order that the requirement of the Law might be fulfilled in us, who do not walk according to the flesh, but according to the Spirit.***

### 2. New surrender to Jesus.

Philippians 2:13, "it is God who is at work in you, both to will and to work for {His} good pleasure. How does He work? Romans 12:1 explains, *"I urge you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies a living and holy sacrifice, acceptable to God, {which is} your spiritual service of worship."* Think like Christ so that you may obey the will of God that is good, reasonable, acceptable, and perfect.

The amazing thing is that obeying isn't painful. In fact, it's profitable. James 1:25 makes it clear, "But one who looks intently at the perfect law, the {law} of liberty, and abides by it, not having become a forgetful hearer but an effectual doer, this man shall be blessed in what he does."

Then this foundation must be placed in "good ground" an "solid rock."

## II. BEDROCK: KNOWLEDGE (KNOWING GOD)

Jeremiah 9:23 and 23 says something very interesting about knowing God. *"Thus says the LORD, "Let not a wise man boast of his wisdom, and let not the mighty man boast of his might, let not a rich man boast of his riches; but let him who boasts boast of this, **that he understands and knows Me, that I am the LORD who exercises lovingkindness, justice, and righteousness on earth; for I delight in these things,**" declares the LORD.*

So, if you want to brag about something, brag about this, that you understand and know God.

***There are three ways to discover who God is and what He is like:***

### A. THE ATTRIBUTE RECORD

#### 1. What is an attribute?

An attribute is a particular characteristic or quality that distinguishes somebody. Attributes or characteristics help us discern the true nature of a person, what he is like, and how he acts and reacts.

Knowing who God is truly helps us to put our complete trust in Him and His Word. He is trustworthy and thus inspires our faith reliance, and more importantly, our obedience.

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### **2. Where do we find God's attributes?**

Though we can discern much about God by observing nature the only comprehensive source of information is the Bible. If you want a rigorous, exciting and challenging study take the twelve or so pages under the heading God in any exhaustive concordance and look up very reference.

List the attributes or other information revealed by each reference. Next, organize the information into a topical index of characteristics and you will have a very broad view of God, who he is and what He is like. This is a thrilling way to know God and build faith.

### **B. THE CHARACTER RECORD**

#### **1. What's in a name?**

One of the most interesting things you discover if you study Biblical Hebrew is to notice the emphasis placed of names. When a Jew named a child he worked hard to make the name meaningful.

Perhaps the name described his conception, his place in the family, or even the parent's hopes and dreams for his future. And when God named a child or changed a persons name it had serious significance. If that was true for persons what about God.

#### **2. What do the names of God reveal?**

Can you imagine the importance of the meanings of the names God gave to Himself? This is another great study. You can do it with a Bible Dictionary, concordance, or one of many good books on the subject.

You find that God refers to himself as God: the ever existing; the ever becoming; the just; the merciful; the all powerful; the Lord and Master; the savior; the healer; the deliverer; the sanctifier; peace; righteousness, shepherd, etc.

### **C. THE HUMAN RECORD**

#### **1. What is an image?**

In normal use the word image refers to:

"A picture or likeness of somebody or something, produced either physically by a sculptor, painter, or photographer, or conjured in the mind." (In Bible times the stamping on a coin)

"Somebody who is very like somebody else in appearance." In a Biblical sense it refers to an exact copy: "Man was created in the image or "likeness of God. "Jesus is the very image or "likeness of God."

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### **2. Who is God's image?**

2 Corinthians 4:4 makes it clear, ". . . *the god of this world has blinded the minds of the unbelieving, that they might not see the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God.*

Colossians 1:13-15 says, "*For He [God] delivered us from the domain of darkness, and transferred us to the kingdom of His beloved Son [Jesus], in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins. And He [Jesus] is the image of the invisible God, the first-born of all creation.*

So, if you want to know what God is like, study Jesus. Master the Gospels and what the Apostles had to say about Him. Colossians 2:9 *sums it up, "For in Him all the fullness of Deity dwells in bodily form,"*

#### **The Bottom Line:**

In order for the lines of communication to remain open and for our prayer life to stand and be effective we must first build on the foundation of obedience to God and His Word.

We are quick to obey because we know who God is and that He is worthy of our trust.

With this trusty bedrock on which to build a foundation of obedience, we are ready to look at the "Prerequisites of Prayer" that assure our prayers will be heard and that our communication with our Heavenly Father is affective.