

Prerequisites for Prayer Part II

Introduction:

Effective prayer is purposeful:

Prayer is an active communication between created children and their father, the Creator God. We desire this on going relationship 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.

Effective prayer demands preparation:

Effective communication with God is founded on our intimate knowledge of Him. Enlarging our God picture can broaden that knowledge. We expand our view of God by studying what Scriptures tell us of Him and by looking at His image in bodily form, Jesus.

Knowing who God is builds trust and brings us to a willingness to do what He instructs us to do and to avoid what He warns us not to do.

Knowledge of God and total trust in Him provide a solid foundation and bedrock ground on which to base our conversation.

Today we continue to look at prerequisites for prayer:

The Bible clearly teaches that there are certain conditions that can help or hinder our communication with God. God has chosen to present certain parameters for effective interaction between God and us.

To quickly review of last week's prerequisites:

1. SALVATION

In Isaiah 59, verses 1 and 2 it explains the problems that sin cause in communication. *"Behold, the LORD'S hand is not so short that it cannot save; neither is His ear so dull that it cannot hear. But your iniquities have made a **separation between you and your God**, and your sins have hidden {His} face from you, so that **He does not hear**. John 9:31 *"We know that God does not hear sinners; but if anyone is God-fearing, and does His will, He hears him.**

Sin causes a barrier between man and God and until that sin problem is addressed man and God remain separated. It takes the substitute sacrifice of a perfect man, Jesus, to remove that sin barrier and allow us to have an intimate, face-to-face involvement with God. We must be saved in order to have effective communication with God.

The first prerequisite for prayer is Salvation, the removal of the sin barrier.

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2. HEARING

God demands reciprocity. If we want Him to hear us we must listen to Him. And how does He communicate with us? Through His Word. This is stated in John 15:7, "*If you abide in Me, **and My words abide in you**, ask whatever you wish, and it shall be done for you.*"

Prayer is communication so we must listen to God as well as talk to Him.

3. FAITH

Mark 11:24 says, "*Therefore I say to you, all things for which you pray and ask, **believe that you have received them, and they shall be {granted} you.***"

Because biblical faith is a belief that God can do anything chooses to do, we want is to find out what those desires of God are so we can agree with Him that His will should be done. If we abide in Him and His words abide in us and we believe without doubt that He keeps his word, then we can pray with assurance that He will hear and respond.

Our prayers must be confident, full of faith, based on who God is.

4. PURITY

Ps. 66:18. "*If I regard wickedness in my heart, The Lord will not hear;*"

If we harbor sin in our hearts or allow patterns of ongoing sin in our lives, God does not hear our prayer. Going back to 1 John 3:21 and 22 it tells us, "*Beloved, if our heart does not condemn us, we have confidence before God; and whatever we ask we receive from Him, . . .*"

We also find it stated this way in 1John 1:6, "*If we say that we have fellowship [or communication] with Him and {yet} walk in the darkness, we lie and do not practice the truth;*"

But verse 9 explains, "*If we confess our sins, He is faithful and righteous to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.*"

Since continual sinning separates us from God we must live righteously.

5. RIGHT MOTIVES

James 4:3 states very simply and clearly, "*You ask and do not receive, because you **ask with wrong motives**,*" and what are these wrong motives, "*so that you may spend {it} on your pleasures.*"

It is a natural tendency for people to ask for things with a selfish purpose. Unbelievers seek things for their own pleasure. What do believers seek things for?

Whatever happens to us as believers, God intends to use as an instrument to spread His grace to more and more people and that brings glory to God. The ultimate goal of every believer then is to speak, live, and even to pray in such a way as to bring glory to God not to ourselves.

1Cor. 10:31 puts it this way, "*Whether, then, you eat or drink or **whatever you do**, do all to the glory of God.*"

The proper motive for our prayer life is to bring glory to God.

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6. FORGIVENESS

In Mark 11:25 and 26 Jesus is dealing with the question of effective prayer, *"And whenever you stand praying, forgive, if you have anything against anyone; so that your Father also who is in heaven may forgive you your transgressions. ["But if you do not forgive, **neither will your Father who is in heaven forgive your transgressions.**"]* Remember, unforsaken sin is a hindrance to communication between God and us.

Col. 3:12-14 *"And so, as those who have been chosen of God, holy and beloved, put on a heart of compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience; bearing with one another, and **forgiving each other, whoever has a complaint against anyone; just as the Lord forgave you, so also should you. And beyond all these things {put on} love, which is the perfect bond of unity."***

The very nature of God's forgiveness of us "while we were yet sinners" demands that we forgive others.

Having an attitude of forgiveness is part of righteous living leading to open communication.

7. LOVE FOR OTHERS

God says, "If you love Me, keep My commandments." And in Mark 12:30 and 31 Jesus said the greatest commandment is "AND YOU SHALL LOVE THE LORD YOUR GOD WITH ALL YOUR HEART, AND WITH ALL YOUR SOUL, AND WITH ALL YOUR MIND, AND WITH ALL YOUR STRENGTH." The second is this, 'YOU SHALL LOVE YOUR NEIGHBOR AS YOURSELF.' There is no other commandment greater than these."

Remember from last week I John 3:23 said, *"And this is His commandment, that we believe in the name of His Son Jesus Christ, and love one another, just as He commanded us.*

How does this "great commandment" tie to effective prayer?

1. Love causes response to people in need. Proverbs 21:13, *"He who shuts his ear to the cry of the poor will also cry himself and not be answered.*
2. Love leads to intercession for other believers. Paul tells us in Ephesians 6:18 and 19, "With all prayer and petition pray at all times in the Spirit, and with this in view, be on the alert with all perseverance and petition for all the saints
3. Love leads to intercession for your enemies. Matthew 5:43 and 44, "You have heard that it was said, 'YOU SHALL LOVE YOUR NEIGHBOR, and hate your enemy.' "But I say to you, love your enemies, and pray for those who persecute you
4. Love for wives makes for effective prayer. 1 Peter 3:7, *"You husbands likewise, live with {your wives} in an understanding way, as with a weaker vessel, since she is a woman; and*

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grant her honor as a fellow heir of the grace of life, so that your prayers may not be hindered."

Since love is an expression of our relationship to God it is a key to open communication with God.

8. PERSISTANCE

In Luke 11 and Luke 18 Jesus told parables to make a point about prayer. In fact, in Luke 18:1 it says, *"Now He was telling them a parable to show that at all times they ought to pray and not to lose heart,"*

The story in Luke 18:1-8 is about a widow who continues to hound a judge in order to hear her case and bring her relief. She harasses him until he finally hears her case to get rid of her, for he says, "She is beating me black and blue" with her persistence.

The second story, in Luke 11:5-8 is about a man that had an unexpected guest that came to his home at night and he had nothing to feed him. He went to a friend's house and woke him up even though it was in the middle of the night and forced him to loan him some bread.

Jesus explains that the meaning of these stories is persevering in prayer when he states in Luke 11:9, *"And I say to you, ask, and it shall be given to you; seek, and you shall find; knock, and it shall be opened to you."*

Persistent prayer is commanded, not for God's benefit because he is "sales resistant" or cruel, but for our benefit:

First, it strengthens us for future trials. Perseverance always builds strength and endurance whether it is in sports, work, or life. Jesus pointed this out to his disciples in the garden just before He was arrested.

In Matthew 26:41 he told them, *"Keep watching and praying, that you may not enter into temptation; the spirit is willing, but the flesh is weak."*

Second, it focuses us on God so we recognize where the power to live a victorious life comes from the Holy Spirit and leads us to a spirit of thanks.

This is explained in 1Corinthians 15:55-58, *"O DEATH, WHERE IS YOUR VICTORY? O DEATH, WHERE IS YOUR STING?" The sting of death is sin, and the power of sin is the law; but thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ. Therefore, my beloved brethren, be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that your toil is not {in} vain in the Lord."*

And third, it is effective as Jesus taught in Luke 11:13, *"If you then, being evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more shall {your} heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to those who ask Him?"*

God has commanded perseverance in prayer for our benefit and His glory.

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9. HUMILITY

All of Scripture makes it plain that God hates pride and honors humility. Isaiah 66:2 talks of God looking over His creation and saying, *"For My hand made all these things, Thus all these things came into being," declares the LORD. "But to this one I will look, to him who is humble and contrite of spirit, and who trembles at My word."*

In His major discourse on pride in Matthew 6 Jesus condemns giving with pomp and circumstance in public in order to be honored by man explaining that when you do you receive your only reward in man's applause but no eternal reward from God.

He then moves on to prayer in verses 5 and 6, *"And when you pray, you are not to be as the hypocrites; for they love to stand and pray in the synagogues and on the street corners, in order to be seen by men. Truly I say to you, they have their reward in full. "But you, when you pray, go into your inner room, and when you have shut your door, pray to your Father who is in secret, and your Father who sees in secret will repay you."*

In his substantial passage on prayer James said it clearly, "GOD IS OPPOSED TO THE PROUD, BUT GIVES GRACE TO THE HUMBLE."

Why would pride tend to interfere with our prayer life and affect our communication with God? Because pride causes us to take credit for the answers and that robs God of the glory He deserves.

In Luke 18:10-14 Jesus also dealt with this problem in a parable: *"Two men went up into the temple to pray, one a Pharisee, and the other a tax-gatherer. **The Pharisee stood and was praying thus to himself,** 'God, I thank Thee that I am not like other people: swindlers, unjust, adulterers, or even like this tax-gatherer. 'I fast twice a week; I pay tithes of all that I get.'*

*"But the tax-gatherer, standing some distance away, was even unwilling to lift up his eyes to heaven, but was beating his breast, saying, 'God, be merciful to me, the sinner!' "I tell you, this man went down to his house justified rather than the other; **for everyone who exalts himself shall be humbled, but he who humbles himself shall be exalted.**"*

Humility is necessary if we are to pray to God rather than just talk to ourselves.

10. REMOVAL OF IDOLS

The Elders of Israel came to Ezekiel and asked Him to pray for them. He was probably pleased because he was a prophet and that was his job. He longed for a sign of any response from this stiff-necked people.

But God told him not to pray for them and gave this reason in Ezekiel 14:3, *"Son of man, these men have **set up their idols in their hearts,** and have put right before their faces the stumbling block of their iniquity. Should I be consulted by them at all?"*

Of course we don't have idols of stone, wood, iron or gold to steal our allegiance from God, but notice they *"**set up their idols in their hearts.**"* We certainly can allow things to shift our focus from Him.

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The rich young man in Mark 10 could not forsake his wealth and follow. The busy land purchaser, the oxen buyer, the newly married man in Luke 14 could not take time out to except the invitation. We often bow at the feet of work, or television, or books, or possessions, or activities and neglect communication with our Lord and Savior.

Communication can be hindered by a preoccupation with things that cause us to lose focus on our love relationship with God.

11. IN JESUS NAME

The words, "In Jesus' Name" have become a magic phrase to many. Words with secret magical powers, like a mantra to be repeated in order to guarantee our prayer will be heard. But Jesus has told us to avoid vain repetitions like the idol worshipers use. What does it mean, then, to pray in Jesus' name?

Look at the use of the phrase throughout the New Testament:

Matt. 18:5 *"And whoever receives one such child **in My name** receives Me;"* (Mark 9:37; Luke 9:48) To receive a person because Jesus desires it.

Matt. 18:20 *"For where two or three have gathered together **in My name**, there I am in their midst."* To discipline because Jesus desires it.

Matt. 24:5 *"For many will come **in My name**, saying, 'I am the Christ,' and will mislead many."* (Mark 13:6; Luke 21:8) To claim equality with Christ as if Jesus desires it.

Mark 16:17 *"And these signs will accompany those who have believed: **in My name** they will cast out demons, they will speak with new tongues;"* (Mark 16:18; Mark 9:39) To do sign miracles because Jesus desires it.

John 14:26 *"But the Helper, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send **in My name**, He will teach you all things, and bring to your remembrance all that I said to you."* To minister to the believer because Jesus desire it.

It would seem, then, that the use of the phrase "In My Name" or "In Jesus' Name" indicates in according to what Jesus desires. This fits well with wanting to have His desires become our desires or wanting to pray in concert with His will.

In John 14:12 Jesus makes an unbelievable claim, John 14:12 *"Truly, truly, I say to you, he who believes in Me {becomes a Christian by faith}, the works that I do shall he do also; and greater {works} than these shall he do; because I go to the Father."*

Faith gospel preachers have used this for years to prove that the miracles that Jesus did are still normative, in fact are to be surpassed by men in the church today.

We know by the context of Scripture, however, that He was speaking about the much greater miracle of spiritual rebirth to multitudes of people that came with the introduction of the Holy Spirit to the church. Any physical miracle pales in comparison to the miracle of new birth.

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In this context Jesus continues in verses 13 and 14, *"And whatever you ask in My name, that will I do, that the Father may be glorified in the Son. **If you ask Me anything in My name, I will do {it.}**"*

This is supported by John 15:16, *"You did not choose Me, but I chose you, and appointed you, that **you should go and bear fruit**, and {that} your fruit should remain, that **whatever you ask of the Father in My name, He may give to you.**"* Of course we know it is God's will that we evangelize so this is surely a prayer offered in Jesus' name or in line with His desires.

Last we have this powerful passage in John 16:23-26, *"And in that day you will ask Me no question. Truly, truly, I say to you, **if you shall ask the Father for anything, He will give it to you in My name.** **Until now you have asked for nothing in My name; ask, and you will receive, that your joy may be made full. In that day you will ask in My name, . . . and I do not say to you that I will request the Father on your behalf; for the Father Himself loves you, because you have loved Me, and have believed that I came forth from the Father.**"*

This, of course referred to that time after the ascension when the Holy Spirit came and Jesus' followers began to pray directly to the Father according to the desires of their Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

We can enter boldly into the throne room of God only because of the substitute sacrifice of Jesus and therefore we pray in Jesus' name.

Whether we say "In Jesus Name" or not that needs to be our heart attitude.

12. ACCORDING TO GOD'S WILL

1John 5:14-15, *"And this is the confidence which we have before Him, that, **if we ask anything according to His will, He hears us.** And if we know that He hears us {in} whatever we ask, we know that we have the requests which we have asked from Him." How do we know the will of God?*

Paul helped us to understand this. In Colossians 1:9-12 *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 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**; strengthened with all power, according to His glorious might, for the attaining of all steadfastness and patience; joyously giving thanks to the Father, who has qualified us to share in the inheritance of the saints in light."*

How can we "become filled with the knowledge of His will in all spiritual wisdom and understanding?" There is just one way, through the study of God's Word.

A great study for you to undertake is to look at the scriptures that specifically say, "This is the will of God concerning you" or similar statements. You will find that His will is clear. Or you might keep a notebook at hand when you are reading and studying and jot down clear teachings of what God wants. Then you can pray with this backdrop or mindset of what God wants permeating your communication with God.

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Then, of course, when His will is not clear, or we're too emotionally involved, we have the promise of Romans 8:26 and 27, "*And in the same way the Spirit also helps our weakness; for we do not know how to pray as we should, but the Spirit Himself intercedes for {us} with groanings too deep for words; and He who searches the hearts knows what the mind of the Spirit is, because He intercedes for the saints according to {the will of} God.*"

As we mature in our walk we should find it more natural to seek God's will as we pray.