

The Privilege of Prayer

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Introduction:

Just imagine receiving an invitation to speak personally to the President of the United States or some other world leader. One of President Ronald Reagan's staff members described the preparation the president made to greet heads of state and royal dignitaries, ten full days of intensive study to learn the history and customs of his guests, their culture, personal character and anything else that would allow him to address them with the respect due their position.

Now, think of the privilege every child of God has to receive at an instant, an audience with the King of Kings, the Creator and Sustainer of the universe, the God of all Glory, and to know that He *longs* to speak with you and is waiting to receive you and commune with you personally and intimately.

Prayer is the most powerful force in the universe! It is indispensable to God's blessings and nothing of abiding or eternal consequence is accomplished without it. And yet no power so awesome and infinite has been so freely extended but so *infrequently* employed by man. Of prayer, the great English preacher, C. H. Spurgeon, wrote:

"My own soul's conviction is that prayer is the grandest power in the entire universe; that it has a more omnipotent force than electricity, attraction, gravitation, or any other of those other secret forces which men have called by name, but which they do not understand... I would rather be master of the art of prayer than M.A. of both Oxford and Cambridge Universities. He who knows how to pray has his hand on the leverage which moves the universe." (*Spurgeon at His Best*, Baker Book House, Page 142)

1. The Definition of Prayer:

A. Some Things Prayer Is Not:

1. Prayer Is Not an **Inherent Right**:

A leading twentieth-century charismatic preacher once spoke of a "Christian Bill of Rights;" specific *inalienable rights* guaranteed in the Scriptures, which, if the Lord neglected, believers might *demand in the name of Christ!* That God would neglect His covenant promises is an attitude totally destitute of spiritual discernment! Further, no one has the right to *demand* anything from God Almighty; such an attitude borders on sacrilege!

2. Prayer Is Not **Casual in Nature**:

The irreverence demonstrated by some toward God during prayer is evidence of a lack of spirituality or regard for His Holy character. Sadly, many who should be *filled with awe*, are merely *awful*:

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But know that the LORD hath set apart him that is godly for himself: the LORD will hear when I call unto him. Stand in awe, and sin not: commune with your own heart upon your bed, and be still. (Psalms 4: 3-4)

B. Prayer Is **Sacred Communion** with **Almighty God**:

1. Prayer Involves an **Entreaty**:

Call unto me, and I will answer thee, and shew thee great and mighty things, which thou knowest not. (Jeremiah 33: 3)

An Entreaty May Be **Spoken**:

Evening, and morning, and at noon, will I pray, and cry aloud: and he shall hear my voice. (Psalms 55: 17)

Prayer May Be Inaudible, **from the Heart**:

Delight thyself also in the LORD: and he shall give thee the desires of thine heart. Commit thy way unto the LORD; trust also in him; and he shall bring it to pass. (Psalms 37: 4-5)

An Entreaty May Be **Unspoken**:

Let the words of my mouth, and the meditation of my heart, be acceptable in thy sight, O LORD, my strength, and my redeemer. (Psalms 19: 14)

An Entreaty May Be **Unspeakable**:

Likewise the Spirit also helpeth our infirmities: for we know not what we should pray for as we ought: but the Spirit itself maketh intercession for us with groanings which cannot be uttered. And he that searcheth the hearts knoweth what is the mind of the Spirit, because he maketh intercession for the saints according to the will of God. (Romans 8: 26-27)

2. Prayer **Always** Includes a **Response**:

Prayer Requires **Listening**, and **Waiting upon the Lord**:

I waited patiently for the LORD; and he inclined unto me, and heard my cry. (Psalms 40: 1)

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But they that wait upon the LORD shall renew their strength; they shall mount up with wings as eagles; they shall run, and not be weary; and they shall walk, and not faint. (Isaiah 40: 31)

Be still, and know that I am God. (Psalms 46: 10)

In Response to Prayer, God **Speaks to the Heart:**

The word of the LORD came to him, and he said unto him, What doest thou here, Elijah? And he said, Go forth, and stand upon the mount before the LORD. And, behold, the LORD passed by, and a great and strong wind rent the mountains, and brake in pieces the rocks before the LORD; but the LORD was not in the wind: and after the wind an earthquake; but the LORD was not in the earthquake: And after the earthquake a fire; but the LORD was not in the fire: and after the fire a still small voice. (1 Kings 19: 9, 11-12)

God Often Answers Prayer Through **Divine Providence:**

The LORD is my shepherd; I shall not want. He maketh me to lie down in green pastures: he leadeth me beside the still waters. He restoreth my soul: he leadeth me in the paths of righteousness for his name's sake. Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil: for thou art with me; thy rod and thy staff they comfort me. Thou preparest a table before me in the presence of mine enemies: thou anointest my head with oil; my cup runneth over. Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life: and I will dwell in the house of the LORD for ever. (Psalms 23: 6)

And we know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to his purpose. (Romans 8: 28)

3. Prayer Is an **Appeal for God's Blessings:**

The believer's *model prayer* (often called *The Lord's Prayer*) is the Lord's response to His disciples' request; *Lord, teach us to pray* (Luke 11: 1). Without question the best known and most often repeated prayer in history, it embodies the perfect submission of man's affairs to God:

After this manner therefore pray ye: Our Father which art in heaven, Hallowed be thy name. Thy kingdom come. Thy will be done in earth, as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread. And forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors. And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil: For thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory, for ever. Amen. (Matthew 6: 9-13)

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It Acknowledges the Holiness of God: *Our Father which art in heaven, Hallowed be thy name.*

It Is Mindful of Christ's Coming Kingdom: *Thy kingdom come.*

It Seeks God's Will over That of Man: *Thy will be done in earth, as it is in heaven.*

It Includes a Petition for Daily Needs: *Give us this day our daily bread.*

It Seeks Forgiveness, Through Forgiveness: *And forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors.*

It Asks Divine Leadership in Living: *And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil.*

It Closes with a Benediction of Glory and Praise, a Proper Withdrawal from the Presence of Royalty: *For thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory, for ever. Amen.*

2. Critical Assumptions to Prayer:

A. Prayer Is a **Holy Privilege**:

1. Prayer Is a **Grace** Secured at **Great Price**:

Seeing then that we have a great high priest, that is passed into the heavens, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold fast our profession. For we have not an high priest which cannot be touched with the feeling of our infirmities; but was in all points tempted like as we are, yet without sin. (Hebrews 4: 14-15)

2. Prayer Is a **Personal Audience** with God:

Let us therefore come boldly unto the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy, and find grace to help in time of need. (Hebrews 4: 16)

3. Prayer Is a Prominent **Element of Worship**:

Let my prayer be set forth before thee as incense; and the lifting up of my hands as the evening sacrifice. (Psalms 141: 2)

And at midnight Paul and Silas prayed, and sang praises unto God: and the prisoners heard them. (Acts 16: 25)

By him therefore let us offer the sacrifice of praise to God continually, that is, the fruit of our lips giving thanks to his name. (Hebrews 13: 15)

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B. Consider the **Invitation** to Pray:

I exhort therefore, that, first of all, supplications, prayers, intercessions, and giving of thanks, be made for all men; I will therefore that men pray every where, lifting up holy hands, without wrath and doubting. (1 Timothy 2: 1, 8)

1. Prayer Is the *Prerogative of Saints*; the Invitation to Pray Implies a Right Relationship to God:

The LORD is far from the wicked: but he heareth the prayer of the righteous. (Proverbs 15: 29)

2. Does God Hear the Prayers of Unbelievers?:

He that turneth away his ear from hearing the law, even his prayer shall be abomination. (Proverbs 28: 9)

Our *Omniscient* (all-knowing) God hears everything. No word or thought is concealed, and He knows both the testimony and the heart of the wicked. The *fatherhood of God and brotherhood of man* heresy has convinced some that God is bound in a *mystical* (and false!) relationship which permits even the *heathen* a dialogue with Him. According to the Scriptures, *no such relationship exists!* It is not God who is *obligated* to hear, but men who must be *reconciled* to God through repentance and saving faith.

Though God is under no obligation to hear unbelievers, He most certainly desires them to be converted (2 Peter 3: 9), and makes abundant provision for their salvation. The Lord speaks to sinners by the testimony of creation (Romans 1: 20), and by the gospel (Romans 1: 16), by the testimony of the redeemed, and of one's own conscience. Surely in His *providential* calling, God may incline Himself to the plea of any man, but the one universal prayer that He will hear of all is, *God be merciful to me a sinner.* (Luke 18: 13)

C. Identifying **Prohibitions** to Prayer:

1. Prayer Is Sometimes Prohibited **by the Scriptures**:

If any man see his brother sin a sin which is not unto death, he shall ask, and he shall give him life for them that sin not unto death. There is a sin unto death: I do not say that he shall pray for it. (1 John 5: 16)

There are several such *sins unto death* revealed in the Scriptures. All such references regard *believers*; therefore, they involve *physical death* (departing earthly life *prematurely*), and not *losing one's salvation*. The *sins unto death* include:

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Lying to the Holy Ghost:

But Peter said, Ananias, why hath Satan filled thine heart to lie to the Holy Ghost, and to keep back part of the price of the land? Whiles it remained, was it not thine own? and after it was sold, was it not in thine own power? why hast thou conceived this thing in thine heart? thou hast not lied unto men, but unto God. And Ananias hearing these words fell down, and gave up the ghost: and great fear came on all them that heard these things.
(Acts 5: 1-10)

Living Carnally after the Flesh:

For if ye live after the flesh, ye shall die: but if ye through the Spirit do mortify the deeds of the body, ye shall live. (Romans 8: 13)

Defiling the Temple of the Holy Spirit:

Know ye not that ye are the temple of God, and that the Spirit of God dwelleth in you? If any man defile the temple of God, him shall God destroy; for the temple of God is holy, which temple ye are.
(1 Corinthians 3: 16-17)

The Unrepentant Debauchery of Fornication:

It is reported commonly that there is fornication among you, and such fornication as is not so much as named among the Gentiles, that one should have his father's wife. And ye are puffed up, and have not rather mourned, that he that hath done this deed might be taken away from among you. For I verily, as absent in body, but present in spirit, have judged already, as though I were present, concerning him that hath so done this deed, In the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, when ye are gathered together, and my spirit, with the power of our Lord Jesus Christ, To deliver such an one unto Satan for the destruction of the flesh, that the spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord Jesus. (1 Corinthians 5: 1-5)

Murmuring Against God:

Neither murmur ye, as some of them also murmured, and were destroyed of the destroyer. Now all these things happened unto them for ensamples: and they are written for our admonition, upon whom the ends of the world are come. (1 Corinthians 10: 10-11)

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Misbehavior at the Lord's Supper:

But let a man examine himself, and so let him eat of that bread, and drink of that cup. For he that eateth and drinketh unworthily, eateth and drinketh damnation to himself, not discerning the Lord's body. For this cause many are weak and sickly among you, and many sleep. (1 Corinthians 11: 27-32)

Rebellion Against God's Chastisement:

Furthermore we have had fathers of our flesh which corrected us, and we gave them reverence: shall we not much rather be in subjection unto the Father of spirits, and live?... And make straight paths for your feet, lest that which is lame be turned out of the way; but let it rather be healed. (Hebrews 12: 9, 13)

2. Prayer Is **Inappropriate** When God **Directs Silence** Concerning a Matter:

Ephraim is joined to idols: let him alone. (Hosea 4: 17)

Therefore pray not thou for this people, neither lift up a cry or prayer for them: for I will not hear them in the time that they cry unto me for their trouble. (Jeremiah 11: 14)

3. Prayer Is **Pointless** When the Holy Spirit **Withdraws Conviction**:

And the LORD said, My spirit shall not always strive with man. (Genesis 6: 3)

Because I have called, and ye refused; I have stretched out my hand, and no man regarded; But ye have set at nought all my counsel, and would none of my reproof: I also will laugh at your calamity; I will mock when your fear cometh... Then shall they call upon me, but I will not answer; they shall seek me early, but they shall not find me. (Proverbs 1: 24-26, 28)

He, that being often reprov'd hardeneth his neck, shall suddenly be destroyed, and that without remedy. (Proverbs 29: 1)

4. Prayer May Be Overshadowed by **Preoccupation with Tragedy**:

Very few people genuinely intend to ignore God and go to hell. Most honestly hope to *make things right* at some point. Some even contemplate a *deathbed conversion*; putting salvation off until the last possible moment. The danger in such reasoning is that it makes no provision for the *unexpected*: sudden death, with no time to pray, or a physical calamity so dreadful that no thought is given to prayer! Consider the wisdom

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in the words of one preacher who said, "I believe in deathbed repentance, but I don't recommend it!"

D. Things to **Avoid** in Prayer:

1. When Praying, Avoid **Vain Repetitions**:

But when ye pray, use not vain repetitions, as the heathen do: for they think that they shall be heard for their much speaking. Be not ye therefore like unto them: for your Father knoweth what things ye have need of, before ye ask him. (Matthew 6: 7-8)

2. Sincere Prayer Avoids **Asking Amis**:

Ye ask, and receive not, because ye ask amiss, that ye may consume it upon your lusts. (James 4: 3)

3. Faithful Prayer Avoids **Stopping Short**:

And he spake a parable unto them to this end, that men ought always to pray, and not to faint. (Luke 18: 1)

Praying always with all prayer and supplication in the Spirit, and watching thereunto with all perseverance and supplication for all saints. (Ephesians 6: 18)

4. Reverent Prayer Avoids **Charging God Foolishly**:

Then Job arose, and rent his mantle, and shaved his head, and fell down upon the ground, and worshipped, And said, Naked came I out of my mother's womb, and naked shall I return thither: the LORD gave, and the LORD hath taken away; blessed be the name of the LORD. In all this Job sinned not, nor charged God foolishly. (Job 1: 20-22)

E. **Truths Prerequisite** to Prayer:

1. Prayer Assumes the **Consecration of Believers**:

There must Be a Genuine **New-birth Experience**:

Jesus answered and said unto him, Verily, verily, I say unto thee, Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God. Marvel not that I said unto thee, Ye must be born again. (John 3: 3, 7)

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Prayer Depends upon **Right Living**:

And whatsoever we ask, we receive of him, because we keep his commandments, and do those things that are pleasing in his sight.

(1 John 3: 22)

Prayer Is Disrupted by **Unconfessed Sin**:

Behold, the LORD'S hand is not shortened, that it cannot save; neither his ear heavy, that it cannot hear: But your iniquities have separated between you and your God, and your sins have hid his face from you, that he will not hear. (Isaiah 9: 1-2)

2. Prayer Demands **Faith**:

But without faith it is impossible to please him: for he that cometh to God must believe that he is, and that he is a rewarder of them that diligently seek him. (Hebrews 11: 6)

But let him ask in faith, nothing wavering. For he that wavereth is like a wave of the sea driven with the wind and tossed. For let not that man think that he shall receive any thing of the Lord. (James 1: 6-7)

3. Prayer must Be Offered **in Jesus' Name**:

And whatsoever ye shall ask in my name, that will I do, that the Father may be glorified in the Son. If ye shall ask any thing in my name, I will do it. (John 14: 13-14)

4. Prayer Is Always to Include a **Submissive Inquiry** to God's Will:

Two principles should consistently guide how believers pray: first, any request should seek *God's greatest glory*; and second, it should be sought for *man's highest good*. Praying for what is *best* for both God and man, accepting obediently His will, greatly simplifies the decisions sought in prayer.

5. Prayer Is **Energized** by the Holy Spirit:

Likewise the Spirit also helpeth our infirmities: for we know not what we should pray for as we ought: but the Spirit itself maketh intercession for us with groanings which cannot be uttered. And he that searcheth the hearts knoweth what is the mind of the Spirit, because he maketh intercession for the saints according to the will of God. (Romans 8: 26-27)

(Read also Ephesians 6: 18, Jude 20)

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6. Jesus Christ Is the **Mediator** and **Intercessor** of Prayer:

For there is one God, and one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus. (1 Timothy 2: 5)

Wherefore he is able also to save them to the uttermost that come unto God by him, seeing he ever liveth to make intercession for them. (Hebrews 7: 25)

7. Prayer Is **Supernatural**, **Effective**, and **Precious**:

The effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man availeth much. (James 5: 16)

And when he had taken the book, the four beasts and four and twenty elders fell down before the Lamb, having every one of them harps, and golden vials full of odours, which are the prayers of saints. (Revelation 5: 8)

3. Prayer Appropriate to its Environment:

I will therefore that men pray every where, lifting up holy hands, without wrath and doubting. (1 Timothy 2: 8)

Pray without ceasing. (1 Thessalonians 5: 17)

In light of these (*and many other*) Scriptures, prayer is most certainly proper at *all* times and in *all* circumstances; the believer's *only* consideration being the *reverent discretion* of God's word fitting the situation:

A. Consider the **Ramifications** of **Public** Prayer:

1. Prayer **Before Unbelievers** must Be **Discreet**:

Give not that which is holy unto the dogs, neither cast ye your pearls before swine, lest they trample them under their feet, and turn again and rend you. (Matthew 7: 6)

What Christians often mistake as a display of *piety* in a worldly place is usually viewed by unbelievers as a public show of *hypocrisy*. Unsaved people are wholly incapable of an appreciation of prayerful worship:

But the natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God: for they are foolishness unto him: neither can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned. (1 Corinthians 2: 14)

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2. Prayer for **Public Consumption Only** Is Prohibited:

And when thou prayest, thou shalt not be as the hypocrites are: for they love to pray standing in the synagogues and in the corners of the streets, that they may be seen of men. Verily I say unto you, They have their reward. (Matthew 6: 5)

Does this mean that believers should not pray in public? Of course not. A blessing offered before a meal in a restaurant or an invocation given when *requested* by a host is altogether fitting and never out of place. Often, praying publicly is used as a testimony of personal faith. Sometimes it is prudent to pray as means to influence the demeanor of others. Such prayer should be done quietly but visibly, and in humility, never as a prideful attempt to draw attention to a Christian's supposed piety.

B. The Preeminence of **Secret Prayer**:

1. Consider the **Admonition** of **Our Lord**:

But thou, when thou prayest, enter into thy closet, and when thou hast shut thy door, pray to thy Father which is in secret; and thy Father which seeth in secret shall reward thee openly. (Matthew 6: 6)

2. Recognize the **Opposition** of the **Adversary**:

And I set my face unto the Lord God, to seek by prayer and supplications, with fasting, and sackcloth, and ashes: And I prayed unto the LORD my God. (Daniel 9: 3-4)

In those days I Daniel was mourning three full weeks... Then I lifted up mine eyes, and looked, and behold a certain man clothed in linen, whose loins were girded with fine gold of Uphaz: His body also was like the beryl, and his face as the appearance of lightning, and his eyes as lamps of fire, and his arms and his feet like in colour to polished brass, and the voice of his words like the voice of a multitude. Then said he unto me, Fear not, Daniel: for from the first day that thou didst set thine heart to understand, and to chasten thyself before thy God, thy words were heard, and I am come for thy words. But the prince of the kingdom of Persia withstood me one and twenty days: but, lo, Michael, one of the chief princes, came to help me; and I remained there with the kings of Persia. (Daniel 10: 2, 5, 12-13)

This is surely one of the most mysterious passages in the Bible. The purpose is not to provoke a theological discussion of the book of Daniel but to reveal the truth that there was a raging battle in the unseen world between the angel and the forces of the devil who withstood him as Daniel prayed. It is wise for believers to understand that there

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is a *spiritual warfare* in the heavens over the matter of prayer! To think that Satan is not fully engaged in the battle is to ignore the warning of Scripture:

Wherein in time past ye walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that now worketh in the children of disobedience. (Ephesians 2: 2)

For we wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high places. (Ephesians 6: 12)

In light of these truths, believers are wise to *avoid the airwaves* (of much public praying), preferring *private* prayer for most devotions; it also forms the logic for having *unspoken requests* during church prayer meeting!

3. Establishing a **Closet** of Prayer:

Considering the great unseen conflict over prayer, is it reasonable to expect an improvement by praying in secret? Absolutely, else our Lord would not have encouraged it! How then is secret prayer really *secret*? In the Old Testament, men (including Daniel) were not permanently indwelt by the Holy Spirit (review Chapter Three, **the Holy Trinity**, pages 15). However, in the New Testament believers are *permanently indwelt*:

Know ye not that ye are the temple of God, and that the Spirit of God dwelleth in you? (1 Corinthians 3: 16)

Since the Holy Spirit dwells within believers, a secret closet is always available within which to pray: It is the *heart* - the ever present *altar* of private prayer, and the location of all that is important in life:

And he that searcheth the hearts knoweth what is the mind of the Spirit, because he maketh intercession for the saints according to the will of God. (Romans 8: 27)

4. Seven Types of Prayer:

A. The Prayer of **Repentance**:

Whether at a sinner's conversion or the revival of a backsliding believer, the first order of prayer is *repentance*. Repentance is produced by *Godly sorrow*:

Now I rejoice, not that ye were made sorry, but that ye sorrowed to repentance: for ye were made sorry after a godly manner, that ye might receive damage by us

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in nothing. For godly sorrow worketh repentance to salvation not to be repented of: but the sorrow of the world worketh death. (2 Corinthians 7:9-10)

Genuine repentance, not mere regret for the outcome of the wages of sin, culminates in *confession*:

If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. If we say that we have not sinned, we make him a liar, and his word is not in us. (1 John 1: 9)

Truly one of the most heartbreaking examples of genuine repentance is the pitiful cry of David:

Have mercy upon me, O God, according to thy lovingkindness: according unto the multitude of thy tender mercies blot out my transgressions. Wash me thoroughly from mine iniquity, and cleanse me from my sin. For I acknowledge my transgressions: and my sin is ever before me. Against thee, thee only, have I sinned, and done this evil in thy sight: that thou mightest be justified when thou speakest, and be clear when thou judgest. Purge me with hyssop, and I shall be clean: wash me, and I shall be whiter than snow. Hide thy face from my sins, and blot out all mine iniquities. Create in me a clean heart, O God; and renew a right spirit within me. Cast me not away from thy presence; and take not thy holy spirit from me. Restore unto me the joy of thy salvation; and uphold me with thy free spirit. (Psalms 51: 1-4, 7, 9-12)

B. The Prayer of **Faith**:

Faith is trusting God. There is *saving faith* (Ephesians 2: 8-9), and *sanctifying faith* (1 Timothy 4: 5). There is *living faith* (2 Corinthians 5: 7), and *overcoming faith* (1 John 5: 4-5). There is even *healing faith* (James 5: 15). The prayer of faith is asking a petition of God, confident that He will answer according to His word, in the fullness of time, and in a manner which best meets the need:

Trust in the LORD with all thine heart; and lean not unto thine own understanding. In all thy ways acknowledge him, and he shall direct thy paths. (Proverbs 3: 5-6)

C. The Prayer of **Thanksgiving**:

Enter into his gates with thanksgiving, and into his courts with praise: be thankful unto him, and bless his name. (Psalms 100: 4)

I will offer to thee the sacrifice of thanksgiving, and will call upon the name of the LORD. (Psalms 116: 17)

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Giving thanks always for all things unto God and the Father in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ. (Ephesians 5: 20)

D. The Prayer of **Praise**:

Praise ye the LORD. Praise God in his sanctuary: praise him in the firmament of his power. Praise him for his mighty acts: praise him according to his excellent greatness. Praise him with the sound of the trumpet: praise him with the psaltery and harp. Praise him with the timbrel and dance: praise him with stringed instruments and organs. Praise him upon the loud cymbals: praise him upon the high sounding cymbals. Let every thing that hath breath praise the LORD. Praise ye the LORD. (Psalms 150: 1-6)

E. The Prayer for **Wisdom**:

If any of you lack wisdom, let him ask of God, that giveth to all men liberally, and upbraideth not; and it shall be given him. (James 1: 5)

F. The Prayer for **Blessing**:

Pray ye therefore the Lord of the harvest, that he will send forth labourers into his harvest. (Matthew 9: 38)

Finally, brethren, pray for us, that the word of the Lord may have free course, and be glorified, even as it is with you. (2 Thessalonians 3: 1)

1. Blessings Based upon God's **Unconditional Promises**:

Some Bible promises are *unconditional*; by them God acts on the believer's behalf, with no qualifying merit on man's part except the grace of God:

Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who hath blessed us with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places in Christ. (Ephesians 1: 3)

2. Blessings Based upon God's **Conditional Promises**:

Some Bible promises are revealed to be *conditional*; such blessings are invoked through obedience to the expressed will of God in matters of faith and practice:

*If my people, which are called by my name, shall humble themselves, and pray, and seek my face, and turn from their wicked ways; then will I hear from heaven, and will forgive their sin, and will heal their land.
(2 Chronicles 7: 14; read also 1 John 3: 22)*

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That a conditional promise may be claimed without regard to Christian obedience is a *violation of Bible truth!*

G. The Prayer of **Intercession**:

I exhort therefore, that, first of all, supplications, prayers, intercessions, and giving of thanks, be made for all men. (1 Timothy 2: 1)

1. The Prayer of **Supplication**:

Supplication is humbly imploring, or utterly *pouring oneself out* to God for mercy concerning a matter:

Be careful for nothing; but in every thing by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known unto God. (Philippians 4: 6)

Praying always with all prayer and supplication in the Spirit, and watching thereunto with all perseverance and supplication for all saints. (Ephesians 6: 18)

2. The Prayer of **Joined Agreement**:

Again I say unto you, That if two of you shall agree on earth as touching any thing that they shall ask, it shall be done for them of my Father which is in heaven. (Matthew 18: 19)

3. The Role of **Fasting**:

The *fast* is a period of *abstinence from eating* in order to devote undivided attention to a matter of prayer. Fasting is not *casual* in nature. It is neither a regimen of health, primarily, nor a required practice of the church. Fasting to attract attention is *hypocrisy* (Matthew 6: 16-18).

Biblical fasting has a twofold purpose: first, it facilitates concentration on a subject of prayer by suspending for a time the ordinary concerns for food; second, it demonstrates to God the believer's attitude toward a matter. Fasting, properly joined, accomplishes two things: it provides a reverent atmosphere for Christians to pray effectively and fervently (James 5: 16), and it is the agency by which the Spirit of God imparts unusual power:

For verily I say unto you, If ye have faith as a grain of mustard seed, ye shall say unto this mountain, Remove hence to yonder place; and it shall remove; and nothing shall be impossible unto you. Howbeit this kind goeth not out but by prayer and fasting. (Matthew 17: 20-21)

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5. Hindrances to Prayer:

A. Not Praying in **Christ's Name**:

And whatsoever ye shall ask in my name, that will I do, that the Father may be glorified in the Son. If ye shall ask any thing in my name, I will do it.

(John 14: 13-14)

Ye have not chosen me, but I have chosen you, and ordained you, that ye should go and bring forth fruit, and that your fruit should remain: that whatsoever ye shall ask of the Father in my name, he may give it you. (John 15: 16)

Verily, verily, I say unto you, Whatsoever ye shall ask the Father in my name, he will give it you. Hitherto have ye asked nothing in my name: ask, and ye shall receive, that your joy may be full. (John 16: 23-24)

B. **Questioning** Whether God Will Hear:

I will therefore that men pray every where, lifting up holy hands, without wrath and doubting. (1 Timothy 2: 8)

But let him ask in faith, nothing wavering. For he that wavereth is like a wave of the sea driven with the wind and tossed. (James 1: 6)

C. Harboring an **Impure Thought Life**:

If I regard iniquity in my heart, the Lord will not hear me. (Psalms 66: 18)

Finally, brethren, whatsoever things are true, whatsoever things are honest, whatsoever things are just, whatsoever things are pure, whatsoever things are lovely, whatsoever things are of good report; if there be any virtue, and if there be any praise, think on these thing. (Philippians 4: 8)

D. **Unreconciled Differences** among Brethren:

Therefore if thou bring thy gift to the altar, and there rememberest that thy brother hath ought against thee; Leave there thy gift before the altar, and go thy way; first be reconciled to thy brother, and then come and offer thy gift. (Matthew 5: 23-24)

E. Nurturing an **UNFORGIVING SPIRIT**:

And when ye stand praying, forgive, if ye have ought against any: that your Father also which is in heaven may forgive you your trespasses. (Mark 11: 25)

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Husbands, dwell with them according to knowledge, giving honour unto the wife, as unto the weaker vessel, and as being heirs together of the grace of life; that your prayers be not hindered. (1 Peter 3: 7)

6. Answers to Prayer:

A. God **Always Hears** the Prayers of the **Righteous**:

The eyes of the LORD are upon the righteous, and his ears are open unto their cry. (Psalms 34: 15)

B. **When** God Answers Prayer:

1. God Responds to Prayer in the **Fullness of Time**:

To many, prayer is a spiritual *spare tire*; it is thoughtlessly neglected until the hour of emergency. Even in great need man tries everything humanly possible before praying to God as a *last resort*. As a result, such prayers are often frantic and desperate - God must act, *now!* The Lord, however, is never caught by surprise; nothing ever *occurs* to Him. He knows the intimate circumstances of every crisis (Psalms 139: 2-4); and what the need is before man even asks (Matthew 6: 8). Knowing the past, present and future ramifications of every situation, God often allows man's *last chance deadlines* to pass, demonstrating His trustworthiness to act at the *appropriate hour*:

Humble yourselves therefore under the mighty hand of God, that he may exalt you in due time: Casting all your care upon him; for he careth for you. (1 Peter 5: 6-7)

2. God Responds to Prayer **on His Own Terms**:

Grant thee according to thine own heart, and fulfil all thy counsel. (Psalms 20: 4)

C. **How** God Answers Prayer:

1. It Is the Lord's **Desire** to Say **Yes**:

The LORD is nigh unto all them that call upon him, to all that call upon him in truth. He will fulfil the desire of them that fear him: he also will hear their cry, and will save them. (Psalms 145: 18-19)

And it shall come to pass, that before they call, I will answer; and while they are yet speaking, I will hear. (Isaiah 65: 24)

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God **Delights** in the Heart of the **Upright**:

For the LORD God is a sun and shield: the LORD will give grace and glory: no good thing will he withhold from them that walk uprightly. O LORD of hosts, blessed is the man that trusteth in thee. (Psalms 84: 11-12)

2. **What If** God's Answer Is **No**?:

Believers Are to Be **Content** with an **All-Knowing** God! :

Let your conversation be without covetousness; and be content with such things as ye have: for he hath said, I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee. So that we may boldly say, The Lord is my helper, and I will not fear what man shall do unto me. (Hebrews 13: 5-6)

Believers Are to **Submit to His Will** When God Says **No**:

For this thing I besought the Lord thrice, that it might depart from me. And he said unto me, My grace is sufficient for thee: for my strength is made perfect in weakness. Most gladly therefore will I rather glory in my infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon me. Therefore I take pleasure in infirmities, in reproaches, in necessities, in persecutions, in distresses for Christ's sake: for when I am weak, then am I strong. (2 Corinthians 12: 8-10)

3. What about Prayer Where God **Remains Silent**:

First, **Reexamine** the Prayer Request:

God may remain silent when prayer is offered with a wrong motive (James 4: 3), or when the request is forbidden by the Scriptures (review *Prohibitions to Prayer*, page 6-3). The first justification to pray must be the faith that it is a proper subject to submit to a Holy God!

Being Confident of the Request, **Do Not Cease to Pray**:

For this cause we also, since the day we heard it, do not cease to pray for you. (Colossians 1: 9)

And let us not be weary in well doing: for in due season we shall reap, if we faint not. (Galatians 6: 9)

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Trust God to Do Right! :

Shall not the Judge of all the earth do right? (Genesis 18: 25)

Therefore I esteem all thy precepts concerning all things to be right.
(Psalms 119: 128)

4. The **Answered Prayer**:

Now unto him that is able to do exceeding abundantly above all that we ask or think, according to the power that worketh in us, Unto him be glory in the church by Christ Jesus throughout all ages, world without end. Amen.
(Ephesians 3: 20-21)

Since man is not of himself a supernatural being, it is often difficult to see beyond the evident need which compels him to pray; an *Omniscient God* is not constrained by the limitations of the flesh. He sees the *big picture* involved in every prayer request. In His lovingkindness God considers the past, present and future ramifications of the petition and its benefit to all concerned, and answers in a manner which (though often not immediately appreciated or fully understood), exceeds the need and excels in the fulfillment of His will. To reverently trust His judgement in the affairs of life is the sum of the believer's model prayer; *Thy will be done.* (Matthew 6: 10)