

A Study of Prayer – Part 1

Hebrews 4:1 Therefore, let us fear if, while a promise remains of entering His rest, any one of you may seem to have come short of it.

Hebrews 4:2 For indeed we have had good news preached to us, just as they also; but the word they heard did not profit them, because it was not united by faith in those who heard.

In the broadest sense, prayer is communication with God. But, this study is focused on “structured” prayer. This is not just an “Oh, God, help me” type prayer or prayers before meals. There is some suffering in your life that you want to address to God through prayer. This is prayer in which a believer puts some thought which has a purpose and a desired outcome.

How would we pray for our church?

There are two points I am making in this study. If you get them, you have gotten what I am trying to communicate.

1. Prayer is addressed to God the Father in the name of Jesus Christ, the Son, in the power of the Holy Spirit.
2. This kind of prayer has three stages (per Herman’s terminology):
 - A. Prayer Preparation
 - B. Prayer (Petition)
 - C. Prayer Pursuit

It is not just being able to repeat those words, but understanding what that means and being able to implement that in your prayer life.

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What is Prayer?

There are some profound statements on prayer that cause us to realize the importance and power of prayer. The purpose of this study is to “get you on your knees” to God.

L.S. Chafer: “Prayer, whether it be petition or praise, is the direct communion of man with God, and, according to the Scriptures, is subject to a four-fold classification.” [Just so your question as to what he meant by the four-fold classification, it is 1. Prayer before the First Advent of Christ, 2. Prayer in Expectation of the Kingdom, 3. The Prayer of Christ and 4. Prayer under the Relationships of Grace.] It is the fourth category that this study deals with.

R. Dean: “Prayer is the most powerful asset that the believer has in his spiritual life. Prayer is an awesome privilege that brings every believer immediately into the throne room of God, into the presence of the Creator of Heaven and earth and all that is in them. Prayer is the believer’s vital communication link to his heavenly Father. Yet, for all that, very few believers are engaged in real biblical praying. Prayer is one of the most misunderstood and often most abused aspects of the Christian life. On the one hand we find that many believers either neglect prayer or it is trivialized as a tool used to manipulate God, to somehow enter into a contract with God, to bargain with God, to try to get God to somehow conform His will to our will. The tragic result of this flawed approach to prayer is that most believers have superficial prayer lives at best and they aren’t really sure that prayer does any good. And because of their ignorance that is probably correct. Their prayers often don’t get any higher than the ceiling.”

Gary Glenney “Prayer is any communication or communion with God.” Notice he reiterates one of L. S. Chafer’s words, “communion.” This is a profound statement.

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In the broadest sense, prayer is the communication of a believer with God. However, here, the focus is on a purposeful, structured communication by a believer in the Church Age with God the Father.

James 4:2 ...You do not have because you do not ask.

James 1:5 But if any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask of God, who gives to all generously and without reproach, and it will be given to him.

James 1:17 Every good thing given and every perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of lights, with whom there is no variation or shifting shadow.

Luke 11:13 If you then, being evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to those who ask Him?"

Ezekiel 22:30 I searched for a man among them who would build up the wall and stand in the gap before Me for the land, so that I would not destroy it; but I found no one.

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

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How does prayer work? How is it that I, a puny believer, not much above the animal kingdom can address the almighty creator of heaven and earth as “Father?” Do you remember the response of the Scarecrow when first addressing the “Wonderful Wizard of Oz?” Why should our approach to God the Father be any different? How is it that we can go “boldly to the throne of grace?”

The prayer mechanics involves praying to God the Father in the name of Jesus Christ in the power of the Holy Spirit.

Prayer to God the Father

The “secret” lies in God’s character and our relationship to God the Father through the Son, Jesus Christ. Both Chris and Phil have stressed this relationship, the relationship we have with God the Father through Jesus. It is supposed to be intimate. James tells us:

James 4:8a Draw near to God and He will draw near to you....

Who is God? Without going into details of the individual characteristics, here is a list supplied by R. B. Thieme Jr.: sovereignty, righteousness, justice, love, eternal life, omniscience, omnipresence, omnipotence, immutability, and veracity.

These are just human words that attempt in some small way to identify who and what God is for us puny humans.

God is love. He is observant and provides what is needed. He is also justice. He cannot pervert His justice. It is because of the work of Jesus Christ on the cross that God can act in love without perverting His justice. Paraphrasing R. B. Thieme Jr., Grace is all that God is able to do based upon the work of Jesus Christ on the cross. So access to God the Father is provided by Jesus Christ. It is our relationship with Jesus that provides entrance to the throne of God the Father.

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Pray in the name of the Son, Jesus Christ

The Old Testament believers had standing before God because of the various covenants. The focus of this study is not on the Old Testament, but there are many wonderful examples of prayers given to us in the Old Testament. The Old Testament believers were under the various covenants, but prayer is always a function of grace.

The believer in the Church Age has a higher standing. We have position in the Son Himself. We have “Positional Truth.” We inherit all that Jesus has. As such, we address God as “Father.” He treats us as His children. And He is a good Father giving us what we need, not always what we ask for.

From R.B. Thieme Jr.:

The Believer Shares Christ’s:

Righteousness (2 Corinthians 5:21)

Eternal Life (1 John 5:11-12)

Sonship (John 1:12; Galatians 3:26)

Heirship (Romans 8:16-17; 12 Peter 1:4)

Royalty (Colossians 1:13; 2 Timothy 2:11-12)

Priesthood (1 Peter 2:5, 9)

Election (Ephesians 1:4)

Destiny (Ephesians 1:5)

Sanctification (1 Corinthians 1:2, 30; Ephesians 1:4)

Remember, we have a good Father:

Luke 11:11 Now suppose one of you fathers is asked by his son for a fish; he will not give him a snake instead of a fish, will he?

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Luke 11:12 Or if he is asked for an egg, he will not give him a scorpion, will he?

Luke 11:13 If you then, being evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to those who ask Him?"

We pray to God the Father, having standing in Jesus Christ. We pray in the name of Jesus because we are positionally in Jesus Christ and inherit all that Jesus has.

Let us consider the words of L. S. Chafer concerning praying in the “name” of Jesus.

“The privilege of praying in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, which under grace is extended to every child of God, lends to prayer a characteristic which lifts it to an infinite degree above every other form of prayer that ever was or ever will be. Likewise, the present form of prayer supersedes all preceding privileges; for when Christ said, "Hitherto have ye asked nothing in my name" (John 16:24), He dismissed every other ground of prayer that had ever been. We may be sure that the name of the Lord Jesus Christ commands the attention of the Father, and that the Father will not only listen when that name is used, but will be inclined to do whatsoever is asked to be done for the sake of His beloved Son.”

“The name of Christ is equivalent to the Person of Christ, and the name is not given to believers merely as something with which to conjure. Praying in the name of Christ means recognition of one's self as a living part of Christ in the New Creation and therefore limits the subjects of prayer to those projects which are in direct line with the purposes and glory of Christ. It is praying a prayer which Christ might pray. Since

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prayer in the name of Christ is like signing His name to our petition, it is reasonable that prayer in His name should be thus limited.” (L. S. Chafer)

Pray in the Power of the Holy Spirit

But there is one additional ingredient that is absolutely necessary: the filling or empowerment of the Holy Spirit.

If we are in sin, we need to realize that fact, change our thinking and acknowledge this to God, returning to faith dependence on the Holy Spirit.

Let me quote from Chris’ words on 1 John 1:9

“What do we do when we find ourselves in the darkness? This is where we move to 1 John 1:9. And I bet most of us could recite this one by heart.”

1 John 1:9 If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness. (NIV)

“and I’ll continue on to verse 10”

1 John 1:10 If we claim we have not sinned, we make him out to be a liar and his word is not in us. (NIV)

“If...starts out the whole thing, if, if we confess our sins, and oh by the way, we should, and in view of verses 7 and 8, God like His truth and His word, makes clear to us our sin nature and when we are in sin when we are walking in the darkness and when we are in sin we are to confess these failures pointed out to us by the conviction of the Spirit and the Word of God.”

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“Confess. The Greek word that is translated confess, *homologeō*, literally means to say the same thing and I am using the Thayer’s definition. Confessing, therefore, means saying about our sins what God says about our sins. Namely that they are indeed sins, offenses against Him that breaks our relationship with Him. What is confession? Agreeing with God that when we are out of fellowship with Him, when we are not walking by the Spirit we are in sin we are making an offense to God. Now, this is one of the hardest things to remember when you get in the habit of confessing and listing your sins. We will talk about that in a second. Sin, sin, sin, sin, sin, OK check. Next. Move on. We forget about the part that every one of those, every sin that we have, every sin that we do is an offense to our God, a holy and righteous God. He does not tolerate sin. When we are in sin we are to confess these failures pointed out to us by the conviction of the Spirit and the Word of God. God calls on us to acknowledge and agree with Him, to say the same thing about breaking of our faith, our sin against Him. That we have made an offense to Him.”

“God does call on us to acknowledge our sins and to agree with Him that they are offenses to Him. And some would say we need to list our sins or to grieve our sins, or to feel sorry for them or promise not to do them again. In the text, I do not see these things. I don’t see any requirement for making a list of specific sins. But I also don’t see anything prohibiting it. I think that there can be specific acknowledgment of what exactly we have done against God as part of our acknowledging the offense. It’s a relationship. We are in a relationship with God. In the same way, I don’t see a requirement or prohibition against an emotional response, when we acknowledge our sin or our offense to God. If we commit an offense against someone that we dearly love, there would very likely be some sort of emotional or relationship response to acknowledge that sins. I’m not saying in any way that we are required to list our sins or to feel sorry for them or to feel guilty about them totally not what is

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called out here. But I also don't think it is wrong to acknowledge before God specifically what we did. Or to feel our relationship being broken some sort of a response to that. I believe only that we diminish Christ's work on the cross if we think that listing our sins or feeling sorry for our sins or some emotional response to our sins increases the cleansing work of Christ. That is not true. There is nothing that we do that will impact the cleansing work of Christ and the penalty that has been paid by Christ on the cross. We do not affect His work. We respond to His work in our relationship with God. But what this verse is saying is that if we want to maintain a relationship with God we need to understand that we are sinners that we do fail and that when we fail we need to acknowledge that failure and understand that we have committed an offense against the holy righteous God. Only then will we have the ability to turn back to God and place our faith in the Spirit thus beginning to walk again in the light."

The mechanics of prayer are summarized by L. S. Chafer "It may be concluded then, that prayer under grace is to be offered to the Father, in the name of the Son, and in the power of the Holy Spirit."

Ephesians 6:18 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,

Jude 20 But you, beloved, building yourselves up on your most holy faith, praying in the Holy Spirit,

1 Corinthians 5:7 for we walk by faith, not by sight

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Romans 14:23 ...whatever is not from faith is sin.

Hebrews 11:6 And 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.