

PART TWO
ADDITIONAL STUDIES ABOUT
PRAYER

(for those who want more)

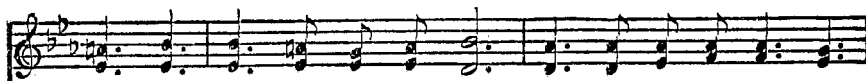
My Prayer

P. P. B.

P. P. BLESS



1. More ho - li - ness give me, More striv - ing with - in; More pa - tience in
 2. More grat - i - tude give me, More trust in the Lord; More pride in His
 3. More pu - ri - ty give me, More strength to o'ercome; More freedom from



suf - f'ring, More sor - row for sin; More faith in my Sav - ior,
 glo - ry, More hope in His word; More tears for His sor - rows,
 earth - stains, More long - ings for home; More fit for the king - dom,



More sense of His care; More joy in His serv - ice, More pur - pose in prayer.
 More pain at His grief; More meekness in tri - al, More praise for re - lief.
 More used would I be; More bless - ed and ho - ly, More, Sav - ior, like Thee.



Addressing God in Prayer

All prayers may not be alike. Some may be short and some long. Some may be private prayers and some public. Some may be beginners' prayers and some long-time saints'. But regardless of the various prayers, all begin by addressing God, the One to whom prayer is made. Let us give some consideration to addressing God in prayer.

1. Avoid Needless Repetition.

It is your writer's thought that too many times people "say words" instead of really "pray prayers". In prayer we are not merely to repeat thoughts and sentiments like saying our A,B,C's but to realize we are actually TALKING TO GOD, and this spiritual communication with God should not be engaged in with an empty head and meaningless lips but with a full heart. For instance, in even a short prayer some people will say "God" or "Lord" or "Father" maybe as many as TEN TIMES. When we call on the name of God, we do not have to keep saying His name over and over and over again as if He were not continuing to pay attention to us. It reminds me of a habit I had apparently picked up at an early stage of my preaching to inject the word "Listen" too frequently when trying to emphasize something. A good lady called it to my attention and said, "We are all listening very attentively, but you continue to say, "Listen!" It was a habit, a rut, into which I had fallen, and that is what I am afraid has happened to our prayers when we begin each line of petition or each statement of thanksgiving with the word "Father". We wouldn't do that in holding a conversation with a person. If your name was Henry Best, wouldn't you think it odd if a person talking to you would call your name "Henry" in beginning every sentence, and then for a little variety occasionally say "Henry Best" instead? Must that not be the way it sounds to God when we say "Father" to begin each line of our prayers except when we occasionally say "Heavenly Father" to break the monotony? Nor would we write a letter to someone that way. Why, then, pray that way? Remember that prayer is communication between us and God, and it too should be intelligently carried on.

When we go to the Bible prayers, such as the

prayer that Jesus taught His disciples in Matt. 6, we find it began with "Our Father which art in heaven", and it was not constantly repeated throughout the prayer. Seemingly only when there was extra urgency concerning some petition was the name of the Lord brought in again--much like we do in a conversation or in a letter. It was in this manner that David used some name of God five times in his chapter long prayer for mercy in Psa. 51. I fear that just as some preachers use "Praise the Lord" or "Hallelujah" or "Amen" throughout their sermons, at times at least it seems more or less to fill in gaps while they think of what they are going to say next, it may be possible that such is what happens when people use and reuse the name of God here and there throughout their prayers.

But such is not an easy habit to overcome. Prayer-ruts are hard to get out of unless one consciously works at them. For instance, have you ever tried to have a strict "praise service", a service in which instead of asking God for anything that each one simply thanks the Lord for various blessings already received? Well, the few times I have personally been in such services, the people found it hard to do what they set out to do--only thank God. The customary, "Help us to...;" and, "Lord, give us...;" etc. inevitably tried to get back into what people said.

2. Use Fitting Expressions.

What about the practice of starting out one's prayer with just the word "God"? Some people pray this way all the time. I am not saying that such can never be done, but I will say that such is seldom found in the Bible prayers. True, both the Pharisee and the publican of Luke 18 began their prayers that way (the Pharisee said, "God, I thank thee, that I am not as other men are," the publican said, "God be merciful to me a sinner"), but such was the exception and not the rule. Occasionally we find, "O God" (Num. 12:13; Psa. 51:1,10,17), an expression of deep feeling, and more often such fuller forms as, "O God of my father" (Gen. 32:9), "O Lord God" (Gen. 24:12; Deut. 3:24; Josh. 7:7; I Kings 8:53), "O God of Israel" (I Kings

8:26), "O Our God (II Chron. 20:12), and others, but habitually just saying "God" seems to lack the thought and sentiment we should show in coming before God.

Let me illustrate. When our boys were small, we had a 5 year old neighbor boy who was a bit mentally retarded. Even though he lived by us for several years, he never learned to use my name. He never called me Mr. Hunt nor even Donald. He would just call me "Man". When he came up to play, he would say, "Man, can the boys come out and play?" And any time he had something to say to me, it would just be "Man, this" or "Man, that". Personally I can see why our heavenly Father, who is called by various names ("Lord," "Jehovah," "Lord God," "Lord of hosts," "Father," "Lord of heaven and earth," and others) might get a little tired of our saying nothing but "God" all the time. And this variety of expression we find in the Scripture. When Solomon was leading Israel in the dedication of the new temple, he began his prayer, "Lord God of Israel" (I Kings 8:23). When David prayed for God to forgive him for his sin with Bathsheba, he said, "O God, thou God of my salvation" (Psa. 51:14). When Elijah stood on Mt. Carmel to call the nation back to the God of their fathers, he began his prayer, "Lord God of Abraham, Isaac, and of Israel" (I Kings 18:36). When Jonah prayed from the belly of the whale, he said, "O Lord my God" (Jonah 2:6). When Hezekiah took the Assyrian King's threatening letter to God in prayer, he began, "O Lord God of Israel, which dwellest between the cherubims, thou art the God, even thou alone, of all the kingdoms of the earth; thou hast made heaven and earth" (II Kings 19:15). Possibly in being sure not to pray to be heard of men, some have made their prayers too plain, too artless, and too unembellished before God.

3. A Noticeable Change.

After studying through the Old Testament

prayers where various forms of expression embodying "God" or "Lord" or "Jehovah" are to be found, we are faced with an abrupt change when we come to the New Testament. Some form of "Father" is used almost entirely; often just "Father" itself (John 11:41; Luke 22:42; Luke 23:34; Luke 23:46); "Our Father, which art in heaven" (Matt. 6:9); and, "O Father, Lord of heaven and earth" (Matt. 11:25,26). It is particularly interesting to note the changes of expression used by Jesus in His great John 17 prayer. Note the following verses and try to determine for yourself in each case why He probably used each expression that He did: "FATHER, the hour is come; glorify thy Son, that thy Son also may glorify thee" (verse 1); "And now, O FATHER, glorify thou me with thine own self with the glory which I had with thee before the world was" (verse 5); "HOLY FATHER, keep through thine own name those whom thou hast given me, that they may be one, as we are" (verse 11); "Neither pray I for these alone, but for them also which shall believe on me through their word; that they all may be one; as thou, FATHER, art in me, and I in thee" (verses 20,21); "O RIGHTEOUS FATHER, the world hath not known thee: but I have known thee" (verse 25).

Beginning with the first expression of our prayers, the way God is addressed, let us at least intelligently address Him instead of not knowing nor not caring how we speak to Him.

QUESTIONS

1. What prayer rut was pointed out under the heading, "Avoid needless repetition"?
2. What were some ways people began their prayers in the Bible besides just beginning with, "God"?
3. What abrupt change in addressing God do we come to when we come to the New Testament?

Praising God in Our Prayers

In yesteryear more than at present it seems, people praised God for His various virtues as they prayed. Possibly our prayers could be improved in this feature.

1. Biblical Examples.

Heb. 13:15 says, "Let us offer the sacrifice of praise to God continually, that is, the fruit of our lips giving thanks to his name." We "praise" God when we tell others of His excellencies. We also "praise" Him when we thank Him for what he has done for us. And we "praise" Him when we extol His own matchless qualities in prayer. It is concerning this latter matter that we conduct the present consideration.

When men in Bible days praised God in their prayers, that about which they praised Him had a direct connection with that for which they were praying. Let us observe that, realizing God is pleased when our faith in His divine characteristics causes us to ask the petitions that we do. For instance, in Matt. 9 we have the story of two blind men of Jericho who followed Jesus, crying, "Thou son of David, have mercy on us." He entered into the house, and they followed Him inside. Before granting their request, Jesus tested them out with this question: "Believe ye that I am able to do this?" (verse 28). When they said, "Yea, Lord," He touched their eyes, saying, "According to your faith be it unto you."

When Moses was about to request God to change His verdict and let him enter the Promised Land, he prefaced his petition with these words: "O Lord God, thou hast begun to shew thy servant thy greatness, and thy mighty hand: for what God is there in heaven or in earth, that can do according to thy works, and according to thy might?" (Deut. 3:24).

When King Asa of Jerusalem was faced by 1,000,000 Ethiopians, he had but 580,000 men with which to offset their charge. He reminded himself and he praised God that numbers in reality did not bother God. He said, "Lord, it is nothing with thee to help, whether with many, or with them that have no power: help us, O Lord our God; for we rest on Thee, and in thy name we go against this multitude. O Lord, thou art our God; let not men prevail against thee" (II

Chron. 14:11). When Jehoshaphat's enemies threatened him, he did similarly (II Chron. 20:6-13). Wouldn't our prayers have more meaning if we thus praised God concerning His power to grant that for which we are making request? Don't just "say words" or "vain repetitions" when you pray--THINK and pray! Pray coherent prayers.

When Daniel was confessing to God the sins of the nation he ascribed "righteousness" to God: "O Lord, righteousness belongeth unto thee, but unto us confusion of faces" (Dan. 9:7). When he prayed for their forgiveness, he made mention of God's "mercies": "To the Lord our God belong mercies and forgiveness, though we have rebelled against him" (verse 9).

When Solomon dedicated the temple, it was a fulfillment of a divine promise made to his father David. Notice how he praised God: "Lord God of Israel, there is no God like thee, in heaven above, or on earth beneath, who keepest covenant and mercy with thy servants that walk before thee with all their heart: who hast kept with thy servant David my father that thou promisedst him: thou spakest also with thy mouth, and hast fulfilled it with thine hand, as it is this day" (I Kings 8:23,24). And he went on to pray, "Therefore now, Lord God of Israel, keep with thy servant David my father that thou promisedst him, saying, There shall not fail thee a man in my sight to sit on the throne of Israel: so that thy children take heed to their way, that they walk before me as thou hast walked before me. And now, O God of Israel, let thy word, I pray thee, be verified, which thou spakest unto thy servant David my father" (verses 25,26). As he was about to ask concerning the unique place that the temple he had just built would occupy in the future prayers of Israel, he said, "But will God indeed dwell on the earth? behold, the heaven and heaven of heavens cannot contain thee; how much less this house that I have builded? Yet have thou respect unto the prayer of thy servant, and to his supplication, O Lord my God, to hearken unto the cry and to the prayer, which thy servant prayeth before thee to day: that thine eyes may be open toward this house night and day, even toward the place of which thou hast said, My name shall be there: that thou mayest hearken

unto the prayer which thy servant shall make toward this place. And hearken thou to the supplication of thy servant, and of thy people Israel, when they shall pray toward this place: and hear thou in heaven thy dwelling place: and when thou hearest, forgive" (verses 27-30).

On the day when Israel presented their abundant offering for the building of the temple, King David blessed the Lord before all the congregation with these words; "Blessed be thou, Lord God of Israel our father, for ever and ever. Thine, O Lord, is the greatness, and the power, and the glory, and the victory, and the majesty: for all that is in the heaven and in the earth is thine; thine is the kingdom, O Lord, and thou art exalted as head above all. Both riches and honour come of thee, and thou reignest over all; and in thine hand is power and might; and in thine hand it is to make great, and to give strength unto all. Now therefore, our God, we thank thee, and praise thy glorious name" (I Chron. 29:10-13). And he went on with more praise like it.

2. What About Our Prayers?

I ask, how long has it been since you have heard a prayer containing such wonderful praise? Have you ever so injected the element of praise into

your prayers? The fact of the matter is, people are afraid their prayers will be criticized today if they include such praise. Some would charge them with praying "formal" prayers. Some would say they are praying to be heard of men. But in guarding against formality and in being sure we do not pray to be heard of men, let us not forget that God deserves to be praised. The command in Psa. 29:2 is: "Give unto the Lord the glory due unto his name." Let us believe that true, sincere, befitting praise of God enriches our prayers, makes them more acceptable to God, and displays a greater depth of spiritual thinking on our part. Let us get away from cheap, "tinny" prayers that do not glorify God nor reflect any depth of spirituality upon our part.

QUESTIONS

1. Heb. 13 says we are to offer what sacrifice continually?
2. We praise God both when we _____ others of His excellencies and when we _____ Him for what He has done for us.
3. Cite various examples in Biblical prayers of people praising God.
4. Should we incorporate more praise into most of our prayers?

Expressing Thanks in Our Prayers

Thanksgiving is not something that comes once a year, nor is it something you do according to the calendar. True thanksgiving is the heart overflowing itself with joy, gratitude, and praise to the one who has done great things for us.

1. Jesus' Joy was Expressed Thankfully.

We see this in Jesus at the happy return of the Seventy. As He saw them rejoicing, He rejoiced, and as He envisioned God's power asserting itself so ably over Satan's power, Luke 10:21 says, "In that hour, Jesus rejoiced in spirit, and said, I thank thee, O Father, Lord of heaven and earth, that thou hast hid these things from the wise and prudent, and hast revealed them unto babes: even so, Father; for so it

seemed good in thy sight." And turning to His disciples He said, "Blessed are the eyes which see the things that ye see: for I tell you, that many prophets and kings have desired to see those things which ye see, and have not seen them; and to hear those things which ye hear, and have not heard them" (verses 23,24). Jesus' heart was overflowing in that hour, and He thanked God. Two other occasions of Jesus' saying, "I thank thee," to His heavenly Father were Matt. 11:25 and John 11:41. In the Luke 10 passage above can you not catch the happy attitude of Jesus and His expressing that happiness and gratitude to the actual source of His joy--God?

2. God Deserves Much Thanksgiving.

God is the source of all the good blessings

which we enjoy (Jas. 1:17), and we should “praise God from whom all blessings flow”. As if we are ones for whom He cannot do too much, our heavenly Father every day “loadeth us with benefits” (Psa. 68:19), and as if to keep us from just “saying” an habitual thanks over and over again for the regular blessings of life, He sends us new mercies “every morning” (Lam. 3:22,23). Oh, how God does open the windows of heaven upon our lives and fills our lives with good things! How He does make our hearts skip with joy time and again! In view of the fact that all His dealings with us are for our good, the last thing that should be upon our lips is murmuring or complaining. Such so often defiled the Israelites of old to God’s rightful displeasure (Num. 14:27). Failure to glorify Him as God which was involved in a failure to be thankful led to man’s turning from God to idolatry and the shameful, degraded living recorded in Rom. 1:21-32. But how often God has to hear the murmurings of people today! If it isn’t the weather, it’s the times; if it isn’t their afflictions, it’s their circumstances; if it isn’t their income, it’s their expenses. All of us enjoy doing things for those who appreciate what we do, but even God, who is regularly “kind unto the unthankful” (Luke 6:35), punished murmuring so severely (Num. 14:26-37). With so much of God’s goodness evident and so much murmuring by people, let every spokesman for God hit this sin with sledge hammer blows!

3. Approaching God With Thanksgiving.

Do you know how a good God desires to be approached? True, He wants us to cast all our care upon Him (I Pet. 5:7). But He also wants us to “serve the Lord with gladness: come before his presence with singing” (Psa. 100:2). He wants us to recognize it is He who has made us and takes care of us: “Know ye that the Lord he is God: it is he that hath made us, and not we ourselves; we are his people, and the sheep of his pasture” (verse 3). Therefore, ‘enter into his gates with thanksgiving, and into his courts with praise: be thankful unto him, and bless his name” (verse 4). How long has it been since the Lord has beheld your gladness? How long has it been since He has heard your singing? How long has it been since He has seen your recognition of His care? How long has it been since He has witnessed your serving Him? Oh, repent of this wickedness!

4. A Specially Appointed Group.

To be sure that God would be praised, David appointed certain Levites to thank and praise the God who had been so good to the nation (I Chron. 16:4). At the same time, David himself was ever so thankful to God for the rich personal blessings he had received. Listen to his expressions of heartfelt gratitude: “And David the king came and sat before the Lord, and said, Who am I, O Lord God, and what is mine house, that thou hast brought me hitherto? And yet this was a small thing in thine eyes, O God; for thou hast also spoken of thy servant’s house for a great while to come, and hast regarded me according to the estate of a man of high degree, O Lord God. What can David speak more to thee for the honour of thy servant?” (I Chron. 17:16-18). Later when David sinned, God reminded him of His great goodness to him (II Sam. 12:7,8) and His rightful displeasure with him over this sin (verse 9) and told him that some of his blessings would necessarily be replaced with severe hardships (verses 10-12).

5. People in the Bible Thanked God.

People of the Bible often expressed their gratitude to their divine Benefactor: Jonah for being delivered from the sea monster (Jon. 2:9); Daniel for the gift of interpretation of dreams that saved his life when Nebuchadnezzar was about to destroy all his wise men (Dan. 2:23); Jesus when instituting the Lord’s supper (Matt. 26:27); Paul when writing to the churches (I Cor. 1:4; Phil. 1:3; I Thess. 2:13); before they ate their food (Mark 8:6; Acts 27:35); the aged Anna when she saw the Christ child (Luke 2:38); Paul who had spent a long winter on his way to Rome amid a shipload of prisoners when brethren heard he was nearing Rome and came out to greet him (Acts 28:15); and many, many others.

6. Let Us Express Our Thanks.

As we pray, therefore, for new blessings, let us not forget to thank God for those blessings already received: “Continue in prayer, and watch in the same with thanksgiving” (Col. 4:2); “With thanksgiving let your requests be made known unto God” (Phil. 4:6). And let us not overlook the fact that Daniel not only prayed three times a day but also thanked his God

each time he prayed; "He kneeled upon his knees three times a day, and prayed, and gave thanks before his God, as he did aforetime" (Dan. 6:10).

If you would please God, be thankful to Him. If you would be fair with God, recognize His goodness to your life. And when you come before Him, do so as much to express your gratitude as to ask Him for blessings. Otherwise you are acting like a spoiled child who thinks only in terms of what you can get and never in terms of showing your appreciation. Ingratitude is one of the cardinal sins of mankind. Let us take measures to be sure it is not one of ours! "Count your many blessings, name them one by one, and it will surprise you what the Lord hath done;" yes, "and you will be singing as the days go by."

My godly mother is now gone, but I shall never forget a statement she often made in prayer

when living with us in her late 80's: "Father, I can't thank you enough for " this or that. And wasn't she correct? We can't.

QUESTIONS

1. Tell of times when Jesus' heart overflowed with joy that He expressed in thanksgiving to God?
2. Comment on God being the source of all our many blessings.
3. What are some things people often complain about?
4. We are to enter God's courts with _____.
5. What king set apart a special group just to praise God?
6. Cite some Biblical examples of people thanking God for various blessings.

Confession of Sin in Prayer

While God wants us to come before His presence with thanksgiving and with praise, it is also important that we come humbly before Him because of the fact of human sinfulness. Any prayer-right we have with God is not based on our merit but on the mediatorship of Christ. Therefore, to acknowledge our sinfulness, our shortcomings, and our demerit as we come before God is absolutely in order.

Of course, if we are deliberately doing wrong, or if we take an impenitent attitude toward some failure that has come to our attention, it will do us no good just to confess that sin to God. That would be to place us in that group whose "prayer shall be an abomination" (Prov. 28:9) and to whose prayers God's ears are not open (I Pet. 3:12). Confession does not replace repentance--it must be preceded by it.

Some of the great prayers of the Bible contained strong confessions of guilt before God.

1. David's Personal Confessions.

During David's reign Satan had entered into his heart, causing him to want Israel numbered. Somehow Joab sensed that some aspect of the matter was not right, and he sought to dissuade David. However, the king was not to be turned from his

intention. After the numbering David's heart smote him, and he humbly confessed, "I have sinned greatly...I have done very foolishly" (I Chron. 21:8). And when God began to mete out the punishment for his sin, David was made to realize more than ever the seriousness of his sin in the sight of God so that he again confessed, "I it is that have sinned and done evil indeed" (verse 17).

On another occasion, when praying for forgiveness concerning his sin with Bathsheba and the other transgressions that grew out of it, David confessed, "I acknowledge my transgressions: and my sin is ever before me" (Psa. 51:3). And even though others had suffered because of his sin (Uriah had died; the baby born of the sin died), David realized that worst feature of his sin was that he had sinned against God, for it was His law that had been broken, God's will that had been disregarded and trampled underfoot, for he stated, "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" (verse 4). Observe also the many confessions of his guilt in the various parts of his prayer in this same chapter: "my transgressions" twice (verses 1,3); "my sin" twice (verses 2,3); "my sins" (verse 9); "mine iniquity" (verse 2); "all mine iniquities" (verse 9); and

“bloodguiltiness” (verse 14). The following petitions in the chapter also demonstrate his feeling of guilt: “Have mercy upon me...blot out my transgressions” (verse 1); “Wash me thoroughly...cleanse me” (verse 2); “Purge me...and I shall be clean: wash me, and I shall be whiter than snow” (verse 7); “Hide thy face from my sins” (verse 9); “Create in me a clean heart...renew a right spirit within me” (verse 10); “Cast me not away from thy presence; and take not thy holy spirit from me” (verse 11). His heartfelt confession of sin and petition for mercy remind one of the publican’s prayer of Luke 18:13: “God be merciful to me a sinner.”

Oh that we all might realize it is this humbling of ourselves before God that enables us to go to our house “justified” (Luke 18:14), and that it was that proud, self-satisfied attitude of the Pharisee that God deplored and that caused Jesus to say, “Every one that exalteth himself shall be abased” (Luke 18:14).

2. Confession in Behalf of the Nation.

During the captivity years of Israel in Babylon, the prophet Daniel confessed the sins of the nation. First of all, he acknowledged that the nation had not obeyed the law God had given them: “We have sinned, and have committed iniquity, and have done wickedly, and have rebelled, even by departing from thy precepts and from thy judgments” (Dan. 9:5). Next he confessed they had also sinned in not repenting when God’s prophets were sent to them: “Neither have we hearkened unto thy servants the prophets, which spake in thy name to our kings, our princes, and our fathers, and to all the people of the land” (verse 6). Daniel, that great man of prayer, knew confession of sin was so important with God, and so should we realize the same today.

So did Nehemiah realize it. See his confession in Neh. 1:6,7. And in the 9th chapter of Neh. the priests interceded in behalf of the nation in which the matter of confessing the nation’s sins was very prominent. Read Neh. 9:16-35.

One of the greatest priestly confessions in all the Bible is that of Ezra: “O my God, I am ashamed and blush to lift up my face to thee, my God: for our iniquities are increased over our head, and our trespass is grown up unto the heavens. Since the days of our fathers have we been in a great trespass unto

this day; and for our iniquities have we, our kings, and our priests, been delivered into the hand of the kings of the lands, to the sword, to captivity, and to a spoil, and to confusion of face, as it is this day” (Ezra 9:6,7). And he went on to narrate the constant goodness of God to them and their continual transgressions against Him. At the time of his confession, the nation was in the midst of another epidemic of sin--that of intermarrying with the heathen in violation of the will of God. He closed his confession with these words: “O Lord God of Israel, thou art righteous: for we remain yet escaped, as it is this day: behold, we are before thee in our trespasses; for we cannot stand before thee because of this” (verse 15). Since space does not permit the carrying of all he said on that occasion, please read Ezra 9:1-15.

It is this willingness to admit our shortcomings in contrast to those who will not that prompted John to write, “If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness” (I John 1:8,9).

It may be the tendency of many to conceal rather than confess their sins, but if we want the Lord’s blessing, that is the wrong policy to follow. Prov. 28:13 says, “He that covereth his sins shall not prosper: but whoso confesseth and forsaketh them shall have mercy.”

QUESTIONS

1. Our prayer-right is not based on _____ merit but on the mediatorship of _____.
2. Is confession without repentance achieving before God?
3. What are some of David’s expression of confession in the 51st Psalm?
4. Why did the publican rather than the Pharisee go to his house justified?
5. Tell of Daniel’s confessing of Israel’s sins in his prayer.
6. Do the same for Ezra’s confessions in his prayer.
7. What does the apostle John promise Christians who acknowledge their sins?
8. What does the book of Proverbs say about covering and confessing one’s sins?

Sometimes Prayer is Just Talking to God

“Oh the pure delight of a single hour that before Thy throne I spend; When I kneel in prayer and with Thee, my God, I commune as friend with friend!”

1. Conversing With God.

These words of a familiar song remind us that prayer is communing with God, communing as friend with Friend! Prayer is not just saying words into the air--prayer is conversing with God about life, about whatever is on one's heart. This is what gives prayer its naturalness to the Christian. A Christian does not have to send to a publishing house to buy a book of prayers--God permits him to talk to Him about whatever is on his heart. A Christian doesn't have to borrow his expressions and petitions and thoughts from others' prayers--he can pray to God in his own way of expressing himself. But prayer is so traditional in form and expression that many people have lost the naturalness of their own personal expression to God. Instead of uttering their own petitions and talking to God in their own personal way, they must conform their prayers to everybody else's. Hence, there is little freshness about people's prayers. And the audience has come to think in the same way, for if a person opens his heart up too much before God in a public prayer, an utterance in which he gets off the "hard, beaten path," people think it is a "little different". Now prayer may be said to be a lot of other things, but don't overlook the fact that when you study Bible prayers, many of them could well be classified as holy conversations with God. Let us see.

2. Moses and Joshua Did.

When the Israelites received the report of the spies and refused to follow Moses' leadership to enter Canaan, God was ready to destroy them. In Num. 14:11,12 He revealed this thought to Moses. But Moses said to the Lord (notice this "holy conversation"--prayer), "Then the Egyptians shall hear it, (for thou broughtest up this people in thy might from among them;) and they will tell it to the

inhabitants of this land: for they have heard that thou Lord art among this people, that thou Lord art seen face to face, and that thy cloud standeth over them, and that thou goest before them, by day time in a pillar of a cloud, and in a pillar of fire by night. Now if thou shalt kill all this people as one man, then the nations which have heard the fame of thee will speak, saying, Because the Lord was not able to bring this people into the land which he sware unto them, therefore he hath slain them in the wilderness. And now, I beseech thee, let the power of my Lord be great, according as thou hast spoken, saying, The Lord is longsuffering, and of great mercy, forgiving iniquity and transgression, and by no means clearing the guilty, visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children unto the third and fourth generation. Pardon, I beseech thee, the iniquity of this people according unto the greatness of thy mercy, and as thou hast forgiven this people, from Egypt even until now" (verses 13-19). And the Lord replied in His part of the conversation in verses 20-25.

Space is not available to print several other examples in full as we would like to do, but you who are studying these considerations on prayer, take your Bibles and notice the same type of communication between Joshua and God in Josh. 7:6-15.

3. Hezekiah Did.

In the above two instances (Moses and Joshua), God answered them back directly. But in Hezekiah's case (II Kings 19:14-34), which read in full from your Bible, God did not answer him directly but sent His answer to Hezekiah through the prophet Isaiah. Notice, though, that Hezekiah also conversed with God in his prayer--he just opened his heart and mind and TALKED TO GOD. If you don't do this, your prayers aren't really worth much to you, to God, or to the situation. Don't be afraid to go to God and tell Him all your heart. Be like a son going to his father and asking him for bread or for an egg or for fish. This is the way Jesus pictured prayer (Luke 11:11-13). Be like a man going to his friend and

asking to borrow some bread to set before an unexpected visitor. This again is the way Jesus pictured prayer (Luke 11:5-9).

4. Others Did.

Notice Jacob's earnest conversation with God concerning his coming meeting with Esau from whom he had fled so many years before (Gen. 32:9-12). Notice in it that Jacob reminded God that in returning he was just doing what God had commanded him to do, and that He had promised to do him good in it (verse 9).

Jesus' great prayer in John 17:1-26 is fully conversational in nature--it was not all thanks and petition, but He talked things over with God. Read it. And notice, too, that His prayer was like ours in that He did all the talking that was done--God did not reply back in words as He did to Moses and Joshua.

Sometimes somebody's public prayer will be criticized because it contains Scripture, as if that would be totally wrong. Oh, how people need to get their Bibles down and do more studying and less criticizing! The words found in the Levites' talk to

God in Neh. 9:6-38 is more a narration of what is recorded in the history written by Moses than it is anything else--God knew every fact contained in it, yet it was in order to say every bit of it. Why? They had a purpose--a sacred purpose--for saying it. And so long as everything we say before God is sincere, is said for the right purpose, and expresses one's thought to God, there is nothing wrong with saying it.

Restudy the above six prayers (and others like them, such as Ezra 9:5-15), and you will see that Bible prayers were actually a commingling of thanksgiving, petition, praise, confession, and holy conversation with God. Let us do more of it ourselves!

QUESTIONS

1. Why does a Christian not need a book of publishing-house prayers?
2. Tell of Moses' talk with God when He was about ready to destroy Israel?
3. At times prayer is like a _____ asking his father for food.
4. Jesus likened prayer to man going to his _____ at midnight to borrow some bread to set before his guest.

Being Definite in Our Petitions

Having discussed praising God for His wonderful attributes and unlimited power, earnest thanksgiving to God for His many benefits, holy conversation to God, and the confession of our sins before God, we now come to the aspect of prayer from which the word "prayer" itself comes--that of asking, beseeching, petitioning God for blessings.

1. Asking Nothing in Prayer.

Though we do all the above things mentioned, if we ask God for nothing, we have hardly "prayed" in the true sense of that word. Oh yes, we are aware of the Pharisee's "prayer" that asked nothing, contained no petition (Luke 18:10,11). In his so-called attempt at prayer it violated about every law and thought of true prayer: he compared himself with fallen man rather than the holiness of God; he made no acknowledgment of his sinfulness before God such as is always in order; and he asked no benefit from God,

nor did he seem to feel such a need. He was a small package all wrapped up in himself--a poor specimen of one praying.

By way of contrast to him and in support of our proposition that prayer is built around "petition", we read that Daniel made his "petition" three times a day (Dan. 6:13), and that we have the "petitions" that we desired of him (I John 5:15). The word "petition" is an apt word for prayer. Our English word "pray" comes from the Latin word "precari" (from which "precarious" comes), and it means to "ask, beg, pray". The dictionary says of "pray": "To make earnest request or petition." And what is a "petition"? Notice this fitting dictionary definition: "Request made for something desired, especially respectful or humble request, as to a superior or to one or those in authority." Is this not exactly what we do when we pray?

Groups of citizens sometimes draw up a request, sign it, and send it to the president or to the

governor or to their congressman, and what do they call it? A "petition". And thus are our prayers much like inferiors calling on our Superior. In this there is the acknowledgment of His capabilities to give, of our need of His giving, and of our faith in His willingness to give. The idea of "petitioning" also reveals an attitude toward God and toward ourselves, and it likewise determines the attitude we have in prayer.

2. A Biblical Illustration of Definiteness in Prayer.

Let us notice how true this comparison is. When Esther came before the king, he asked her, "What is thy petition? and it shall be granted thee" (Esth. 5:6). In fact, this word "petition" is used several times in the book of Esth. (5:7; 5:8; 7:2; 7:3; and 9:12) concerning her request to an earthly superior. And the same Hebrew word ("shelah" or "sheelah") is used concerning Hannah's requests to God in I Sam. 1:17 ("the God of Israel grant thee thy petition that thou hast asked of him") and I Sam. 1:27 ("For this child I prayed: and the Lord hath given me my petition which I asked of him"). Notice the definiteness of her petition: "For this child I prayed." And notice the definiteness of the Lord's answer: "The Lord hath given me my petition which I asked of him." It was this definiteness of petition that caused her to know God had heard her cry, and it is a definite petition that God desires to hear. The more definite our petitions, the more sure we can be God has heard us, the more real thanksgiving we can give to God as a result.

3. Why We Major on This Point.

We major on this point because the tendency is to generalize rather than be specific in both petitions and thanksgiving. How much more like Bible prayers is it to pray for the blessing of a child, for the

restoration of one's health, for the conversion of one you are teaching, for helping in preparing a given sermon, etc. than to pray in an indefinite, general way as so many are prone to do! And how much better to thank the Lord for specific blessings of a suitable job, adequate money to pay a large bill that is about due, and safe arrival from a long trip, etc. than to thank the Lord in an indefinite, general way as so many tend to do!

We are, therefore, driven to the conclusion that one of the things wrong with many prayers is that they are too general and not specific enough. Is it because we believe God prefers it that way, or is it that we are too mentally lazy, too little observing, too unspiritual at heart to want to take the time to break down our needs into specific requests? Whatever it is, it is not good. Not until we pray more definitely will we really know what to pray about, will we be able to spend much time in prayer with God, or will we know whether God has answered our prayers or not.

QUESTIONS

1. Why was the Pharisee's prayer a poor specimen of prayer?
2. Whose prayers were called petitions in the Bible?
3. How definite was Hannah in her prayer for a child?
4. How definite did she say God was in His answer?
5. The tendency is for people to _____ rather than being _____ in their prayers.
6. What are some explanations for people praying as described in question 5?

Asking in Jesus' Name and "Amen"

Why when we pray do we include the name of Jesus? It is not merely to complete a form, but it has significant, important meaning.

1. We Are Unworthy.

When man sinned, he lost his opportunity for immediate contact with God. In order to teach man that he was not worthy to come to God directly, God set up the priesthood of the Old Testament. The priest represented man before God as well as God to man. This is one of the important lessons taught us by the Old Testament.

2. Jesus is Our Mediator.

When Jesus came, He showed that He was the One through whom men would approach God as well as He being the One through whom God would speak to men. He said, "I am the way, the truth, and the life: no man cometh unto the Father but by me" (John 14:6). After claiming that no man knew the Father but He Himself and he to whomsoever He would reveal Him, He called on men to come to Him if they would find rest for their souls (Matt. 11:27,28).

The book of Hebrews is especially rich in setting forth Jesus as our mediator, our intercessor, our high priest at the right hand of God. Yes, God speaks to us today through His Son (Heb. 1:1,2), but He also accepts those who come to Him through His Son. Christ "is able to save them to the uttermost that come unto God by him" (Heb. 7:25), and the rest of the verse goes on to say "Seeing he ever liveth to make intercession for them."

That Jesus was to be the abiding high priest is traceable back as far as Psa. 110:4: "The Lord hath sworn, and will not repent, Thou art a priest for ever after the order of Melchizedek," a statement applied in Heb. to Jesus: "So also Christ glorified not himself to be made an high priest; but he that said unto him, Thou art my Son, to day have I begotten thee. As he saith also in another place, Thou art a priest for ever after the order of Melchizedek" (Heb. 5:5,6).

When we pray we are to approach God through Christ: "Hitherto have ye asked nothing in my

name: ask, and ye shall receive" (John 16:24); "Giving thanks to God and the Father by him" (Col. 3:17). In using Jesus' name, therefore, we are admitting our unworthiness to an audience with God, and that our only hope of God's hearing us or regarding our prayer is that He recognizes Jesus in whose name we pray. That the world needs a Savior from sin is evident, but that Christians yet need a mediator with God proves that we still (this side of our baptism) stand by grace and not by merit.

Sometimes the question is asked if it is necessary to mention Jesus' name in the prayer itself since it is understood that all prayer today by a Christian is through the mediatorship of Jesus. It is true that whatever we do is to be done in the name of Jesus (Col. 3:17), and we don't go around saying, "This I do in Jesus' name," concerning everything we do. On the other hand, Jesus said, "In my name shall they...lay hands on the sick, and they shall recover" (Mark 16:17,18). It is noteworthy that when Peter healed the lame man, he said, "In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth rise up and walk" (Acts 3:6), and it seems fair to infer that Paul must have audibly used the name of Jesus in his miracles at Ephesus the way the sons of Sceva tried to imitate him (Acts 19:11-13). Surely one is completely in order to say that his prayer is being prayed in the name of Jesus, and he should do so with the full understanding that Jesus is at God's right hand to intercede for him, and that God honors the prayer because of Jesus and not because of the merit of the one praying it.

3. The Meaning of "Amen".

The "amen" at the end of our prayers comes from a Greek word that means "truly". It was placed at the end of Bible books (Matt. 28:20; Mark 16:20; Luke 24:53; John 21:25; Rom. 16:27; I Cor. 16:24; II Cor. 13:14--in fact every New Testament book except Acts, Jas., and III John) as well as at the end of prayers. Everything we pray we should mean and be able to say "amen" meaningfully at the end as well as use it when others are leading in prayer (I Cor. 14:16).

QUESTIONS

1. What deprived man of his opportunity for immediate contact with God?
2. God has set up a _____ between Himself and us.

3. Cite some verses showing Jesus to be our mediator with God.
4. Why do we pray in Jesus' name?
5. What does "amen" mean?

Kneeling in Prayer

It is not always necessary to kneel in prayer, otherwise it would be wrong to stand in prayer such as is customary during a single prayer or during the benediction at a public church service, but the fact is that apparently more prayers in the Bible were prayed on people's knees than from any other position. Private prayers as well as the prayer meeting group can find greater satisfaction in prayer if people realize their smallness and God's greatness and demonstrate that realization by kneeling. Do not be ashamed to kneel before God--be afraid not to. And anyone claiming to go by the Bible who would dare make fun of a Christian praying on bent knee or who would call him a Pentecostal in derision is either woefully ignorant of the Scriptures or has a heart that needs to be humbled before God.

1. Significance of Kneeling.

The Egyptians were to bow the knee before Joseph (Gen. 41:43). In mock honor, the soldiers bowed the knee before Jesus when He was on trial (Mark 15:16-20). A trembling captain of fifty men fell on his knees before Elijah and pleaded for his life and theirs (II Kings 1:13). When Peter saw the great catch of fishes, he felt humbled, fell at Jesus' knees and confessed his unworthiness (Luke 5:8).

2. Biblical Example of Kneeling in Prayer.

When Solomon dedicated his temple to God,

he knelt before Him as he prayed (II Chron. 6:13). When Daniel prayed his three times a day, he did so on bended knee (Dan. 6:10). The leper who came seeking cleansing knelt before Jesus when he made his request (Mark 1:40). The Gadarene demoniac fell down before Jesus (Luke 8:28). When Peter would raise Dorcas, he knelt as he called on God (Acts 9:40). Stephen's dying prayer was prayed on bent knee (Acts 7:60). At Miletus Paul knelt and prayed with the Ephesian elders (Acts 20:36). It was a large group that knelt in prayer on the seashore at Tyre when Paul was leaving them (Acts 21:5). And who can overlook the fact that Jesus knelt in prayer, yea even prostrated Himself on His face, in Gethsemane (Luke 22:41; Matt. 26:39)? Even the worshippers of Baal bowed their knees before their images (I Kings 19:18).

"O come, let us worship and bow down: let us kneel before the Lord our maker" (Psa. 95:6).

QUESTIONS

1. What was the significance of kneeling in Bible days even in matters not involving prayer?
2. Did this significance carry over into prayer?
3. Cite instances in Biblical prayers when they knelt.
4. In Bible days did they always kneel in prayer?
5. Should we be ashamed to kneel in prayer?

Meaningful Public Prayer

Have you been called on to lead in public prayer? Did you realize the responsibility that was yours? The words "lead in prayer" imply you are to pray so others can freely unite with you in the things you pray. Let us who lead others in public prayer so pray that they will pray when we pray. Otherwise we are not leading them in prayer! Let us give some thought to this subject.

1. Suggestions

If we are to lead others in public prayer, let us pray about things that are common-interest rather than things that are personal to us. At home, at the bedside, in the secret closet, is the place to pray about personal matters unless it is something unusual that others would be glad to join us in prayer about.

Each prayer should be appropriate for the occasion. For instance, if praying at the Lord's table, pray about things pertinent to it. Don't pray about the sermon coming up, the rulers of the nation, the young people, the unsaved, the sick, etc. Let those be prayed for at other times.

2. Abuses.

When we lead in public prayer, we are not to preach a sermon. Nothing will kill the spirit of prayer quicker than when one quits praying to God and begins "getting things off his chest" to people. Sometimes people do this when there is dissension in the congregation, and they want others to hear something said for their benefit. The true purpose of prayer should not be abused either by preacher, elder, deacon, or anybody else.

When leading in public prayer, guard against meaningless repetition. Some people say "Lord" or "Father" or "God" with nearly every line of prayer. People will sometimes ask a preacher to speak to some brother who has about worn everybody out with an over-use of the name God. There have been times

when after wearing people out with their repetition prayers, they have been known to use the name of God more than 100 times in a given prayer. If you would do this to somebody's name with whom you were visiting, they would notice it and would say something to you about it. Here is an example of what we mean: "Our kind, heavenly Father, we thank Thee, Lord, that Thou hast brought us together in this service, God, and we pray, dear Lord, that Thou wilt have Thy way, Lord, in this service..." If we will be aware each time when calling the name of God, we will probably not over-use it. Every addressing of God should be thoughtfully made. He won't go away while we are praying, and He doesn't quit listening.

Similarly some over-use word "just". Example: "Father, we just pray that you will help us in our personal lives, and that you will just be with us today. Just be merciful to us in all our failures, and just help us be faithful to thee until we die."

Some public prayers seem to roam around with nowhere really to land. Many pray well in their opening words and in the middle part of their prayers, but in leading up to some kind of a conclusion they seem not to know how to do it. Such expressions as "Be with us in this service; be with us as we go to our homes; be with our lives; be with us during this week; be with us throughout life; and be with all of those for whom it is our duty to pray" are usually more formal than really meaningful, and yet it is meaningful prayer that we are after.

QUESTIONS

1. What do the words "lead in prayer" imply?
2. In public prayer should we pray about our personal matters or matters of common concern?
3. What would be an example of praying appropriately for the occasion?
4. What is wrong with "preaching" in public prayer?
5. Give some example of meaningless repetition in public prayer?

The Sincerity of Private Prayer

Jesus' statement in Matt. 6:6 has sometimes caused people to question whether we should pray publicly. It reads, "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."

1. Public Prayer is Not Forbidden.

If we had that statement only, we might so conceive, but there are other passages that show they prayed in public with divine approval. Here are some of them.

The apostles and others met together in public prayer prior to the day of Pentecost (Acts 1:14). The prayers referred to in Acts 2:42 would seem to be public prayers. Peter and John returned from the persecuting authorities and gathered the church together for prayer (Acts 4:23ff). In consecrating the seven to their labor, the apostles, prayed as well as laid their hands on them (Acts 6:6). Stephen prayed his final prayer with a loud voice in public (Acts 7:60). In conferring the powers of the Holy Spirit on the Samaritans, Peter and John prayed (Acts 8:14,15). When Peter was in jail, many gathered together in public prayer (Acts 12:12). Barnabas and Saul were sent forth on their evangelistic tour after being prayed for by those of the Antioch church (Acts 13:2,3). The prisoners heard Paul and Silas pray in the prison (Acts 16:25). Paul and the Ephesian elders prayed together on his departure from them (Acts 20:36). The church at Tyre (men, women, and children) all knelt down on the seashore with Paul in a great prayer meeting as he departed from them for Jerusalem (Acts 21:4,5). Before they ate, Paul publicly thanked God for the food even though his travel companions were not Christians (Acts 27:33-35).

Surely from these passages in Acts (and many more could be produced from other Bible books), it is evident that Christ was not forbidding public praying. He was, however, warning against praying merely to be seen of men. To parade one's religion is wrong; to live it sincerely is right. When a person prays in public but does not in private, surely God would just as soon not have him pray in public. If the privilege of prayer

really means something to him, he will be praying often when he is by himself.

I remember dealing one time with a man on the matter of prayer. He was so terribly weak in the matter of private prayer, but he could pray a fine sounding prayer in public. That has to be labeled hypocrisy, and Jesus forbid it. Jesus used this very word in Matt. 6: "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" (verse 5). On the other hand, one does not let people interfere with his religion. That, I believe, is why Paul went right ahead and prayed on board the storm tossed vessel before eating. He did not pray merely to be seen of men, and, he did not let their presence keep him from praying. Some people fail in one way (hypocrisy), and some in the other way (timid followers).

2. Jesus Urges Private Prayer.

Besides forbidding hypocritical praying we do know that Jesus was urging private prayer in Matt. 6:6, and this is so all important. Numerous times do we read of Jesus going aside from the masses in order to be alone with God in prayer. In Mark 1:35 we read of His rising a long time before daybreak and going out into a solitary place to pray. In Gethsemane, though He wanted His disciples near Him, He was removed from the closest of them at least a stone's throw in order that He might know the holy presence of God the more (Luke 22:39). When Jesus perceived that His impressed crowd would desire to crown Him as a king in opposition to the rule that was over them, He sent the people away (John 6:15) and went into the mountain for some needed prayer (Matt. 14:23), and He remained there in prayer for a long season. And He spent all night in private prayer before choosing His apostles (Luke 6:12,13).

Those who are truly spiritually minded and who have prayer burdens on their hearts (actually those who are truly living the Christian life) will so arrange their lives that they will know the joy and the power of a real prayer life. The limited number of

public prayers will not suffice with them.

There is an unquestionable need for many to heed Jesus' instruction to abound in the matter of private prayer. This praying at church but not in the private "closet" is not New Testament Christianity. And note Christ's wonderful promise: "Thy Father which seeth in secret shall reward thee openly." May the Lord stir up your heart to walk closer to Him and to pray more each day.

Have you read each of these studies on prayer? Have you meditated on the Scriptural examples of prayer studied? Have you compared them with your own prayers? Wherein have your prayers been found amiss or lacking? How have these studies improved

your own prayers? Do you care how you pray? Is God pleased with your praying? If He isn't how should you go about trying to improve your prayers? May God have blessed them to that end and use these studies as one means of drawing you closer to Him in an everyday life of prayer!

QUESTIONS

1. How do we know Jesus was not forbidding public prayer in Matt. 6:6?
2. What was Jesus urging in that verse?
3. Cite instances in Jesus' life when He prayed privately.

How the Devil Attacks Our Prayer Lives

God wants us to pray. His Word is filled with admonitions for us to pray. How God rejoices to see the Christian upon his knees! Jesus has set us an example of fervent, persistent, and prevailing prayer. But the devil attacks our prayer lives. He does everything within his power to keep us from praying. Surely every Christian can verify this in his own experience. If we would maintain the life of constant and prevailing prayer, we must be on guard lest the devil's attacks defeat us. Thus, Paul wrote the Christians to "watch unto prayer". This message is a personal one. The writer is writing from his own experience and the experiences of others with whom he has conversed. Will you not look into your own life, dear reader, and determine just what it is that has been keeping you from praying as you ought?

1. We get so busy doing other things that we neglect prayer.

Men get busy with their farming or some other job. Women get busy with the house work and other matters. Preachers get busy with "church work". These may not be necessarily objectionable, but the result is that so much do these occupy people's time

that no time is left (or taken) for prayer.

Now even though we are busy, we take time to eat and sleep. So your writer has found the only solution to the above attack is to devote a definite portion of every day to prayer. Until we make prayer as much a part of every day as we do food, work, and sleep, the devil will always play havoc with our prayer lives and will gain the upper hand.

You people know this is a chief attack in your life. Then take necessary measures to correct this condition. I challenge you to devote a definite time or times in every day when you are to be found in prayer.

2. We maintain wrong attitudes toward what we should ask.

The average person has little tasks, little problems, and little matters before him every day of his life. But too often the attitude is that prayer for these little, insignificant things is not in order. The result is that the little things are not taken to the Lord in prayer. On the other hand men do not ask big things of God. They would consider such action as exaggerated. The result is that they do not ask God for big things. Consequently the little things are too

small to bother God with, and the big things are too much to ask of the Lord.

Then some people have the idea that the only things for which we should pray are spiritual blessings. Oh, how this conception has wilted the prayer out of the average person! Actually prayer is the **DESIRE** of the heart expressed to God in the name of Christ. Several appropriate passages could be cited showing that every petition should stem from the desire rooted in the human heart. What did Christ teach we should do about our desires? Mark 11:24 says, "Therefore I say unto you, What things soever ye desire, when we pray, believe that ye receive them, and ye shall have them." Jesus says to pray and express our desires to God. What desires? "What things soever ye desire." This would include every desire of the Christian. I challenge you to point out one legitimate desire which a Christian may have which he cannot properly pray to God for. Brethren, by our ignorance and unbelief we have limited that "whatsoever" to spiritual things. But such is vicious and prayer-blighting. It is no wonder people pray so little.

The simple way I pray is this. I am going to pray for **THE VOICE OF EVANGELISM**, shall I say for illustration. How do I pray? Well, I ask myself this question: What do I desire to result from my praying about it? Here are some of the things that come to my mind as my desires with reference to it: I desire spiritual insight into the needs of men's hearts so that vital things can be published which will stir them up for Christ; I desire ability in writing and expressing those things in a powerful way which the Lord has laid on my heart; I desire to be protected from circulating anything that is false teaching; I desire God's help and blessings on the other men who write for the paper; I desire help in compiling the particular issue being made up today; I desire that each sermon, every article, every editorial will fill a need and be blessed as it goes on its way; I desire that more people will get to read the paper regularly; I desire that those who do read might find the help they need; I desire that adequate finances will be on hand to meet every expense connected with it. Now these are some of the things that I desire in my heart for **THE VOICE OF EVANGELISM**. So as I pray, how shall I pray? Shall I say, "Lord, bless the paper; bless and help it to be what it should be; bless and help it grow, etc., etc., etc., in Jesus name. Amen?" No! That type of praying is not telling the Lord in any reasonable way what I

desire. That's a lazy man's way of doing a thing half-heartedly. I take every one of those desires and pray for it personally until my real desire has been sufficiently expressed to God. I can illustrate it like this. Suppose somebody told you to write down your desires, and whatever you desired and asked would be given. How would you do it? Would you write, "Lord, give me whatever I need?" That sounds good but would not express the desires of your heart as God has asked you to do, and because you don't do what God says--express whatever desires you have--you are weak in your prayer life, prayer is a drudgery task that only a conscience can keep you doing. My brethren, you would not write your desires in such a sense. No. You would list the things that were in your heart. You would pray, "Lord, I have a time with my tongue--help me to overcome my sin of gossip. I need wisdom for the responsibility of teaching this particular lesson--Lord, give me the wisdom to deal with pertinent problems. I have a bill (a righteous bill) coming due next week, and, Lord, you have said owe no man anything. Now, Lord, I want to meet my honest debts--help me in some way meet that obligation. If I have wasted money or have been a poor manager, help me know it and overcome it. Father, I am going to talk to Mr. So and So about his soul--help me be used this day to his salvation; help me to know just what to speak; how to speak it; even, Father, where to begin in my talking with him."

Who doesn't delight to express his legitimate and real desires? We all do. But how much better when we realize there is a possibility that those desires can become realities. This is what I understand Jesus to mean about receiving great joy in prayer. He said, "**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). Before I came to realize this was the way the Bible teaches us to pray, the way that Biblical prayers were prayed, my prayer life was a burden, a problem, a shamefully weak thing. But now, thank God, I know the joy of prayer. I know the meaning of prayer. It is now the most natural thing of my Christian life. And for anyone who wants to quibble about what I have just written, I ask you, "Would you say you pray as you should? Do you find it a burden to pray? Do you find yourself neglecting prayer? Do you find yourself resolving every time you hear a sermon on prayer that you are

really going to pray from now on, only to fall back into the same old rut?" Then, brother, open your eyes. Ditch this infidel attitude toward prayer as for what you should ask. Make it natural--just like the Bible says--ask God for the desires of your heart, and if you cannot ask God for your desires, then it is wrong for you to have such desires. If in the name of Christ you work to bring about your desires, then why cannot you pray to God to help you in the name of Christ?

3. Prayer is too often just a form and habit.

If the devil cannot keep us from praying, then he must get hold of our prayer lives so prayer means nothing to us spiritually. He often does this by perverting the purpose and the motive of prayer. If he can get us just to say words, to mouth pious expressions, to keep prayer merely formal, then he has nullified the real meaning of prayer. If he can get us to pray merely from the standpoint of habit instead of desire, then again he has defeated us in prayer. How many people merely "say" words over their food! He

gets them to grunt out a few sounds just before crawling into bed at night, not because they love to pray, but because they feel it is their duty to pray.

Whenever the devil has overpowered us with this conception of prayer, then he has us paralyzed as far as active, accomplishing prayer is concerned.

May the Lord bless these words to your prayer lives.

QUESTIONS

1. What was the first attack mentioned?
2. What was the suggested solution to this problem?
3. What was the second attack listed?
4. Why do little things often not get prayed about?
5. Why do big things often not get prayed about?
6. What does the Bible say about prayer and our desires?
7. What was the final attack listed?

What Makes a Prayer Meeting Joyous?

The public prayer meeting is almost a "has been". Few congregations even pretend to have a prayer meeting. Usually those that do have prayer meetings find a very light attendance of a few elderly people. In an effort to build the prayer meeting crowd, all types of methods have been used, such as light refreshments afterwards. But a prayer meeting does not need to be dull and boring. A prayer service can be joyous indeed. In fact, all prayer should be joyous. Jesus said, "Ask, and ye shall receive, THAT YOUR JOY MAY BE FULL" (John 16:24). In a brief way let us set forth some things that make a public prayer service joyous.

1. When many participate.

When Peter came to Mary's house after being

miraculously delivered from prison, the book of Acts says he found "many gathered together praying" (Acts 12:12). When the prayer meeting draws a good turn-out of faithful, praying people, it makes for a joyous service.

2. When there are many urgent requests.

When brethren come together to pray, there ought to be something to pray about. There is no virtue inherent in merely coming together to pray. But with so many things to pray for and about, there is no excuse for God's children to gather without plenty of urgent requests. When there are deep prayer-burdens on the hearts of those gathering, presented as requests, then a joyous time before the throne of grace is in store.

3. When great earnestness characterizes the prayers.

When people pray with real fervor and spirit, not just mouthing prayer expressions but praying with real feeling and concern, then a prayer service is joyous. Heartless and formal praying has done much to discourage attendance at the prayer meeting.

4. When the service is not draggy.

Over much repetition of certain requests does much to stifle a good prayer meeting. When a request has been sincerely prayed for, then other petitions should be prayed for instead of "vainly" rethrasing a former one.

Great inexcusable pauses between prayers should be avoided if a prayer service has the power it ought to have. A good prayer service is a LIVE service--not a dead and draggy one.

5. When people get down on their knees before the Father.

It is true that one can acceptably pray to God in any legitimate body-position, but it is also true that the Bible pictures earnest prayer many times on the knees. When Paul and the Ephesian elders prayed that farewell prayer, they got down on their knees (Acts 20:36-38). Upon his departure from Tyre, Paul and the brethren knelt on the shore in prayer (Acts 21:3-5). This is a much neglected element in prayer today that we would do well to restore.

6. When a brotherly and harmonious spirit pervades the hearts of those gathered.

Nothing will kill the spirit of prayer quicker than the spirit of enmity and contention. When brethren really love one another, then they are interested in one another's petitions; then they can wholeheartedly engage in the whole service.

Really there is no reason why brethren cannot have real, live, joyous prayer meetings. We thank God for some such services over the land. They have been a blessing to our hearts. We thank God for the faithful preachers who have taught people their need of prayer and how to pray. They have made an inestimable contribution to many lives and homes and to the life of the church.

If the church is not having such a prayer service, by all means do all within your power and ability to gather the brethren for such a service. Pray for yourselves, for one another, for faithful preachers and evangelistic meetings in progress, for backsliders, for interested sinners, for the church itself. May God multiply the power of the church today by multiplying the number of such meetings.

QUESTIONS

1. What is the sad state of prayer meeting with many congregations?
2. Give Biblical proof that prayer should be joyous and not boring?
3. Name 3 things that can make a prayer meeting joyous.

We Need Prayer-Power with God

Men of the world seek for various kinds of power. They are interested in money power and political power. We often hear of "purchasing power". Religious ecclesiastics are seeking dominating power. Many are paying dearly for personality power. Some are seeking fame that they might have the power of prestige.

But the power that we are declaring that is needed is altogether different from any of the above-named powers. While the above powers are human, earthly, and worldly, the power that is needed lies in a different realm. The power that is really needed is SPIRITUAL power.

I know prayer can accomplish great things. I know there is something wrong when there is much praying but little accomplishment. This demonstrates the fact it is possible to pray but have no prayer-power with God.

There are many ways I know prayer can accomplish great things.

FIRST of all, I know from the promises concerning prayer. Jesus said, "Ask, and ye shall receive; seek, and ye shall find; knock, and it shall be opened unto you: for every one that asketh receiveth; and he that seeketh findeth; and to him that knocketh it shall be opened" (Matt. 7:7-11). Nobody can accept the Bible at face-value and say nothing happens in answer to prayer. People may say prayer is a waste of time and they have whatever they need even if they don't pray, that nothing in particular is a direct result of prayer, but as long as Jesus is the One in whom we believe, we dare not deny that prayer is a powerful part of our Christian lives. Jas. 5:16 declares, "The effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man availeth much." If such a promise does not mean that prayer accomplishes much, it is nothing but a false promise held out to gullible people.

SECONDLY, I know prayer can accomplish great things because of the emphasis placed on prayer in the example of Jesus. The fervency and the constancy with which Jesus prayed definitely indicates the importance of prayer. Of Him the Hebrew writer wrote, "Who in the days of his flesh, when he had offered up prayers and supplications with strong

crying and tears unto him that was able to save him from death, and was heard in that he feared" (Heb. 5:7). What a portrait of His wonderful life! Inspiration drew the picture of His prayer-life--praying constantly, praying fervently, praying expectantly! Jesus would not have spent so much time in prayer if it were a fruitless endeavor. If prayer be vain and useless, let us be "wise" and not follow the example of prayer left us by Jesus.

THIRDLY, I know prayer can accomplish great things because of the emphasis placed on prayer in the teaching of the Bible. Of the first converts in the dispensation of grace it says they continued steadfastly in prayer (Acts 2:42). There is much teaching in the epistles about prayer. There are many examples of people praying. There are many allusions to prayer. Why all of this if prayer is void of accomplishment? "Why?" I ask!

FINALLY, I know that prayer can accomplish great things because of my observations of those who do pray. Jesus said, "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" (Matt. 6:6). To those who live the real life of prayer Jesus promises that they will be rewarded openly. In other words, instead of praying as the hypocrites do (pray to be seen of men), Jesus promised that if they lived the life of prayer as they should, they wouldn't need to flaunt their prayer lives before men. God would reward them OPENLY. Men whom I have worked with who are men of great prayer have been blest mightily. God has heard their prayers. He has seen their sincerity and their faithfulness. He has rewarded them openly before the eyes of all men. In the life of every praying child of God there has been that difference of life all can easily detect.

Since prayer can accomplish great things, we ought to pray so as to have great power with God. As willing as we ought to be to ask and receive, I verily believe God is even more willing to hear and give. God delights in answering prayer for those who really trust Him and seek Him. "He is the rewarder of them

that diligently seek Him” (Heb. 11:6). There is great depth in that verse which will bear much thought and consideration.

If we are going to pray, surely we ought to pray availingly. We ought to desire to prevail mightily in prayer. We should have great prayer-power with God. But this power we shall never have until we pray the Bible way.

To pray the Bible way means that we must pray continually. The example of Jesus, the example of Paul, and the teaching of the New Testament (I Thess. 5:17; Col. 4:2) demonstrate Bible praying is **CONSTANT** praying. Prayer is not something Christians engage in spasmodically. It is something we are to persevere in. If we are going to pray the Bible way, we must take time to pray. We must not get in a hurry about getting through praying when we are alone before the heavenly Father. As we bow before the great God of all, brother after brother, congregation after congregation, preacher after preacher, and need after need should flood our minds and hearts. Such praying is fruitful prayer. It is meaningful and satisfying prayer. Yes, it is powerful prayer. It is the prayer taught in the Bible.

Bible praying prays about “everything”--not just a few things of life. Writing to the Philippians, Paul said, “Be careful for nothing; but in **EVERYTHING** by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known unto God” (Phil. 4:6). Not until we learn to pray about the little matters of life and the big matters alike will we know the real and full meaning of prayer. Not until we “take everything to God in prayer”, as the hymn goes, will we know the power that prayer can be in our lives. This is Bible prayer, and it alone is availing prayer.

Bible praying is earnest praying. Jas. 5:16 says, “The effectual **FERVENT** prayer of a righteous man availieth much.” Of Jesus’ praying Luke 22:44 says,

“And being in an agony he prayed more **EARNESTLY.**” Concerning a brother who was with Paul, he wrote, “Epaphras, who is one of you, a servant of Christ, saluteth you, always **LABORING FERVENTLY** for you in prayers, that ye may stand perfect and complete in all the will of God” (Col. 4:12). These three passages show us that Bible praying was zealous praying. It was prayed in real earnestness of soul. It was not dead, heartless praying as so much praying tends to be today. Notice that Epaphras actually “labored” in prayer. When the Bible promises great things in answer to prayer, remember that it is fervent earnest praying that carries the promise.

Perhaps many who read these lines are getting nowhere in prayer. Maybe you have started but have quit. Maybe your prayer life goes limping along as a burdensome chore rather than a joyful accomplishment. Aren’t you concerned about having greater prayer-power with God? Are you intending to do nothing about the fruitlessness and barrenness of your prayers? Because you dwell among people who have no life in their prayers and who do not persevere in prayer, are you going to be satisfied with such weakness when you could have great power? I tell you it is a shame to pray much and get nowhere. It is a shame to pray and get nowhere when we can pray and get somewhere. In view of real thinking I believe we ought to count the time wasted that we spend in prayer when we get nowhere and avail nothing. Why waste time and power when we can lay hold upon divine power?

QUESTIONS

1. Of the 4 things mentioned name 3 ways we can know prayer accomplished specific things.
2. What 3 things were pointed out as to the way we should pray?

Prayer and God's Providence

Somewhere between the natural and the miraculous order of things there is the providential working of God in the affairs of this world. "All things work together for good, to them that love God and that are called according to His purpose" (Rom. 8:28) is a definite statement of such. If I didn't believe in God's providential care, I would cease to pray, for if there isn't God's providence in the world, there can be no answering of prayer. Indeed most people who doubt God's providence today have become very negligent in prayer.

People often propose the theory that prayers have no affect on God, but that the change is merely in us. For example, when we pray, it makes us feel better, and by doing this, prayer does work a blessing on us. The question is, does this theory adequately represent prayer? Does God really hear us? Does He regard our prayers? Has He promised to answer our petitions? If He has, then prayer must be acknowledged to be more than a psychological change in us.

The Scriptures declare that Christ, our great High Priest, "can be touched with the feeling of our infirmities, for He was in all points tempted like as we are, yet without sin. Let us therefore come boldly unto the throne of grace that we might receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need" (Heb. 4:15,16). This Scripture makes the psychological theory a very poor representative of prayer. In fact, that which the psychological theory denies, this Scripture affirms--that God is moved and affected about our needs, and in answer to our prayers before the throne of grace grants us mercy and grace in time of need.

The Scriptures abound with affirmations of God's providence, and that He is a prayer-hearing and prayer-answering God. Let us stand by in reverent faith as some of these holy declarations of prayer parade before us: "The eyes of the Lord are over the

righteous and His ears are open to their prayers, but the face of the Lord is against them that do evil" (I Pet. 3:12); "Ask and ye shall receive" (Matt. 7:7); "And whatsoever we ask we receive of Him, because we keep His commandments, and do those things that are pleasing in His sight" (I John 3:22); "And this is the confidence that we have in Him, that if we ask anything according to His will, he heareth us" (I John 5:14); and, "Ye have not because ye ask not, ye ask and receive not because ye ask amiss, that ye may consume it upon your own lusts" (Jas. 4:2,3).

Prayer is conditional, but to them that "walk by the Spirit" and that ask "according to God's will" it is the Father's "good pleasure to give" them the things that will help them to grow in grace and in the knowledge of Christ. "God is able to do exceeding abundantly above all that we ask or think" (Eph. 3:20), and He will supply all the needs of His people in Christ (Phil. 4:19).

Jesus was a perfect example of dependence and prayer. Marvelous is the thought that He who had created all things, left His glory, emptied Himself, became wholly dependent and lived among men, revealing to them the true life of trust! As He went about doing good, many times He became wearied, but He withdrew Himself into solitude and there prayed to God. In His trying hour in Gethsemane, He cried with "strong crying and tears", thus exemplifying to mankind what He meant when He said, "Men ought ALWAYS to pray and not to faint."

QUESTIONS

1. Give Biblical proof of God's providential working?
2. What do some people say is the main effect brought about by prayer?