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## What Should We Be Praying For?

**Matthew 6:6:** (NASB) *But you, when you pray, go into your inner room, close your door and pray to your Father who is in secret, and your Father who sees what is done in secret will reward you.*



Many, many people pray. And we pray for all kinds of things from wanting more material things in our lives, to wanting to be healed from disease or injury, to wanting bad experiences to end. While we also pray for God's will to be done, it seems as though the focus of most of our prayers is about - well, it is all about me - what I feel, what I want and what I prefer. Think about it - prayer is supposed to be spiritual access to the God of all things and in that access all we can focus on is...me? How is prayer supposed to work? Are there guidelines or rules for HOW we should pray? Are there "do's" and "don'ts" for WHAT we should be praying for? WHO may pray? Is prayer an open and easily accessible tool for anyone who wants to talk to God or is it more of a privilege for those who are seeking God's will?

Prayer can be a tool of life. It has been used in such a way in numerous cultures for thousands of years. Our focus today will be on Judeo-Christian prayer and how it is laid out in Scripture for us to freely use. One of the wildly popular misconceptions about prayer, that is, prayer is all about me! But Scriptures clearly show us differently!

**David is in the wilderness of Judah hiding from King Saul and running for his life:**

**Psalms 63:1-8:** David only focuses on his own needs *after* putting God in perspective in his own mind and thoroughly praising and extolling God.

**Prayer Observation:** True, deep and life-changing prayer has or seeks a godly perspective.

David sought God's perspective. When you talk about the greatness of God in your head and heart, it changes the way you look at what is happening in front of you.

Science shows us that the very act of praying can actually affect our brains in a positive way. This by itself can be seen as a negative for those who do not believe.

Prayer is a tool that requires several components to be effective. There are three basic points regarding prayer that we will focus on: Privilege (having your prayers go before God in a respectable and acceptable way), Process (what makes a prayer into a good prayer - is it format? Sincerity? Praise? Posture?) and Persistence (is persistence vital in prayer? Does it go against God - we don't get the answer we want so we keep asking - what is He said "no?")

**How do we access the point of "privilege"? What does it take to be noticed?**

Privilege: Having your prayers go before God in a respectable and acceptable way.

Our theme text is taken from the context of "The Lord's Prayer." While the "Our Father" prayer is "viral" in the Christian community, few of us know the verses (that are often ignored) that *precede* the Lord's Prayer: **Matthew 6:5-8:** Jesus is talking about the general subject of prayer and is saying very strongly, here is what *not* to do: *Do not be like the hypocrites.*

We want to begin to determine where we are on the "prayer privilege scale" by examining the WHY of our prayers. Are we truly seeking the attention of God or the attention of others, or even stroking our own ego? Is it to make a show with eloquent speech or do we pray as a representative for those around us to talk to God? Public prayer is not unacceptable, but we must be wary of *how* we are praying. If we are trying to impress those around us, then we are abusing the privilege of prayer. *But you, when you pray, go into your inner room, close your door and pray to your Father who is in secret, and your Father who sees what is done in secret will reward you.* This is the exact opposite of hypocrites who pray to impress the crowd. Jesus is telling us not to pray as a spectacle but to be humble. He says *when you pray, go in private and focus on talking with God.* When you truly honor God, there is great humility.

*Go into your inner room, close your door and pray - (Source: Biblical commentary by Albert Barnes) Verse 6. Enter into thy closet. Every Jewish house had a place for secret devotion. The roofs of their houses were flat places for walking, conversation and meditation in the cool of the evening.*

Every Jewish home had a place for quiet devotion. There is something to be said for finding solitude for prayer in a specific place, or a place inside of your mind, maybe by listening to music or reading certain Scriptures.



We are not entitled to prayer; prayer is a privilege for the humble. The HOW of our prayers needs to be built on this foundation. <sup>7</sup>And when you are praying do not use meaningless repetition as the Gentiles do, for they suppose that they will be heard for their many words. <sup>8</sup>So do not be like them; for your Father knows what you need before you ask Him.

Prayer is a privilege for the sincere. It really is about needs and not at all about wants - it is really about our hearts and not about our eloquence - it is really about *our thoughts* and not about our words.

**Prayer Observation:** Prayer's privilege can be found by anyone willing to truly put God first!

This is the key to prayer - it must be God first! The Lord's Prayer is perhaps the best-known prayer amongst Christians. It is a prayer given as a *model* of how to pray. It is *not* a prayer for repetition. It is simple, focused and eloquent. **Here we learn how to pray:**

**Matthew 6:9-13:** (NASB) <sup>9</sup>Pray, then, in this way: Our Father who is in heaven, Hallowed be Your name. <sup>10</sup>Your kingdom come. Your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven. <sup>11</sup>Give us this day our daily bread. <sup>12</sup>And forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors. <sup>13</sup>And do not lead us into temptation, but deliver us from evil.

**We must be sure our prayers are godly:**

**Matthew 6:9:** (NASB) Pray, then, in this way: Our Father who is in heaven, Hallowed be Your name.

- **First order of business Jesus teaches us: Recognize the privilege! Glorify God our Father!**

The simple beginning of prayer is to first remember we are talking with the Creator of the Universe. We must slow down and honor His greatness.

**Romans 8:15:** Privilege lies in the realization that God is VERY approachable - just like a daddy should be to his child. (The title *Abba* is a tender, fatherly term similar to the English "daddy.")

**Isaiah 64:8:** Privilege lies in the realization that God shapes us and our lives - we do not shape His will. If we are praying properly, He can shape *our* will.

We need to learn about the privilege of prayer so we can position ourselves to be granted that privilege, because privilege does not come to everyone. First, it seems as though we are to have a godly perspective about our God and about ourselves.

**If we don't, this could keep us from the privilege of prayer:** **Isaiah 57:15:** Humility and contriteness (being sorry when you have done something wrong) - are these all that is necessary for the privilege of prayer? They are a good start...

**Next, built upon these we need to be living in a manner that would be pleasing to God:**

**Proverbs 15:6-9:** In Scripture, righteousness is not merely being "good;" it is being "godly good" and having godly principles. It is not good enough for our prayer life to be vital if we are just being good and not striving to be godly good.

**Does this all mean that everyone who prays is NOT on equal footing before God? Yes!**  
**Proverbs 15:28-29**

**God explained these things to Isaiah regarding Israel and their idolatrous behavior:**

**Isaiah 65:1-5:** Israel was God's chosen people in the Old Testament, but they strayed away from His laws. God said, *I permitted Myself to be sought* by them even though they were looking for something else; He put Himself before them in spite of their behavior.

Seeking spirituality or seeking a higher power or intervention is not necessarily seeking GOD! We need to be godly good in seeking Him.

(Source: John Gill's Exposition of the Bible) ...that sacrificeth in gardens; to idols ...as they were under every green tree; or in groves, where idols were worshipped... "Upon bricks" ...when they made bricks, they put upon them incense for idols; or, "upon tiles;" upon the roofs of their houses, which were covered with tiles;

God is literally describing Pagan ritualistic worship practices from His own chosen people. They were seeking spirituality and goodness but not God or godly goodness. Today is probably the time of the greatest idolatry in the history of mankind. Everything is about "ME."



(Source: John Gill's Exposition of the Bible) In order to practice necromancy, to consult the dead, where they imagined demons and departed spirits haunted, and of whom they fancied they might get knowledge of future things: ...whole nights for the same purposes...Which eat swine's flesh; forbidden by the law.

Compare that with today's movie industry, which directly reflects this activity of spiritism. This is not a way to find God. <sup>5</sup>Who say, *Keep to yourself, do not come near me, for I am holier than you! These are smoke in My nostrils, a fire that burns all the day.* (If you get smoke in your nostrils, it is irritating. God is saying, "This is an irritation to Me and is not honoring Me.")

Arrogance, idolatry and false worship are all things that do NOT honor God.

**Prayer Observation:** We cannot find God in places and things that takes His glory and power for their own.

Process: What makes a prayer into a good prayer? Is it format? Sincerity? Praise? Posture?

What makes a prayer a good prayer? Is it how you do it? Is it the order of the things you say? Is it about your heart? Is it about what you are doing or where you are?

**Matthew 6:10:** (NASB) *Your kingdom come. Your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven.*

- Second order of business: Pray for the plan of God to unfold

Solomon prayed for wisdom and he received it. He stopped praying and lost it.

Prayer throughout the Bible is varied. The clearly specific "list" of do's and don'ts we have thus far revolves around seeking the true God and being humble. Now we add seeking God's will above all things and God's kingdom as well.

**Jesus only doing the will of the Father made this kingdom possible:** Matthew 26:37-44: Jesus showed deep humility in saying, "Father this is what I want, but what I want doesn't matter. God, it is what You want! Your will be done!" Jesus gloriously walked into the trial and torment of his experience because he knew he was doing the will of the Father. This is why we pray for the kingdom - because Jesus did.

**Jesus paved the road for this kingdom. It must come by replacing (not enhancing or reorganizing) the kingdoms of this world:** Daniel 2:44

**And it must come through the growth of Israel as a nation - God's chosen people:** Jeremiah 23:2-5:

**Prayer Observation:** The process of prayer calls upon us to have God's plan firmly fixed in our minds.

**Matthew 6:11:** (NASB) *Give us this day our daily bread.*

- Third order of business: Petitioning for basic needs

The process of our prayers when followed is truly built with success in mind... We begin with the privilege of approaching the Almighty God and then we rehearse His will and His kingdom. It is only now - after we have honored God and rehearsed His kingdom - that our minds can see our own needs with a clear vision; a vision that has just been reminded that God's got this!

**It is now all about our needs and not our wants! God knows our needs before we even ask.** Matthew 4:4: This can have two different meanings: Physical sustenance and spiritual sustenance. The word of God is also our "daily bread." 1 Timothy 6:8: (NASB) *If we have food and covering, with these we shall be content.* **Jesus is generous about what may be before us if we would only ask:** Matthew 7:7-11: Whatever we ask, it should be "in accordance with your will, Father." The best way to learn to pray is to follow the way Jesus prayed.

**Knowing prayer's process, we also know that we can fall into godlessness in our own prayers:** James 4:1-3: We must not ask with wrong motives. Some churches teach and encourage if there is something you want that you feel will enhance or fulfill your life, go and physically touch what you are looking for. What you touch God will bring to your life. (A bigger house, a better job, etc.) The problem is they have forgotten the James Scripture. The key is not to touch something so you can get it. The key is to ask God if it is His will for you so He can bless you in the way that *He sees best.* God's answer could be yes, no or wait. The most important thing is to focus on the will of God. Prayer is not merely an activity; it is a way



to format our life. We do not always have to be physically on our knees to pray, but our posture should be one of humility and reverence. We may not always be able to follow the process of prayer (honoring God's name first) when urgent prayers are necessary. Our prayer life overall should be of praise and sincerity.

**Matthew 6:12:** (NASB) *and forgive us our **debts <3783>**, as we also have forgiven our debtors.*

- **Fourth order of business:** Being forgiven and forgiving

**Debts:** Strongs #3783 opheilema (of-i'-lay-mah); something owed, a due; morally, a fault

**NOTHING WORKS WITHOUT FORGIVENESS! We can forgive because we are forgiven:**

Ephesians 1:7 Matthew 18:21-22: (Part of the way we can reflect being forgiven is to be forgiving.)

**Prayer Observation:** Our own needs and forgiveness are best viewed in the context of God's plan for ALL!

**Persistence:** Is persistence vital in prayer? Does persistence go against God - we don't get the answer we want so we keep asking - what if He said, "No?"

**Matthew 6:13:** (NASB) *and do not lead us into temptation, but deliver us from evil.*

- **Fifth order of business:** Seeking God's overruling and protection

Persistence is not for the purpose of getting God's attention - it is for the purpose of focusing our attention on His overruling providence, for His providence most often comes in unexpected ways! 2 Peter 2:9: As godly individuals, do we want to be rescued from temptation? Do we offer a prayer of urgency under those circumstances? Are we willing to take the lifeline even if it is not the one you wanted? God CAN and WILL deliver us when we NEED delivering! Romans 12:12: (NASB) *rejoicing in hope, persevering in tribulation, devoted to prayer...* Notice how our hopes and trials and prayers are all intertwined? We can rejoice in hope and persevere in trials *if we are devoted to prayer.*

Let us observe and learn from the humble petitioning of two of God's faithful servants...

**Daniel was in Babylon for YEARS and continually prayed for the return of Israel to their home:** Daniel 9:17-19: Daniel representing his nation is asking God to return them to their land. He is praying for something that was an expectation. Daniel is not praying as a powerful leader, he is putting himself in the context of all of the others who have sinned. He is showing humility in prayer. He is asking for the fulfillment of his prophecy.

**Nehemiah, a rarely spoken of servant of God, was instrumental in the rebuilding of the walls of Jerusalem. His prayers and actions brought this most improbable task to fruition!** Nehemiah 1:4-7: Nehemiah is mourning and crying over this for days. In his prayer he is saying, "We have sinned." He is not blaming others. God overruled in his life because of his petition in prayer.

**Prayer Observation:** Persistence brings personal and lasting value to prayer, for it is through persistence that habits are developed and new habits build a new life!

When we look at the great examples of great moving prayers in Scripture, we see individuals praying for God's will, God's way, God's timing and individuals who see themselves in terms of their own humility, their own brokenness and the greatness of God. They put it all in perspective, just like Jesus showed us how to do in "The Lord's Prayer." Honor God first! Honor God's kingdom! Honor God's will, honor the basic needs of your life and then seek forgiveness. Make sure your prayer life is well rounded by seeking God's will first. It is not about being good but about being righteous, which is godly good. Pray without ceasing in a godly fashion.

*So, what should we be praying for?  
For Jonathan and Rick and Christian Questions...  
Think about it...!*