

The Power of Prayer



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The importance of prayer can be easily overlooked. Today in this modern world of busy hectic lives in the struggle to earn a living amongst many who deny even the existence of God, prayer can become neglected and sometimes forgotten. This article is designed to help understand the power of prayer to God, and communication with Him, and also to assist in ensuring that prayer to the Almighty God is a habit, an instinct, a second nature as it were, in a way which is acceptable to Him.

That prayer can be a powerful and effective, the scripture leaves us in no doubt. Matthew 21:22: *And all things, whatsoever ye shall ask in prayer, believing, ye shall receive.* James 5:16 *The effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man avails much.*

It is without doubt an important subject in the Bible, with pray, prayer and prayers being mentioned over 500 times in Scripture, not including the number of other descriptions of men and women calling upon God, giving thanks, crying out to God, and so on. But prayer is often misunderstood, so that it becomes no longer effective. For example, all around us are churches and mosques and different religious groups all praying – some very loudly, all to God – their God, and all expecting some kind of answer in response. Especially in a world full of violence, many pray for safety, for protection. Some on opposing sides in war, call their chaplains and priests to pray to God to give them success, both sides expecting God

to give them the victory! Whilst others who deny the existence of God all their life, suddenly at their funerals want the 'Lord's Prayer' read out – for the sole reason it is the done thing! The value of effective prayer seems to be lost on some people.

Communication with God is a two-way thing – of course how different people want to pray to God, is up to them, but how can we be sure that God will respond, and in what way does He respond?

The following are some questions that crop up from time to time from those seeking a better understanding of the Word of God:

- Why are prayers necessary?
- How is it physically possible for God to hear my prayer?
- Why do we need a high priest or a Mediator?
- Does God listen to the prayers of unbelievers?
- What should we pray for?
- How should prayers be conducted?

Why are prayers necessary?

Prayer is the means to draw near to God, through communication, either silent or verbally, to give thanksgiving, praise, and ask petitions of God. It is the means of expressing the innermost thoughts, of seeking forgiveness for sins. It is the means of acknowledging the character of God, and His love for mankind, and enables the opportunity of seeking guidance concerning His will. Communication is key to any successful relationship, and it is no different with God. But our relationship with God is unlike any other. For no man can see God and live (Exodus 33:20), *no man has seen God at any time* (John 1:18, and God dwells *in the light which no man can approach unto; whom no man hath seen, nor can see.* (1 Timothy 6:16) Communication with God therefore cannot be on the same level, if He cannot be seen or heard in the same way as mankind is. How then is it possible to be in communion with God, and express feelings and fears, joys and faith, if prayer did not exist? It is a means of approaching the Divine Grace, despite His supreme power, and dimensions which as humans we cannot discern, despite the natural unworthiness of man, God has made Himself accessible – but this

access is subject to certain conditions. Prayer is appreciating the presence of God, and in communal prayer, it is a way of expressing unity, and sharing that unity and togetherness which is possible because of the Almighty.

How is it physically possible for God to hear my prayer?

How do I know that God hears my prayers, seeing there is no answer I can hear back when I talk? This a question often asked. How can God hear our prayers when they are private thoughts of our mind? This again is also a good question. But the Bible assures us that prayers can be heard. One of the attributes and characteristics of God, is that he is omnipresent, present everywhere, and His presence fills His creation. Not only does God use His power to remain in contact with His creation, but He is especially interested in mankind who He created in His own image. For example: Psalm 46:1 *God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble.* In Isaiah 57:15 *For thus says the One who is high and lifted up, who inhabits eternity, whose name is Holy: I dwell in the high and holy place, and also with him who is of a contrite and lowly spirit, to revive the spirit of the lowly, and to revive the heart of the contrite.* Though dwelling in majesty and might, God can and does condescend to those who call upon Him. *The Lord looks from heaven; he beholds all the sons of men. From the place of his habitation, he looks upon all the inhabitants of the earth.* (Psalm 33:13-14) It is worth remembering that if God had the Power to create man in the first place, He has the power to relate entirely with His creation! Psalms 94:9 *He that planted the ear, shall he not hear? he that formed the eye, shall he not see?* Additionally, the character of God is one of mercy, and understands fully what He created in the first place: Psalm 103:14 *For he knows our frame; he remembers that we are dust.* Seeing that God is familiar with man, and knows how they function, he is able also to know what they think - *for he knows the secrets of the heart* (Psalms 44:21). Often in the New Testament we can read how the Lord Jesus, the Son of God who was given the Holy Spirit, this Power of God, was able to read the thoughts of men (see Matthew 9:4, 12:25, Mark 2:8, Luke 6:8, John 2:24,25). If Jesus could read the innermost thoughts of men, how much more can his Father

in heaven, the Creator of heavens and earth know the hearts and minds of men? Hebrews 4:13: *Neither is there any creature that is not manifest in his sight: but all things are naked and opened unto the eyes of him with whom we have to do.* On a practical level, man has invented modern technology which allows a fully paralysed patient to navigate a crowded room in a wheelchair using neural signals just the power of thought (New Scientist 18/11/22) If man can transmit the power of thought, surely God who created us with the ability to do this, can receive the same power of thought? 1 John 3: 20 *For if our heart condemn us, God is greater than our heart, and knows all things.* Additionally there are examples in the Bible of where silent prayer was made, and that it was heard by God – For example Abraham's servant in Genesis 24:45, Hannah in 1 Samuel 1:12-13, David in Psalm 139:1-4, Nehemiah in 2:4. But it must be noted that all of those people had something in common. We will return to that point later.

Why do we need a high priest or a Mediator?

Today there is no direct verbal reply from heaven or angels to personal prayer. This is because of the breach caused by sin.

In the beginning before the fall, communication between God and man was not hindered by sin, (Genesis 2:16,17) and in chapter 3, *the Lord God walked in the garden in the cool of the day*, but because of the sin of man and woman, they saw the need to hide from that voice because of their shame. Because of their sin, they were banished from the garden, and mortality imposed upon them and the creation. A breach had come in between God and man. *God is of purer eyes than to behold evil, and cannot not look on iniquity* (Habakkuk 1:13), a separation was necessary. But God intended immediately for that breach to be healed and devised a way for restoration to be possible. Communication could be restored, but only under certain conditions. This plan was centred in His Son, Jesus Christ who would destroy the root cause of sin. Of course, Jesus also the son of man, achieved this, and lived a life free from sin, but was crucified because he refused to disobey God, and thus condemned sinful nature. God in His mercy raised him from the

dead, and risen as a new man, free from the effects of sin and condemnation, was granted eternal life and ascended to the right hand of God.

Throughout his life, Jesus spoke to his Father in prayer – to God, and the four gospel records show how he communicated with his Father, often, regularly, in humility, in love, and reverence, and above all in faith. He prayed in complete unity with God, as he was fulfilling the will of God, and was completely in tune with God's plan. He was God's plan. His prayers were answered every time.

Because all men are descendants of Adam, they inherit the same sinful nature as Adam but unlike Jesus Christ, *all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God*, (Romans 3:23) it is not possible for the relationship with God and man to be exactly as it was in the beginning. Instead, God has given His son to be an Intercessor to intercede and appeal on behalf of men to God, he is now a Mediator – a go between – to heal the breach between God and man. Jesus himself taught this:... *I am the way, the truth, and the life: no man cometh unto the Father, but by me*. (John 14:6) Similarly in 1 Timothy 2:5: *For there is one God, and one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus*; Jesus is supremely and uniquely qualified to be a representative for man. He as a Son of Man, had the same nature – (Hebrews 2:14 -17) made like unto his brethren, and in Hebrews 4: Hebrews 4:15: *For we have not an high priest which cannot be touched with the feeling of our infirmities; but was in all points tempted like as we are, yet without sin*.

As High Priest, the Lord Jesus fulfilled the role of the high priests under the law of Moses, which Israel were to keep, in their approach to God and worship of Him. They were taught that as sinners they were estranged from God, separated from him, so to be forgiven from their sins, and to communicate with God they were given a priest who would petition for them, who had to conduct offerings and sacrifices in specific ways. Not that any of this was effective by itself, but that it pointed forward to the work of the Lord Jesus, who gave himself for the sins of mankind, and who would appeal on behalf of those who acknowledged their sins, and in faith wanted to

be at one with God. Those priests under the law of Moses were just temporary, because they were mortal, but the Lord Jesus is always there as an advocate: Hebrews 7:25: *Wherefore he is able also to save them to the uttermost that come unto God by him, seeing he ever lives to make intercession for them.*

Does God listen to the prayers of unbelievers?

God is sovereign and can choose to answer any prayer He sees fit. The Lord Jesus also has a role of appealing on behalf of the men and women he represents. It must be remembered that God is all powerful, all seeing, and all knowing. He is also Holy. The rulers of this world, claim to be accessible to their subjects, yet certain protocols are necessary to have an audience with the prime minister or president. It is not respectful or appropriate to just barge in and demand to be heard. Is not God far greater than mere human rulers? The Lord Jesus, the Son of God, who was holy himself, - even he observed the right way to speak to his Father, as he taught: Matthew 6:9: After this manner therefore pray you: Our Father who art in heaven, Hallowed be thy name... Hallowed, or holy, - Jesus teaches here that God must be approached recognising that He is Holy, and far above the ways of man. There is then a correct attitude and correct approach required. As earlier quoted from Isaiah 57: I dwell in the high and holy place, and also with him who is of a contrite and lowly spirit... To be contrite, is to be humble, and seeking forgiveness, repentant. Additionally, earlier those examples listed who prayed to God – Abraham, Hannah, David and Nehemiah all had something in common, their prayers were heard because they prayed in faith, fully persuaded that, what God had promised, he was able also to perform (Romans 4:20-22) Of the Lord Jesus in his prayers to God we read: Hebrews 5:7 *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;* This is the example that the Lord Jesus gave in his attitude towards his Father, and how other believers approached God in prayer.

However it does not follow that anyone, can just utter a prayer to God, or their god, and expect to be listened to. There are examples in the Bible of people who prayed so very hard all day long to their god, - as people do even today. But it was impossible for there to be any reaction....for their god was non-existent: 1 Kings 18: 26- 29 *O Baal, hear us. But there was no voice, nor any that answered. And they leaped upon the altar which was made. And it came to pass at noon, that Elijah mocked them, and said, Cry aloud: for he is a god; either he is talking, or he is pursuing, or he is in a journey, or sleeping, and must be woken up. And they cried aloud, and cut themselves ... with knives and lancets, till the blood gushed out... when midday was past...until ... the evening ... there was neither voice, nor any to answer, nor any that regarded.*

The Almighty God of heaven is capable of hearing anything He so desires to, as discussed already, but why should He listen prayers of those made, where there is no faith, respect or even belief in Him? Here are some examples.

- Those who pray with personal or selfish motives, that are not aligned with the will of God, they will receive no answer: James 4:3: *You ask and do not receive, because you ask amiss, that you may spend it on your pleasures.* God will not listen to those who harbour sin in their hearts: Psalm 66:18: *If I regard iniquity in my heart, The Lord will not hear.* People who are unrepentant of their sin, - not contrite – they are not heard: Isaiah 59:2 *But your iniquities have separated you from your God; And your sins have hidden His face from you, So that He will not hear.*
- So also: *Now we know that God does not hear sinners; but if anyone is a worshiper of God and does His will, He hears him –* John 9:31. Those who are off hand, casual, disrespectful, giving little attention to what they are saying – that is who are insincere – are not listened to: Take the example described in Malachi: 1:7-9, where unworthy service is offered to God, ... *With such an offering on your part, will He receive any of you kindly?" says the LORD of hosts.*

- Similarly people who have forsaken the ways of God, and seek to just please themselves, they would be hypocritical to expect to be heard: *Jeremiah 14:10-11 ...they have loved to wander; They have not restrained their feet. Therefore the Lord does not accept them; He will remember their iniquity now, And punish their sins."* Then the Lord said to me, *"Do not pray for this people, for their good. When they fast, I will not hear their cry;*
- People who cannot be bothered to understand the Gospel, and ignore God's call, why do they expect God to hear their call? *Because I have called and you refused... Because you disdained all my counsel.... Then they will call on me, but I will not answer; They will seek me diligently, but they will not find me* (Proverbs 1:24-25, 28). See also Zechariah 7:11-13.
- There are those who want help, but are not prepared to help those in a worse position than themselves; these are warned in Proverbs 21:13: *Whoever shuts his ears to the cry of the poor, Will also cry himself and not be heard..* The same applies for those who are violent - see Isaiah 59:2-3, and those who love idolatry, worshipping the superstars of this world - see Ezekiel 8:15-18.
- Finally, praying to God, and not even believing him, is insulting. Why would God hear that person? James 1:6-7 *... ask in faith, with no doubting, for he who doubts is like a wave of the sea driven and tossed by the wind. For let not that man suppose that he will receive anything from the Lord*

Following the above observations, it can be clearly seen that people who do not believe in God, or ignore His Gospel message, or who proudly continue in their sins, their prayers will not be listened to, let alone answered.

How then is it possible to reach God?

In Acts 17:26,27 the Apostle Paul explains that God has so designed things that people from all nations would be able to seek Him in the hope that they might feel after him and find Him, even though He is not far from every one of us, and that *He is not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance* (2 Peter 3:9)

This means that people who do not know God, have the ability to call out to Him. Although mankind has alienated himself from God because of sin, the desire for reconciliation is then exempt from this, as Isaiah states in 66:2 *...but to this man will I [God] look, even to him that is poor and of a contrite spirit, and trembles at my word.* God is not deaf to prayers from people who are sinners... *as while we yet sinners Christ died for us* (Romans 5:8).

The example of Cornelius, a Roman Centurion of what was known as the Italian Cohort who lived in Caesarea is given in Acts 10, where he is described as being devout, and who revered God, and also all his household. We can read that he gave generous alms to the poor, and that he prayed always. He was not a Believer, he did not understand the Gospel fully, yet we read that his prayers went up as a memorial to God – see verse 4. A memorial, or a reminder. His prayer was heard and answered in that he was introduced to Peter who then explained and taught him the Gospel in order for him and all his household to be baptised and then saved. Cornelius was not praying to God asking for his Italian band of soldiers to be preserved or victorious in battle, nor was he praying for more money to give to the poor. We know this, because how he reacted, and responded, he treated the events as a prayer that was answered.

In this it becomes clear that God is ready to listen to prayers even from those who are sinners or who are lost, if they come from sincere hearts, and are willing to repent. It means that there is always a way back to God, with the Mediator Christ Jesus interceding on behalf of those who call upon God. Paul the Apostle was once known as Saul of Tarsus, who arrested the disciples of Jesus and had them put to death. He was lost, and committing grievous sin against God. Manasseh was a king of Judah centuries before. He was extreme in his wickedness, and as a result taken away captive with a hook through his face and in chains. He cried out to God in his humiliation., and God heard him. He greatly repented and attempted to reverse all the damage he had done. Paul likewise, was used as an instrument to preach the gospel to the nations by God. The point of this, is that with the three examples given, God listened

to the pleas of those who were not saved, because of their repentant, and contrite minds.

What should we pray For?

Even those who believe and have been baptised cannot assume that their prayers are heard. In fact, for those in a state of unrepentant sin, God will not hear, as already referred to earlier. But also disunity in a marriage between believers can have an effect on prayer, meaning a wrong frame of mind, and a distracted mood can hinder prayer as Peter explains in 1 Peter 3:7: *Likewise, ye husbands, dwell with them according to knowledge, giving honour unto the wife... that your prayers be not hindered.* Jesus also teaches his disciples not to be hypocrites, - if seeking reconciliation to God, ensure that forgiveness is given to others - Matthew 5:23-24 *Therefore if thou bring thy gift to the altar, and there remember that thy brother hath ought against thee; Leave there thy gift before the altar, and go thy way; first be reconciled to thy brother, and then come and offer thy gift.*

The truth is, those with humble and contrite minds, and hold God in such esteem as to tremble at his word (Isaiah 66:2) acknowledge that they do not really know how to pray effectively, and sometimes what even to pray for. They are just grateful to be able to approach unto God through Jesus Christ their Saviour. What words can really express that? Believers today have no Divine inspiration, and with mere words how is it possible to articulate feelings and emotions which overcome in the daily battle against sin, or the deep love and appreciation for the Creator? But help is always at hand! Romans 8:26: *Likewise the Spirit also helps our infirmities: for we know not what we should pray for as we ought: but the Spirit itself makes intercession for us with groanings which cannot be uttered.* It is why Jesus disciples ask him, *Lord teach us to pray:* (Luke 11:1-4) and Matthew 6:9-13:

**9 After this manner therefore pray ye: Our Father which
art in heaven, Hallowed be thy name.**

Immediately - Our Father...only those who have become part of His family through adoption – baptism into His name can call him Our Father, Hallowed be thy name, shows the acknowledgement of the need for reverence and awe, that God is Holy and high above us in many senses.

10 *Thy kingdom come, Thy will be done in earth, as it is in heaven.*

This reveals the pattern of prayer that Jesus was so accustomed to – praying in line with the Will of God. If hearts and mind are truly aligned with God, why would they pray for anything else? 1 John 5:14: *And this is the confidence that we have in him, that, if we ask any thing according to his will, he heareth us:* Yet millions who believe they go to heaven when they die, or that Jesus and God, are the self-same person cannot say this prayer, and certainly will not be heard unless they follow the example of Cornelius.

11 *Give us this day our daily bread.*

A plea and admission that we are utterly dependant upon the grace and mercy of God for daily natural provisions, food, drink, health, that can be so easily taken for granted and thought of as a right. Likewise the daily bread of the Word of Life – even

12 *And forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors.*

This is the test of a truly repentant and contrite heart: 1 John 1; 9 *If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.* Such a promise is only true if the same person forgive those who sin against them. *For if ye forgive men their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you:* but if not, then there is no forgiveness, and the prayer will go unanswered

13 *And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil:*

This is one of the last things Jesus warned his disciples to pray earnestly for before he was taken away to be crucified. It was a

prayer he must have uttered many times: Matthew 26;41 *Watch and pray, that ye enter not into temptation: the spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak.* Asking God to help organise our lives in order to avoid triggers which can distract and cause sin, is very much in line with the Will of God, - it is the strait and narrow way that leads to life everlasting.

For thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory, for ever. Amen.

This confession of faith, is the acknowledgement of Sovereignty that belongs to God, and Him alone. Therefore the believer in this statement is stating that God is well able to hear, to listen to this prayer and give a response and answer, and that the answer will be accepted. The answer will not always be what is expected.

Prayer for strength to overcome can result in more difficulties being sent to make us stronger. A prayer for wisdom can be answered by being given more problems to solve. Prayers for courage can be by being sent more dangers to overcome, a prayer for love, in being sent more troubled people to help. Effective prayer is trusting that God knows the best answer.

Be ye therefore thankful is another exhortation from the Apostles who add in 1 Thessalonians 5:18 *In every thing give thanks: for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus concerning you.* The faithful mind should also remember this piece of advice from the Lord himself: Matthew 5:44 ... *pray for them which spitefully use you, and persecute you;*

How should we pray?

As has been emphasised through, humility and reverence must be the attitude of the prayerful remembering this: Isaiah 55: 8-9: *For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways, saith the Lord. For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways, and my thoughts than your thoughts.*

Examples of this can be seen in posture – for example: Psalms 95:6 *O come, let us worship and bow down: let us kneel before the Lord our maker.* This Jesus did: Luke 22:41 *And he was withdrawn from them about a stone's cast, and kneeled down, and prayed,* and so did the Apostles: Acts 20:36 *And when he had thus spoken, he kneeled down, and prayed with them all;* Acts 21:5: *...we kneeled down on the shore, and prayed.* This position of homage is not always possible – In another place we read to be ... *instant in prayer* (Romans 12:12) in other words spontaneous. We read that the Psalmist laying upon his bed at midnight, Daniel in the lion's den, the Apostles in manacles and chained in prison, Nehemiah whilst standing before the king holding his cup, all prayed spontaneously – where kneeling would be difficult – but the humility is not in the position of the body, that is only reflective of what is in the heart, and that is what really matters. Bowing the head, clasping the hands together, may all give the impression of studious piety, but the mind might be wandering somewhere else. Likewise, some like to raise their hands when praying – as in 1 Timothy 2:8: *I will therefore that men pray every where, lifting up holy hands, without wrath and doubting.* The emphasis, is not that prayer should be made in every place or that hands should be lifted, but that wherever we pray, it must be without wrath and doubting – both of which render our minds ineffective for communication with the Father, and the emphasis is on holy hands, not sinful ones!

Spontaneity in prayer and freedom to pray, reveals a prayerful life, where the servant of Christ is in close communion in his heart, and aware of the presence of God in the life. Such frequency of prayer is seen in Daniel 6:10 *Now when Daniel knew that the writing was signed, he went into his house; and his windows being open in his chamber toward Jerusalem, he kneeled upon his knees three times a day, and prayed, and gave thanks before his God, as he did many times before.* He wasn't showing off, or being provocative, he just stuck to his routine, as he trusted in God. Then in Psalms 119: 164 *Seven times a day do I praise thee because of thy righteous judgments.* There is of course no limit to the number of times prayer

can be made, in fact the Apostle exhorts: *Pray without ceasing!*. (1 Thessalonians 5:17)

Sometimes praying together as an act of fellowship is appropriate. Communal prayer is an aspect of worship by the ecclesia towards God. In this respect, The Apostle teaches in 1 Corinthians 11, that brothers should remove their head covering during worship and witness, and sisters should cover their heads – to show the Divine hierarchy, and that the true covering is Christ Jesus. In this prayers should be not long and rambling, but focussed, clear, and on subject. There may be the unlearned in the room, and Paul in 1 Corinthians 14:16 asks how can these say Amen, if they do not understand a word that is being said...

Most times prayer is made alone. Jesus comments on this: Matthew 6:5 -7: *And when you pray, do 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. ... But thou, when thou pray, enter into your inner room, and when thou hast shut the door, pray to thy Father which is in secret; and thy Father which sees in secret shall reward thee openly. But when you pray, use not vain repetitions, as the heathen do: for they think that they shall be heard for their much speaking.* Compare this to Ecclesiastes 5:2 *Be not rash with thy mouth, and let not thine heart be hasty to utter any thing before God: for God is in heaven, and thou upon earth: therefore let thy words be few.* No need to further comment on that is there? Read also Luke 18:1-14.

The effectual fervent prayer of the righteous should also acknowledge the Mediator. We come unto the Father in the Name of Jesus Christ – *No man can come unto the Father but by me...* Jesus says also in John 14:13,14 *...whatsoever ye shall ask in my name, that will I do, that the Father may be glorified in the Son. If ye shall ask any thing in my name, I will do it.*

This is an important point, for it reminds the prayerful, that they need an intercessor, that they need to show humility and reverence and they must prayer in harmony with the will of God – all aspects which are covered in the phrase “asking anything in my name...” The

Apostle often emphasises this point: Ephesians 2:18: *For through him we both have access by one Spirit unto the Father.* Colossians 3:17: *And whatsoever ye do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God and the Father by him.* Hebrews 13:15: *By him therefore let us offer the sacrifice of praise to God continually, that is, the fruit of our lips giving thanks to his name.*

We can be assured therefore, that if we are seeking the salvation of God in all sincerity, God will hear us. And if we are praying with understanding, reverence, humility, and in unity with the Gospel we can be confident: Hebrews 4:16: *Let us therefore come boldly unto the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy, and find grace to help in time of need.*

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