

(Philippians 4:6-7). What soothing balm for an injured heart to carry all our troubles to One Who always cares and can and will always help!

But, whose prayer will God hear? Peter declares:

For the eyes of the LORD are on the righteous,

And His ears are open to their prayers; But the face of the LORD is against those who do evil (1 Peter 3:12).

God will not hear just anyone's prayer. He will only accept the petitions of those who are in heart and life righteous, i.e., right in reference to God's law, as the Lord would have us to be. For our hearts to be righteous when we approach the Father, we must truly believe He will hear us (James 1:6-7), pray sincerely, not just to be heard or seen of men (Matthew 6:5-6), approach Him in humility (1 Peter 5:6-7), speak to Him in reverence, not with the brash familiarity with which we address our own peers (Psalm 111:9), not ask selfishly (James 4:3), truly repent of our sins (Acts 8:22), and maintain a forgiving attitude toward those who wrong us (Matthew 6:14-15). Furthermore, our lives must be righteous (1 John 3:22), i.e., we must be leading lives in harmony with His precepts.

How are we to pray? Regardless of currently popular doctrine, the Father refuses to hear some kinds of petitions. We, as the Lord's disciples, should have the attitude, "Lord, teach us to pray" (Luke 11:1). The object of our requests, i.e., the One addressed, should be God (Matthew 6:9). not the virgin Mary, dead saints, angels, or any other created being. The avenue of our prayer, i.e., the One through Whom we pray, must be Jesus Christ (Romans 1:8; Colossians 3:17), not saints or Mary. The nature of the petition should be "according to his will," i.e., in harmony with the Law of the Lord. The time we should pray is "always" (Ephesians 6:18), and the place is "everywhere" (1 Timothy 2:8).

For what should we pray? Scriptural prayer is actually pleading the promises of God. The Father has not promised to give us anything we desire in answer to prayer, but He has pledged to give us specific blessings for which we may implore.

The heavenly Father has promised to grant certain supplications. As Christians we may and should pray for the forgiveness of our sins (Acts 8:22), for deliverance from temptation (Matthew 6:13), for wisdom (James 1:5), for comfort in afflictions (James 5:13), for a reasonable degree of health (James 5:14-15), and for our material necessities (Matthew 6:11). In none of our supplications should we either request or expect a miracle, for God has promised no such intervention today.

The Father will also hear our scriptural intercessions. We should

pray that God's Will might be done (Matthew 6:10), determining to be faithful instruments in carrying out His revealed Will. We should intercede in behalf of Gospel preachers, that they might be presented with opportunities to reach the lost and that they might plainly proclaim the truth (Colossians 4:2-4). Christians ought to pray for "all men," particularly those "in authority" (1 Timothy 2:1-2) and for the health of others (James 5:16). We must never forget to sincerely and lovingly intercede in behalf of the welfare of the church, that Christians might "be filled with the knowledge of his will in all wisdom and spiritual understanding" (Colossians 1:9).

Christians of all people should be thankful for the Father's blessings. We should "in everything give thanks" (1 Thessalonians 5:18).

The life of a Christian may be summarized in one word, "faith," i.e. trust (2 Corinthians 5:7). The deepest expression of that dependent trust in God is prayer. The Lord once spoke a parable to teach "that men always ought to pray and not lose heart" (Luke 18:1). Having spoken of a Widow who persistently troubled an unjust judge until he finally granted her request, in order to emphasize the surety that a just and merciful Father will speedily hear His children, the Master concluded, "Nevertheless, when the Son of Man comes, will He really find faith on the earth?" (Luke 18:8).

Faith is synonymous with prayer in this verse. When we pray we have no miraculous proof that God hears us. We have only faith in the promises of His Word. Prayer is the ultimate expression of our faith.

Devout Christians with deep, trusting, unshakable faith are the ones who "pray without ceasing." Dear Christian, prayer does avail; our loving Father does hear His children's requests (1 John 5:14-15). Therefore:

Rejoice always, pray without ceasing, in everything give thanks; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you (1 Thessalonians 5:16-18).

Works Cited

Bengel, J.A., **New Testament Word Studies.**
Thayer, J.H., **A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament.**
Vine, W.E. **An Expository Dictionary of New Testament Words.**

Questions for Review

I. True/False

1. _____ Prayer is important only because it makes us feel better.
2. _____ We should take our problems to a psychiatrist.

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3. ____ God will hear anyone's prayer.
4. ____ For God to hear us, we must truly believe He will hear.
5. ____ We must pray sincerely, not just to be heard or seen of men.
6. ____ We should pray to the Virgin Mary and to saints.
7. ____ Christ is the One through Whom we are to pray.
8. ____ Christians need to be in a holy place to pray.
9. ____ We should only pray three times a day.
10. ____ It doesn't matter how we pray as long as we pray.
11. ____ We should in everything give thanks.
12. ____ Scriptural prayer is actually pleading the promises of God.
13. ____ We should not pray for our material necessities.
14. ____ We should pray for our rulers.
15. ____ Prayer is the ultimate expression of our faith.

II. Matching

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| 1. ____ supplications | A. any offering of our desires and wishes to God |
| 2. ____ prayers | B. expressions of personal need |
| 3. ____ intercessions | C. right in reference to God's law |
| 4. ____ giving of thanks | D. seeking the presence and hearing of God on behalf of others |
| 5. ____ righteous | E. telling God "thank you" |

I have heard it said, "Christians don't pray as they used to." I know of no objective proof either to confirm or disprove this assertion, but I do know that prayer is absolutely essential and central to the life of a Christian.

What, then, does the New Testament teach about Christians and prayer? I will answer this question by posing five specific questions about prayer and by allowing the will of Christ to answer these inquiries.

What is prayer? Paul describes prayer by using four words which describe its components. He admonishes, "Therefore I exhort first of all that supplications, prayers, intercessions, and giving of thanks be made for all men" (1 Timothy 2:1). "Supplications" are "the expressions of personal need" (Thayer. 126), i.e., asking God for things we personally need. It is like a helpless beggar asking for sustenance. "Prayers" are "any offering of our desires and wishes to God" (Bengel. 2:512). This is the general word covering all of our subject and is simply "talking to God." "Intercessions" are "seeking the presence and hearing of God on behalf of others" (Vine. 2:267), i.e., asking blessings, not for ourselves, but for other people. "Giving thanks" is simply telling God "thank you" for the blessings we receive daily.

Should Christians pray? Yes, of course we should, because, rather than prayer being an empty exercise to make us feel better, we can be assured that, when we pray in harmony with God's will, He actually does hear and grant our requests (1 John 5:14-15). We ought to speak to the Father regularly as an important part of our daily lives, because we are so commanded (1 Thessalonians 5:16-18). We have the example of prayer in the life of our Master, Who began His public ministry with prayer immediately following His baptism by John, closed His work on earth with prayer in the garden and on the cross, and regularly and sincerely communed with His Father in prayer throughout His walk here (cf. Luke 6:12). The early church also left an approved example of regular prayer (cf. Acts 12:5). We ought to pray because believing prayer, not the psychiatrist's couch, is the refuge and comfort for the Christian from the heartache and worry of life