

# **A Closer Walk With God**

## **Prayer in the Life of the Disciple of Christ Part Two**

### **The Practice of Prayer**

#### **INTRODUCTION:**

- I. In our series of lessons entitled "A Closer Walk With God," we began last week to look at one of the most important aspects of having a close walk with God – prayer.
  - A. During that lesson specifically, we began taking a close look at "Prayer in the Life of the Disciple of Jesus Christ."
    1. In fact, since this subject is so important to all of us as followers of Jesus Christ, I decided to focus on two critical aspects of prayer in two separate lessons.
  - B. In that lesson, we talked about "The Principles of Prayer."
    1. And there were three important aspects about prayer we discussed in that lesson:
      - a. The characteristics of acceptable prayers
      - b. Obstacles to prayers
      - c. And how God answers prayers.
  - C. However, in this lesson I want us to examine "The Practice of Prayer" in the life of everyone who calls themselves a disciple of Christ.

1. More specifically, I want us to look at such issues as:
  - a. When we should pray.
  - b. With whom we should pray.
  - c. How we should pray.
  - d. And for what we should pray.
2. The reason for spending time examining this all-important issue is simply because many brethren admit prayer has become one of the most neglected aspects of their life as a disciple of Jesus Christ.
3. So, hopefully, these lessons will encourage you to be more active in prayer – making it a daily part of your life.

**Body:**

- I. Let's begin by looking at what the scriptures teach with regard to when we should pray.
  - A. Some find it helpful to have set times to pray – it seems to help them in making prayer a regular habit.
    1. This is certainly a scriptural approach to prayer. We find many examples in which prominent men in Old Testament history prayed at specific times each day.
      - a. David, whom God described as "*a man after my own heart*," prayed at specific times: **Psalms 55:17** – "*Evening and*

*morning and at noon I will pray, and cry aloud, and He shall hear my voice."*

- b. The same is true for Daniel, whom the angel of God described as "O man greatly beloved": **Daniel 6:10** – *And in his upper room, with his windows open toward Jerusalem, he knelt down on his knees three times that day, and prayed and gave thanks before his God, as was his custom since early days.*
2. This was a customary time of prayer for all Jews during both Old Testament and even into New Testament times – and still is among many Jews today.
3. While we're not commanded to stop whatever we're doing and pray at specific times during the day, this is still a worthwhile example to consider.
  - a. The only thing we need to guard against is turning this activity into a ritual which is done out of habit rather than out of a sincere, heart-felt devotion.
  - b. In other words, don't make specific times of prayer become a habit where we end up doing what Jesus accused the Pharisees of doing in their prayers to God: **Matthew 15:8** – *"These people draw near to Me with their mouth, and honor Me with their lips, but their heart is far from Me."*

4. At the very least we can find a time each day to be alone with God in prayer.
    - a. For some people, early in the morning may work best.
    - b. For others, finding time in the evenings to be alone with God in prayer works best.
  5. Regardless of when you set aside time to pray, just make sure you keep that appointment.
    - a. Make it your time to be all alone with your Heavenly Father.
- B. And yet, while having specific times to pray seems to work for some, don't be limited to set times. Special needs may call for special times to pray – and we may encounter those special needs at the most unexpected times.
1. There was one occasion when Jesus spent the whole night in prayer: **Luke 6:12-13** – *Now it came to pass in those days that He went out to the mountain to pray, and continued all night in prayer to God. 13 And when it was day, He called His disciples to Himself; and from them He chose twelve whom He also named apostles. . .*
    - a. Jesus prayed all night before choosing the twelve men whom He selected to be His apostles.
    - b. I will never forget two times in my life when I also prayed all night – from evening till past sunrise.

- (1). One of those occasions was when my grandmother, who was so close to obeying the gospel, was lying in an emergency room at the point of death from a coronary thrombosis – a blood clot in a coronary artery of the heart.
  - (2). I prayed all night that the Lord spare her life and give her an opportunity to be baptized into Christ – and He answered that prayer. She not only eventually obeyed the gospel, but lived a faithful Christian for years, after until her death at the age of 96.
2. Paul and Silas prayed at midnight while in prison stocks.
    - a. **Acts 16:25** – *But at midnight Paul and Silas were praying and singing hymns to God, and the prisoners were listening to them.*
    - b. There may be times in our lives when we are in the middle of a crisis and simply need to stop and pray.
  3. Nehemiah prayed on the spur of the moment – right between being asked a question and giving his answer: **Nehemiah 2:1-6** – *And it came to pass in the month of Nisan, in the twentieth year of King Artaxerxes, when wine was before him, that I took the wine and gave it to the king. Now I had never been sad in his presence before. 2 Therefore the king said to me, "Why is your face sad,*

*since you are not sick? This is nothing but sorrow of heart." So I became dreadfully afraid, 3 and said to the king, "May the king live forever! Why should my face not be sad, when the city, the place of my fathers' tombs, lies waste, and its gates are burned with fire?" 4 Then the king said to me, "What do you request?" So I prayed to the God of heaven. 5 And I said to the king, "If it pleases the king, and if your servant has found favor in your sight, I ask that you send me to Judah, to the city of my fathers' tombs, that I may rebuild it."*

*6 Then the king said to me (the queen also sitting beside him), "How long will your journey be? And when will you return?" So it pleased the king to send me; and I set him a time.*

- a. How many times have you prayed on the spur of the moment?
- b. I think we all do that at times – or at least we should –  
whenever we need the help of God at that very moment.

C. And yet, the goal of every Christian should be to *"pray without ceasing"* **(cf. 1 Thessalonians 5:17)**.

1. That simply means there should never come a time in our life when we cannot pray, or when we stop praying.
2. Having "set times" might help to develop the habit of praying, but we should also be able to pray spontaneously – as needs arise.

II. But what does the Bible say about with whom we should pray – and by this I mean, should we always pray alone, or are there times when we can join with others to pray? The answer is: "Both!"

A. Jesus exhorted His disciples to pray "in secret."

1. **Matthew 6:5-6** – *"And when you pray, you shall not be like the hypocrites. For they love to pray standing in the synagogues and on the corners of the streets, that they may be seen by men. Assuredly, I say to you, they have their reward. 6 But you, when you pray, go into your room, and when you have shut your door, pray to your Father who is in the secret place; and your Father who sees in secret will reward you openly."*
2. Jesus wasn't saying to literally go into a closet to pray. He was using a hyperbole – an exaggeration – to emphasize the need to pray where you will be all along, and where no one will interrupt.
3. We need these private times all alone with God – uninterrupted times when no one will disturb us while we're praying.
  - a. I must admit I get a little frustrated at times when I'm talking on the phone with one of my daughters and they are constantly being interrupted by one of the kids.
  - b. I wonder how God feels when we're in the middle of a prayer and have to essentially say, "Lord, hold on a minute while I take care of this."

4. So, there are times when you need to find a private place to pray where you know you won't be interrupted. These are those times of *"secret prayers"* that are just between you and God alone.
- B. But Jesus also spoke about praying with "two or three."
1. **Matthew 18:19-20** – *"Again I say to you that if two of you agree on earth concerning anything that they ask, it will be done for them by My Father in heaven. 20 For where two or three are gathered together in My name, I am there in the midst of them."*
  2. In the New Testament, Christians often prayed together – especially in times of trouble.
    - a. Immediately after the apostles were released by the Sanhedrin, we're told: **Acts 4:23-24** – *And being let go, they went to their own companions and reported all that the chief priests and elders had said to them. 24 So when they heard that, they raised their voice to God with one accord. . .*
    - b. When Peter had been arrested and was facing certain death, we're told: **Acts 12:5** – *Peter was therefore kept in prison, but constant prayer was offered to God for him by the church.*
  3. Christians also prayed at times when they had to say "goodbye" to someone they may never see again in this life.
    - a. When Paul said his final "goodbyes" to the elders from Ephesus – perhaps the very men under whom he had once



served as an evangelist – we're told: **Acts 20:36-38** – *And when he had said these things, he knelt down and prayed with them all. 37 Then they all wept freely, and fell on Paul's neck and kissed him, 38 sorrowing most of all for the words which he spoke, that they would see his face no more.*

- b. When Paul's ship docked in Tyre to unload cargo, we're told: **Acts 21:4-6** – *And finding disciples, we stayed there seven days. They told Paul through the Spirit not to go up to Jerusalem. 5 When we had come to the end of those days, we departed and went on our way; and they all accompanied us, with wives and children, till we were out of the city. And we knelt down on the shore and prayed. 6 When we had taken our leave of one another, we boarded the ship, and they returned home.*
- 4. There is nothing sweeter than to say "goodbye" to dear brothers and sisters in Christ by Christians gathering together to pray.

III. But what does the Bible say about how we should pray?

A. Jesus taught us how to pray.

- 1. We're all familiar with the lesson Jesus taught on prayer during the Sermon on the Mount. But rather than look at Matthew's account, let's look at Luke's record.

- a. **Luke 11:1-4** – *Now it came to pass, as He was praying in a certain place, when He ceased, that one of His disciples said to Him, "Lord, teach us to pray, as John also taught his disciples." 2 So He said to them, "When you pray, say: Our Father in heaven, Hallowed be Your name. Your kingdom come. Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven. 3 Give us day by day our daily bread. 4 And forgive us our sins, for we also forgive everyone who is indebted to us. And do not lead us into temptation, but deliver us from the evil one."*
2. There are several things Jesus taught His disciples about prayer in this lesson.
  - a. First, our prayers are directed to God - *"Our Father in heaven."*
  - b. Second, our prayers should praise God's holiness – *"Hallowed be Your Name."*
  - c. Third, our prayers may include supplications, or requests, that we are confident are in keeping with God's will.
    - (1). One such supplication is that God's plans and will be done. While we're now in the kingdom that has come, we can still pray for the growth of the kingdom, and most certainly that *"Your will be done. . ."*

- (2). Another supplication may be to ask God to continue blessing us with our basic daily needs - *"Give us this day our daily bread."*
- (3). A third supplication would be for our own spiritual needs – *"Forgive us our sins. . ."*
- (4). And another would be for the spiritual needs of others – *"For we also forgive everyone who is indebted to us."*

3. And when we look at the teaching of Jesus in the Sermon on the Mount we see the beautiful simplicity of prayer.

- a. **Matthew 6:9-13** – *"Our Father in heaven, Hallowed be Your name. 10 Your kingdom come. Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven. 11 Give us this day our daily bread. 12 And forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors. 13 And do not lead us into temptation, but deliver us from the evil one. For Yours is the kingdom and the power and the glory forever. Amen."*

B. Some time ago I shared with you a little acrostic that might be helpful in remembering how to pray – it's the acrostic A-C-T-S.

1. "A" is for "Adoration" which simply means to give God sincere praise out of a humble and contrite heart.
  - a. The Psalms are literally filled with examples of praise and adoration.

- b. Another wonderful example is: **1 Chronicles 29:10-13** –

*Therefore David blessed the Lord before all the assembly; and David said: "Blessed are You, Lord God of Israel, our Father, forever and ever. 11 Yours, O Lord, is the greatness, the power and the glory, the victory and the majesty; for all that is in heaven and in earth is Yours; Yours is the kingdom, O Lord, and You are exalted as head over all.*

*12 Both riches and honor come from You, and You reign over all. In Your hand is power and might; in Your hand it is to make great and to give strength to all. 13 Now therefore, our God, we thank You and praise Your glorious name."*

- c. That's true praise and adoration. Incorporate that kind of praise and adoration into your prayers – but make sure it's truly coming from your heart, and not just nice-sounding words.

2. "C" is for Confession – that is, acknowledging our sins before God.

- a. When we truly understand how sin can break the fellowship we have with God, we should want to restore that fellowship as quickly as possible.
- b. Therefore, we confess our sins to God – essentially admitting to God things about us that He already knows.

- c. This is absolutely essential to you and I as Christians if we expect to be cleansed by the blood of Christ: **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.*
- 3. "T" stands for Thanksgiving – being truly thankful for everything God has given us, and done for us.
  - a. This should be an essential ingredient in every prayer – especially times when we are asking God for things.
  - b. **Philippians 4:6-7** – *Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known to God; 7 and the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus.*
  - c. The only way we can truly have peace of mind when pouring out our heart to God is to be thankful for however He chooses to answers our requests.
  - d. If we truly believe He will give us only what is best for us, then we can rejoice and be thankful – no matter how He answers that prayer.
  - e. In fact, there are several benefits to expressing thanksgiving in our prayers:

- (1). Being thankful causes us to acknowledge God's existence, His love, and His care.
  - (2). It reminds us of His goodness.
  - (3). And it helps us to focus more on what we have than on what we don't have.
- f. And the list of things we can be thankful for is truly endless.
- We can be thankful for:
- (1). Our health - you know it could be worse!
  - (2). Family and friends.
  - (3). Brothers and sisters in Christ.
  - (4). God's guidance through His Word, and His answers to previous prayers.
- g. Not to mention:
- (1). His love for us in saving us from our sins.
  - (2). And His gift of eternal life in heaven.
  - (3). And on, and on, and on. . .
4. And finally, "S" stands for Supplication – those special requests we make of God.
- a. If we're faithful to include the first three (Adoration, Confession, and Thanksgiving), this last will keep our prayers from becoming a spiritual "shopping list" or treating God as if

He were some "cosmic vending machine," where we drop in a prayer or two and out pops what we wanted.

- b. However, the best way to keep our "supplications" – our requests – from being all about US, is to also offer intercessory prayers on behalf of the needs of OTHERS.
- c. This is something the Lord wants us to do: **1 Timothy 2:1-2** – *Therefore I exhort first of all that supplications, prayers, intercessions, and giving of thanks be made for all men, 2 for kings and all who are in authority, that we may lead a quiet and peaceable life in all godliness and reverence.*

IV. And this leads us into our final point about the "Practice of Prayer" and that is to answer the question "For what should we pray?"

- A. Once again, the list is truly endless.
  - 1. The Bible teaches us there are times when we need to pray for ourselves.
    - a. Remember, those daily physical and spiritual needs Jesus taught us to pray for **(Matthew 6:11-13)**?
  - 2. We can pray for our families – especially for our children that we will bring them up in *"the nurture and admonition of the Lord"* **(Ephesians 6:4)**.
  - 3. We can pray for our community – that peace will prevail.

- a. The Lord told Jeremiah that this is exactly what the children of Israel needed to do when they arrived in the cities of captivity to which they were being taken: **Jeremiah 29:7** – *"And seek the peace of the city where I have caused you to be carried away captive, and pray to the Lord for it; for in its peace you will have peace."*
4. We certainly need to pray for the church:
  - a. For love and unity to prevail – as Jesus prayed (**John 17:20-21**).
  - b. For the spiritual growth of each member – as Paul prayed on behalf of the Philippians (**Philippians 1:9-11**).
  - c. For the gospel to have free course – as Paul asked the Thessalonians to pray (**2 Thessalonians 3:1**).
5. We should always be praying for the nation:
  - a. We should certainly pray that our leaders rule wisely.  
Remember **1 Timothy 2:2**?
  - b. And we should also be praying for national repentance and for an awareness among the people that God IS.
    - (1). **Psalms 33:12** – *Blessed is the nation whose God is the Lord. . .*
    - (2). **Proverbs 14:34** – *Righteousness exalts a nation, but sin is a reproach to any people.*



6. We should also be praying for non-believers.
  - a. Paul did: **Romans 10:1-2** – *Brethren, my heart's desire and prayer to God for Israel is that they may be saved. 2 For I bear them witness that they have a zeal for God, but not according to knowledge.*
  - b. Paul even asked the Ephesian church to pray: **Ephesians 6:19-20** – *. . .for me, that utterance may be given to me, that I may open my mouth boldly to make known the mystery of the gospel, 20 for which I am an ambassador in chains; that in it I may speak boldly, as I ought to speak.*
7. We are also told to pray for the sick – not only for those who are physically sick, but for those who are spiritually sick as well.
  - a. James tells us why our prayers in these instances are so important: **James 5:16b** – *The effective, fervent prayer of a righteous man avails much.*

## CONCLUSION:

- I. There is so much more we could say on the subject of "The Practice of Prayer."
  - A. However, let me close with three questions that might start you thinking about finding ways to improve your prayers, and to encourage praying more often.

1. Do you spend time each day in prayer to God?
  - a. I certainly hope you do – and if you're not, that you will start spending some time every day all alone with God in prayer.
2. Do you find prayer an easy or difficult activity?
  - a. It shouldn't be difficult at all – it's simply talking to God.
  - b. But don't allow your prayers to become too casual. You're talking to the Holy God of Heaven.
  - c. In prayer, you've entered the Throne Room of your God. Keep that in mind.
3. Do your prayers include the needs of others, or just your own concerns?
  - a. Sometimes our prayers can be so selfish and self-centered.
  - b. The best way to break that habit is to have a prayer where you pray only for the needs of others.
  - c. One thing you might consider is to take a church directory, and pray for everyone in the directory individually – praying for them and their family.

B. I hope these two lessons on prayer will help you in developing "A Closer Walk With God."

1. Prayer is so important to you and I as a disciple of Jesus Christ, especially when it comes to dealing with all the things that try to pull us away from the Lord.

- a. Knowing that we can go to God in prayer and ask for help in times of need is most comforting
  - b. But prayer is also critically important to us whenever we sin and fall short of what the Lord expects of us.
2. Could that be you? Are there sins in your life as a disciple of Christ that you need to confess through prayer?
- a. If so, why not do that now. Take a few moments to quietly pray to God asking for the forgiveness of those sins.
  - b. If you want the prayers of your brothers and sisters in Christ to help you overcome areas of weakness in your life, then let that be known as well.
3. And for those of you who have yet to become a disciple of Jesus Christ, our prayer for you is that you do that now as well.
- a. Come to Christ in faith, repenting of your sins, confessing your faith in Christ, and be buried with Christ in baptism to wash away all your past sins.