

# Prayer: it's not *that Sunday morning thing!*

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## Abstract

Imagine... that I would ask one of you about what is important in his life. Then, when he is talking, constantly yawn, ask if he is almost done, if he can speak quicker so I can be done, ... Finally, ask him if he can give me \$100 and quick, I need to go!

Do you think this is very rude? Very often, our relationship with God tend to look like that. If this is rude to my fellow human, how dare we behave that way toward God! We need to learn to listen to Him, to enjoy spending time with God, to have "quality time" in prayer.

We can not imagine that rushing through our prayer, rushing through our Bible reading are any kind of pleasing to God. In doing so, we break the first, fourth and second of the ten commandments (Ex 20)! It basically means that God is not our priority!

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# 1 The meaning of prayer

## 1.1 What is it to pray?

*[what does it means for you, and why? Definition? Spiritual consequences?]*

- it is a commandment: 1 The 5:17 "pray without ceasing". Isaiah 55:6 "Seek you the Lord while he may be found, call you on him while he is near", Matthew 7:7 "Ask, and it shall be given you; seek, and you shall find; knock, and it shall be opened to you", Philippians 4:6 "Be careful for nothing; but in every thing by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God."
- this is the act of requesting a favor, the offering of adoration, confession, supplication, and thanksgiving to the Supreme Being (Webster 1913).
- a reverent petition to a deity, an urgent request (WordNet);
- converse with God; the intercourse of the soul with God, not in contemplation or meditation, but in direct address to him. Prayer may be oral or mental, occasional or constant, spontaneous or formal. It is a "beseeching the Lord" (Ex. 32:11); "pouring out the soul before the Lord" (1 Sam. 1:15); "praying and crying to heaven" (2 Chr. 32:20); "seeking unto God and making supplication" (Job 8:5); "drawing near to God" (Ps. 73:28); "bowing the knees" (Eph. 3:14).

⇒ it implies a belief in God and a willingness to have a relationship with Him, as well as submission and deep reverence.

## 1.2 From a Godldy perspective, prayer is

- Bowing the knees Eph 3:14
- Looking up Ps 5:3
- Lifting up the soul Ps 25:1
- Lifting up the heart La 3:41
- Pouring out the heart Ps 62:8
- Pouring out the soul 1Sa 1:15
- Calling upon the name of the Lord Ge 12:8; Ps 116:4; Ac 22:16

- Crying to God Ps 27:7; 34:6
- Drawing near to God Ps 73:28; Heb 10:22
- Crying to heaven 2Ch 32:20
- Beseeching the Lord Ex 32:11
- Seeking to God Job 8:5
- Seeking the face of the Lord Ps 27:8
- Making supplication Job 8:5; Jer 36:7

### 1.3 Prayer is then, an action from me that signifies

*[So, what does it mean when I pray? How should my heart/mind be set for prayer?]*

- repentance: I'm asking for mercy (the death row inmate begging for forgiveness) - 1Ki 8:33; Jer 36:7 - Ne 1:6; Ps 17:1; 55:1,2; 61:1; *[ask if they know what "mercy" really means]*
- humility: I know that I am nothing - Ge 18:27;
- submission to the will of God: no matter what I ask for, I seek God's will and not mine - Lu 22:42;
- intimacy with God: this is a one on one dialog, this is being brought into the presence of God - 1 Sam. 1:15, also Moses, Christ, Paul...;
- trust and faith: I have faith that God hears my prayer and I trust He is loving me - Ps 56:9; 86:7; 1Jo 5:14;

## 2 Prayer in my life

### 2.1 How to make our prayer effective?

*[Then, how can I make my prayer effective? Watch out, there is a trick!]*

- This is an insult to God to try to make our prayer effective!! You don't command God what to do, you don't buy His collaboration!
- prayer is a relationship, not a contest into which we can win some benefits for our enjoyments! (imagine having meetings/books to discuss how to be effective in what we ask our pastor!)

## 2.2 What is the proper way/posture to pray?

*[How are we to pray? Words, posture, attitude, time, place?]*

- Words to use? "thus says the Lord" instead of commas and "amen" instead of period are a sign of lack of understanding and lack of faith more than anything else (this is connected with the belief that we need some kind of magic words). We are to avoid vain words, repetitions, ... - Mt 6:7. We need to be reverent, but using our own words (cf Christ crying out to the Father in Aramaic!). Again, prayer is pouring out my heart to God. Do I pour my heart with words borrowed from somebody else? \*[Do you know what "in the name of Christ" means?] This is not a magic sentence, that means asking through the person of Christ. Would we really ask Christ to carry that prayer to God for us? Because this is what it means! (picture Christ in full glory, standing in front of you: what are you really going to ask?!)
- in humility, not in ostentation! cf Mt 6:5. Our prayer must be directed toward God, not toward others! (in prayer, we are talking to God, not to people around us!). Inserting sentences directed to other people in the group would be very rude in any relationship, so how much worse can it be when this is with God!
- with sincerity: cf people who beg Jesus to heal a son, a daughter...  
*[Have you already being imploring somebody in your life? Do you need a "prayer book" to go and talk with your Dad?]*
  - they pray Him for somebody who is very close ⇒ real, deep love;
  - they are truly concerned: they travel, ... to come to Jesus;
  - fasting: not as a magical way to gain some attention from God, not a way to manipulate God, but because they are so concerned they can not take the time to eat or they don't have any willingness to eat! (cf mourning, Daniel 9:3 "And I set my face to the Lord God, to seek by prayer and supplications, with fasting, and sackcloth, and ashes"). This is also a sign of true repentance (cf Niniva, sackclothes and ashes). That mean that our desires to come to God are above anything else and prevent us from enjoying anything else!
  - God wants people to be broken (cf OT), so that they cry out to Him, He answers their prayers and He is glorified. It creates a deep, true renewal of the hearts (=sincerity).

- often in solitude: Mat 6:6 "But you, when you pray, enter into your closet, and when you have shut your door, pray to your Father which is in secret; and your Father which sees in secret shall reward you openly.", Jesus going to the desert, to the mountains, ... Paul drawn into solitude (blindness + voice to him only) from the multitude going with him to Damascus. [*Do you have a personal prayer life?*]
- Posture: none, what is important is not how we pray, but what we did before praying! (cf the Lord does not want offerings and sacrifices but He wants pure hearts! (Es, Ps)) ⇒ what matters is the inclination of the heart!
- daily walk with God: cf Moses, Abraham, David, Daniel... They know God, they spend time in His presence, they seek Him and their prayer is heard (comunion with God). We can not reject God, or push Him to the side of our life and then call Him to give some orders about what we want!
  - to pray in truth (Ps 145:18; Joh 4:24), we must know the truth!
  - to pray in fear (Ps 5:7; 89:7; Pr 2:3-5; Mal 3:16), because we realize Who we are talking to!
  - to be washed from evil (Heb 10:22), we need to receive the grace of Christ!
  - we must prepare our hearts (Job 11:13)!
  - we must pray in spirit and in truth, so we need to receive the Spirit and give Him dominion over our lives!

### 3 Conclusion

Once again, what matters is our hearts. God is not looking at appearances, but He is looking deep inside our hearts. We should not hide behind congregational prayer, "religious wording", ready-to-pray prayers. We should strip ourselves to the heart, in a faith-based relationship with God. We should first pray for the Holy Spirit to pray in us, to teach us how to pray (Lk 11:1, Rom 8:26, Zec 12:10). We should be ready to be lead in prayer by God Himself, through the Holy Spirit, and be ready to pray for the will of God, even if it is against our own will. We should seek God night and day, drink to His Word, have Him purify our hearts; and then, God will hear our prayers and reply, showing us His grace, His power and His wisdom as a testimony

of Him. Be ready for God to move in your life: this is fearful but this is a glorious blessing!

"Prayer is like the dove that Noah sent forth, which blessed him not only when it returned with an olive-leaf in its mouth, but when it never returned at all.",

Robinson's Job.

## A God answers prayers!

*[Do you have memories of God answering your prayers? And not answering your prayers for the best?]*

"Abraham's servant prayed to God, and God directed him to the person who should be wife to his master's son and heir (Gen. 24:10-20).

"Jacob prayed to God, and God inclined the heart of his irritated brother, so that they met in peace and friendship (Gen. 32:24-30; 33:1-4).

"Samson prayed to God, and God showed him a well where he quenched his burning thirst, and so lived to judge Israel (Judg. 15:18-20).

"David prayed, and God defeated the counsel of Ahithophel (2 Sam. 15:31; 16:20-23; 17:14-23).

"Daniel prayed, and God enabled him both to tell Nebuchadnezzar his dream and to give the interpretation of it (Dan. 2: 16-23).

"Nehemiah prayed, and God inclined the heart of the king of Persia to grant him leave of absence to visit and rebuild Jerusalem (Neh. 1:11; 2:1-6).

"Esther and Mordecai prayed, and God defeated the purpose of Haman, and saved the Jews from destruction (Esther 4:15-17; 6:7, 8).

"The believers in Jerusalem prayed, and God opened the prison doors and set Peter at liberty, when Herod had resolved upon his death (Acts 12:1-12).

"Paul prayed that the thorn in the flesh might be removed, and his prayer brought a large increase of spiritual strength, while the thorn perhaps remained (2 Cor. 12:7-10).



## B Biblical references

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### B.1 The meaning of prayer

**1 The 5:17** pray without ceasing,

**Isaiah 55:6** Seek the Lord while he may be found; call upon him while he is near;

**Matthew 7:7** Ask, and it will be given to you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you.

**Philippians 4:6** do not be anxious about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God.

**Job 8:5** If you will seek God and plead with the Almighty for mercy,

**Eph 3:14** For this reason I bow my knees before the Father,

**Ps 5:3** O Lord, in the morning you hear my voice; in the morning I prepare a sacrifice for you and watch.

**Ps 25:1** To you, O Lord, I lift up my soul.

**La 3:41** Let us lift up our hearts and hands to God in heaven:

**Ps 62:8** Trust in him at all times, O people; pour out your heart before him; God is a refuge for us. Selah

**1Sa 1:15** But Hannah answered, No, my lord, I am a woman troubled in spirit. I have drunk neither wine nor strong drink, but I have been pouring out my soul before the Lord.

**Ge 12:8** From there he moved to the hill country on the east of Bethel and pitched his tent, with Bethel on the west and Ai on the east. And there he built an altar to the Lord and called upon the name of the Lord.

**Ac 22:16** And now why do you wait? Rise and be baptized and wash away your sins, calling on his name.

**Ps 27:7** Hear, O Lord, when I cry aloud; be gracious to me and answer me!

**Ps 73:28** But for me it is good to be near God; I have made the Lord God my refuge, that I may tell of all your works.

**Heb 10:22** let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith, with our hearts sprinkled clean from an evil conscience and our bodies washed with pure water.

**2Ch 32:20** Then Hezekiah the king and Isaiah the prophet, the son of Amoz, prayed because of this and cried to heaven.

**Ex 32:11** But Moses implored the Lord his God and said, O Lord, why does your wrath burn hot against your people, whom you have brought out of the land of Egypt with great power and with a mighty hand?

**Job 8:5** If you will seek God and plead with the Almighty for mercy,

**Ps 27:8** You have said, Seek my face. My heart says to you, Your face, Lord, do I seek.

**Job 8:5** If you will seek God and plead with the Almighty for mercy,

**Jer 36:7** It may be that their plea for mercy will come before the Lord, and that every one will turn from his evil way, for great is the anger and wrath that the Lord has pronounced against this people.

**1Ki 8:33** When your people Israel are defeated before the enemy because they have sinned against you, and if they turn again to you and acknowledge your name and pray and plead with you in this house,

**Jer 36:7** It may be that their plea for mercy will come before the Lord, and that every one will turn from his evil way, for great is the anger and wrath that the Lord has pronounced against this people.

**Ne 1:6** let your ear be attentive and your eyes open, to hear the prayer of your servant that I now pray before you day and night for the people of Israel your servants, confessing the sins of the people of Israel, which we have sinned against you. Even I and my father's house have sinned.

**Ps 17:1** Hear a just cause, O Lord; attend to my cry! Give ear to my prayer from lips free of deceit!

**Ge 18:27** Abraham answered and said, Behold, I have undertaken to speak to the Lord, I who am but dust and ashes.

**Lu 22:42** saying, Father, if you are willing, remove this cup from me. Nevertheless, not my will, but yours, be done.

**Ps 56:9** Then my enemies will turn back in the day when I call. This I know, that God is for me.

**1Jo 5:14** And this is the confidence that we have toward him, that if we ask anything according to his will he hears us.

## **B.2 Prayer in my life**

**Mt 6:7** And when you pray, do not heap up empty phrases as the Gentiles do, for they think that they will be heard for their many words.

**Mt 6:5** And when you pray, you must not be like the hypocrites. For they love to stand and pray in the synagogues and at the street corners, that they may be seen by others. Truly, I say to you, they have received their reward.

**Daniel 9:3** Then I turned my face to the Lord God, seeking him by prayer and pleas for mercy with fasting and sackcloth and ashes.

**Mat 6:6** But when you pray, go into your room and shut the door and pray to your Father who is in secret. And your Father who sees in secret will reward you.

**Joh 4:24** God is spirit, and those who worship him must worship in spirit and truth.

**Ps 5:7** But I, through the abundance of your steadfast love, will enter your house. I will bow down toward your holy temple in the fear of you.

**Pr 2:3–5** yes, if you call out for insight and raise your voice for understanding, if you seek it like silver and search for it as for hidden treasures, then you will understand the fear of the Lord and find the knowledge of God.

**Mal 3:16** Then those who feared the Lord spoke with one another. The Lord paid attention and heard them, and a book of remembrance was written before him of those who feared the Lord and esteemed his name.

**Heb 10:22** let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith, with our hearts sprinkled clean from an evil conscience and our bodies washed with pure water.

**Job 11:13** If you prepare your heart, you will stretch out your hands toward him.

### **B.3 Conclusion**

**Lk 11:1** Now Jesus was praying in a certain place, and when he finished, one of his disciples said to him, Lord, teach us to pray, as John taught his disciples.

**Rom 8:26** Likewise the Spirit helps us in our weakness. For we do not know what to pray for as we ought, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us with groanings too deep for words.

**Zec 12:10** And I will pour out on the house of David and the inhabitants of Jerusalem a spirit of grace and pleas for mercy, so that, when they look on me, on him whom they have pierced, they shall mourn for him, as one mourns for an only child, and weep bitterly over him, as one weeps over a firstborn.

**Esther 4:15–17** Then Esther told them to reply to Mordecai, Go, gather all the Jews to be found in Susa, and hold a fast on my behalf, and do not eat or drink for three days, night or day. I and my young women will also fast as you do. Then I will go to the king, though it is against the law, and if I perish, I perish. Mordecai then went away and did everything as Esther had ordered him.

**Acts 12:1–12** About that time Herod the king laid violent hands on some who belonged to the church. He killed James the brother of John with the sword, and when he saw that it pleased the Jews, he proceeded to arrest Peter also. This was during the days of Unleavened Bread. And when he had seized him, he put him in prison, delivering him over to four squads of soldiers to guard him, intending after the Passover to bring him out to the people. So Peter was kept in prison, but earnest prayer for him was made to God by the church. Now when Herod was about to bring him out, on that very night, Peter was sleeping between two soldiers, bound with two chains, and sentries before the door were guarding the prison. And behold, an angel of the Lord stood next to him, and a light shone in the cell. He struck Peter on the side and woke him, saying, Get up quickly. And the chains fell off his hands. And the angel said to him, Dress yourself and put on your sandals. And he did so. And he said to him, Wrap your cloak around you and follow me. And he went out and followed him. He did not know that what was

being done by the angel was real, but thought he was seeing a vision. When they had passed the first and the second guard, they came to the iron gate leading into the city. It opened for them of its own accord, and they went out and went along one street, and immediately the angel left him. When Peter came to himself, he said, Now I am sure that the Lord has sent his angel and rescued me from the hand of Herod and from all that the Jewish people were expecting. When he realized this, he went to the house of Mary, the mother of John whose other name was Mark, where many were gathered together and were praying.