

Principles Of Prayer

By Adrian Rogers

As temples of the Holy Spirit our bodies should be houses of prayer. Anything that distracts from vital prayer in our lives is a treacherous thief, stealing from us the blessings the father longs to bestow and taking from the father the glory that he so richly deserves. We need to learn the art of prevailing prayer which links us with the almighty god in a miraculous way.

If god does hear and answer prayer, then the one thing above all else that I should learn to do is to pray. Failure to pray is more than a tragedy. It is a sin. God's word says, "moreover, as for me, far be it from me that I should sin against the lord in ceasing to pray for you; but I will teach you the good and the right way" (ISA 12:23).

What did Jesus teach about prevailing prayer? In MAT 6:9-13, our lord provided some wonderful insights to aid us in our prayer life.

The person of the prayer

Notice that Christ's model prayer begins with "our father." Right away we learn that vital prayer is a child talking with his father. Therefore, we must be children of god in order to pray with effectiveness. Not everyone has the right to call god "father." Only those who have been born into his family have that right, and god makes it clear in the scriptures that some human beings are not his children. Jesus said of the unconverted Pharisees, "you are of your father the devil" (JOH 8:44). We become children of god and can call him "Father" only when by faith we receive Christ as our lord and savior and are born into his family. John makes this clear in his words concerning Jesus, "he came to his own, and his own did not receive him. But as many as received him, to them he gave the right to become children of god, to those who believe in his name" (JOH 1:11, 12).

But if he is your father, how simple and natural it ought to be for you to pray. The Holy Spirit has even taught us to pray, "Abba, father" (ROM 8:15). *Abba* is an Aramaic word that is very close to our word "daddy." It was one of the first words framed upon the lips of a little baby. How thrilling to know that as god's dear child you can come with such intimate confidence as to call him "Abba, father."

The purpose of the prayer

We are told to pray, "your kingdom come, your will be done." This tells us immediately that prayer has one major purpose, I.e., To seek and to secure the will of god. Prayer is answered only when it is in the will of god. "now this is the confidence that we have in him, that if we ask anything according to his will, he hears us" (1JO 5:14). Praying in the will of god does not mean fewer blessings, but rather greater blessings for you. We should never fear the will of god.

But remember that prayer is not some exercise whereby we try to bend god's will to fit our will. Prayer is not talking god into doing something that he ordinarily would not want to do. Prayer is the thrilling experience of finding god's will and then asking him for it. How do we know god's will? Obviously god's will is made known in a general sense as we read the bible, but there are so many specific things that the scriptures do not touch upon.

The secret of knowing god's will in prayer is not only to know the bible and let its truth abide in us, but to be very, very sensitive to the leading of the holy spirit of god. Remember that because you are a temple of god and a house of prayer, god's

Holy spirit abides within you, and he will help you pray (ROM 8:26, 27). We call this "praying in the spirit." When we pray, we are to pray to the father, through the son, in the spirit. What a glorious partnership there is between the holy spirit and the human spirit. The holy spirit teaches us the will of god and helps us to pray as we ought. The holy spirit, as our helper, wants to think through our minds, feel through our hearts, speak through our lips, weep through our eyes, and express himself through our spirits. Prayer is the holy spirit's finding a desire in the heart of the father and then placing that desire into our hearts. The desire is then sent back to heaven in the power of the cross. This is why we must learn to wait before the father in meditation and openness when we pray.

The provision of the prayer

Surely we may ask for our needs (“give us this day our daily bread”). While we should not pray selfish prayers, we certainly may pray personal prayers for personal needs. Our father is concerned with every need we have. Remember that this model prayer is but a guide for praying. Jesus did not mean we should only ask for bread. What he did mean was that we should bring all of our needs to the father and ask him specifically for what we need. Paul reminds us, “and my god shall supply all your need according to his riches in glory by Christ Jesus” (PHI 4:19). Notice he did not say “all your wants.” Sometimes we want things we do not need, and sometimes we need things we do not want. Many Christians have needs that are unmet simply because they do not pray. James reminds us, “you do not have because you do not ask” (JAM 4:2). Let us learn to ask the father for the things we need. Nothing that is big enough to concern us is too small to concern him. Ask him for your needs.

The pardon of the prayer

Powerful prayer must come from a clean heart. Jesus taught us to pray for daily forgiveness (“forgive us our debts”) just as we pray for daily bread. Many of our prayers are not answered because we are not including confession and repentance with our petitions. The prayer from a dirty heart is a prayer not answered. “if I regard iniquity in my heart, the lord will not hear” (PSA 66:18). James warns all of us when he says, “draw near to god and he will draw near to you. Cleanse your hands, you sinners; and purify your hearts, you double-minded” (JAM 4:8). We cannot pray effectively with dirty hands, defiled hearts, and double minds. So many of us, it seems, would rather hold to our sins than enjoy the freedom of a prayer life that knows no limits. Are there sins that have made your temple a den of thieves rather than a house of prayer? If so, pray, “forgive me my debts.”

The protection of the prayer

The phrase, “deliver us from the evil one,” is an acknowledgment of our need for god to provide us a way of escape from our great enemy the devil. Satan has already made plans to sabotage your life and to hurt your loved ones. He has already dug a pit for your feet to fall in this day.

Satan cannot get at god directly. He knows, as evil persons have always known, that if you cannot harm someone, then the next most effective thing is to harm someone that person loves. God loves you, and, therefore, Satan has aimed all of the artillery of hell at you. You need the protection provided through prayer. The prayer for deliverance from evil and temptation is preventive medicine.

The praise of the prayer

Jesus’ model prayer both opens and closes on a note of praise (“yours is . . . The glory forever”). How appropriate this is. Prayer must be done in faith, and praise is the best expression of faith.

When we ask god for things, that is petition. But petition without praise is unbelief. Praise without petition, however, is presumption. But when we link petition and praise together, that is power. When I ask god, then praise god, I am believing god. Petition says, “please.” Praise says, “thank you.” If your faith is strong, your prayers will be strong. Pray and believe and you will receive. Pray and doubt and you will do without. How important, therefore, it is that we learn to praise. If your prayer life seems useless and powerless, learn to praise god. The bible says that god inhabits the praises of his people. He is very near when we praise him.

The lord’s prayer begins with “our father” and ends with “yours is the kingdom.” Our father is a king. Just think about that. I have a father who will hear me and a king who can answer me. I have the sympathy of a father and the sovereignty of a king attuned to my prayer. Yes, why shouldn’t I offer god praise? You will discover victory when you let your temple be a house of prayer. 1

1W.A. Criswell, *Believer’s study Bible [computer file], electronic ed.*, Logos Library System, (Nashville: Thomas Nelson) 1997, c1991 by the Criswell Center for Biblical Studies.