

A Scriptural Primer: PRAYER

What is PRAYER? Is it giving thanks to God before eating a meal? Is it petitioning Him for blessings, desires, or relief? Prayer is much more than all these things. Scripture teaches us that prayer is about each of our personal and intimate relationship to God.

WHO DO WE PRAY TO?

“For although there may be so-called gods in heaven or on earth—as indeed there are many ‘gods’ and many ‘lords’—yet for us there is one God, the Father, from Whom are all things and for Whom we exist, and one Lord, Jesus Christ, through Whom are all things and through Whom we exist” (1 Corinthians 8:5-6).

Whether we pray to the Father or the Son, we are praying to God. Jesus says, “I and the Father are one” (John 10:30).

Paul explained our prayers are destined to come before the Father through Jesus by the Spirit, “for through Him we both have access in one Spirit to the Father” (Ephesians 2:18).

“My little children, I am writing these things to you so that you may not sin. But if anyone does sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous” (1 John 2:1).

“No one who denies the Son has the Father. Whoever confesses the Son has the Father also” (1 John 2:23).

“The Father loves the Son and has given all things into His hand” (John 3:35).

ALL GOOD THINGS ARE FROM GOD AND ALL THINGS WORK FOR GOOD IN THE BELIEVER’S LIFE

Regardless of the difficulties, trials, and traumas of life, we must never forget the foundational truth in prayer that God is good, and He gives only good things to us—also that everything happening to us is ultimately for our greatest good in all eternity. “Do not be deceived, my beloved brothers. 17 Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of lights, with whom there is no variation or shadow due to change. 18 Of His own will He brought us forth by the word of truth, that we should be a kind of firstfruits of His creatures” (James 1:16-18).

“And we know that for those who love God all things work together for good, for those who are called according to His purpose” (Romans 8:28).

“What then shall we say to these things? If God is for us, who can be against us? 32 He who did not spare His own Son but gave Him up for us all, how will He not also with Him graciously give us all things? 33 Who shall bring any charge against God’s elect? It is God who justifies. 34 Who is to condemn? Christ Jesus is the one Who died—more than that, Who was raised—Who is at the right hand of God, Who indeed is interceding for us. 35 Who shall separate us from

the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or danger, or sword? 36 As it is written, 'For Your sake we are being killed all the day long; we are regarded as sheep to be slaughtered.' No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through Him who loved us. 38 For I am sure that neither death nor life, nor angels nor rulers, nor things present nor things to come, nor powers, 39 nor height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord" (Romans 8:31-39).

PRAY ACCORDING TO GOD'S WILL, AND IT WILL BE ANSWERED

The foundational principle of prayer is that it must be in the Father's will for it to be answered. Remember, we are "called according to His purpose" (Romans 8:28b). His will is our good, but it may not always be what we think is good for us. God's will is found in His Word. Abiding in His Word is the best way to remain in a healthy relationship of prayer.

"And this is the confidence that we have toward Him, that **if we ask anything according to His will He hears us.** 15 And if we know that He hears us in whatever we ask, we know that we have the requests that we have asked of Him" (1 John 5:14-15).

"If you abide in Me, and My words abide in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be done for you. By this My Father is glorified, that you bear much fruit and so prove to be My disciples. 9 As the Father has loved Me, so have I loved you. Abide in My love. 10 If you keep My commandments, you will abide in My love, just as I have kept My Father's commandments and abide in His love" (John 15:7-10).

"Truly, truly, I say to you, whoever believes in Me will also do the works that I do; and greater works than these will he do, because I am going to the Father. 13 **Whatever you ask in My name, this I will do,** that the Father may be glorified in the Son. 14 If you ask Me anything in My name, I will do it" (John 14:12-14).

"Therefore do not be anxious, saying, 'What shall we eat?' or 'What shall we drink?' or 'What shall we wear?' 32 For the Gentiles seek after all these things, and your heavenly Father knows that you need them all. 33 But **seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness,** and all these things will be added to you" (Matthew 6:31-33).

PRAYING IN THE SPIRIT

"Whoever keeps His commandments abides in God, and God in him. And by this we know that He abides in us, by the Spirit whom He has given us" (1 John 3:24). For our prayers to be in God's will, we must abide in God's Word, the commandments of Christ. We also must abide in the Spirit that abides in us, praying in the Spirit: "It is these who cause divisions, worldly people, devoid of the Spirit. But you, beloved, building yourselves up in your most holy faith and praying in the Holy Spirit, keep yourselves in the love of God, waiting for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ that leads to eternal life" (Jude 19-21).

OUR PRAYERS ARE NOT ALWAYS ANSWERED WHEN WE EXPECT OR AS WE EXPECT

Because we often pray for things that seem good to us, but are not actually good for us, our prayers are not always answered as we would like. “So to keep me from becoming conceited because of the surpassing greatness of the revelations, a thorn was given me in the flesh, a messenger of Satan to harass me, to keep me from becoming conceited. 8 Three times I pleaded with the Lord about this, that it should leave me. 9 But He said to me, ‘My grace is sufficient for you, for My power is made perfect in weakness.’ Therefore I will boast all the more gladly of my weaknesses, so that the power of Christ may rest upon me. 10 For the sake of Christ, then, I am content with weaknesses, insults, hardships, persecutions, and calamities. For when I am weak, then I am strong” (2 Corinthians 12:7-10).

Job suffered greatly without any idea why it was happening, and his prayers for relief were not answered for a long time. His trial was for God’s glory and concerned great things unseen in Heaven. This should be a reminder to us that what we go through in life has profound importance in the Kingdom of God: “As an example of suffering and patience, brothers, take the prophets who spoke in the name of the Lord. 11 Behold, we consider those blessed who remained steadfast. You have heard of the steadfastness of Job, and you have seen the purpose of the Lord, how the Lord is compassionate and merciful” (James 5:10-11).

PRAYING AS A SON RELATING TO HIS FATHER

It is foundational to understanding prayer to first understand our nature as children, and that as children, you are to “be obedient to your parents in all things, for this is well-pleasing to the Lord” (Col. 3:20). We also understand that just as our Heavenly Father has instructed fathers not to “exasperate [Gr. to stir to anger] your children, so that they will not lose heart” (Col. 3:21), we can be secure knowing that God will not exasperate us.

Like natural children, our understanding of the nature of reality is severely limited: “When I was a child, I used to speak like a child, think like a child, reason like a child; when I became a man, I did away with childish things. For now we see in a mirror dimly, but then face to face; now I know in part, but then I will know fully just as I also have been fully known” (1 Cor. 13:9-12). “Beloved, now we are children of God, and it has not appeared as yet what we will be. We know that when He appears, we will be like Him, because we will see Him just as He is” (1 John 3:2).

Children tend to think that everything is about them (or should be), rather than the hundreds of people who are woven into their lives. Their worlds are fragile and easily disturbed, and they don’t always understand the consequences of their actions. Responsibility and discipline can seem like punishment and trials to them. Children often get angry with their parents when they are denied what they feel they need (or deserve) to make them feel special or happy. Parents often deny or ignore pleas and requests that will only serve to harm their children down the road—even though to the child it seems crucial to their happiness. And sometimes parents cause their children pain while fixing serious problems the children don’t even know they have. Just as natural children only know in part, we also know so little of what is going on.

We truly are “little children” (1 Jn. 4:4) being raised by our Father to live in a reality that is currently too big for us to fully understand. Yet He has not left us without guidance: “God has sent the Spirit of His Son into our hearts, crying, ‘Abba! Father!’” (Gal. 4:6) Jesus is God’s “firstborn” (Rom. 8:29b)—you and I are among His “many brethren” (Rom. 8:29b). Jesus is our role-model for relating to the Father. “Therefore be imitators of God, as beloved children; and walk in love, just as Christ also loved you and gave Himself up for us, an offering and a sacrifice to God” (Eph. 5:1-2a). We must emulate Jesus’ dependence, obedience, and sacrifice, saying with Him, “I can do nothing on My own” (John 5:30a). He “emptied Himself” (Phil. 2:7a) and “humbled Himself” (Phil. 2:8b) to obey His Father’s will though it led to a cross, saying, “I seek not My own will but the will of Him who sent Me” (John. 5:30b). May we so walk. Even so, Amen.

Prayer is often described as a child relating to a father, as in the case of our Heavenly Father, just as when Jesus “fell on His face and prayed, saying, ‘My Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from Me; nevertheless, not as I will, but as You will’” (Matthew 26:39).

“In the days of His flesh, Jesus offered up prayers and supplications, with loud cries and tears, to Him who was able to save Him from death, and He was heard because of His reverence. 8 Although He was a son, He learned obedience through what He suffered. 9 And being made perfect, He became the source of eternal salvation to all who obey Him” (Hebrews 5:7-9).

“So they took away the stone. And Jesus lifted up His eyes and said, ‘Father, I thank You that You have heard Me. 42 I knew that You always hear Me, but I said this on account of the people standing around, that they may believe that You sent Me’” (John 11:41-42).

“‘Now is My soul troubled. And what shall I say? ‘Father, save Me from this hour’? But for this purpose I have come to this hour. 28 Father, glorify Your name.’ Then a voice came from heaven: ‘I have glorified it, and I will glorify it again’” (John 12:27-28).

“O righteous Father, even though the world does not know You, I know You, and these know that You have sent Me. 26 I made known to them Your name, and I will continue to make it known, that the love with which You have loved Me may be in them, and I in them” (John 17:25-26).

“For you did not receive the spirit of slavery to fall back into fear, but you have received the Spirit of adoption as sons, by whom we cry, ‘Abba! Father!’” (Romans 8:15)

“So I ask you not to lose heart over what I am suffering for you, which is your glory. For this reason I bow my knees before the Father, 15 from Whom every family in heaven and on earth is named, 16 that according to the riches of His glory He may grant you to be strengthened with power through His Spirit in your inner being, 17 so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith—that you, being rooted and grounded in love, 18 may have strength to comprehend with all the saints what is the breadth and length and height and depth, 19 and to know the love of Christ that surpasses knowledge, that you may be filled with all the fullness of God” (Ephesians 3:13-19).

“And if you call on Him as Father Who judges impartially according to each one's deeds, conduct yourselves with fear throughout the time of your exile, 18 knowing that you were ransomed from the futile ways inherited from your forefathers, not with perishable things such as silver or gold, 19 but with the precious blood of Christ, like that of a lamb without blemish or spot” (1 Peter 1:17-19).

PRAYING AS A BRIDE RELATING TO HER HUSBAND

Prayer is also relating in love to our betrothed, the Son of God, Jesus Christ, who is our spiritual husband, as Paul described: “For I feel a divine jealousy for you, since I betrothed you to one husband, to present you as a pure virgin to Christ. But I am afraid that as the serpent deceived Eve by his cunning, your thoughts will be led astray from a sincere and pure devotion to Christ” (2 Corinthians 11:2-3).

We know we pray to God, and Jesus also is God. Jesus tells all His disciples, “Whatever you ask in My name, this I will do, that the Father may be glorified in the Son” (John 14:13).

Therefore, we also pray to Him: “To the church of God that is in Corinth, to those sanctified in Christ Jesus, called to be saints together with all those who in every place call upon the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, both their Lord and ours” (1 Corinthians 1:2).

“For I know that through your prayers and the help of the Spirit of Jesus Christ this will turn out for my deliverance” (Philippians 1:19).

The Holy Spirit Himself, who dwells inside every Believer, is the Spirit of Christ: “And because you are sons, God has sent the Spirit of His Son into our hearts, crying, ‘Abba! Father!’” (Galatians 4:6)

The Spirit “Himself intercedes for us with groanings too deep for words” (Romans 8:26b).

So, whether we pray to the Father or the Son, we are praying to God, “for through Him [Jesus] we both have access in one Spirit to the Father” (Ephesians 2:18).

“That which we have seen and heard we proclaim also to you, so that you too may have fellowship with us; and indeed our fellowship is with the Father and with His Son Jesus Christ” (1 John 1:3).

Just as you cannot boil down the intimate fellowship of marriage to calculated exchanges of petitions, praises, thanks, and requests to one another, a healthy relationship of love goes far beyond the tangible as it is a profound “mystery” (Ephesians 5:32) created by God that can cause two people to become one. Through Jesus, by the Spirit, we have been made one, for “he who is joined to the Lord becomes one spirit with Him” (1 Corinthians 6:17).

PERSISTENCE IN PRAYER

“And He told them a parable to the effect that they ought always to pray and not lose heart. 2 He said, ‘In a certain city there was a judge who neither feared God nor respected man. 3 And there was a widow in that city who kept coming to him and saying, “Give me justice against my adversary.” 4 For a while he refused, but afterward he said to himself, “Though I neither fear God nor respect man, 5 yet because this widow keeps bothering me, I will give her justice, so that she will not beat me down by her continual coming.”’ 6 And the Lord said, ‘Hear what the unrighteous judge says. 7 And will not God give justice to His elect, who cry to Him day and night? Will He delay long over them?’” (Luke 18:1-7)

“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.’ 2 And He said to them, ‘When you pray, say:

“Father, hallowed be Your name.
Your kingdom come.
3 Give us each day our daily bread,
4 and forgive us our sins,
for we ourselves forgive everyone who is indebted to us.
And lead us not into temptation.”

5 And He said to them, ‘Which of you who has a friend will go to him at midnight and say to him, “Friend, lend me three loaves, 6 for a friend of mine has arrived on a journey, and I have nothing to set before him”; 7 and he will answer from within, “Do not bother me; the door is now shut, and my children are with me in bed. I cannot get up and give you anything”? 8 I tell you, though he will not get up and give him anything because he is his friend, yet because of his impudence he will rise and give him whatever he needs. 9 And I tell you, ask, and it will be given to you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you. 10 For everyone who asks receives, and the one who seeks finds, and to the one who knocks it will be opened. 11 What father among you, if his son asks for a fish, will instead of a fish give him a serpent; 12 or if he asks for an egg, will give him a scorpion? 13 If you then, who are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will the heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to those who ask Him!’” (Luke 11:1-13)

BE STEADFAST AND THANKFUL IN PRAYER

“Rejoice in hope, be patient in tribulation, be constant in prayer” (Romans 12:12).

“Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God” (Philippians 4:6).

“Continue steadfastly in prayer, being watchful in it with thanksgiving” (Colossians 4:2).

“Rejoice always, pray without ceasing, give thanks in all circumstances; for this is the will of

God in Christ Jesus for you” (1 Thessalonians 5:16-18).

SANCTIFYING WITH PRAYER

“For everything created by God is good, and nothing is to be rejected if it is received with thanksgiving, for it is made holy by the word of God and prayer” (1 Timothy 4:4-5).

PRAY FOR THE SAINTS

“You also must help us by prayer, so that many will give thanks on our behalf for the blessing granted us through the prayers of many” (2 Corinthians 1:11).

“Praying at all times in the Spirit, with all prayer and supplication. To that end, keep alert with all perseverance, making supplication for all the saints” (Ephesians 6:18).

“Is anyone among you suffering? Let him pray. Is anyone cheerful? Let him sing praise. 14 Is anyone among you sick? Let him call for the elders of the church, and let them pray over him, anointing him with oil in the name of the Lord. 15 And the prayer of faith will save the one who is sick, and the Lord will raise him up. And if he has committed sins, he will be forgiven” (James 5:13-15).

PRAY FOR ALL PEOPLE

“You have heard that it was said, ‘You shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy.’ 44 But I say to you, Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, 45 so that you may be sons of your Father Who is in heaven. For He makes His sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the just and on the unjust” (Matthew 5:43-45).

“First of all, then, I urge that supplications, prayers, intercessions, and thanksgivings be made for all people, 2 for kings and all who are in high positions, that we may lead a peaceful and quiet life, godly and dignified in every way. 3 This is good, and it is pleasing in the sight of God our Savior” (1 Timothy 2:1-3).

“I desire then that in every place the men should pray, lifting holy hands without anger or quarreling” (1 Timothy 2:8).

REPENT OF SIN FOR THE SAKE OF YOUR PRAYERS

“He also told this parable to some who trusted in themselves that they were righteous, and treated others with contempt: 10 ‘Two men went up into the temple to pray, one a Pharisee and the other a tax collector. 11 The Pharisee, standing by himself, prayed thus: “God, I thank you that I am not like other men, extortioners, unjust, adulterers, or even like this tax collector. 12 I fast twice a week; I give tithes of all that I get.” 13 But the tax collector, standing far off, would not even lift up his eyes to heaven, but beat his breast, saying, “God, be merciful to me, a sinner!” 14 I tell you, this man went down to his house justified, rather than the other. For everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, but the one who humbles himself will be exalted”

(Luke 18:9-14).

“Therefore, confess your sins to one another and pray for one another, that you may be healed. The prayer of a righteous person has great power as it is working. 17 Elijah was a man with a nature like ours, and he prayed fervently that it might not rain, and for three years and six months it did not rain on the earth. 18 Then he prayed again, and heaven gave rain, and the earth bore its fruit” (James 5:16-18).

“Likewise, husbands, live with your wives in an understanding way, showing honor to the woman as the weaker vessel, since they are heirs with you of the grace of life, so that your prayers may not be hindered” (1 Peter 3:7).

“For the eyes of the Lord are on the righteous, and His ears are open to their prayer. But the face of the Lord is against those who do evil” (1 Peter 3:12).

“The end of all things is at hand; therefore be self-controlled and sober-minded for the sake of your prayers. Above all, keep loving one another earnestly, since love covers a multitude of sins” (1 Peter 4:7-8).

Coming back to God often in prayer helps with temptation: “Watch and pray that you may not enter into temptation. The spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak” (Matthew 26:41).

THE HOLY SPIRIT INTERCEDES FOR US ACCORDING TO THE WILL OF GOD

“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. And He who searches hearts knows what is the mind of the Spirit, because the Spirit intercedes for the saints **according to the will of God**. 28 And we know that for those who love God all things work together for good, for those who are called according to His purpose. 29 For those whom He foreknew He also predestined to be conformed to the image of His Son, in order that He might be the firstborn among many brothers. 30 And those whom He predestined He also called, and those whom He called He also justified, and those whom He justified He also glorified” (Romans 8:26-30).

“But the Helper, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in My name, He will teach you all things and bring to your remembrance all that I have said to you” (John 14:26).

PRAYER IS PERSONAL AND PRIVATE

Jesus spent a great deal of time in prayer alone: “And rising very early in the morning, while it was still dark, He departed and went out to a desolate place, and there He prayed” (Mark 1:35).

The very nature of intimate relationships intrinsically means it is not for show. “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. 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. 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. 8 Do not be like them, for your Father knows what you need before you ask Him. 9 Pray then like this:

‘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 also have forgiven our debtors.
13 And lead us not into temptation,
but deliver us from evil’” (Matthew 6:5-13).

PRAYER AS SEEN IN HEAVEN

Scripture provides us with a few glimpses of how our prayers are received in Heaven: “And when He [Jesus] had taken the scroll, the four living creatures and the twenty-four elders fell down before the Lamb, each holding a harp, and golden bowls full of incense, which are the prayers of the saints” (Revelation 5:8).

“Then I saw the seven angels who stand before God, and seven trumpets were given to them. 3 And another angel came and stood at the altar with a golden censer, and he was given much incense to offer with the prayers of all the saints on the golden altar before the throne, 4 and the smoke of the incense, with the prayers of the saints, rose before God from the hand of the angel. 5 Then the angel took the censer and filled it with fire from the altar and threw it on the earth, and there were peals of thunder, rumblings, flashes of lightning, and an earthquake” (Revelation 8:2-5). When God answers prayer, the spiritual reality is intense!

“The Spirit and the Bride say, ‘Come.’ And let the one who hears say, ‘Come’...He who testifies to these things says, ‘Surely I am coming soon.’ Amen. Come, Lord Jesus!” (Revelation 22:17a, 20)