

## OBSERVATIONS ON PRAYER

### A. Why spend time talking about prayer?

1. It is what humans do.
  - a. Timothy Keller, *Prayer is one of the most common phenomena of human life...Efforts to find cultures, even very remote and isolated ones, without some form of religion and prayer have failed.*
  - b. Martin Luther, *As it is the business of tailors to make clothes and of cobblers to mend shoes, so it is the business of Christians to pray.*
  - c. Elton Trueblood, *At the profoundest depths in life, men talk not about God but with Him.*
2. It works.
  - a. Martin Luther, *None can believe how powerful prayer is, and what it is able to effect, but those who have learned it by experience.*
  - b. R. C. Sproul, *We pray to glorify God, but we also pray in order to receive the benefits of prayer from His hand. Prayer is for our benefit, even in light of the fact that God knows the end from the beginning. It is our privilege to bring the whole of our finite existence into the glory of His infinite presence.*
  - c. Richard Trench, *Prayer is not overcoming God's reluctance but cooperating with His willingness.*

### B. What is prayer? Some definitions of prayer

1. Clement of Alexandria, *Prayer is conversation with God.*
2. John Calvin, *The chief exercise of faith, by which we daily receive God's benefits.*
3. M. Guyon, *Prayer is the overflowing of the heart in the presence of God.*
4. J. I. Packer, *Prayer is finding our way through duty to delight.*

### C. What is involved in prayer? Some descriptions of prayer from the Bible

1. It concerns one's heart and soul
  - a. Lamentations 3:41, *Let us lift up our hearts and hands to God in heaven.*
  - b. Psalm 62:8, *Trust in him at all times, O people; pour out your heart before him; God is a refuge for us.*
  - c. Psalm 25:1-2, *To you, O LORD, I lift up my soul. O my God, in you I trust;*
2. It is connecting to God.
  - a. Psalm 27:7, *Hear, O LORD, when I cry aloud; be gracious to me and answer me!*
  - b. Psalm 116:4, *Then I called on the name of the LORD: "O LORD, I pray, deliver my soul!"*
  - c. Psalm 34:4, *I sought the LORD, and he answered me and delivered me from all my fears.*

### D. What to pray? Some types of prayer

1. Confession - admitting personal guilt
  - a. Psalm 51:1-4, *Have mercy on me, O God, according to your steadfast love; according to your abundant mercy blot out my transgressions. Wash me thoroughly from my iniquity, and cleanse me from my sin! For I know my transgressions, and my sin is ever before me. Against you, you only, have I sinned and done what is evil in your sight...*
  - b. Daniel 9:4-5, *I prayed to the LORD my God and made confession, saying, "O Lord, the great and awesome God, who keeps covenant and steadfast love with those who love him and keep his commandments, we have sinned and done wrong and acted wickedly and rebelled, turning aside from your commandments and rules..."*
2. Petition - making personal requests
  - a. 1 Samuel 1:27, *For this child I prayed, and the LORD has granted me my petition that I made to him.*
  - b. Matthew 14:30, *But when he saw the wind, he was afraid, and beginning to sink he cried out, "Lord, save me."*
3. Thanksgiving - giving thanks for what God has done
  - a. Psalm 100:4, *Enter his gates with thanksgiving, and his courts with praise! Give thanks to him; bless his name!*
  - b. Colossians 4:2, *Continue steadfastly in prayer, being watchful in it with thanksgiving.*

4. Adoration - praising God for Who He is
    - a. Psalm 34:1, *I will bless the LORD at all times; his praise shall continually be in my mouth.*
    - b. Revelation 5:13, *And I heard every creature in heaven and on earth and under the earth and in the sea, and all that is in them, saying, "To him who sits on the throne and to the Lamb be blessing and honor and glory and might forever and ever!"*
  5. Intercession - making requests for others
    - a. Matthew 5:44, *But I say to you, Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you.*
    - b. Luke 23:34, *And Jesus said, "Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do."*
  6. Complaint - having doubts about God, His nature, or His purposes
    - a. Exodus 5:22, *Then Moses turned to the LORD and said, "O Lord, why have you done evil to this people? Why did you ever send me?"*
    - b. Matthew 27:46, *And about the ninth hour Jesus cried out with a loud voice, saying, "Eli, Eli, lema sabachthani?" that is, "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?"*
- E. How do I pray - Jesus' pattern for prayer in Matthew 6:9-13, *Pray then like this: "Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name. Your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread, and forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors. And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil.*
1. Pray concerning the Person of God: Matthew 6:9, *Pray then like this: "Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name.*
    - a. Address Him as God our Heavenly Father.
      - 1) The word *Father* is not the word used for God in the Old Testament. Such intimacy was almost never found in Old Testament prayers.
      - 2) Because of the work of Jesus on our behalf, we are adopted into the family of God and may call God our Heavenly father, John 1:12-13, *But to all who did receive him, who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God, who were born, not of blood nor of the will of the flesh nor of the will of man, but of God.*
      - 3) *Our Father* speaks of the nearness of God (immanence) but *in heaven* points to His being set apart (transcendence).
      - 4) R. C. Sproul, *We can come to God and call Him Father, but this filial (family) relationship does not allow us to have the type of familiarity that breeds contempt. We are to come with boldness, yes, but never with arrogance or presumption...When we pray, we must remember who we are and whom we are addressing.*
    - b. Remember He is to be honored.
      - 1) Leviticus 10:1-3, *Now Nadab and Abihu, the sons of Aaron, each took his censer and put fire in it and laid incense on it and offered unauthorized fire before the LORD, which he had not commanded them. And fire came out from before the LORD and consumed them, and they died before the LORD. Then Moses said to Aaron, "This is what the LORD has said: 'Among those who are near me I will be sanctified, and before all the people I will be glorified.'"*
      - 2) R. C. Sproul, *No matter how close God invites us to come, there is still an infinite gulf between our sinfulness and His majesty. He is the heavenly one; we are of the earth. He is perfect; we are imperfect. He is infinite; we are finite. He is holy; we are unholy.*
  2. Pray concerning the program of God: Matthew 6:10, *Your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven.*
    - a. The kingdom of God is real.
      - 1) God's rule is established in heaven, Psalm 115:3, *Our God is in the heavens; he does all that he pleases.*
      - 2) Jesus sits exalted at the right hand of God and reigns as King, Acts 2:32-33, *This Jesus God raised up, and of that we all are witnesses. Being therefore exalted at the right hand of God.*
    - b. The kingdom of God is spiritual.
      - 1) The kingdom of God may be seen in the lives of Christians who live out kingdom truths.
      - 2) Luke 10:8-9, *Whenever you enter a town and they receive you, eat what is set before you. Heal the sick in it and say to them, 'The kingdom of God has come near to you.'*

- c. The kingdom of God will be earthly
  - 1) We are to pray that the invisible will become visible.
  - 2) Jesus Christ will reign on earth, Revelation 5:9-10, *And they sang a new song, saying, "Worthy are you to take the scroll and to open its seals, for you were slain, and by your blood you ransomed people for God from every tribe and language and people and nation, and you have made them a kingdom and priests to our God, and they shall reign on the earth."*

\* There is now a transition in prayer from a focus on God to a focus on oneself and on others, R. C. Sproul, *We should not come rushing into God's presence arrogantly, assaulting Him with our petty requests, forgetting whom we are addressing. We are to make certain we have properly exalted the God of creation. Only after God has been rightly honored, adored, and exalted do the subsequent petitions of God's people assume their proper place.*

3. Pray for provisions from God: Matthew 6:11, *Give us this day our daily bread,*

- a. He meets physical, mental, emotional, financial and spiritual needs
- b. We are needy people.
  - 1) God provides all we need, Matthew 6:33, *But seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be added to you.*
  - 2) God provides our needs one day at a time, Matthew 6:34, *...do not be anxious about tomorrow, for tomorrow will be anxious for itself. Sufficient for the day is its own trouble.*
  - 3) Prayer is a matter of trusting God not making Him aware of our needs, Matthew 6:30-32, *But if God so clothes the grass of the field, which today is alive and tomorrow is thrown into the oven, will he not much more clothe you, O you of little faith? Therefore do not be anxious, saying, 'What shall we eat?' or 'What shall we drink?' or 'What shall we wear?' For the Gentiles seek after all these things, and your heavenly Father knows that you need them all.*

4. Pray for purity from God: Matthew 6:12, *and forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors.*

- a. Ask forgiveness for sins (moral shortcomings)
  - 1) God's children sin and are convicted of sin by the indwelling Holy Spirit.
  - 2) God forgives when His children confess and repent, 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.*
- b. Forgive others as you have been forgiven.
  - 1) Reasons for forgiving others
    - a) We are commanded to forgive, Colossians 3:12-13, *Put on then, as God's chosen ones, holy and beloved, compassionate hearts, kindness, humility, meekness, and patience, bearing with one another and, if one has a complaint against another, forgiving each other; as the Lord has forgiven you, so you also must forgive.*
    - b) We are to imitate Jesus, Luke 23:34, *And Jesus said, "Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do."*
    - c) It confirms God's forgiveness of us, Matthew 6:14-15, *For if you forgive others their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you, but if you do not forgive others their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses.*
  - 2) Thoughts on forgiving others
    - a) R. C. Sproul, *The supreme warning from Jesus is that God will judge us according to how we have judged other people. Since man is saved by grace, what better evidence could there be of a man's salvation than that he offers to others the grace he himself has received?*
    - b) Jonathan Edwards, *It is an insult to God for us to withhold forgiveness and grace from those who ask us, while claiming to be forgiven and saved by grace ourselves.*
    - c) Tom Constable, *The person who does not forgive a brother's offenses does not appreciate how much he himself needs forgiveness.*

5. Pray for protection by God: Matthew 6:13, *And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil.*
- a. Ask for protection from temptations that lead to sin.
    - 1) Temptations become sin when one yields to the temptation.
    - 2) God does not test or tempt anyone, James 1:13-14, *Let no one say when he is tempted, "I am being tempted by God," for God cannot be tempted with evil, and he himself tempts no one. But each person is tempted when he is lured and enticed by his own desire.*
    - 3) Tom Constable, *Why then do we need to pray that He will not lead us into testing? Even though God is not the instrumental cause of our testing He does permit us to experience temptation from the world, the flesh, and the devil. Therefore this petition is a request that He minimize the occasions of our testing that may result in our sinning.*
  - b. Ask for deliverance from demonic attacks.
    - 1) This is another way of saying what was said in the first sentence and gives emphasis and identifies the source of temptation, Satan, Luke 22:31-32, *Simon, Simon, behold, Satan demanded to have you, that he might sift you like wheat, 32 but I have prayed for you that your faith may not fail.*
    - 2) Martin Luther called temptations *unbridled assaults of Satan.*

<b>CLOSING THOUGHTS</b>
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- A. John Bunyan, *In prayer, it is better to have a heart without words than words without heart.*
- B. Hudson Taylor, *I used to ask God to help me. Then I asked if I might help Him. I ended up asking Him to do His work through me.*
- C. Peter Marshall, *Forgive us for thinking that prayer is a waste of time and help us to see that without prayer our work is a waste of time.*
- D. The only prayers guaranteed to be answered by God with a *yes* are His promises in the Bible.