

## Basic Truth for Young Believers

Stark Road Gospel Hall

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### *The Importance of Prayer: Private and Public*

Readings: *Matt 6:8-13; 18:19-20; 21:12-13; John 14:12-14; Acts 2:42; Phil 4:6-7; 1Tim 2:1-8*  
Preliminary Comments:

- This study does not purport to be comprehensive or exhaustive on the subject. This is a focused look at principles in Scripture that emphasize the importance of prayer.
- While the focus is upon the importance of prayer, I have felt obliged to young believers to provide (hopefully) some practical guidance. This guidance is certainly not comprehensive either.

#### **I. What is prayer?**

- A. Prayer in general is communication with God.
  - 1. Worship is honoring, magnifying and praising the glory of God
  - 2. Thanksgiving is expressing sincere gratitude to God
  - 3. Supplication is expressing a specific need to God
  - 4. Intercession is expressing another's need, on another's behalf
  - 5. Confession is expressing repentance from sin for forgiveness and cleansing
- B. Private prayer is an individual believer alone in prayer.
- C. Public prayer is a gathered company of believers together in prayer.

#### **II. Why should we pray?**

- A. Privately
  - 1. The Importance to God the Father
    - a. All prayer (worship, thanksgiving, etc) is ultimately for the glory of God (Matt 6:8-13; John 14:13).

"And whatever you ask in My name, that I will do, [in order] that the Father may be glorified in the Son." The Lord Jesus had already specifically instructed His disciples to pray "for the kingdom, power and glory of God" in Matthew 6. Prayer in all forms is designed to give God glory.

- b. Prayer is an opportunity to be involved in what God is doing, to see God's power at work, and to thank and praise Him.

God is working (John 5:17) and prayer allows us to be in on what God is doing. Prayer is not primarily for our benefit but for God's. As we search out God's will in His Word, we learn to recognize His ways and purposes in our immediate experience. As we align our prayers in the direction of His will and see Him answer, we see God's magnificent power and praise Him.

- 2. The Importance to God the Son
    - a. Prayer gives God the Father the opportunity to honor the person and work of His Son on our behalf. (John 14:13)

Jesus said, "ask in My name... the Father may be glorified in the Son." According to John 5:23, the Father is pleased to honor His Son in every way. Prayer allows God the opportunity to affirm the sufficiency and worth of the Cross on our behalf— a glory to Christ as Savior and Redeemer.

- b. Prayer is our opportunity to enjoy what Christ has secured for us – access and acceptability before God our Father. (Eph 1:6; Heb 4:16)

Christ has secured for us full acceptance and peace in the presence of God forever. Prayer is a practical means of entering into the joy and blessing of being in God's presence here and now. Living in the value of His work, we honor the Lord Jesus as our Savior.

### 3. The Importance to God the Holy Spirit

- a. Prayer is the natural outworking of the Holy Spirit within us. As spontaneously as a child cries out to his natural father, so with the Spirit of God within us we should cry out to our Heavenly Father. (John 14:15-18; Rom 8:15)

Paul wrote, "For you did not receive the spirit of bondage again to fear, but you received the Spirit of adoption by whom we cry out, 'Abba, Father.'" (Rom 8:15) The Lord Jesus spoke of the Spirit as "The Comforter" who would come to dwell with us and abide with us forever. The Holy Spirit always moves us in the direction of Christ and of the Father, and so a yearning for prayer to God is an essential evidence of the Spirit's presence and work within us.

- b. The Holy Spirit is the one who truly teaches us to properly pray. (Rom 8:26)

Again, Rom 8:26, "The Spirit also helps in our weaknesses. For we do not know what we should pray for as we ought, but the Spirit Himself makes intercession for us with groanings which cannot be uttered." The Holy Spirit literally tutors and trains us in prayer, always helping in our weakness and lack of understanding. Prayer then is an essential training ground for us.

### 4. The Importance to Believers

- a. Prayer is commanded of us (Ps 29:1-2; Phil 4:16; 1Th 5:17)
- b. Prayer is expected of us (Rm 8:15; Heb 4:16).
- c. Prayer is desired of us, "The prayer of the upright is [God's] delight." (Prv 15:8)

Prayer is one of two spiritual activities that should never cease in a believer's life. The other is the study of God's Word. For all the reasons described above – living to bring glory to God the Father, living before God in all the value of the person and work of Christ, and living in the power and influence of the Holy Spirit – prayer is an essential element for spiritual growth. Indeed, without prayer we cannot grow spiritually.

#### Misconceptions regarding private prayer:

- ❖ *Prayer is a spiritual parachute – great to have in case of emergency, but hopefully never needed.*

Prayer is a vital element in true Christianity, as discussed above. Without prayer, spiritual growth and maturity are not attainable.

- ❖ *If I don't open or close my prayer with the words, "in Jesus' Name, Amen," (or an equivalent) my prayer will not reach Heaven or be heard.*

Prayer is not a matter of formulas or special phrases. We cannot bind God in any way by a misconstrued understanding of what Christ promised, nor should we hope to "sanctify" insincerity by simply signing off with the right catch phrase.

To pray "in the Name of Jesus Christ" means to pray in accord with all that He is. God's name (and Christ's) is the embodiment of all that He is. The Lord Jesus was instructing His disciples to pray in accord with what they understood to be the will of Christ, or in other words, the will of God.

**Suggestion: Think in these terms – "This I ask because I believe this is the will of Christ." See how your requests stack up against a qualifier like that.** See Paul's examples of "qualified" prayers – see how he prayed according to God's will for himself and for other believers.

- ❖ *Prayer is primarily a means of speaking to God, of asking God for what I want or need.*

Prayer is primarily for the glory of God. God has promised to answer prayer, but that promise always resides in a context of absolute submission to His will. Psalm 37 says, “Delight yourself in the LORD, and He shall give you the desires of your heart.” Tremendous promise, very similar to Jesus’ promise in John 14. BUT, “delight yourself in the LORD” means to be so diligent in studying God’s Word, so devoted to Him as LORD, so occupied with His desires and purposes that His Word becomes your word, His heart your heart, and His desires your desires. Thus when you are praying, you are asking God to do what you have already learned to be His will. God will answer that prayer every time.

**Prayer is more a matter of listening than speaking, more a matter of asking to understand God’s will than of asking for my own will.**

## B. Publicly

### 1. The Importance to God the Father

- a. Prayer must characterize the House of God (Isa 56:7; Matt 21:13), which is the assembly (1Cor 3:16; 1Tim 3:15)

“My house shall be called a house of prayer.” Jesus reiterated this statement when He cleansed the Temple of the moneychangers, “It is written, ‘My house...,’ but you have made it a den of thieves.” God intends that His house, His gathered company, be characterized by worship, by thanksgiving, and by waiting and depending upon Him in all matters.

- b. All public prayer is a glory to God the Father, an essential acknowledgement of His presence among us, His authority over us and His claims upon us.

1Cor 3:16 and 1Tim 3:15 speak to the “ownership” of God relative to the assembly. Prayer is an essential practice in recognizing this.

### 2. The Importance to God the Son

- a. Public prayer magnifies the centrality and thus the glory of Christ in the assembly (Matt 18:19-20).

“Again I say to you that if two or three of you agree on earth concerning anything that they ask, it will be done for them by My Father in heaven. For where two or three are gathered...” Christ is the gathering Center; He is the common bond; He is the One in whom we agree. Public prayer recognized this centrality.

- b. Public prayer is a real expression of our unity and acceptability in Christ. We have been gathered unto Him. We are one body in Him, and we approach the Father collectively in His Name alone.

We are not a group of believers coincidentally in the same building offering up individual prayers to God, accepted separately by God. We are a company of believers who have been gathered unto the Name of the Lord Jesus Christ, and as one company, united together in Christ, we approach the Father and we are accepted as one in Christ. (Note: For this reason, audibly saying “Amen” at the end of public prayers is very appropriate, because in that statement we are expressing our agreement, our oneness with the brother who has prayed.)

### 3. The Importance to God the Holy Spirit

- a. The Holy Spirit dwells within the local assembly (1Cor 3:16), and public prayer is the natural outworking of His power and activity.

Absolutely parallel to the essential work of the Spirit in an individual believer. Public, united prayer by the gathered company is evidence of the power and activity of the Holy Spirit.

- b. The Spirit's work is to bring the company of believers into the full experience of unity in Christ (Eph 4), and collective prayer is essential to that progression.

Paul's letter to the Ephesians clearly emphasizes the role of the Spirit in bringing about unity among believers, particularly those of a locally gathered company. Public, united prayer is an unquestionably critical ingredient in this process.

#### 4. The Importance to Believers

- a. Public prayer is vital in properly acknowledging the authority and claims of God the Father, the centrality of Christ and the operation of the Holy Spirit. The assembly cannot properly function, much less progress, without consistent and faithful collective prayer.
- b. Public prayer is one of the cornerstone practices of the first assembly (Acts 2:42).

#### Misconceptions regarding public prayer:

- ❖ *Audible participation in public prayer is an exercise of gift.*

No. Reiterated time and time again. Prayer is a responsibility of all men, not a gift.

- ❖ *If I'm a male, I don't have to necessarily participate audibly. As long as I'm in attendance at the prayer meeting I'm participating.*

1Tim 2:8-11 contrasts the roles of men and women in public prayer of the assembly. "I desire therefore that the men pray [audibly] everywhere," and that the women "learn in silence with all submission." Certainly attendance is essential to participating in public prayer, however, God's design is for "the men" (not some men) to pray audibly. If I'm a male and don't, as a general course or habit, pray audibly, I'm not fulfilling God's role has for me as a man in the assembly. Silence in the women's role.

- ❖ *If I'm a female, I don't necessarily need to prepare specific things, since I'm not given that role of audible participation.*

Having agreed that attendance at the prayer meeting is a means of participation, it is vital for the unity of the collective prayer of the assembly that the women come prepared as if they would be participating audibly – as specifically as the men. The whole assembly ought to be joining in the prayers, and the Spirit can direct different brothers to express the varied needs and burdens of the entire assembly. (Goes to every brother's participation.)

- ❖ *Private prayer life and public prayer life are not necessarily related.*

### III. When should we pray?

#### A. Privately

1. People in the Bible prayed at all different times:

*In the morning (Ps 5),  
In the evening (1Kg 18),  
Before meals (Mt 14),  
After meals (Dt 8),  
At bedtime (Ps 4),*

*At midnight (Acts 16),  
Day and night (Lk 2),  
Three times/day (Dn 6),  
Often (Lk 5),  
When young (Jer 3),*

*When old (Dn 9),  
When in trouble (2Kg 19),  
Everyday (Ps 86),  
Always (Lk 18)*

2. A time of focused prayer is valuable, but God is most concerned with continuity in prayer (1Thess 5:17). Time or routine should not restrict our prayer life. (A.Ramsay said, "I can't remember a time when I spent an hour in prayer. On the other hand, I can't remember an hour when I wasn't praying." A principle to live by.)

B. Publicly

1. Pray whenever the gathered company has met together for prayer.

**IV. Where should we pray?**

A. Privately

1. People in the Bible prayed all over, nearly anywhere possible:  

<i>In battle (2Chr 13),</i>	<i>By a river (Acts 16),</i>	<i>In a home (Acts 9),</i>
<i>In a cave (1Kg 19),</i>	<i>By the sea (Acts 21),</i>	<i>Inside a fish (Jnh 2),</i>
<i>In a closet (Mt 6),</i>	<i>In the street (Mt 6),</i>	<i>On a housetop (Acts 10),</i>
<i>In a garden (Mt 26),</i>	<i>In the Temple (1Kg 8),</i>	<i>In a prison (Acts 16),</i>
<i>On a mountain (Lk 6),</i>	<i>In bed (Ps 4),</i>	<i>In the wilderness (Lk 5).</i>
2. A place of focused prayer is valuable, but again God is most concerned with continuity in prayer (1Thess 5:17). Location or circumstance should not restrict our prayer life.

The apostle Paul demonstrated in his life a way of ordering himself mentally and spiritually so that on all occasions, in all places, in all circumstances, despite what he was outwardly engaged in, on a deeper level he was in prayer to God. Thus, he always uses the word, "always," when he describes his prayers.

B. Publicly

1. Pray wherever the gathered company has met together for prayer.

**V. How do we pray?**

A. Privately

1. What is the priority of prayer from Scripture?
  - a. Worship (see Matt 6:8-13; Luke 11:1-4)
  - b. Thanksgiving
  - c. Confession
  - d. Supplication/Intercession
2. How do we prepare to pray in these ways?
  - a. Worship
    - ✓ *Write down the things you appreciate about the Lord Jesus as you read your Bible;*
    - ✓ *Review these again and again;*
    - ✓ *Bring these things to God with a thankful heart in prayer (Psalm 29:1-2)*
  - b. Thanksgiving
    - ✓ *See worship;*
    - ✓ *Write down things you appreciate about your brothers and sisters in your assembly – ways in which you see evidence of God's working in their lives;*
    - ✓ *Review these and bring them to God with a thankful heart – thankful that God is working in another believer's life (example 1Thess 1:2-4);*
    - ✓ *Continually bring sincere thanks to God for every gift and blessing that He daily provides (1Thess 4:18).*
  - c. Confession

- ✓ *Come before God immediately – don't allow the break in communion to be prolonged (Ps 51);*
- ✓ *God is faithful to forgive us and to cleanse us (1John 1:9)*

d. Supplication

- ✓ *Express your need to God immediately as you sense it;*
- ✓ *Write down things that burden you – spiritual or material, physical needs, and continually bring them before God as exhorted in Phil 4:6-7.*

e. Intercession

- ✓ *Express another's need to God as soon as you become aware of it;*
- ✓ *Write down needs that you sense or know of in other believers' lives – spiritual or physical needs, and bring them before the Lord as directed in James 5:14-16;*
- ✓ *Keep a list of people you know who are not saved and pray for their salvation on their behalf before God.*

**B. Publicly**

1. What is the priority of prayer from Scripture?

- a. Worship (Heb 13:15; 1Pet 2:5)
- b. Thanksgiving
- c. Supplication/Intercession

(Missing: Confession belongs in private prayer.)

2. How do we prepare to pray publicly in these ways?

a. Worship

- ✓ *Write down the things you appreciate about the Lord Jesus as you read your Bible through the week;*
- ✓ *Review again and again, and practice verbalizing your thoughts;*
- ✓ *Come prepared in your heart and mind each week to offer your gift to God.*

b. Thanksgiving

- ✓ *Liberally incorporate thanksgiving into worship and all forms of prayer*

c. Supplication

- ✓ *Write down needs you can see within the assembly (e.g. continual need for greater love and unity among believers, need for continuity in the testimony, need for wise and faithful leaders, need for younger to shoulder the responsibilities at hand, etc.)*
- ✓ *Come prepared each meeting to pray to God on behalf of the assembly for these things*

d. Intercession

- ✓ *Write down needs you can identify in others (e.g. grace and strength for believers going through difficult times, salvation for the lost, etc., see 1Tim 2)*
- ✓ *Come prepared each meeting to pray to God on behalf of these individuals*

**VI. Examples of prayer in Scripture**

A. The disciples' (Lord's) Prayer (Matt 6:8-13; Luke 11:1-4)

*Perfect example; prototype for priority, order, purpose and essentials*

B. The prayers of the Apostle Paul

*Example of true spiritual burdens and cares for fellow believers; example in types of requests to bring before God – types of needs all Christians experience.*

1Cor 1:4-9  
Eph 1:15-23  
Eph 3:14  
Phil 1:9-11

Col 1:3-14  
1Thess 1:2-4  
1Thess 3:11-13  
2Thess 1:11-12

2Thess 3:1-2  
1Tim 2:1-4  
2Tim 1:3-7  
Phile 4-7

C. The Psalms

*Example of a heart's yearning for God in prayer (42:1); example of a sincere heart in all manner of prayer -- worship, thanksgiving, supplication, intercession and confession.*