

BASIC BIBLE PRINCIPLES

PRAYER

Prayer **To pray** is to communicate with God
is the substance of what is communicated to God

Introduction

God knows everything. Nothing we say or do is unknown by Him. No thought or intention escapes His attention. Our attitudes, feelings and disposition are fully known by Him. Why then is there a need to pray? What can we communicate that He does not know already? Jesus said: "your Father knoweth what things ye have need of, before ye ask Him" (Mt. 6:8).

From earliest times there has been a two-way communication between God and man (Gen. 1:28; 3:9). Despite the separation God imposed, following the expulsion of Adam and Eve from the Garden, He has maintained that communication (though differently achieved) lest man should feel totally isolated and rejected.

Prayer is a responding to God's invitation to communicate. It is a drawing near to God so that His reality may be more fully appreciated, His praise verbally expressed, and our desires and needs presented to Him after careful thought.

We communicate with our fellow beings through more than just the spoken word. The written word, facial expression, body posture, and our behaviour all send messages to those who can see. Because God's eyes "are in every place, beholding the evil and the good" (Prov. 15:3) we transmit information to Him about our beliefs, our faith, our desires, and our hopes through our attitude, our response to situation and circumstance, and our behaviour in general. In that way our whole life becomes a prayer, and so, thereby, we fulfil Paul's appeal: "Pray without ceasing" (1 Thess. 5:17).

The principles of prayer

Prayer invited

In times past God clearly indicated that His people should call upon Him in prayer.
1 Kgs. 3:5; 2 Chron. 7:14; Ps. 50:15; Jer. 33:3.

Prayer encouraged

Aware of this, and experienced in its application, many have encouraged others to respond to this call.

1 Chron. 16:11; Ps. 32:6; Prov. 2:3; Joel 2:32; Mt. 7:7; Lk. 21:36; Jas. 1:5; 1 Jno. 3:22.

Response promised

As an encouragement to active prayer God has promised to respond.

Ex. 22:27; Ps. 34:17; Isa. 30:19; Jer. 29:12; Mt. 6:6; 21:22; Jno. 9:31; 1 Jno. 5:15.

Prayer answered

To emphasise that His promises do not fail, God has caused to be recorded evidence of His answer to prayer.

Solomon: *1 Kgs. 3:9,28*

David: *Ps. 34:4*

Elijah: *Jas. 5:17*

Daniel: *Dan. 9:20-23*

Jesus: *Lk. 22:42,43*

Paul: *2 Cor. 12:8,9*

The practice of prayer

Prayer presented

The channel of communication for us, now, is through the Lord Jesus Christ. He is our mediator.

Jno. 16:23; Rom. 1:8; Eph. 2:18; 1 Tim. 2:5.

Physical posture

There is no prescribed form in which we should present ourselves while at prayer. Each is at liberty to use whatever manner best befits the occasion. The Scriptures record many variations:

standing:	<i>1 Kgs. 8:22; Neh. 9:2; Mk. 11:25</i>
kneeling:	<i>1 Kgs. 8:54; Ps. 95:6; Lk. 22:41</i>
bowing:	<i>Gen. 24:26; Neh. 8:6; Eph. 3:14</i>
prostrated:	<i>Num. 16:22; Josh. 5:14; Mt. 26:39</i>
hands raised:	<i>1 Kgs. 8:38; Ps. 28:2; 1 Tim. 2:8.</i>

Mental attitude

Far more important than bodily position is our mental state before, during and after prayer. Examples of what appear to be essential attitudes and characteristics for prayer to be effectual include:

faith:	<i>Mt. 21:22; Heb. 10:22; Jas. 1:6</i>
obedience:	<i>Jno. 9:31; 1 Jno. 3:22</i>
truth:	<i>Jno. 4:24; Heb. 10:22</i>
perseverance:	<i>Lk. 18:1; Eph. 6:18; Col. 4:2</i>
forgiveness:	<i>Mk. 11:25</i>
secrecy:	<i>Mt. 6:6.</i>

As faith without works is dead, so prayer without our associated watching, listening, action and support lacks a crucial ingredient.

Subject of prayer

Any matter which concerns God's purpose and man's salvation is a legitimate subject for prayer. Many illustrations are to be found in the Scriptures, among them:

praise:	<i>Ps. 7:17</i>	thanksgiving:	<i>Eph. 5:20</i>
confession:	<i>Dan. 9:4</i>	forgiveness:	<i>Acts 8:22</i>
mercy:	<i>Heb. 4:16</i>	blessing:	<i>Joel 2:13,14</i>
wisdom:	<i>Col. 1:9</i>	help:	<i>Jas. 5:13</i>
God's will:	<i>2 Thess. 1:11</i>	God's Kingdom:	<i>Mt. 6:10</i>

The effect of prayer

"The effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man availeth much" (Jas. 5:16).

(The references listed above are, in most cases, but samples taken from more extensive lists.)

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