

## HOW TO PRAY

The Bible tells us how to pray. It tells us how we can go to God in prayer any day in the year, any hour of the day or night, and get from God the very things that we ask. The secret, as we will discover, comes from a study of God's own Word.

In Acts 12, we have the record of a most remarkable prayer, remarkable because of what was asked for and remarkable because of the results of the asking. King Herod had killed James, the brother of John. This greatly "pleased the Jews", so he proceeded further by arresting another leader of the Christians, the Apostle Peter, with the intention of killing him also. Early the next morning (because Passover week had now ended) Peter was to be taken out and beheaded.

There seemed to be little hope for Peter. He was in a secure dungeon, guarded by sixteen soldiers, and chained by each wrist to a soldier who slept on either side of him. There appeared to be no hope whatsoever for Peter. But the Christians in Jerusalem were determined to get Peter out of his perilous position. How did they go at it? They had prayer. They were praying for Peter to get out of prison. Can there be anything more ridiculous than trying to pray a man who is so securely incarcerated, and so near his execution, out of prison? If the enemies of Peter and of the church had known of that attempt, doubtless they would have laughed in the faces of every Christian. But the attempt to pray Peter out of prison was entirely successful.

While Peter was sound asleep in the prison, an angel struck him on the side to wake him. The angel said, "Quick, get up!" Instantly Peter's chains fell from his hands and he arose to his feet. The angel told him to get dressed and to follow him. Peter, dazed and wondering, thought he was dreaming; but he was wise enough to obey God even in his sleep. He went out and followed the angel, although he thought he was seeing a vision. The soldiers were all asleep, and the angel and Peter passed the first guard and the second guard and came to the strong iron gate that led into the city. Moved by the finger of God, the gate "opened for them by itself." They went out and silently passed through one street.

Now Peter was safe, and the angel left him. Finally Peter came to himself and realized he was not dreaming. He headed to Mark's mother's house and soon was pounding at the outside gate. Remember that a little servant girl named Rhoda answered the door and recognized Peter's voice and was so overjoyed that she

ran back to the group and exclaimed, "Peter is at the door!" Nobody believed her at first, but Peter kept on knocking until they opened the door. There stood Peter, the living evidence that God had answered their prayer.

Now if we can find out how these people prayed, then we will also know just how to pray so as to get what we ask. In the fifth verse of chapter 12 we are told exactly how they prayed: "*Prayer was made without ceasing of the church unto God for him.*" The whole secret is found in four phrases: "without ceasing", "of the church", "unto God", and "for him". Let's take each of these four phrases and study them carefully.

In this passage, "without ceasing" literally means "stretched-out". The King James translators were thinking about stretched out over a long time, but most other translators use the word "earnestly", as in the soul being stretched out in the intensity of its earnestness toward God.

Did you ever see a foot race? The sprinters are all toeing the mark waiting for the starter to say "Go", or to fire the gun as a signal to start. As the critical moment approaches, the runners become more and more tense, until when the word "Go" comes, they go racing down the track with every nerve and muscle stretched toward their goal. That is the picture of the soul (in prayer) stretched out in intense earnestness toward God.

It is very closely related to the same Greek word that is used in Luke 22:44. "*And being in an agony he prayed more earnestly: and his sweat was as it were great drops of blood falling down to the ground.*" We can easily picture Jesus in prayer. The single word that best describes His prayer is "intense".

It is the intensely earnest prayer to which God pays attention and which He answers. This thought comes out again and again in the Bible. Notice in Jeremiah 29:12-13, "*Then shall ye call upon me, and ye shall go and pray unto me, and I will hearken unto you. And ye shall seek me, and find me, when ye shall search for me with all your heart.*" Here we discover the reason why so many of our prayers are unheard by God. There is so little heart in them, so little intensity of desire for the thing asked, that there is no reason why God should pay attention to them.

Think about the recent times we have been in prayer to God. Has it been an intense earnestness situation, like a little kid begging for something? No? Then how can we obtain that real, heart-stirring, heart-wringing, God-moving earnestness in prayer? The Bible tells us in Romans 8:26-27,

*"Likewise the Spirit also helpeth our infirmities: for we know not what we should pray for as we ought: but the Spirit itself maketh intercession for us with groanings which cannot be uttered. And he that searcheth the hearts knoweth what is the mind of the Spirit, because he maketh intercession for the saints according to the will of God."*

Look to the Spirit to create the earnestness. Today the Holy Spirit makes himself known through God's Word. In essence we are saying that we need to be guided by the scriptures and our willingness to communicate with God to have that intense prayer. The Bible gives us many guidelines on how to pray, and that is how today the Holy Spirit helps our prayers to be earnest ones.

The prayer that God particularly delights to answer is united prayer, in our example, "of the church". There is power in the prayer of a single individual, and the prayer of individuals has produced some great things, but there is far greater power in united prayer. Jesus taught this same great truth in Matthew 18.

*"Again I say unto you, That if two of you shall agree on earth as touching any thing that they shall ask, it shall be done for them of my Father which is in heaven. For where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them."* (Matt. 18:19-20)

God delights in the unity of His people, and He does everything in His power to promote that unity, and so He especially honors unity in prayer. There is power in the prayer of one true believer: there is far more power in the united prayer of two, and greater power in the united prayer of still more.

The key is that real unity must exist. When brethren who are united in Spirit pray together, their prayer is simply more powerful. Think about when you are in a crowd, and everybody is saying something different. It's hard to comprehend. But if everyone says the same thing in unison, you get the message loud and clear. Likewise, when a brother leads our minds in prayer, we must all focus on that prayer. We can't let our minds wander. Otherwise our prayers to God may be for naught. So one key to praying is that it be a united prayer.

The most important aspect of our prayer is "unto God" if we want to get what we ask for. But someone will say, "Isn't all prayer to God?" No, not really. Some pray to their idols and to their false gods. Some pray to the Virgin Mary and to saints. And some, who call themselves Christians, pray, but not to God. They

pray to please men's ears like in the parable of the Pharisee and the publican. Sometimes when we pray, we start moving our lips but our thoughts wander off and there isn't a real conscious approach to God in our hearts. When we pray, do we truly think of coming into the presence of God and really speaking to him?

How can we come into the presence of God, and how can we be sure that we have come into His presence and that we are really talking to Him? According to Hebrews 10, we come into the presence of God *"by the blood of Jesus"* (Heb. 10:19-22). Remember under the Old Law that the priests could not enter the holy place of the tabernacle until they washed themselves clean and offered the proper sacrifices and sprinkled the blood into the holy place. In the same way, we must have our sins washed away and we must contact the blood of the perfect sacrifice before we can truly enter in to the presence of God.

This can all be accomplished through the blood of Jesus Christ. How? Through baptism (Rom. 6:3-4). When we approach God, not on our own merit, but by the blood of Jesus then God will hear our prayers. When we obey the Gospel, showing that we respect our Father and are willing to obey His commands, then we can truly come into God's presence. Isaiah 59 says that God will not hear the prayers of sinners.

*"Behold, the LORD'S hand is not shortened, that it cannot save; neither his ear heavy, that it cannot hear: But your iniquities have separated between you and your God, and your sins have hid his face from you, that he will not hear."* (Isa. 59:1-2)

Here is a second way to know that we have come into the presence of God: when we pray through His Son, who is also our mediator (Eph. 2:18). Our prayers must be in the name of Jesus Christ, which means by His authority, according to His will. *"And whatsoever ye do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God and the Father by him"* (Col. 3:17). If we pray according to the many examples that Jesus has given us to follow, then we can be assured we are in the presence of God.

Now let us look at the fourth phrase, "for him" (for Peter). The prayer was a definite prayer for a definite person (the church was praying for the Apostle Peter); and that is the kind of prayer God answers. Unfortunately many of our prayers are general and vague, like "Please touch the sick with Your healing hands." They sound nice, they are phrased nicely, they flow out

of the mouth charmingly, but frequently they ask no definite, specific thing. Hence they get no definite, specific answer. If we want to pray so as to receive something, then we must have a very definite, clear-cut idea of just exactly what we want to ask of God, and ask Him for that definite and specific thing. Remember, God's answer will be as definite as our prayer.

*"Ask, and it shall be given you; seek, and ye shall find; knock, and it shall be opened unto you: For every one that asketh receiveth; and he that seeketh findeth; and to him that knocketh it shall be opened. Or what man is there of you, whom if his son ask bread, will he give him a stone? Or if he ask a fish, will he give him a serpent? If ye then, being evil, know how to give good gifts unto your children, how much more shall your Father which is in heaven give good things to them that ask him?" (Matt. 7:7-11)*

When we have a specific and definite prayer, we also have to ask with the right motives in order for God to fulfill our request. *"Ye ask, and receive not, because ye ask amiss, that ye may consume it upon your lusts."* (Jas 4:3)

To sum it all up, the prayer that God answers is the prayer that is an intense, sincere, earnestness of our heart, and comes from a united group of people who have a singleness of heart, and that the prayer is "unto" God which means in His presence, and finally, it is a specific and definite prayer. That's the lesson we have learned from the early church in Acts 12:5 when they prayed for Peter's safety.

*"Confess your faults one to another, and pray one for another, that ye may be healed. The effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man availeth much."* (Jas. 5:16)

Adapted from a sermon by RAY McMANUS  
(Deceased)

## APOLOGIA

QUESTION: As you conduct the Lord's Supper, should you not allow certain people to partake or does each person need to examine their selves? What if they partake and they are not baptized?

ANSWER: There is no provision in the Lord's Church as there is in several sects (especially in early England and America) to prohibit those who are not members from partaking. The

communion, however, was designed by our Lord as a memorial for His disciples in remembering His death. Luke 22:19 instructs, *"This do in remembrance of Me."* Paul explains five times in 1 Corinthians 11:17, 18, 20, 33, 34 that this observance was designed for when the disciples *"[came] together in the church."*

The exhortation is that *"a man examine himself"* (verse 28) so that his partaking be in *"discerning the Lord's body"* (verse 29). None are worthy of Christ's death, of course, so the "unworthiness" of verses 27 and 29 refers to our understanding and not whether or not we are personally worthy.

In 1 Corinthians 14:24 Paul mentions the possibility of a non-Christian being present at the assembly. If a person partakes who has never been baptized, he has not placed himself in any further jeopardy. He is simply not in the body of Christ reached through baptism and among whom Jesus appointed His death to be remembered. He is accountable for his sins to be sure, but his partaking is a matter of misunderstanding.

HARRY COBB  
P.O. Box 75  
Wedowee, AL 36278

## GOSPEL MEETINGS

<u>DATES</u>	<u>PLACE</u>	<u>SPEAKER</u>
October 1 – 3	Ashlock Near Celina, TN	Chris Richardson (Leitchfield, KY)
October 4 – 10	Mt. Zion Crab Orchard, KY	Joe Hill (Hager Hill, KY) & Aaron Keeton
October 11 – 15	Oak Grove Eubank, KY	Joe Hill (Hager Hill, KY)
October 14 – 17	Marrowbone Marrowbone, KY	Wilbur Bass (Auburn, AL)

October 15 – 17	Dowell Hill Columbus, IN	Harry Cobb (Wedowee, AL)
October 22 – 24	Napoleon Woodland, AL	Dwight Thomas (Wedowee, AL)
October 22 – 24	Claud Eclectic, AL	Hunter Bulger (Fort Deposit, AL) & Eric Jacks
October 29 – 31	Verona Verona, KY	Joe Hill (Hager Hill, KY)
October 29 – 31	Willow Oaks Russell Springs, KY	J. D. McDonald (Woodbury, TN)

## SEARCH THE SCRIPTURES

Remember last month's questions?

1. Why did God put a mark on Cain? TO PROTECT HIM FROM INJURY BY OTHERS (Gen. 4:15)
2. Why did King Asa remove his mother from the position of queen mother? SHE MADE AN IDOL (1 Ki. 15:13)
3. In the book of Nehemiah after the project was completed, all the people gathered in front of the Water Gate to hear the reading of the Law. Who read it to them? EZRA (Neh. 8:1-3)
4. According to the Sermon on the Mount, what did Jesus say would be the reward for those who are pure in heart? THEY SHALL SEE GOD (Matt. 5:8)
5. It had been reported to Paul that some of the Thessalonians had become what? BUSYBODIES (2 Thes. 3:11)