

## Christian Faith and Practice Through...Prayer

*He who turns away his ear from listening to the law, even his prayer is an abomination.* Proverbs 28:9 NASB

*But as for me, my prayer is to You, O LORD, at an acceptable time; O God, in the greatness of Your lovingkindness, answer me with Your saving truth.* Psalm 69:13 NASB

Oh boy what a loaded subject! I could write a book, but I want to focus on just a few aspects of prayer. I hope to help the “rookie” who is shedding the crippling doctrines of men and returning to practices based on the teachings (Torah) of YHVH given to us in the Bible. Prayer in particular has been used and abused and disconnected so much from what He specifically teaches in His Word that it has mostly become cold, ineffective, and whiny. There is a large amount of material in the Word about prayer, but there is not a great deal of specific commands for how to do it. This does not mean that there couldn't be new forms of expression or living out of His Will, but these new expressions (if indeed they are new) shouldn't be taught as Torah. Since God told us not to add to or subtract from His Word, let's dig in and get back to His basics.

I am going to start including word studies whenever I can in these articles, but I'm not all that wild about word studies for two reasons. First, I shouldn't be doing your work for you. You need to get out there and 'study to show yourself approved.' What, do I look like the last word in whatever it is I'm writing about? Don't take my opinions at face value, check 'em out. I'm not trying to tell you what to think, I'm trying to teach you how to think. The second reason I don't like to include word studies in an article is that it usually makes for dry reading and it's hard to dress up. How many different intros for a word can one person write anyway? But there are also a couple of good reasons for including them. One is that you can tell if I've done my homework, and didn't just put together some schlock opinions off the cuff. Another is that it can give you a boost in the right direction and suggest starting points for your own studies. But I don't want to bog you down with details you may not need right now, so for those of you who would like help there is the beginnings of some information at the end of the article.

We don't need to get all wrapped up in word definitions from Hebrew and Greek to understand prayer, but getting a feel for how the words are used might help us refine our practice and broaden our understanding. A simple definition of prayer is 'communication with God' which might involve some or all of the elements listed at the end of this article. This communication can be as plain as "God have mercy on me a sinner" (Luke 18:13) or as involved as the intercessory prayer of Daniel (9:1-19). Sometimes, even the Holy Spirit intercedes for us when we don't know what to say.

*But if we hope for what we do not see, with perseverance we wait eagerly for it. In the same way the Spirit also helps our weakness; for we do not know how to pray as we should, but the Spirit Himself intercedes for us with groanings too deep for words; and He who searches the hearts knows what the mind of the Spirit is, because He intercedes for the saints according to the will of God. Romans 8:25-27 NASB*

Ever since we departed from direct fellowship with Him in the Garden He has been working on rectifying that situation. This has involved a great deal of communication back and forth, and both sides of some of the conversations have been preserved for us to study in the written record. If you have swallowed evolutionary theories you may think that life a long time ago was primitive and marked by ignorance, while modern life is progressive and we now enjoy the benefits of 'learning.' If you believe this I have some oceanfront property in Arizona you might also be interested in. One of the many lies from evolution is that it leads you to think that life started out bad and has been getting better and better, which in turn affects how we see and apply Scripture.

The truth revealed for us in the Word is that life started out 'very good' (Genesis chapter one) and has been sliding into the proverbial toilet ever since our first disobedience. But God in His mercy has been consistently interfering with our slide by reminding us of His Word and Ways (Torah). Some people used to know how to talk with God, but in these last days many of us have lost much of the ability and understanding that we started out with some 6,000 years ago. We have almost 'educated' ourselves into permanent separation from the Source of Life and Love. The fruit from the tree of knowledge promotes self-centeredness, but prayer is about God-centeredness. It is not something external that those of us who follow Him use as a tool to get our own way. It is not separate from us but part of us, a natural extension of communion with Him.

*May my prayer be counted as incense before You; the lifting up of my hands as the evening offering. Psalm 141:2 NASB*

A long time ago (no jokes about how long) I thought, "Why pray?" since God already knows everything and takes steps to insure His plan continues. Later I realized that God has ordained that some things will only happen through prayer (sometimes specifically my prayer), so it is my responsibility to pray. Now, it's just natural for me to pray all the time (or commune) with God on a multitude of subjects and issues. Prayer is to the soul as breathing is to the body. I can go weeks without eating and days without drinking, but only moments without breathing. So it is with prayer and my soul. Those of us with an active prayer relationship could no more stop praying than we could stop breathing. Part of this breathing comes through obedience to His ways (Torah). Minute by minute I marvel at the blessings the Father bestows (also Torah) and find constant reason to thank Him and bless Him. Some walk this world without such a relationship but they are like the living dead, zombies to be pitied who long for life but suffer in a formless, dreary, waking death. We do not 'have' to pray. The Father does not force us to come to Him

for discussion and permission. We delight in asking His will for specific circumstances, and humbly submit to the designs of His plan. He is not some cosmic sugar-daddy who responds to the rantings of a spoiled debutante or mistress. He desires intimacy, a relationship of kindred spirits, the sharing of joy and peace and perfection.

When I tune my guitar I use something called ‘harmonics.’ If I press on each of two different strings in a certain way at a certain place on the neck, and pluck each string as I press, then they will vibrate and make tones I compare together. If both strings are ‘in tune’ then both of them sound like one note. If one is out of tune with the other (and it doesn’t take much), there is a wavering sound because they are out of balance. I change the length of the string that is out of tune so that it will vibrate at the same pitch as the other string. When we pray, ideally we harmonize with God in such a way that we vibrate together with one tone. He is already at the correct pitch, and it is our job to match His vibrations, to change and fit His tone. Some try to force YHVH to do the changing and match their tone, which is why some prayers don’t produce fruit. We are not in tune with our Maker.

*“So when you spread out your hands in prayer, I will hide My eyes from you; yes, even though you multiply prayers, I will not listen. Your hands are covered with blood.”* Isaiah 1:15 NASB

Being in tune with our Father means doing His will. If we are outside of His will we couldn’t very well expect Him to approve our requests. We acknowledge His will both by recognition (holy be Your Name) and by obedience (Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven). Besides the verse at the top of this article, there are other ‘in His will’ verses such as that of James 5:16 (below), or those in James chapter four which list impediments to prayer like asking with wrong motives or simply failure to ask.

*Therefore, confess your sins to one another, and pray for one another so that you may be healed. The effective prayer of a righteous man can accomplish much.*

Speaking of doing His Will (Torah), in Matthew 6:8-13 we have what has been termed the ‘Lord’s Prayer.’ It’s not actually His prayer but a format or template for prayer that He gave to us, so it’s really Our Prayer Template. He laid it out pretty simply, beginning with acknowledging the Father and agreement with His will. Then He speaks of requesting a day’s providence, resting our forgiveness on forgiving others, and finally reminding ourselves of His protection. Some other instructions related to this template are to avoid using meaningless repetition (verse seven), pray in private (verse six), and not like the hypocrites (verse five). Many, many people like to repeat syllables such as the name ‘Jesus’ over and over in a public prayer (or music), both of which are in direct contradiction to these instructions. Recent examples of this type of practice were brought into congregational meetings by the flower children of the ‘60’s. They mixed Transcendental Meditation (remember the mantra, “ohm-man-ah-pahd-me-ohm?”) with their new-found belief in Jesus. They just switched the mantra around a little and added some hallelujahs.

In addition to the prayers of Yahshua found in the Apostolic Writings (NT), which have in my opinion been over analyzed, over emphasized, and under utilized (we love to talk about the Word but actually doing it is a different matter), there are several other recorded prayers that might help us with examples of what's involved with praying. One of these is Hezekiah's prayer in Isaiah 37:15-20.

*Hezekiah prayed to the LORD saying, "O LORD of hosts, the God of Israel, who is enthroned above the cherubim, You are the God, You alone, of all the kingdoms of the earth. You have made heaven and earth. Incline Your ear, O LORD, and hear; open Your eyes, O LORD, and see; and listen to all the words of Sennacherib, who sent them to reproach the living God. Truly, O LORD, the kings of Assyria have devastated all the countries and their lands, and have cast their gods into the fire, for they were not gods but the work of men's hands, wood and stone. So they have destroyed them. Now, O LORD our God, deliver us from his hand that all the kingdoms of the earth may know that You alone, LORD, are God."*

You can see that this is roughly the same format as Matthew 6. Many of the Psalms are prayers, and many blessings and songs are prayers. As a matter of fact, using His Words in prayer is a good thing. We can remind ourselves of His promises, glorify His name because He did what He said He would do, or comfort ourselves and each other with them. Prayers are generally short and frequent, consisting mainly of blessings, thanks, recognition, and requests for others. Prayer (8605) and supplication (8467, to show favor or be gracious) are used together frequently in verses that show they are the same word, such as Psalm 6:9, 55:1, and 86:6. Believers are also exhorted to pray for Jerusalem.

*Pray for the peace of Jerusalem: "May they prosper who love you. May peace be within your walls, and prosperity within your palaces." For the sake of my brothers and my friends, I will now say, "May peace be within you." For the sake of the house of the LORD our God, I will seek your good. Psalm 122:6-9 NASB*

The meaning of Paul's suggestion in Thessalonians 5:17 to 'pray without ceasing' is not necessarily 'all the time' in the sense of every second of the day (although not such a bad idea) but rather formally and 'habitually.' By formally I don't mean impersonally but with a format. Psalm 55 (verse 17) tells us that David prayed three times a day. I'm sure he prayed more than that, especially when on the run from his enemies, but my guess is he (like Daniel in Daniel 6:10) made it a regular practice to stop and clear some space to pray formally three times each day. Even though prayer isn't limited to time or place in the Word it's good to establish a habit of regularity as Paul suggests. Fortunately God is always open to talk with His people at anytime, but we are, after all, creatures of habit.

Sometimes in the Word we see the phrase 'call on the Name of the Lord' to indicate contact with the Father either through sacrifice or prayer (Genesis 12:8, 13:4, 21:33; I Kings 18:24-26; Psalm 99:6; Isaiah 12:4, 64:4, 65:1; Zephaniah 3:9; Zechariah 13:9; Acts 9:21, 22:16; I Corinthians 1:2.) Look up these references, because sacrifice and prayer

are very closely related subjects that I don't have space to delve into here but may be studied with great profit. Joel 2:32 (quoted in Acts 2:21 and Romans 10:13) tells us that all who 'call on the name of the Lord shall be saved,' but Revelation 6:15-17 says people call on the rocks to fall on them. How tragic they call on the rocks instead of the Rock!

Incidentally, none of the verses listed below (and I looked closely at most of them), had any prescribed formula for a praying position. Sometimes the text mentions looking towards heaven with hands spread out, but that's about it. Closing eyes, looking down, or clasping hands is not suggested or commanded. Prostration is mentioned (although not commanded), and kneeling is also, but I have no idea where the classic Christian posture came from. If God is in heaven or inside of us, why do we close the eyes and look down? I guess that in the Church's desire to do everything backwards from the Jews they got a little over zealous, because Jews look up with their hands spread out when they pray.

I also couldn't find a 'prayer language' anywhere. The usual text cited for some sort of supposed prayer language is in our Romans 8:25-27 reference above. But if you look closely (a practice that would avoid a great deal of false teaching), the Spirit intercedes with 'groanings too deep for words.' I don't know, what do you think? Does 'too deep for words' mean that there is a language, or there is no language? You be the judge.

"Now the God of peace, who brought up from the dead the great Shepherd of the sheep through the blood of the eternal covenant, *even* Yahshua our Lord, equip you in every good thing to do His will, working in us that which is pleasing in His sight, through Yahshua haMashiach, to whom *be* the glory forever and ever. Amen." Hebrews 13:20,21 NASB (changes to Yahshua (Jesus) and haMashiach (the Messiah, anointed, Christ) are mine)

### **Words For Extended Study**

In the Tanach (OT) all forms of the word pray (prays, prayed, prayer, prayers) appear about 329 times, and Hebrew has eight or nine words to describe various types of prayer. Intervene or interpose (6419 *palal*) has the highest usage and is first used in Genesis 20:7. Prayer (8605 *tephillah* from 6419) is used about 70 times. Supplication or entreaty (6279 *athar*) is first used in Genesis 25:2. A related word *techinnah* (8467, or 8469 *tachanun*) is a request for a favor or supplication from the word *channan* (2603a) to show favor or be gracious (Psalm 6:9, 55:1, 86:6). A short word, *na* (4994) is sometimes translated beseech as in Genesis 32:11 but is also translated many other ways. *Tsela* (6739) means pray as in Ezra 6:10; 'to confess' is from *yadah* (3034) used in places like Ezra 10:1.

In the Apostolic Writings (NT) the Greek has about 14 words for the various forms of pray used about 151 times in different ways. The general term 'to pray' (4336, *proseuchom*) is variously represented as make prayers or offer prayers. It is from *pros* (4314) meaning toward and *euchomai* (2172, prayer or wish). *Euchomai*, by itself, is used in places such as 2 Corinthians 13:7 and 9, and is used the most (87 times of the 151). Other passages where this word is used are I Corinthians 14:10-15 where it is

mentioned with tongues and singing; I Thessalonians 5:17 where it is suggested we pray without ceasing; and I Timothy 2:8 where we are to pray with holy hands and without wrath or dissension. *Proseuche* (4335), mostly translated prayer, seems to be used more of the prayer itself such as in Mark 9:29 and Matthew 21:22 or more specifically in Acts 10:4,31 where it is mentioned together with alms or charity (*eleemosune* 1654). In Acts 16:25 *proseuche* is listed together with singing hymns to God; in Romans 1:10 with making requests (1189a *deomai*); in Ephesians 1:16 with giving thanks (2168 *eucharisteo*) and remembering others (3417 *mneia*); and in Colossians 4:12 with the idea of laboring.

A supplication or entreaty (*deesis* 1162) is from the word *deomai* (1189a) to beseech or beg. This word is used by itself in Luke 2:37; Luke 5:33; Acts 8:22, 24; Romans 10:1; 2; and in context with 'helping' in 2 Corinthians 1:11, while in 2 Corinthians 9:14 entreaty is made on behalf of others. In I Peter 3:12 *deesis* is translated as prayer, which cross references to Psalm 34:15 where it is equated to the cry of the righteous. In Philippians 4:6 it is translated as supplication; in I Timothy 2:1 as entreaties; and in Ephesians 6:18 it is translated as 'petition' twice (all three main words are mentioned together here).

*With all prayer (4335) and petition (1162) pray (4336) at all times in the Spirit, and with this in view, be on the alert with all perseverance and petition (1162) for all the saints, and pray on my behalf, that utterance may be given to me in the opening of my mouth, to make known with boldness the mystery of the gospel, (Ephesians 6:18,19 NASB parenthesis added)*

Some other words not used very often in the Apostolic Writings (NT) are *aitema* (155) translated request or demand in Philippians 4:6; *hiketeria* (2428) as supplications in Hebrews 5:5 where the prayers (1162) and supplications (2428) of Yahshua are mentioned; *euche* (2171) pray or vow which is from *euchomai* (2172) mentioned above and used in James 5:15; and *enteuxis* (1783) meaning petition or supplication in I Timothy 2:1 and 4:5.

*First of all, then, I urge that entreaties (1162) and prayers (4335), petitions (1783) and thanksgivings, be made on behalf of all men, I Timothy 2:1 NASB*

So we can see that a lot of prayer is intervention on behalf of others (*palal*), consisting of supplications (*deesis*) or entreaties (*athar*). We also beseech God (*na*) to show us favor or grace (*techinnah*), and confess to Him (*yadah*) our unworthiness for such treatment. Our prayers (*proseuche*) can be made like or with alms (*eleemosune*), singing of hymns, or thanksgiving (*eucharisteo*). We labor in prayer unceasingly remembering others (*mneia*) and making requests (*deomai*) with holy hands but without dissension or wrath. The cry of the righteous (*deesis*) is a prayer full of petitions or entreaties (*deesis*) that is in tune with the prayers (*deesis*) and supplications (*hiketeria*) of Yahshua our Messiah.

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