

Prayer

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Prayer is one of the key factors in many religions including Judaism and Islam. In Christianity too, prayer is the central pillar of one's faith. Someone of a great repute said, 'a church can go without revival, without meetings, without praise and worship, but the one thing it cannot go without is prayer.'¹

We find that Jesus taught a lot about prayer. He said that if we pray only in public, so that people may see how religious and pious we are, then it is hypocrisy. God is not interested in such prayers. He said, "When you pray, do not be like the hypocrites, for they love to pray standing in the synagogues and on the street corners to be seen by men..." (Matthew 6:5-6)

His instructions were that worship of God should be in spirit and truth (John 4:24). If our mind and heart are not right, all our prayers are useless. He said that we should not repeat things over and over again while praying (Matthew 6:7). The Jews had many set prayers that they would simply repeat at high speed. Jesus taught that such prayers are of no benefit. God does not hear us just because we use many words, or repeat the same words many times in our prayers. He said, "Learn from me" (Matthew 11:29).

How should we pray?

He gave an example of prayer, which is sometimes called the Lord's prayer (Matthew 6:9-13). However it would be more appropriate to call John 17: 1-26 "The Lord's prayer". Jesus did not intend His disciples to repeat this prayer verbatim. Rather He was giving them an idea of what true prayer should be like. When praying we would do well to ask God that His rule should be effective here on this earth; to plea for our physical and spiritual needs; to appeal for forgiveness and finally to acknowledge His sovereignty.

Jesus did not instruct us to pray facing Jerusalem or in any other direction. Nor did He give instructions about the movements of our bodies during our prayers. According to Jesus, God is more interested in the motives of our hearts. One may ask, 'How much do I need to be in prayer?' Jesus spent long periods of time in prayer, both before important events and as a regular practice. The apostles did the same and advised other Christians to do so.

Answers to our prayer

A Christian by faith and practice wrote:

There is a multitude of different kinds of prayers that we can pray, and generally speaking three kinds of answers that we can receive. In it's simplest form it can be a Yes, No and

Wait. We have to believe when we pray and also in what we pray. We also have to pray in the spirit, because with our carnal minds, we can often pray dangerous prayers. We tend to forget that the power of life and death is in the tongue, and pray soulish prayers because we do not have spiritual vision to see the wider plan ... We also pray selfish prayers which is generally called charismatic witchcraft. ²

Elsewhere she wrote:

The power of prayer and the way it conveys 'oxygen' to our spiritual 'blood' to regenerate and bring energy that changes lives and circumstances, is a power that should never cease to make us stand in awe that He chose us and gave us such powerful 'tools' to even be able to change not just the history of the individual, but that of nations. ³

Certainly prayer changes things. However, the Bible does not only tell us to have faith, but also that we are to put our faith into action. Prayer must not be

regarded as a labour-saving device; God will not do for us the things that he has given us the ability to do for ourselves. He will listen to our prayers, and will help us in our difficulties. He will accept our prayers for the things that are best for us.

When Christians pray to God, they do so in the name of Jesus, because this is what Jesus commanded them to do. God first approached us in Jesus. Jesus Himself said, "My Father will give you whatever you ask in my name. Until now you have not asked for anything in My name. Ask and you will receive, and your joy will be complete" (John 16:23-24).

Notes:

1. as cited by Loraine Visser, New Testament Survey: Outline On The Letter of Ephesians (unpublished B.O.M essay assignment, p. 8, n.d)
2. Loraine Visser, New Testament Survey: Outline On The Letter of Ephesians (unpublished B.O.M essay assignment, p. 8, n.d).
3. Ibid, p. 11.

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