

Aspects of Prayer according to God's Word

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As I was preparing for my daily time of Scripture reading and prayer, some thoughts came to my mind that are helpful, and I want to share them with you. I pray they may facilitate your communion with God.

1. Keep in mind that the prayer of the righteous is powerful and effective. (James 5:16 NRSV) Who are the righteous? Especially those of us who profess faith in Jesus Christ are aware of our sinfulness and sins and that God has not promised to hear, much less bless, those who defiantly, knowingly, and continuously disobey him.

Nevertheless, be comforted by the clear teaching of the Bible that by faith in the Triune God, we are credited with the righteousness of Christ Jesus and that faith is verified and made complete by concomitant deeds. (Romans 4, in particular verses 23-25; James 2, in particular verses 23-26; Matthew 7:20-23). Recall the significance of the torn curtain in the temple: that Jesus' death has brought the only once-for-all sacrifice that provides redemption and cleansing for us sinners who are otherwise unworthy to enter the presence of the loving albeit most holy God, but in Christ Jesus we can now come into his presence. (Matthew 27:50-51; Hebrews 10, especially verses 17-25; John 14:6) This is why early on in our time of prayer it is important to confess, including repenting of, our sins with the request for God's help to not repeat them and to implement the changes we need to make. Repentance in the Bible means not only contrition, sincere sorrow for sin, but a commitment to change behavior, moving from disobedience to obedience, thus demonstrating true love for God (e.g., John 14:21).

2. In recognition that prayer is not just a one-way but a two-way communication, a dialogue, and that God has first approached us by revealing who he is, what he is like, what he is doing, who we are, and what he expects of us, it helps to begin by reading, studying, and reflecting on a passage from his Word, the Bible. Rather than skipping around, I like to read through one book at a time. Currently I'm working my way through the book of Acts. What great joy!

Be careful with the study part, that what you are reading is from a reliable source, such as the notes in the NIV Study Bible. The New International Version (NIV) is not the best translation, but the authors of the notes in the NIV Study Bible are trustworthy, informative, and have written the most extensive of such commentaries. The NIV is one of the easiest to read translations; to check certain passages (e.g., John 3:16) for a more careful translation of the original Hebrew of the Old Testament and the original Greek of the New Testament, read those same passages in the New American Standard Bible (NASB) or the King James Version (KJV). Pertaining to the dialogue part of prayer, as you begin to read God's Word, ask him to guide you as you read so you can know and do what he would have you know and do in your life.

3. For your daily special time(s) of prayer, select a room that is quiet at that time of day and in which you can pray without distractions and interruptions. Use that room each day; in

time it will become your sanctuary. Even if you use that room for other purposes on other occasions, when you enter it for prayer, it will facilitate your communion and communication with God, in particular your focusing on him and sensing his presence and interaction with you. That room can help you feel especially close to him. (Cf. Matthew 6:6 in its context.)

4. Pray in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ. Praying in his name means much more than just adding at the end of the prayer the words, “in Jesus’ name I/we pray. Amen.” Praying in Jesus’ name means praying as a constant believer in and follower of (i.e., obedient to) Jesus Christ.
5. As you begin to pray, do so in **absolute awe** of the reality that you have the privilege of communicating with the Creator and Owner of the universe! Many people feel privileged to meet and talk with a person who has a high stature in our society, such as the owner and/or president of a large multinational corporation, a TV or movie star, or a famous sports figure; how much more, infinitely more so, can and should we sense the huge privilege of meeting and conversing with the Lord of all creation! And that we get to do so every day, and at any time of day or night! Furthermore, he knows you, loves you, and has given you a standing invitation to speak with him 24/7 about whatever is on your mind and in your heart. What a wonderful prelude to being with him forever, as we will be when he brings us home!
6. We need to remember with Whom we are talking, Whose we are, who we are and what we are like, all that he has done for us, and to ask him for his help for others as well as ourselves. Thus, at this special time of day set aside for Scripture reading and prayer, I like to use the well-known **ACTS** acronym as a guide for prayer: **A**doration, **C**onfession, **T**hanksgiving, and **S**upplication.
7. Choose a bodily position for prayer that helps you pray. We are holistic beings; i.e., our body, mind, and spirit/soul are linked, and each part affects the other. When you pray, do you ever find your mind wandering or becoming sleepy? In such circumstances and for other reasons, it helps to pray standing, which is a common posture for prayer in the Bible. (E.g., Luke 18:13) Standing, called the orans position (> Latin, *orare* to pray), is the posture for prayer that was used in the early church. In this position, it is meaningful to stand with hands held high and palms facing toward each other though slightly away from us, especially open in a giving manner, when praising or thanking God, but slightly toward us in a receiving manner when making requests. In the early church the whole congregation prayed in the orans manner. Other positions used by God’s people for prayer, include kneeling (e.g., Luke 22:41), sitting down (e.g., 1 Chronicles 17:16 ff.), and laying prostrate (e.g., Matthew 26:39). Let your need lead you to the posture for your time of prayer.

For my main time of prayer each day, I typically stand. We stand to show respect for someone of stature (e.g., every time the judge enters the courtroom the bailiff commands, “All rise!”); thus, if you are feeling, and want especially to show, respect for God, consider standing during your time of prayer. Many church congregations throughout the

world stand for the reading of God's Word, especially for the reading from the four accounts of the Gospel. Many also stand for the congregational prayer. I attended a worship service at a Russian Orthodox Church in Leningrad (now called by its original name, St. Petersburg), which was about three hours in length, and we all stood the whole time (there were no pews or other seats), for we were worshipping God in his presence, wonderfully symbolized by the icon of Christos Pantokrator (meaning Christ Ruler over All) in the top of the dome covering the sanctuary, reminding us that we yet here on earth (theologically referred to as the church militant, still battling in the spiritual war in which we are engaged) were worshipping God together with the church in heaven (theologically, the church triumphant)!

If you feel a need to facilitate a mentality of humility, kneeling or laying prostrate helps, but these postures are not necessary to express humility (e.g., 1 Chronicles 17:16, Luke 18:13). If standing or kneeling is physically difficult to do, pray seated; you can still show respect to God and humility in that position.

As described above in the first paragraph of this section, lifting up our hands is a significant part of prayer. (See, e.g., Psalm 141:1-2.) Doing so expresses praise to the Lord and reaches out to him for his blessing. When so doing, it helps to have our palms open in a giving manner when offering praise and thanksgiving (rather than upright facing toward him as if preventing something, holding off, or pushing back), thus physically expressing our praise from us to him and, facing our palms slightly toward us welcoming his blessing to us.

God is more concerned with our attitude in prayer than with which posture we use. (Cf. Matthew 6:5-13). Yet, positions reflect, and can help shape, our mentality as we pray.

8. As you pray, consciously speak to God as a living personal being. Keep in mind that he is listening carefully to you. You are conversing with him, not an impersonal force or abstract entity.

Remember who he is and what he is like as he tells us in his Word, e.g., he is love to the core of his being (1 John 4:8) as well as holy, holy, holy (Isaiah 6:3 and Revelation 4:8). He is also almighty (Isaiah 6:3) and therefore capable of doing whatever he wills; he is transcendent and immanent (Psalm 113:4-6 and 7-9), just to mention a few of his many attributes.

Speaking out loud, in a normal voice or in a whisper, helps to concentrate on, remember, and articulate what we want to say. That is usually how I pray during these times, and yet at some points I also pray quietly in thought, remembering that God knows our thoughts, even ahead of time. (Psalm 139:4)

If you ask him for guidance in a particular matter, stop talking for a short time; ponder your question and listen for his answer. You likely won't have to wait long. Typically, I find that his answer is immediate; when I ask for his help on a specific matter, ideas often come to my mind that I'd not previously considered, even before I've fully articulated my

question! On other matters, he continues to respond over time regarding some complex concerns that require more reflection on my part and/or other action on the part of myself and others involved.

Of course there is much more to say about praying. The foregoing pertains mostly for the special time or times each day that we set aside for communion with God in rest, peace, and quiet, where we can talk with God, and receive any responses from him that we need, with a minimum of distractions.

Nevertheless, it is good to pray to God throughout the day as well. (“Pray without ceasing.” [1 Thessalonians 5:17 KJV.]) As we experience blessings, have needs ourselves, and sense the needs of others, at those moments, we can quickly say, “Thank you Father,” for something good that has occurred, for we know that blessing is straight from his loving hand. (James 1:17) We can also say, “Dear God, please help me with this, or please help John or Mary with that.”

I hope and pray that these thoughts will enrich your life and help you enjoy daily prayer with our Triune God: the Father, together with his only begotten Son Christ Jesus, and both together with the Holy Spirit, three in one. I offer more on these aspects of this vital subject on my Website at www.fromacorntoak12.com (also www.edwardseely.com). On the main menu that appears, when clicking on either of these URLs, select the Christian Theology page and in particular the *Essential Christianity* PowerPoint program. Use the Find feature and type in the word prayer. Please note that everything on my Website is, and always will be, free; I’m not selling anything! May God bless you greatly as you daily commune with him through reading his Word, acting on it in accord with his will, and in prayer!