

## HOW TO PRAY

*“And whenever you pray, do not be like the hypocrites, for they love to stand and pray in the synagogues and at the street corners, so that they may be seen by others. Truly I tell you, they have received their reward. But whenever you pray, go into your room and shut the door and pray to your Father who is in secret; and your Father who sees you in secret will reward you. When you are praying, do not heap up empty phrases as the Gentiles do; for they think that they will be heard because of their many words. Do not be like them, for your Father knows what you need before you ask him. Pray then in this way: ‘Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name. Your kingdom come. Your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread. And forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors. And do not bring us to the time of trial, but rescue us from the evil one.’ For if you forgive others their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you; but if you do not forgive others, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses” (Matthew 6:5-15).*

God is constantly speaking to us through nature, through Scripture, and through His many providential interactions. But that is not enough to keep us in a close relationship with Him. We also need to talk to Him. Prayer is opening our hearts to God just as we do with a friend. Prayer doesn't bring God down to us; it lifts us up to Him.

When Jesus lived here on earth, He taught His disciples how to pray. He told them to tell God about their needs and to share with Him their trials and difficulties. Jesus spoke from experience. All that He endured from day to day, surrounded by sin, He shared with His Father. That's how He found comfort and strength to carry on. If Jesus felt that need to pray regularly, constantly, how much more we need to do so as well.<sup>57</sup>

Never be reluctant to pray, for prayer is the key in the hand of faith to unlock heaven's treasure house. Without regular prayer we are in danger of growing careless and losing our way.

Now, there are some conditions on which we can expect God to hear and answer our prayers. To begin, we must feel a need for His help. Unless our hearts are open to the Spirit's influence we can't receive God's blessing. The Bible says, "Ask and it will be given to you; seek and you will find; knock and the door will be opened to you" (Matthew 7:7, NIV).

Next, we need to have faith. Jesus said to His disciples, "Whatever you ask for in prayer, believe that you have received it, and it will be yours" (Mark 11:24, NIV). Even when we do not receive the exact things we pray for, we need to believe; we need to have faith. When it seems our prayers are not being answered, hold on! Believe, trust in the promise, and the answer will come. God is too wise to make a mistake and too good to keep from us anything that is for our best good.<sup>58</sup>

When we come to ask for a blessing from God, we should have a spirit of forgiveness in our heart. Jesus reminds us of this in His model prayer by saying, "Forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors" (Matthew 6:12, NIV). If we expect our prayers to be heard, we must forgive others in the same way and to the same extent as we hope to be forgiven.<sup>59</sup>

Daily, continual prayer keeps our lives united with God, so we must never allow anything to interrupt this prayer connection. Pray with others, pray with the family, but, above all, take time for personal, private prayer, for it is the very lifeblood of your soul.<sup>60</sup>

What will you talk to God about in your personal prayers? Everything! Your wants and needs, your happiness and sadness, your problems and fears, tell it all to God. He will never consider a single word or request a burden, no matter how long or how much you pray.

Certainly nothing is too great for Him to notice; remember, He sustains all the worlds of the universe. Nothing is too small for His interest and desire to help you. If it's something of concern to you, it's a concern to Him, too.

Jesus says, "I will do whatever you ask in my name" (John 14:13). To pray in the name of Jesus means more than merely mentioning His name at the beginning or end of a prayer. It means praying in the spirit of Jesus, believing His promises, relying upon His grace, and acting as He would have us act.

God is not asking us to become hermits or monks and retire from the world. He is calling us to live like Jesus, and to alternate between "the mountain of isolation and peace" and the crowds where we live and study and work each day. A person who does nothing but pray will soon stop praying meaningfully.

If we were to talk to God every time He showed His care for us, we would hardly stop talking to Him in prayer all day! We talk about our own lives with our friends because that's where our interests lie. We talk about our friends because we love them. Well, we have an infinitely greater reason to love God than to love our friends, so it should be the most natural thing in the world to make Him first in our thoughts, to talk of His goodness, and to share with others His power in our lives.

Our devotional time should not be only about asking. When we pray, we need to take time to express our thanks for the way God has led and blessed us. God is like a most tender, merciful Father. For that reason, serving Him should never be thought of as a dreary, distressing duty. It needs to become our pleasure and inspiration. In your personal prayer time, think about His cross, His love, His sacrifice, and then you will begin to express your thanks and praise for His magnificent gift for you. You will know that Jesus loves and cares for you, and you can cheerfully go about your daily activities, knowing Jesus expects to go with you as your best Friend.<sup>61</sup>