

By Wayne Harlan

## PRAYER

What is prayer? Prayer is the way we communicate with God. We give Him thanks in prayer and we seek His favor through prayer. Martin Luther said, "Prayer is the daily business of a Christian." John Bunyan, Author of The Pilgrim's Progress wrote, "Thou then art not a Christian, that art not a praying person." Friedrich Heiler wrote, "To pray means to speak to and have intercourse with God as a supplicant with judge, servant with master, child with father . . ." Prayer is communion, a desire to enter into a conscious and intimate relationship with God. This is not just a one-way street. **Revelation 3:20-21** makes it clear that God desires a relationship with us, too. Prayer is not intended to be a monologue, but a dialogue between creator God and created man. **Revelation 3:20-21, Listen! I am standing at the door and knocking! If anyone hears my voice and opens the door I will come into his home and share a meal with him, and he with me. I will grant the one who conquers permission to sit with me on my throne, just as I too conquered and sat down with my Father on his throne. (NET)**

As the psalmist said, "**Be still and know that I am God**". I confess that my spiritual journey has not yet progressed to the point of dialogue. My prayers are still a monologue asking or thanking God for His blessings and interceding for others.

We pray for various reasons and to accommodate these, we pray in various ways.

1. We pray in adoration of God and His wonders. The book of Psalms is a beautiful collection of prayers of adoration. **Psalm**

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**3:3, But you, Lord, are a shield that protects me; you are my glory and the one who restores me. (NET); Psalm 8:3-4, When I look up at the heavens, which your fingers made, and see the moon and the stars, which you set in place, Of what importance is the human race, that you should notice them? Of what importance is mankind, that you should pay attention to them, (NET); Psalm 65:1-13, Praise awaits you, O God, in Zion. Vows made to you are fulfilled. You hear prayers; all people approach you. Our record of sins overwhelms me, but you forgive our acts of rebellion. How blessed is the one whom you choose, and allow to live in your palace courts. May we be satisfied with the good things of your house—your holy palace. You answer our prayers by performing awesome acts of deliverance, O God, our savior. All the ends of the earth trust in you, as well as those living across the wide seas. You created the mountains by your power, and demonstrated your strength. You calm the raging seas and their roaring waves, as well as the commotion made by the nations. Even those living in the most remote areas are awestruck by your acts; you cause those living in the east and west to praise you. You visit the earth and give it rain; you make it rich and fertile with overflowing streams full of water. You provide grain for them, for you prepare the earth to yield its crops. You saturate its furrows, and soak its plowed ground. With rain showers you soften its soil, and make its crops grow. You crown the year with your good blessings, and you leave abundance in your wake. The pastures in the wilderness glisten with moisture, and the hills are clothed with joy. The meadows are clothed with sheep, and the valleys are**

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**covered with grain. They shout joyfully, yes, they sing. (NET) pages 95:1-7.**

2. We pray with Thanksgiving in our hearts. **Psalm 100:1-4, Shout out praises to the Lord, all the earth! Worship the Lord with joy! Enter his presence with joyful singing! Acknowledge that the Lord is God! He made us and we belong to him; we are his people, the sheep of his pasture. Enter his gates with thanksgiving, and his courts with praise! Give him thanks! Praise his name! (NET); Psalm 103:1-22; Praise the Lord, O my soul! With all that is within me, praise his holy name! Praise the Lord, O my soul! Do not forget all his kind deeds! He is the one who forgives all your sins, who heals all your diseases, who delivers your life from the Pit, who crowns you with his loyal love and compassion, who satisfies your life with good things, so your youth is renewed like an eagle's. The Lord does what is fair, and executes justice for all the oppressed. The Lord revealed his faithful acts to Moses, his deeds to the Israelites. The Lord is compassionate and merciful; he is patient and demonstrates great loyal love. He does not always accuse, and does not stay angry. He does not deal with us as our sins deserve; he does not repay us as our misdeeds deserve. For as the skies are high above the earth, so his loyal love towers over his faithful followers. As far as the eastern horizon is from the west, so he removes the guilt of our rebellious actions from us. As a father has compassion on his children, so the Lord has compassion on his faithful followers. For he knows what we are made of; he realizes we are made of clay. A person's life is like grass. Like a flower in the field it flourishes, but when the hot wind blows by, it**

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**disappears, and one can no longer even spot the place where it once grew. But the Lord continually shows loyal love to his faithful followers, and is faithful to their descendants, to those who keep his covenant, who are careful to obey his commands. The Lord has established his throne in heaven; his kingdom extends over everything. Praise the Lord, you angels of his, you powerful warriors who carry out his decrees and obey his orders! Praise the Lord, all you warriors of his, you servants of his who carry out his desires! Praise the Lord, all that he has made, in all the regions of his kingdom! Praise the Lord, O my soul! (NET) Psalm 136:1-6; Give thanks to the Lord, for he is good, for his loyal love endures. Give thanks to the God of gods, for his loyal love endures. Give thanks to the Lord of lords, for his loyal love endures, to the one who performs magnificent, amazing deeds all by himself, for his loyal love endures, to the one who used wisdom to make the heavens, for his loyal love endures, to the one who spread out the earth over the water, for his loyal love endures, (NET); Philippians 4:6-7, Do not be anxious about anything. Instead, in every situation, through prayer and petition with thanksgiving, tell your requests to God.<sup>7</sup> And the peace of God that surpasses all understanding will guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. (NET)**

3. We pray in petition, asking or requesting a favor from God. **Job 8:5-6, But if you will look to God, and make your supplication to the Almighty, if you become pure and upright, even now he will rouse himself for you, and will restore your righteous abode. (NET); Psalm 102:1-9, O Lord, hear my prayer! Pay attention to my cry for help! Do**

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**not ignore me in my time of trouble! Listen to me! When I call out to you, quickly answer me! For my days go up in smoke, and my bones are charred like a fireplace. My heart is parched and withered like grass, for I am unable to eat food. Because of the anxiety that makes me groan, my bones protrude from my skin. I am like an owl in the wilderness; I am like a screech owl among the ruins. I stay awake; I am like a solitary bird on a roof. All day long my enemies taunt me; those who mock me use my name in their curses. For I eat ashes as if they were bread, and mix my drink with my tears, (NET)**

4. We raise prayers of intercession on behalf of others. **Exodus 32:12-14, Why should the Egyptians say, 'For evil he led them out to kill them in the mountains and to destroy them from the face of the earth'? Turn from your burning anger, and relent of this evil against your people. Remember Abraham, Isaac, and Israel your servants, to whom you swore by yourself and told them, 'I will multiply your descendants like the stars of heaven, and all this land that I have spoken about I will give to your descendants, and they will inherit it forever.'"** Then the Lord relented over the evil that he had said he would do to his people. (NET); **Job 42:10, So the Lord restored what Job had lost after he prayed for his friends, and the Lord doubled all that had belonged to Job. (NET); Luke 23:34, [But Jesus said, "Father, forgive them, for they don't know what they are doing."]** Then they threw dice to divide his clothes. (NET); **John 17:9-11, I am praying on behalf of them. I am not praying on behalf of the world, but on behalf of those you have given me, because they belong to you. Everything I have belongs to you, and**

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**everything you have belongs to me, and I have been glorified by them. I am no longer in the world, but they are in the world, and I am coming to you. Holy Father, keep them safe in your name that you have given me, so that they may be one just as we are one. (NET); 1 Timothy 2:1-4, First of all, then, I urge that requests, prayers, intercessions, and thanks be offered on behalf of all people, even for kings and all who are in authority, that we may lead a peaceful and quiet life in all godliness and dignity. Such prayer for all is good and welcomed before God our Savior, since he wants all people to be saved and to come to a knowledge of the truth. (NET); James 5:14-15, Is anyone among you ill? He should summon the elders of the church, and they should pray for him and anoint him with oil in the name of the Lord. And the prayer of faith will save the one who is sick and the Lord will raise him up—and if he has committed sins, he will be forgiven. (NET)**

5. We confess our sins in prayer. **Psalm 51:1-11, Have mercy on me, O God, because of your loyal love! Because of your great compassion, wipe away my rebellious acts! Wash away my wrongdoing! Cleanse me of my sin! For I am aware of my rebellious acts; I am forever conscious of my sin. Against you—you above all—I have sinned; I have done what is evil in your sight. So you are just when you confront me; you are right when you condemn me. Look, I was guilty of sin from birth, a sinner the moment my mother conceived me. Look, you desire integrity in the inner man; you want me to possess wisdom. Sprinkle me with water and I will be pure; wash me and I will be whiter than snow. Grant me the ultimate joy of being**

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**forgiven! May the bones you crushed rejoice! Hide your face from my sins! Wipe away all my guilt! Create for me a pure heart, O God! Renew a resolute spirit within me! Do not reject me! Do not take your Holy Spirit away from me! (NET); Daniel 9:4-9, I prayed to the Lord my God, confessing in this way: "O Lord, great and awesome God who is faithful to his covenant with those who love him and keep his commandments, we have sinned! We have done what is wrong and wicked; we have rebelled by turning away from your commandments and standards. We have not paid attention to your servants the prophets, who spoke by your authority to our kings, our leaders, and our ancestors, and to all the inhabitants of the land as well. "You are righteous, O Lord, but we are humiliated this day—the people of Judah and the inhabitants of Jerusalem and all Israel, both near and far away in all the countries in which you have scattered them, because they have behaved unfaithfully toward you. O Lord, we have been humiliated—our kings, our leaders, and our ancestors—because we have sinned against you. Yet the Lord our God is compassionate and forgiving, even though we have rebelled against him. (NET); Hebrews 4:16, Therefore let us confidently approach the throne of grace to receive mercy and find grace whenever we need help. (NET); 1 John 1:8-9, If we say we do not bear the guilt of sin, we are deceiving ourselves and the truth is not in us. But if we confess our sins, he is faithful and righteous, forgiving us our sins and cleansing us from all unrighteousness. (NET).**

6. We pray in submission to God as we abandon our own desires and surrender to the will of God. **2 Chronicles 7:14, if my**

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**people, who belong to me, humble themselves, pray, seek to please me, and repudiate their sinful practices, then I will respond from heaven, forgive their sin, and heal their land. (NET); Job 22:21-23, "Reconcile yourself with God, and be at peace with him; in this way your prosperity will be good. Accept instruction from his mouth and store up his words in your heart. If you return to the Almighty, you will be built up; if you remove wicked behavior far from your tent, (NET); Jeremiah 29:12-14, When you call out to me and come to me in prayer, I will hear your prayers. When you seek me in prayer and worship, you will find me available to you. If you seek me with all your heart and soul, I will make myself available to you," says the Lord. "Then I will reverse your plight and will regather you from all the nations and all the places where I have exiled you," says the Lord. "I will bring you back to the place from which I exiled you." (NET); Luke 22:41-43, He went away from them about a stone's throw, knelt down, and prayed, "Father, if you are willing, take this cup away from me. Yet not my will but yours be done." Then an angel from heaven appeared to him and strengthened him. (NET); Matthew 26:39, Going a little farther, he threw himself down with his face to the ground and prayed, "My Father, if possible, let this cup pass from me! Yet not what I will, but what you will." (NET); Mark 14:36, He said, "Abba, Father, all things are possible for you. Take this cup away from me. Yet not what I will, but what you will." (NET).**

The Hebrews were a praying people. As the disciples compared their prayers and those of the Rabbis to Jesus, they realized that

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they were not praying as He did and asked Him to teach them to pray.

**7. Matthew 6:8-14; Do not be like them, for your Father knows what you need before you ask him. So pray this way: Our Father in heaven, may your name be honored, may your kingdom come, may your will be done on earth as it is in heaven. Give us today our daily bread, and forgive us our debts, as we ourselves have forgiven our debtors. And do not lead us into temptation, but deliver us from the evil one. "For if you forgive others their sins, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. (NET); Luke 11:1-4, Now Jesus was praying in a certain place. When he stopped, one of his disciples said to him, "Lord, teach us to pray, just as John taught his disciples." So he said to them, "When you pray, say: Father, may your name be honored; may your kingdom come. Give us each day our daily bread, and forgive us our sins, for we also forgive everyone who sins against us. And do not lead us into temptation." (NET).**

Notice the difference in the two versions. Matthew's version of the Lord's Prayer contains seven (7) petitions; Luke's shorter version has five (5) petitions. This variation can be explained by the fact that Matthew was an eye-witness to the events and Luke was writing as a reporter, at a later date, possibly from other sources.

Jesus used this opportunity to teach His disciples how they should pray, contrasting it to the prayers of the scribes and Pharisees who loved to make a public spectacle of their prayers. **Matthew 6:5-8, "Whenever you pray, do not be like the hypocrites,**

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**because they love to pray while standing in synagogues and on street corners so that people can see them. Truly I say to you, they have their reward. But whenever you pray, go into your room, close the door, and pray to your Father in secret. And your Father, who sees in secret, will reward you. When you pray, do not babble repetitiously like the Gentiles, because they think that by their many words they will be heard. Do not be like them, for your Father knows what you need before you ask him. (NET)**

The important thing pointed out there is our attitude when we pray. The hypocrites were praying for public acclaim, not true communion with God. Where you pray is not important, or whether you are standing, sitting, kneeling or lying in bed. You can commune with God while walking along the seashore or hiking on a mountain trail. The location is not the factor here. It is the attitude, the heart, mind and spirit of the person praying. If you are attuned to God through the spirit, your prayer will be heard. **John 4:23-24, But a time is coming—and now is here—when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth, for the Father seeks such people to be his worshipers. God is spirit, and the people who worship him must worship in spirit and truth.” (NET); John 14:15-17, “If you love me, you will obey my commandments. Then I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Advocate to be with you forever—the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot accept, because it does not see him or know him. But you know him, because he resides with you and will be in you. (NET); 1 John 5:14-15, And this is the confidence that we have before him: that whenever we ask anything according to his will, he hears us. And if we know that he hears us in regard to whatever**

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## **we ask, then we know that we have the requests that we have asked from him. (NET)**

We as Christians may be asked if prayer really can change anything or is it just a ritual to perform, some activity we partake in to make us “feel better and connected to God.”

The Bible does confirm that prayers are answered. Acts chapter 12 relates how Peter was arrested and jailed by King Herod. The church earnestly prayed for Peter’s release. That night an angel of the Lord appeared and rescued him. Note that the church had earnestly prayed for him. This shows the absolute power of corporate prayer at work. **Psalm 50:15** promises “**pray to me when you are in trouble, I will deliver you and you will honor me.**” **Ephesians 3:20, Now to him who by the power that is working within us is able to do far beyond all that we ask or think, (NET); 1 John 3:22, and whatever we ask we receive from him, because we keep his commandments and do the things that are pleasing to him. (NET); 1 John 5:14, And this is the confidence that we have before him: that whenever we ask anything according to his will, he hears us. (NET)**

Words have the power to change men’s minds, to incite nations to fight wars or to achieve peace. But do prayers have the power to change the mind of God? The Calvinist preacher Charles Spurgeon said, “Prayer is able to prevail with heaven and bend omnipotence to it’s desire.” Moses, in his unique relationship with God was able to persuade Him, change his mind if you will, and saved the fledgling Israelite nation from being destroyed by God in the wilderness. (See Exodus, chapter 32)

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In Genesis 18 Abraham bargained with God in an attempt to get him to change His mind about destroying Sodom and Gomorrah. Abraham asked God if he could find fifty (50) Godly people in the city, would He not destroy it? God agreed. Abraham continued to bargain with God finally getting Him to agree to save the city if only ten (10) Godly people could be found there. We know that Sodom and Gomorrah were destroyed by God at dawn the next day so it would appear there were not even ten (10) Godly people living there.

Prayer has the power to persuade God to change His mind and grant His petition in a situation that can only be called a miracle of God. This brings to mind one of my favorite verses, **James 5:16, "The prayer of a righteous person has great effectiveness."**

Indeed, it does!

Amen.