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PRAYER

A very necessary work

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Prayer is to be entered into by every believer. Paul says, *“Pray without ceasing”* **1Thess.5:17**. The earliest church made up of the apostles and other disciples numbering altogether 120 (**Acts 1:14**), plus the 3000 who had been baptised on the day of Pentecost (**Acts 2:41**), *“continued steadfastly in ... prayers”* (**Acts 2:42**). The church is to pray – corporate prayer, and every believer is to pray – individual prayer.

Prayer is a fundamental part of church life and a very necessary work for every believer to continue in. Both Jesus and Paul demonstrate for us an amazing commitment to prayer and show us the absolute importance of an ongoing relationship with God through prayer. It is Paul who exhorts us to pray without ceasing, and shares with us his own commitment to prayer as in **Philippians 1:4**, *“Always in every prayer of mine making request for you all with joy”*; also in **Colossians 1:9**, *“For this reason we also, since the day we heard it, do not cease to pray for you”*.

JESUS PRAYED AND TAUGHT ON PRAYER

There are many references to Jesus praying in the Gospels and finally in **John 17:9-25**, Jesus is praying for the *“men whom You have given Me out of the world”*. He continues in prayer for them and then in **verse 20** He expands His prayer *“for those who will believe in Me through their word”*.

In **Matthew 6:5-15** Jesus teaches specifically on prayer and actually **teaches us how to pray** – the Lord’s Prayer (**v.9-13**). We have taught much on the Lord’s Prayer elsewhere, and refer you to those teachings (e.g. *Prayer A Way of Life manual*). The verse that is relevant to us today, and is very powerful in application, is **verse 6**, *“But you, when you pray, go into your room, and when you have shut the door, pray to your Father who is in the secret place; and your Father who sees in secret will reward you openly.”*

- 1) When you pray:** notice Jesus did not say ‘if you pray’, but He assumed that we would all be ones who were committed to prayer.
- 2) Go into your room:** not everyone has a private room to go to, but we all need to be able to retreat from normal everyday events and relationships to spend time in prayer. It requires us to do something: **GO!**
- 3) When you have shut the door:** personal individual prayer is a private exercise. It is between the person and God. God wants us to shut the door; to extricate ourselves from all that is going on around us. Prayer is more than just praying in tongues while you do your work – even though that is highly commendable and a very healthy practice; prayer is withdrawing into an exclusive place with God and shutting the door to all other distractions and involvements.

- 4) **Pray to the Father:** Jesus emphasises many times in the Gospels that we are to relate to God as our Father. Calling God, Father, and coming to know God as our Father is so important to take away other wrong modes of relationship with God, such as, God is the big boss or master, and we are His servants. One of the greatest things that Jesus did was for Him to introduce and reveal God as the Father of us all (**Ephesians 3:14-15**).
- 5) **Who is in the secret place:** this is a wonderful revelation – God is in the secret place! That is where we will find Him; Jesus said so. God is always available and will always respond to the person who comes to seek Him in the secret place. He is waiting for us in that place. God said in **Jeremiah 29:13** “*And you will seek Me and you will find Me, when you search for Me with all of your heart.*”
- 6) **Your Father who sees in secret:** God already knows everything, and He knows that we need to come to Him. He knows all that is in our heart and He is always prepared to receive us and hear us and provide His answers for us.
- 7) **Your Father will reward you openly:** this is referred to in **Hebrews 11:6**, “*But without faith it is impossible to please Him, for he who comes to God must believe that He is, and that He is a rewarder of those who diligently seek Him.*” God promises in **Isaiah 65:24**, “*It shall come to pass that before they call, I will answer; and while they are still speaking I will hear*”. Your Father who sees in secret will reward you openly.

WHAT IS PRAYER?

Strong's #4336, the Greek word *proseuchomai*. The word is progressive. Starting with the noun *euche*, which is prayer to God that also includes making a vow, the word expands to the verb *euchomai*, a special term describing an invocation, request, or entreaty. Adding *pros*, in the direction of (God), *proseuchomai* becomes the most frequent word for prayer.

What is supplication?

Supplication is a focused form of prayer, making entreaties. In the Hebrew it comes from a word meaning ‘graciousness’ and it is God’s graciousness that enables us to make entreaties. It is an earnest form of prayer. In the Greek it comes from a word meaning ‘to beg’ (as binding oneself); it means to petition. It is serious prayer and we need to take care that what we promise God as we entreat Him to help us, we will then remember to do what we have promised.

With Thanksgiving

All of prayer and supplication is in the context of thanksgiving. It is always helpful when we come to God in prayer, to first thank Him for all His goodness and graciousness, remembering His past kindnesses to us and most of all remembering that He came and died on the cross for us.

Thanksgiving in the context of prayer is mentioned in **1 Timothy 2:1**, and in **1 Thessalonians 5:17-18**: “*Pray without ceasing, in everything give thanks*”.

The peace of God

In **Philippians 4:6-7**, Paul exhorts us to prayer, not only to prayer, but also to supplication. Both **prayer** and **supplication** are to be made with **thanksgiving**. Prayer should be our response whenever we are faced with circumstances or inner thoughts and feelings that are anxious and stressful. Paul exhorts us to *“be anxious for nothing”*. This is reflecting the teaching of Jesus in **Matthew 6:25-34**, where He gives us very clear and practical instruction as to how to handle worry and anxiety. Paul says that *“prayer and supplication with thanksgiving”* should be our response to any situation, real or imagined, that causes us anxiety and stress.

If you will seek God, He will give you His peace and the peace that comes assures us that God has heard our prayers. There is no need to pray any more about that issue. We can certainly rest in that and be thankful. The peace that He gives *“surpasses all understanding [and] will guard your hearts and mind through Christ Jesus”*.

A PERSONAL RESPONSE

Do you have a personal, set apart [go into your room] private prayer time [with your Father in the secret place]? When I, Paul, was born again in 1974, into a Charismatic Evangelical movement of the Holy Spirit, I knew that the expected thing was to have **a daily private time with God**, a time of personal devotion. As I made the effort to keep that time, it meant rising early; it meant **giving attention to the word as well as to prayer**, and it became a necessary part of my life and walk with God in Christ.

All too easily we can allow our responsibilities and our work commitments to squeeze out our own prayer time. We find ourselves ‘shooting off prayers’ as we rush here and there. It can be just like grabbing a cup of coffee to keep us going.

Prayer needs to be much more than a momentary calling upon God. It is good to call upon God in every moment [pray without ceasing], but we also need to **foster a personal time with God** each day [if possible], and also to keep a journal record of our prayers and God’s answers. It is such an encouragement to check one’s journal weeks or months later and recognise how **God has heard and answered our prayers**. He is a faithful God.

Having a committed prayer time enables us to be established in the word, that is, in the will of God. Sometimes the fruit of our prayers is not seen until a future date, but as surely as God saw the smoke of the incense rising up from the altar (**Rev.5:8**), so He sees, that is, He hears every prayer that is made, every petition/supplication, every intercession.

**It is time to check the foundation of prayer in our lives,
both personal and corporate prayer!
This is a necessary ‘first work’ (Rev.2:5)
that keeps us close to Jesus and in the centre of His will.**