

Bite Size Bible Study

Thoughts on Prayer #251

By Lee Logue

Prayer is something we are encouraged to do. But if you are like me, I was not given much instruction on how to pray. We were all taught the “Lord’s Prayer” and maybe even Jesus’ prayer in Gethsemane. I remember that as a small child I was taught the “Now I lay me down to sleep” prayer. Over the years most of us have developed a way to pray that seems to work for us, but could there be some improvements.

I have noticed that very few of us like, or are even willing, to pray in public. Even some of those that do, seem to me to be praying to the audience and not directly to God. Their wording seems to be directed to me more than to God. It often seems like a sermon directed to the audience and not specifically to God.

I am not the best at prayer, and I definitely don’t know all there is to be a real prayer warrior. However, I would like to relate some of what I find useful in my prayers.

This is what Jesus told his disciples about prayer:

“And 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 others. Truly I tell you, they have received their reward in full. But when you pray, go into your room, close the door and pray to your Father, who is unseen. Then your Father, who sees what is done in secret, will reward you. And when you pray, do not keep on babbling like pagans, for they think 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.”
Matthew 6:5-9 NIV

Most of our prayers should probably be in private. There are times when we will want to pray with someone else, or with a group of people, but these should probably be the exception rather than the rule. Long public prayers are usually tedious for the audience and to me resemble a “sermon” more than a prayer to God.

My prayers are a private conversation between me and God. They are mostly in my mind – rarely vocal. Anything we (He and I) say in these prayers is communication between us. I find it necessary to stop talking at times, so the Holy Spirit “can get a word in edgewise”. In other words, it is a two-way conversation, not just a “to do list” for Him or a “want list” from me. And I find it helpful to remember, and accept, what Jesus said at Gethsemane. *“not my will, but yours be done.”*

A lot of my prayers are thanking Him or remembering how awesome He and His creation are. How intricately He has created this world for us to live in.

Let’s look at the “Lord’s Prayer” that Jesus taught us.

*“This, then, is how you should pray:
“Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name, your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as it is in*

heaven. Give us today our daily bread. And forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors. And lead us not into temptation (strong testing), but deliver us from the evil one.” Matthew 6:9-13 NIV

I don’t believe that Jesus intended His disciples, or us, to pray this as a prayer, but to use it as an example of how to pray about important things that could be included in our prayers. I think it is useful to take the example and rewrite it in our own words to make it our own.

Here is one of my rewrites:

Daddy, I know you are always with me and provide everything I need. Thank you for all the things you do for me. I am so glad to be your child and to have you as my mentor. But I wanted to talk to you now. Help me to learn the things I need to know to be useful in Your Kingdom, now and in the future. I don’t enjoy testing and trials, but I know that they help me mature into the person you created me to be. Thank you for forgiving my mistakes and being patient with me. Help me to love and be patient with all your children and to treat them with the love and respect you have for them (Here I stop talking and listen).

You might notice that I don’t include “in Jesus’ name, Amen”. This may be necessary in public prayer, but I don’t believe that it is in private prayer. I have come to believe that “in Jesus’ name” means that I am trying to pray “in the character of Jesus” and everything I have prayed for has been in recognition of His character. Amen means “so be it” and I already feel that it will be so – if He desires it to be so. I don’t need to restate that. Don’t get me wrong if these fit your way of praying then fine, it’s not wrong. We just need to understand what we are saying. It isn’t a “sign off” for our prayer or like a QED at the end of a geometric proof.

Paul tells us to pray always.

And pray in the Spirit on all occasions with all kinds of prayers and requests. Ephesians 6:18a

At first glance this seems impossible – we would not be able to do anything else. The Jewish teaching is to pray one hour three times a day. Each prayer is to be preceded with an hour before the prayer to center one’s thoughts. Then an hour after the prayer to meditate on any answers we may have received. Not many of us in this culture have 6-9 hours each day to follow this teaching.

But I find that it is possible to be constantly in communication with God. I try to be constantly aware of His creation and how intricate it is. How everything is in relation to everything else. Also being aware of how I am representing Him (or maybe not). This communication helps me to see the good in this world that is so full of the “not so good”.

When I encounter the “not so good” I ask how this is going to help mature me for the Kingdom. This way I can accept most of all the things that come my way. I may not like them, but if I can keep the mindset that everything will eventually be for the good of both me and the others involved, I can more easily see His involvement in everyday affairs.

Worry and depression are minimized with this mindset but not eliminated – I am still human after all.

All of this comes from constant communication with Him.

I hope that some of what I have shared will be a help you in your communication (prayers) with God.

If you have some thoughts on prayer or ways that you pray, I would love to hear them, after all “iron sharpens iron”. We are all learning to be in His Image (character).

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