

“When you pray...”
Summary of Study

In Matthew 6:5, during His Sermon on the Mount, Jesus said, “And *when* you pray...”. Clearly, He was not indicating that prayer was optional (“*if* you pray”). The assumption, even command, was that believers *would* pray.

The very act of prayer makes certain assumptions:

- the finite (human) can communicate with the Infinite (Divine)
- the Infinite (Divine) is interested in communicating with the finite (His creation)
- prayer is intended to inculcate certain attitudes in the one who prays, rather than to influence the recipient (God)
- prayer is intended to train a person to focus on the recipient (God) through philosophical and intellectual contemplation
- prayer is intended to enable a person to gain a direct experience of/with the Recipient
- prayer is intended to affect the very fabric of reality as we perceive it
- prayer is a catalyst for change in oneself and/or one's circumstances, or likewise those of third party beneficiaries
- the Recipient (God) desires and appreciates prayer

Why *don't* we pray?

- I tried it and it didn't work.
- I don't feel like praying.
- I don't have much time for prayer.
- I'm not worthy.
- My concerns are so petty.
- I don't know what or how to pray.

Posture

You can certainly pray anytime, anywhere and in any position. However, as we recognize that we are approaching not only our Heavenly Father, but the Almighty God, our postures may help in reflecting our attitudes:

- Kneeling – Luke 22:41, Acts 20:36
- Bowing – Psalm 95:6
- Face down (prostrate) – Matthew 26:39, I Chronicles 21:16
- Standing – Mark 11:25
- Hands lifted – I Timothy 2:8, Psalm 28:2

Pattern

- Adoration (praise/worship) – Psalm 95:6, Psalm 16:7
- Supplication (petition) – Psalm 119:170
- Thanksgiving - Philippians 4:6
- Intercession - John 17:14-21
- Confession (repentance) – I John 1:9

Postscript (ending)

When the Lord taught us to pray, he did not mention to pray in His Name. However, later on he instructs His disciples (and us) to ask in His name – “*I have spoken of these matters in figures of speech, but soon I will stop speaking figuratively and will tell you plainly all about the Father.*”²⁶ **Then you will ask in My name.** I'm not

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saying I will ask the Father on your behalf, ²⁷ for the Father himself loves you dearly because you love me and believe that I came from God.” - John 16:25-27

Answers

"This is the confidence we have in approaching God: that if we ask anything according to his will, he hears us. And if we know that he hears us -- whatever we ask -- we know that we have what we asked of him." God answers our prayers according to His will (and according to his wisdom, his love for us, his holiness, etc.).

Where we trip up is assuming we know God's will, because a certain thing makes sense to us! We assume that there is only one right "answer" to a specific prayer, assuming certainly THAT would be God's will. And this is where it gets tough. We live within the limits of time and limits of knowledge. We have only limited information about a situation and the implications of future action on that situation. God's understanding is unlimited. How an event plays out in the course of life or history is only something he knows. And he may have purposes far beyond what we could even imagine. So, God is not going to do something simply because we determine that it must be his will."

What can affect or impact answers to our prayers?

- Sin - Psalm 66:18-20
- Wrong motives - James 4:3
- Doubt, unbelief - James 1:5-7
- Lack of a relationship with the Lord - John 10:14, 27

Our prayer partner – the Holy Spirit

Romans 8:26-27 - *“In the same way, the Spirit helps us in our weakness. We do not know what we ought to pray for, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us through wordless groans. ²⁷ And he who searches our hearts knows the mind of the Spirit, because the Spirit intercedes for God’s people in accordance with the will of God.” (NIV)*

Prayer and fasting

Prayer and fasting go together in Scripture (Acts 14:23, Acts 13:2-3, Daniel 9:3, Nehemiah 1:4, Ezra 8:23). Christ gave us a similar pattern for both prayer (Matt. 6:5-7) and fasting (Matthew 6:16-18). Notice that Christ said ***when you pray***, not *if* and ***when you fast***, not *if*.

Intercessory prayer

Intercessory prayer is the act of praying on behalf of others. God calls all Christians to be intercessors. It is God’s desire that every believer be active in intercessory prayer. What a wonderful and exalted privilege we have in being able to come boldly before the throne of Almighty God with our prayers and requests!

I Timothy 2:1 – *“I urge, then, first of all, that petitions, prayers, **intercession** and thanksgiving be made for all people—“*

For whom are we to pray (examples, not an exhaustive list):

- Fellow believers – Ephesians 6:18
- Our enemies – Matthew 5:44
- Those in authority, government leaders – I Timothy 2:2
- Pastors for their churches – Philippians 1:4
- People for their pastors – 2 Corinthians 1:11
- Those who are sick – James 5:14
- The lost/unbelievers – Luke 19:10