

Understanding Prayer

A few months ago, I entered a local book store. While looking around, I found a book published by Harvest House Publishers entitled One Minute Prayers for Men. This book carried multiple prayers for many topics ranging from giving to communication to helping others. It really is a good resource, however, is a reference like this really needed? Perhaps there is a portion of prayer that is being neglected. In order to ensure that we are not neglecting important parts of prayer, we need to get back to basics.

First, what is the purpose for prayer? Why do we pray? The definition of prayer is “to intreat, implore, supplicate, beg, beseech, plead, etc.; thus to speak to God — to offer adoration, praise, thanksgiving; to confess, petition and supplicate, etc. to God.” Pulling from the definition, we pray so that we may communicate with our God in Heaven. The type of communication as well is not specified, so if we feel the need to make a request, we can freely do so. Although, we need to remember who it is that we are speaking to. When you are bowing your head in prayer, you are bowing to speak to God Himself, who has established all we see, who formed you and made you in His likeness. That power demands respect; it demands reverence. So consider the parable of the Pharisee and the tax collector in Luke 18; the man who was justified in his prayer was the man who humbled himself when going to God.

Second, we need to ask the question, what are supposed to pray about? Yes, there is no limit in how we can speak to God about anything, but are there any specific things that are needed in prayer? The answer is no; there are not limitations to what we can request of God. However, there is a limit to what will be granted to us. God, who is truly a loving and caring Father, wants to bless us and give us many things, but things which He will give must be in accordance with His will. For example, when I was a kid, I really wanted a dirt bike; so I would often pray that I could have a dirt bike. God does want to give me things, but I never received that dirt bike, because I was not asking for something that was in accordance with His will or would benefit me in a way that led me to Him.

That being said, if you need help with prayer, you can break down the process to help you. Oliver C. Cunningham, a minister at the Willow Street Church of Christ in Cookeville, Tennessee, made a 7 point outline for acceptable prayer:

1. All prayer must be addressed to the Father: “Our Father who art in Heaven.”
2. Thanksgiving: “We thank thee for thy many blessings.”
3. Petitions: “We pray that all these blessings may continue.”
4. Forgiveness: “Forgive us our sins as we forgive those who sin against us.”
5. If it be God’s will: “Grant unto us these blessings if it be thy will.”
6. Salvation: “Save us by thy mercy and grace.”
7. Pray in the name of Christ: “In the name of Christ, Amen.”

While this outline was given by man, you can find the source of this outline in Jesus' prayer in Mathew 6, where He includes all these components. So remember these steps and it can help with knowing how you should pray.

In conclusion, we've reviewed what the purpose of prayer is. Prayer's entire purpose is so that we communicate to our Father in Heaven to thank Him for what He's done, to ask for something that we need in our life, or if we just want the opportunity to talk to Him. We've also recalled that when we do pray to God, it is a very important task, so we must humble ourselves and recognize who we are talking to. For those who need help with prayer, a list has also been given that hopefully will help to make prayer less daunting. The only question now is, will you take time to pray? The Lord is ready and willing to hear you and wants nothing more than to listen and bless you, but He can't unless you call out to Him.

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