

Seeking God in prayer

Some people can give the impression that they have a fantastic prayer life, when they don't, whilst others regularly and faithfully pray and nobody knows anything about it. Most of us are somewhere in between. We all feel that we could pray more or better. Some people find it easier to pray than others but this seems to be more to do with personality than anything else. There is nothing in the Bible to support the assumption that is frequently made that some are more "gifted" or "anointed" in prayer than others (intercessors, prayer warriors etc). We can all pray. In fact the main attribute in prayer seems to be persistence (**Luke 18¹**). Prayer is learned and the more we experience it the better we become. (John Ortberg: *The Life You've Always Wanted*. P97)

There are a great many books written on the subject of prayer. Prayer is often misunderstood because it can mean different things to different people or they have been taught to pray in a particular way and so feel more familiar with that particular style. There are many different ways and styles of prayer.

And pray in the Spirit on all occasions with all kinds of prayers and requests. With this in mind, be alert and always keep on praying for all the saints. **Ephesians 6¹⁸**

Different types of prayer (in no particular order):

- Adoration, praise and worship
- Confession and repentance
- Thanksgiving
- Intercession
- Petition
- Meditation or contemplative

Paul said to pray without ceasing (**1Thessalonians 5¹⁷**). In a sense, like worship, our lives can become a constant prayer or communication (communion) with God.

As with any relationship, we have to spend time getting to know the object of our affection. It is important for Christians to take time to become familiar with God, to be in his presence and to understand his ways. God wants to communicate with us and he will do this in a variety of ways, through scripture, directly into our hearts, through other people and things, in our circumstances, in our dreams and in prayer. The more we spend time getting to know him, the more conscious we will be in our awareness of him and in communicating with him.

If we want to get to know God better, we need to get to know Jesus better.

Jesus answered, "I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me. If you really knew me, you would know my Father as well. From now on, you do know him and have seen him." Philip said, "Lord, show us the Father and that will be enough for us." Jesus answered: "Don't you know me, Philip, even after I have been among you such a long time? Anyone who has seen me has seen the Father. How can you say, 'Show us the Father'?" **John 14⁶⁻⁹**

We want to know God's will and purpose for our lives. God's general will is in the Bible. We don't have to seek God to know if he wants us to be put our trust in Jesus or that he loves us or that we mustn't steal.

The Bible says to seek the Lord not His will. Becoming "hung up" on knowing God's will only makes it more difficult to see past this and to know God himself, which makes it more difficult to know his will for us. It is a vicious circle. On the other hand, if we know God, we become familiar with his ways and we will know his will as a consequence of knowing him. We will also be less likely to confuse our own thoughts and desires with God's will.

Therefore, I urge you, brothers, in view of God's mercy, to offer your bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God - this is your spiritual act of worship. Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is - his good, pleasing and perfect will. **Romans 12¹⁻²**

God's specific will or purpose for our lives (as with prophecy):

- Does not contradict the Bible
- Needs confirmation
- Always has aim of extending His kingdom on earth and bringing him glory (ie it's for him, not us.)
- Is not usually a complete surprise to us
- Often already doing it in the natural – eg teachers teach, carers care

The spiritual did not come first, but the natural, and after that the spiritual. **1Corinthians 15⁴⁶**

How to seek the Lord:

- Quiet time and place

Jesus often withdrew to lonely places and prayed. **Luke 5¹⁶**

He **withdrew** about a stone's throw beyond them, knelt down and prayed. **Luke 22⁴¹**

- Don't be afraid of silence (but not the kind of embarrassed silence when nobody knows what to pray about)
- Rest and listen - not too much to say. (John Ortberg: God is Closer Than You Think. P98)
- Get used to waiting and recognising His presence
- Things in your head – pray about them – hand them over to God (John Ortberg: The Life You've Always Wanted. P101)
- Share with others about what God has revealed to you (be appropriate)
- Corporate prayer we need to speak to communicate with others

Hindrances to seeking the Lord:

- Not sure what to pray about or how to start.

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 with groans that words cannot express. And he who searches our hearts knows the mind of the Spirit, because the Spirit intercedes for the saints in accordance with God's will. **Romans 8²⁶⁻²⁷**

- Lack of obedience. We have to be prepared to do what God tells us to.
...if our hearts do not condemn us, we have confidence before God and receive from him anything we ask, because we obey his commands and do what pleases him. **1John3²¹⁻²²**
- Unconfessed sin and lack of repentance (intimacy, character, gifting)
Is any one of you in trouble? He should pray. Is anyone happy? Let him sing songs of praise. Is any one of you sick? He should call the elders of the church to pray over him and anoint him with oil in the name of the Lord. And the prayer offered in faith will make the sick person well; the Lord will raise him up. If he has sinned, he will be forgiven. Therefore confess your sins to each other and pray for each other so that you may be healed. The prayer of a righteous man is powerful and effective. **James 5¹³⁻¹⁶**
Husbands, in the same way be considerate as you live with your wives, and treat them with respect as the weaker partner and as heirs with you of the gracious gift of life, so that nothing will hinder your prayers. **1Peter 3⁷**
- Self-centeredness (His face not His hands)
My heart says of you "Seek his face!" Your face, Lord, I will seek. **Psalms 27⁸**
- Sometimes God will hide himself to make us seek him– draw me after you.
If ... you seek the Lord your God, you will find him if you look for him with all your heart and with all your soul. **Deuteronomy 4²⁹**
- Wait/preparation. Things we work/wait for are appreciated and stay with us longer than sudden revelations. Not that this devalues revelation but usually we have to do the spadework afterwards (eg Joseph).