



# A Pattern For Prayer

by Ben Godwin

Prayer is a valuable asset to the believer. As such, prayer should be our first resource not our last resort. It is the key to the heart of God that unlocks all of the resources of heaven.

President Abraham Lincoln during the dark days of the Civil War era stated, “*I have been driven many times to my knees by the overwhelming conviction that I had nowhere else to go.*” Prayer enables us to tap into a supernatural power source when human effort is insufficient. King David expressed it this way, “*Hear my cry, O God; attend unto my prayer. From the end of the earth will I cry unto thee, when my heart is overwhelmed: lead me to the rock that is higher than I.*” (Psalm 61:1-2)

On one occasion, Jesus’ disciples approached Him with a simple request, “*Lord, teach us to pray...*” (Luke 11:1) In response, Jesus gave them a pattern prayer (a sample, a model, an outline), not so much to be memorized and recited repetitiously or mechanically, but as a guide to the proper method of approaching God. We will examine that prayer a little later.

- **What is prayer?**

Simply put, prayer is talking to (the act of communion with) God. Prayer doesn’t have to be lengthy, fancy or shrouded in religious verbiage, it just needs to be sincere and from the heart. God spoke to Moses and vice versa “*face to face, as a man speaketh unto his friend.*” (Exodus 33:11) A relationship is only as strong as its communication and our relationship with God is facilitated through prayer. Prayer, however, should be a two-way conversation—a dialogue not a monologue. Tennis provides a helpful analogy. You cannot play tennis with one player very well. Someone must return the ball once you hit it over the net. So it is with prayer. There should be give and take. Once we have poured out our heart to God, we should wait and be quiet in His presence and listen for His answer.

- **The Practice of Prayer:**

Prayer should be as normal to the believer as eating and sleeping. The Reformer Martin Luther said, “*To be a Christian without prayer is no more possible than to be alive without breathing.*” Prayer should not be just a crutch in a crisis, but a consistent lifestyle.

How often should we pray? The Psalmist David wrote, “*Evening, and morning, and at noon, will I pray...*” (Psalm 55:16) The Prophet Daniel had a similar regimen, “*Daniel kneeled upon his knees three times a day, and prayed, and gave thanks before his God.*” (Daniel 6:10) Paul raised the bar even higher when he instructed us to “*Pray without ceasing.*” (I Thessalonians 5:17) In other words, always remain in an attitude or mindset of prayer. So prayer should not only be a daily discipline but an open-ended and ongoing conversation between us and God.

- **The Purpose of Prayer:**

The purpose of prayer is not to *inform* God for “*your Father knoweth what things ye have need of, before ye ask him.*” (Matthew 6:8) Rather, it is to *invite* God to be involved in every aspect of our lives. The Lord’s Prayer in Matthew’s Gospel (6:9-13) is only 66 words long. In this pattern prayer given to His disciples, Jesus outlined several important purposes for prayer:

1. **To perpetuate a relationship:** “*Our Father which art in heaven...*”

The term *Father* indicates a relationship. So prayer is a vehicle through which we can nurture and maintain close fellowship with God. We do not pray to a distant, impersonal force out in the universe, but to our intimate, loving, heavenly Father.



2. **To praise God’s name:** “*Hallowed be Thy name...*”

The word *hallowed* means to make holy, to sanctify, to venerate or consecrate. Notice the prayer begins with praise. The proper way to approach God is with an attitude of gratitude. “*Enter into His gates with thanksgiving, and into his courts with praise...*” (Psalm 100:4)

3. **To promote God’s kingdom and will:** “*Thy kingdom come, Thy will be done in earth as it is in heaven...*”

God’s will is for all humanity to be saved. His kingdom is His rule, dominion or authority. Prayer helps facilitate the fulfillment of God’s will and the advancement of His kingdom in the earth.

4. **To petition God for personal needs:** “*Give us this day our daily bread...*”

Pay attention to the all-inclusive words *our*, *us* and *we*, used eight times in this pattern prayer. This is not a selfish, exclusive prayer; it is inclusive of the needs of others. Certainly we should present our own personal needs in prayer. But the key to having our needs met is often interceding for the needs of others—“*And the LORD turned the captivity of Job, when he prayed for his friends.*” (Job 42:10)

5. **To pardon us of sin:** “*Forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors...*”

A true prayer of confession and repentance garners forgiveness. However, our capacity to receive forgiveness hinges on our willingness to extend it. Jesus expressed this principle in the beautiful Beatitude, “*Blessed are the merciful: for they shall obtain mercy.*” (Matthew 5:7)

6. **To prevent us from falling and protect us from evil:** “*Lead us not into temptation but deliver us from evil...*”

Either prayer will keep us from sinning or sin will keep us from praying! “*Watch and pray, that ye enter not into temptation: the spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak....*” (Matthew 26:41) Prayer keeps us strong in order to resist temptation and sensitive to the Holy Spirit to help us shun the very appearance of evil.

7. **To praise God again:** “*For Thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory, forever, amen.*”

Notice how this prayer starts and ends with praise. I call it a “praise sandwich” because the petitions are “sandwiched” between two periods of praise. So the proper way to pray is to begin with praise and finish with praise for what God has done and will do.

• **The Power of Prayer:**

John Wallace wrote, “*Prayer moves the hand that moves the world.*” Prayer places all the resources of heaven at your disposal. The value and power of prayer is immeasurable. “*The effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man availeth much.*” (James 5:16) The scriptures are replete with examples of how prayer turned the tide in the favor of God’s people:

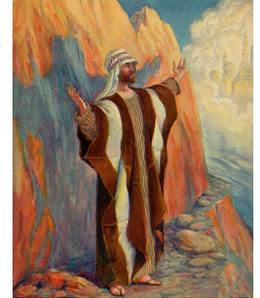
- The cries of Israel moved God to deliver them from slavery in Egypt—Exodus. 2:23.
- The prayer of Elijah shut up the rains for three and a half years. Then, when he prayed again, God restored the rain—James 5:17-18.
- The desperate prayer of Hannah produced a son—I Samuel 1:12-20.
- Prayers of repentance sparked a city-wide revival in Nineveh and postponed the judgment of God—Jonah 3:8-10.
- The New Testament church was birthed out of a prayer meeting—Acts 1:14.

Numerous other examples could be cited. The power of prayer has and can literally change the course of history. *“If my people, which are called by my name, shall humble themselves, and pray, and seek my face, and turn from their wicked ways; then will I hear from heaven, and will forgive their sin, and will heal their land.”* (2 Chronicles 7:14)

- **Pointers for Prayer:**

- **Pray periodically:** *“And when thou prayest...”* (Matthew 6:5) Notice Jesus said *when* not *if* you pray. Make prayer a habit that you engage in periodically throughout your daily routine.

- **Pray without pretense:** *“And when thou prayest, thou shalt not be as the hypocrites are: for they love to pray standing in the corners of the streets, that they may be seen of me.”* (Matthew 6:5) Motives matter to God. The purpose of prayer is not to impress people or appear religious but to draw close to and make a spiritual connection with the God of the universe.



- **Pray in private:** *“But thou, when thou prayest, enter into thy closet and when thou hast shut thy door, pray to thy father which is in secret: and thy father which seeth in secret shall reward thee openly.”* (Matthew 6:6) Corporate prayer is desirable at certain times and there is power in having others agree with you in prayer (Matthew 18:19). But the real secret to prayer is secret prayer! The word translated **closet** in the above verse is from a Greek word meaning “bed chamber”, a place where husband and wife share intimacy. A married couple will say things in private they would never say otherwise. Likewise, when you get alone with God, you will share things out of your heart that you wouldn’t with other people in earshot.

- **Pray differently than pagans:** *“But when ye pray, use not vain repetitions as the heathen do: for they think that they shall be heard for their much speaking.”* (Matthew 6:7) Some religions incorporate the use of chants that are repeated over and over for extended periods of time. Jesus called this “vain repetitions.” This does not mean that it is wrong to pray repeatedly about a certain need. For instance, Elijah prayed seven times for rain. Paul prayed three times for God to remove his thorn in the flesh. Even Jesus prayed the same prayer three times in the Garden of Gethsemane. Jesus simply wanted us to avoid memorized, mechanical prayers that don’t come from the heart.

- **Pray with persistence:** After Jesus concluded the parable prayer in Luke 11, He told the Parable of the Friend at Midnight. In the story, a man has a guest show up unexpectedly and he comes to his neighbor’s house to borrow food to feed him. The neighbor initially makes excuses and refuses to help him, but the friend persists. Eventually, the neighbor gives him what he needs. The point is simple—if persistence pays when requesting a favor from a reluctant friend at midnight, how much more does persistence pay when petitioning a willing God? Jesus followed the parable up with this famous verse, *“Ask, and it shall be given unto you; seek, and ye shall find; knock, and it shall be opened unto you.”* (Luke 11:9)

- **Pray with precision:** *“And this is the confidence that we have in him, that, if we ask any thing according to his will, he heareth us: And if we know that he hear us, whatsoever we ask, we know that we have the petitions that we desired of him.”* (1 John 5:14-15) Prayer, like archery, involves aiming at and hitting a target! The target in prayer is the will of God. James explained a common cause for unanswered prayer, *“Ye ask, and receive not, because ye ask amiss, that ye may consume it upon your lusts.”* (James 4:3) God will not answer prayer that is inconsistent with His will. The way to know the will of God is to stay immersed in the Word of God. Jesus stated, *“If ye abide in me, and my words abide in you, ye shall ask what ye will, and it shall be done unto you.”* (John 15:7) Notice the conditional term “if.” For if we truly abide in Him and His Word abides in us, we won’t want anything that is contrary to His will. Let God’s Word guide your prayers like arrows to the bullseye of His will. This will increase your effectiveness and eliminate wasted time praying for the wrong things.

F. B. Myer astutely observed, *“The great tragedy of life is not unanswered prayer, but unoffered prayer.”* The Apostle James noted, *“Ye have not, because ye ask not.”* (James 4:2) The words of an old, familiar hymn are fitting,

*“Oh what peace we often forfeit,  
oh what needless pain we bear,  
all because we do not carry  
everything to God in prayer.”*

May we all develop a greater discipline for daily prayer. May we all follow the pattern for prayer that Jesus provided. May we all utilize this key to the resources of heaven and realize how powerful an ally this priceless gift is called prayer.

