

The other necessity, as we have already seen from considering the incense, is faith, the salt which tempers the incense ingredients together: "he that cometh to God [in prayer] must believe that He is, and that He is a rewarder of them that diligently seek Him" (Heb. 11:6). So prayer has to spring from our conviction that the living God, Whom we cannot see, hears us and responds to us in mercy and truth, and will ultimately fulfil all His great and precious promises and allow us to partake of His Divine nature. Our prayers, therefore, are a mirror of our faith, and our faith derives from the Word of God. Prayer and faith go hand in hand as we walk towards the Kingdom of God, trusting in our God.

A third help to overcome difficulties in prayer is to memorise Scripture, particularly the Psalms. The "prayers and supplications with strong crying and tears" offered up by our Lord Jesus (5:7) are surely recorded for us in the book of Psalms, and many have found that particular psalms express their own needs in prayer. In the long, wakeful hours we sometimes experience in bed at night, when we commune with our hearts and with our God, the Psalms can provide immeasurable comfort, and adequately express our prayers far better than our own words and thoughts.

A fourth help is the element of habit. Israel was instructed to offer incense morning and evening, at the beginning and the ending of the day. Surely our days should begin and end in supplication and thanks to our heavenly Father. If we are in a habit of praying, then the difficulties we may experience may be overcome. The element of habit can help to overcome our moods and our circumstances, both of which can change markedly from day to day.

Paul gives us a valuable lesson about prayer in 2 Corinthians 12. Three times he prayed for the removal of a "thorn in the flesh", but his request was not granted. It was a request undoubtedly made out of unselfish motives, perhaps so that he could preach the Word more effectively. Unlike us, Paul had a direct answer to his prayer: "My grace is sufficient for thee: for my strength is made perfect in weakness" (v. 9). The thorn in the flesh remained, but Paul had spiritual strength to rise above his affliction. His brethren and sisters would have been able to see that God can be with a person and provide him or her with strength to overcome all difficulties, and that the gospel is indeed powerful to save. So God's strength was "made perfect in weakness". May our prayers help us to achieve the same spiritual strength.

## How should we pray?

Tony Benson

*The purpose of this article is to deal with various practical issues concerning prayer, using Scriptural guidance where this exists. It is anticipated that this article will be more helpful to those who are young in the Truth; those who have been in the Truth for some time will no doubt have formed their own pattern and practices of prayer.*

**C**HRISTADELPHIANS have never made use of set prayers; we have no prayer book, unlike the established churches or other religions. We have no rules about what language to use in our prayers. This is in accordance with Scripture, for we find no evidence of fixed forms of prayer being used by our first-century brethren, and very little even in relation to Israel un-

der the Law of Moses, though Numbers 6:23-27 is one exception.

### What form of words should we use?

In our private prayers we are free to say what we feel to be appropriate, though we must bear in mind the need to be reverent in our approach to the Father. Simple, direct language is surely the best here. God knows our thoughts anyway, and we should express our thoughts to Him in a natural way. And the same principle of using simple language should surely apply to our public prayers also. We have as a community developed a certain vocabulary of prayer which can easily wash over us without creating much impact. Praying in public is not easy, and sticking to particular wording may be necessary for some, but that wording can at least be simple; why, for

example, pray for ‘those languishing on beds of sickness’, when we can simply pray for the sick?

#### ‘You’ or ‘Thou’?

When I was baptized, about forty years ago, God was always addressed in prayers as ‘Thou’ or ‘Thee’, to the best of my recollection. Today many address Him as ‘You’, and this is sometimes a matter of contention, even to the point of brethren walking out of a meeting when ‘You’ is used, or setting up another ecclesia to ensure that it is avoided.

Though I still use ‘Thou’, I can see no justification for it being insisted on. It was presumably used universally because it is the form of address used in the AV. At the time the AV came into being, of course, ‘thee’ and ‘thou’ were singular and ‘you’ and ‘ye’ were plural, but today there is only ‘you’. It has been argued that we should use the archaic singular forms as an expression of our belief in the unity of God, and that ‘you’ has Trinitarian overtones. However, I cannot believe that anyone hearing a brother address God as ‘You’ would ever think he was addressing God in the plural, especially as he would, at least at the beginning of the prayer, make it clear that he was praying to one person by the use of such terms as ‘God’, ‘Lord’ or ‘Father’.

To me it comes naturally to address God as ‘Thou’ because it is how He is addressed in the Bible that I normally read, which is the AV/RV interlinear. Likewise, it seems to me, it would be natural for someone who normally uses a modern version that addresses God as ‘You’ to do likewise. However, there are those who normally use the AV and yet prefer to address God as ‘You’, so clearly there are those who think it right to address God in everyday speech. It must be borne in mind that using ‘Thou’ necessitates other archaic word forms too, like ‘-eth’ or ‘-est’ at the end of verbs, and prayers offered in such terms can be cumbersome. In my experience, prayers where God is addressed as ‘You’ are generally easier to follow, and those who continue to use ‘Thou’ ought to pay particular attention to making their prayers understandable.

The practice of saying ‘You’ is undoubtedly growing, and, as those who use ‘Thou’ out of habit rather than conviction become fewer, the use of archaic terms will die away except where retained as a matter of conviction. It is an area where we surely ought to be tolerant of one

another and accept both. In practice, it is the use of ‘You’ which is likely to cause problems with those who use ‘Thou’, rather than the other way round. If someone uses ‘You’ where ‘Thou’ is thought to be necessary, then the matter should be gently explained, and brethren should not insist on using ‘You’ if they know it will cause problems.

#### Use of Scriptural language

The all-important fact that our prayers should be based on the Bible is something which comes out in various places and various ways in this magazine, but to what extent should our prayers be expressed in Biblical language? Ideally, as much as possible, but this is something we may often find difficult. If we can remember the words of Scripture well enough to use them, this is fine, but it is surely better to express ourselves simply and clearly in words of our own which are in accordance with Biblical teaching, than to try to remember Scripture and get our words tangled, or fail to concentrate on what we are actually saying in an effort to remember the wording of Scripture.

Of the three elements of prayer—praise, thanks and petition—the first is where the use of Scripture is easiest. There are many expressions of praise in Scripture which could be used at the opening of our prayers and which are not too difficult to bring to mind.<sup>1</sup> When it comes to thanks, we are to “[give] thanks always for all things unto God and the Father in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ” (Eph. 5:20), and for the most part there is no Scriptural wording in which we can express our thanks. Though we have examples of people giving thanks for food (Mt. 14:19; Acts 27:35), we have no record of what they said. What Scripture does teach very strongly is that we should be thankful in our attitude; complaining and grumbling should have no place in our lives. When we read the epistles of Paul we find there is no complaining about the hardships he had to endure; a spirit of thankfulness pervades all he said and did. It is this that makes our thanks Scriptural, rather than the actual words we use.

When it comes to petitions, then whether we can use Scripture depends on what we are praying for. The basic things we should ask for in

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1. For examples see Table 2 in [“Praise and thanksgiving”](#) (p. 172).

prayer are to found in the Lord's Prayer, and we could just use its wording in our prayers. However, most of us probably prefer to expand on the very brief wording of this prayer, especially in our private prayers, where we might wish to relate the various petitions to our own circumstances. Beyond these basic elements of prayer, there will be other things we wish to pray for, the needs of others, for example, and Scripture will not always give us the exact words in which to express such prayers.

### **Repetition in prayer**

One area of concern to us might be that of tending to say the same things all the time in our prayers. Did not Jesus condemn "vain repetitions"? He certainly did, but if we consider what he said we shall realise that what he is condemning is different from anything that we practise. His words are: "But when ye pray, use not vain repetitions, as the heathen do: for they think that they shall be heard for their much speaking" (Mt. 6:7). He is clearly referring to the kind of prayers offered by the Baal worshippers on Mount Carmel, when they chanted over and over again, "O Baal, answer us" (1 Kgs. 18:26, mg.). Such praying is practised by Roman Catholics today, with the repetition, for example, of the 'Hail Mary' prayer many times supposedly being of special merit.

Another form of 'vain repetition' is the reciting of set prayers at set times, as is practised by Muslims, who are expected to pray at five set times a day using set words. Similarly, Jews and various churches of Christendom have set prayers to be recited on particular occasions. It is difficult to understand what those who pray like this think is the benefit of such prayers.

We do not, of course, need to say the same thing more than once in a prayer, for God hears everything the first time. Moreover, He will judge the acceptability of a prayer by the sincerity in which it is uttered and the appropriateness of its sentiments, not the number of times it is said. However, we thank God for the same things time and time again, and likewise ask Him for the same things time and time again, and we are bound to use the same or similar wording. If repetition does not impress the Almighty, neither will mere novelty of speech. Where repetition becomes a problem is where we use the same words each time we pray without really thinking of their meaning, and this is something to beware of in our daily prayers.

### **The use of 'Amen'**

All our public prayers are concluded with the word 'Amen', and presumably it is the practice of readers to end their private prayers the same way. Why do we do this? God does not need to be told that we are concluding the prayer at that point, and, though it is useful in public prayer to know when the brother praying has finished so that we can sit down, this is, of course, not the purpose of saying it.

'Amen' is a Hebrew word carried forward into the New Testament and then into the English language. In the Old Testament it appears as 'Amen' twenty-seven times, and is translated 'so be it' once and 'truth' twice. In the New Testament it appears as 'Amen' fifty times, and is translated 'verily' a hundred times. It is closely linked with Hebrew words for 'faithfulness' and 'truth'. It is often said to mean 'so be it' when attached to a prayer, and this seems reasonable. In 1 Chronicles 16:36, the people said "Amen" at the end of David's psalm of praise at the bringing up of the ark to Jerusalem, indicating their assent to what was said. From 1 Corinthians 14:16 we gain the idea that in the ecclesia at Corinth it was customary to "say the Amen at [the] giving of thanks" (RV).

Unlike in Biblical times, however, it is not our general practice for congregations to say 'Amen' out loud at the conclusion of a public prayer, though Biblical practice indicates that perhaps it should be said. We should at least say 'Amen' to ourselves, to indicate our assent to what has been said.

### **When should we pray?**

One of the great privileges which we have through the work of the Lord Jesus Christ is that we can approach God at any time in His Name. There are therefore no set times for prayers. It seems to have been the practice in Old Testament times to pray three times a day, morning, midday and evening (Ps. 55:17; Dan. 6:10), and this was still the practice in New Testament times (Acts 3:1; 10:9). Paul, however, says: "Pray without ceasing" (1 Thess. 5:17).

When Paul urges us to "Pray without ceasing", he does not mean that we should spend all our time praying, but that we should live lives of prayer, never giving up praying, always being ready to pray. Though there is no obligation on us to pray at any fixed time, most, if not all, readers of these words will pray each night when they go to bed and many will also do so at the

beginning of the day. Few, I would think, pray regularly in the middle of the day, though this might be a good discipline, especially for those whose daily tasks take them away from the things of God.

These regular habits of prayer are a necessary discipline for us, as long as our prayers are not mere recitations of fixed forms of words with little thought given to what we are saying. The best time to pray is when we have the time to devote ourselves properly to it and the ability to concentrate on what we are doing, and this must be a matter of individual choice.

Prayer for the faithful has surely never been limited to fixed occasions; Nehemiah's quick, brief prayer at a moment of opportunity is a prime example of prayer being offered in particular circumstances (Neh. 2:4). This is something we can all do, but probably do not as much as we could and should, because we are not sufficiently prayer-minded. A quick prayer might be appropriate, for example, before setting out on a journey, before entering a situation which might be difficult, when tempted to do wrong, or when we become aware of the needs of others. Being unable to sleep might be an opportunity for prayer, not just for our own needs but for those of others also.

#### **The posture of prayer**

There are examples in Scripture of prayer being offered in various different postures:

- standing (Lk. 18:11,13)
- sitting (2 Sam. 7:18)
- prostrate (Ezek. 9:8)
- kneeling (Eph. 3:14)
- with uplifted hands (1 Kgs. 8:22).

This indicates that there is no standard posture for prayer. Our normal practice for public prayer is, of course, to stand (though in some ecclesias it is customary to remain seated when thanks are offered for the bread and wine), and there is no reason to change this practice.

When it comes to private prayer, then we have to bear in mind two things. We should not be so comfortable that we fall asleep in our prayers, but we should not be so uncomfortable that we curtail our prayers.

#### **Prayer to Jesus Christ**

The matter of whether it is appropriate to offer prayer to Jesus Christ is one that has exercised the Brotherhood in recent years. As pointed out in the article, [“The basis of prayer”](#) (p. 145), the

Biblical basis for prayer is that it should be offered to God through Jesus Christ.

It is sometimes argued that, because people petitioned Jesus during his ministry, it is right to do so now; but our present situation cannot be equated with one where people were addressing him face to face. In the Acts of the Apostles there are various occasions where Jesus Christ is addressed directly, and, though sometimes this is because he is there in vision, this is not always the case. However, such prayers were offered by apostles who were under the control and direction of Christ in their ministry. They received direct communication from him at times, which we do not, and petitioned him directly, which we should not. We occasionally have expressions such as, “Even so, come, Lord Jesus” (Rev. 22:20), but an expression of desire for his coming is not the same as a petition that he should come.

It is sometimes said that as God and Christ can both hear our prayers then it does not matter to whom we address them. However, this is not the issue; it is a matter of whom it is appropriate for us to petition. Furthermore, there seems to be no good reason to address petitions to Christ rather than God; after all, we surely cannot suppose that we shall get a more favourable answer that way.

However, it depends on what is meant by prayer when we ask if it is appropriate to address prayer to Christ. What we have said above covers petitions—praying for things—not praise and thanksgiving. God is the provider of all things, including salvation from sin and death through His Son, and our praise and thanks should predominately be addressed to him. However, we shall praise the Lord Jesus Christ in the Kingdom, and he is just as worthy of that praise now, so it is surely appropriate that we should do so now, and so we do in our hymns and anthems. And surely it is acceptable to God, and indeed right, that we should thank Jesus in our personal prayers for all he has done for us.

#### **Concentrating in our prayers**

We all battle against the weaknesses of the flesh, and many of our failures stem from lack of concentration on the right things. I am sure all who read this are conscious of this in their own prayers, and in the public prayers they participate in.

Regarding public prayer, those who pray on behalf of the congregation can help the rest to concentrate by being relevant and using simple,

straightforward language. For listeners who find their minds wandering in public prayers, I pass on a piece of advice which I came across once, to break the prayer down in one's mind into sections, and say 'Amen' to oneself after each.

Regarding concentration in private prayer, this is likely to depend on one's state of mind when praying. Saying our prayers when the mind is racing with other things is not a good idea, and a degree of relaxation is advisable first, though not to the extent that we fall asleep. If our minds are full of personal worries, or concerns for others, then we can channel these to become part of our prayers, but if they are full of something

exciting we have just watched on television then some reassessment of when we pray and what we do with our time is surely appropriate.

In the New Testament, prayer is sometimes linked with fasting (Mt. 17:21; Acts 14:23). This is said to be an aid to concentration, and appropriate to times when circumstances demand more intense prayer than usual. The danger in fasting is that it might engender pride, and the teaching of Jesus is that anyone who chooses to fast should give no indication that this is so to others. For this reason it is unlikely that we shall be aware of whether or not it is practised in our community.

## What should we pray for?

Jim Wood

*This article will address what we should ask for in our prayers. It is written with an appreciation that prayer is not just asking for things, and that other articles will deal with other essential aspects of prayer such as the expressing of praise, fear and honour.*

*It will concentrate on those things that we might ask for which affect our material, physical and spiritual lives. It will attempt an analysis of the Lord's Prayer so that we have a basis for answering this question: What should we pray for?*

*In its treatment of the motive behind our prayers it is appreciated that such matters are often complex, and that the motives we have chosen to explore are not necessarily the only ones that there may be. Those chosen were chosen so that the application of the principles might be examined, and the reader is left to examine others as appropriate to his or her own situation.*

*It seeks not to presume to dictate what God ought to be concerned with, but attempts to understand how we, whose thoughts are not His thoughts, might determine what God will be pleased to hear and be prepared to respond to.*

“**L**ORD, TEACH us to pray”, was the request addressed to Jesus by one of the assembled disciples (Lk. 11:1). What did he mean? What was he asking? Was it an en-

quiry about manner and mode of prayer? Or was the interest at this time about the content, the subject of prayer? From the answer Jesus gave to the disciples (vv. 2-4) it would appear to be the latter.

How should we view this prayer, which we call the Lord's Prayer, that Jesus gave in answer to the query?

- Should it be taken as indicating that the topics mentioned are the only things that we should pray for?
- Do the general statements indicate that we should never include details, that we should never mention particular personal problems and we should not express our desires for specified people?
- Does the brevity suggest that prayer is of minor importance?
- Does the absence of any specific reference to the offering of thanks mean that God takes our gratitude for granted and that there is no need for prayerful reinforcement?

We need look only at the Lord Jesus himself at prayer to draw the conclusion that the answer to each of these questions is 'No'.

For example, dealing with these points in order:

- John records that just before Jesus went with his disciples “over the brook Cedron, where was a garden” (Jno. 18:1), he “lifted up his eyes to heaven” (17:1) and prayed for those who in the future would come to be his followers, “for them . . . which shall believe on