

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?

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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

me" (v. 20), and for their unity (v. 22) and love (v. 26).

- After the final meeting with his disciples in the upper room Jesus turned to Simon and said: "I have prayed for thee, that thy faith fail not" (Lk. 22:32).
- Not all Christ's prayers were as short as this. Just prior to his choosing the twelve apostles the record says: "he went out into a mountain to pray, and continued all night in prayer to God" (6:12).
- Amongst the occasions when the Son offered thanks to the Father was at the raising of Lazarus, when Jesus said: "I thank Thee that Thou hast heard me . . . I knew that Thou hearest me always" (Jno. 11:41,42).

Jesus prays for things other than those mentioned in his model prayer. He prays for individuals. Sometimes he spent many hours in prayer, and his prayers included the giving of thanks. So the answer to each question is, No. That same conclusion would be reinforced by a consideration of the prayers of others, too, as will be seen in the contributions to be found in this Special Issue.

Perhaps, then, the prayer Jesus proposed contained the essence of prayer; and the essence consists of two ingredients: God's purpose, and the means whereby disciples might be involved in its development and in its climax. Here are the two main themes of all prayerful petition.

The hierarchy of petition

Jesus once said that on two commandments "hang all the law and the prophets" (Mt. 22:40). These were, first, "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind" (v. 37), and, second, "Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself" (v. 39). All other commandments issue from these and provide the much needed detail associated with the everyday application of them. It is as though there were two major headings in a compilation of commandments, and under these headings all others could be classified. Then there may be further subdivision of each entry under these headings. Each specific commandment could then be seen as a partial fulfilment of the "first" or "second" commandment.

Perhaps, in similar manner, in the Lord's Prayer there is demonstrated a hierarchy for petitions. The first petition, "Thy kingdom come", reflects the crowning stage in God's purpose, the establishment of His perfect Kingdom on earth.

By placing it first, the one praying indicates that his or her premier desire is in tune with this. Here is the first ingredient in the essence of the petitions of our prayers.

Such emphasis on the Kingdom is reflected, among other things, in these facts:

- the preaching of John the Baptist focused on the coming *Kingdom* (Mt. 3:2)
- at the start of his ministry Jesus "began to preach, and to say, Repent: for the *kingdom of heaven* is at hand" (4:17)
- in the Sermon on the Mount Jesus declared: "seek ye first the *kingdom of God*" (6:33)
- his speaking with the apostles after his resurrection was centred in "the *kingdom of God*" (Acts 1:3).

The Kingdom is at the centre of God's plan, fundamental to His purpose. It is the climax of His desire. It is that to which He is working and it should be that to which our desires are directed first and foremost. The first petition in the Lord's Prayer is therefore: "Thy kingdom come". It stands as the first great petition.

The second petition is: "Thy will be done". This is not a request that the will of God will be done in the fully instituted Kingdom; it will, of that there is no doubt. God will then "be all in all" (1 Cor. 15:28). This must be a petition that, in the days that are now, God's will might be done, so that speedily the conditions for the Lord's return will be upon us. The ultimate desire is that the Kingdom will be set up. We pray that, as a necessary precursor to that, His will be done to bring about the right conditions for its establishment. This is a petition subordinate to but associated with the first great petition.

The next petition shifts the emphasis to the disciple. It is that God will provide our daily bread. Without that provision there would be no living disciple. With that provision of natural and spiritual food we might then be in a position to participate, to be involved and to contribute, according to the desire of our heavenly Father, to the accomplishing of the conditions that herald Christ's return. This is the second great petition.

Having been strengthened and sustained by the daily bread, the disciple's next petitions concern those matters which must be attended to so that our lives might be acceptable to God. For life to be sustained is the first step. Once that is granted, the next level, as it were, might be considered, and petitions presented referring to the aims and characteristics of that life.

The categories of commandments	
The first great commandment	The second great commandment
"Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind" (Mt. 22:37)	"Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself" (Mt. 22:39)
Examples: "Thou shalt have no other gods before Me" (Ex. 20:3) "Thou shalt not take the name of the LORD thy God in vain" (v. 7)	Examples: "Thou shalt not bear false witness against thy neighbour" (Ex. 20:16) "Thou shalt not covet . . . any thing that is thy neighbour's" (v. 17)

If such an analysis of the Lord's Prayer be upholden then it provides assistance in deciding what we ought to pray for; what God wishes to hear; whether He is interested in specifics and willing to consider the minutiae of everyday life. The conclusion of the analysis would be that God would wish to be approached by His children on any matter which has a bearing on, first, the establishment of His Kingdom, and, second, His children's preparation for and contribution to its establishment. Where the particular petition might be in the hierarchy of petitions, whether it is a major or minor issue, does not affect its acceptability or legitimacy. In the prayers of a thoughtful disciple there will be a well-balanced choice from both principal petitions, covering the vast range of possible subjects that make up our life in the Truth at all levels.

May we therefore conclude that it is legitimate to pray for anything, major or minor, national or ecclesial, communal or personal, spiritual or physical, specific or general, which has a bearing on the establishment of and the preparation for the Kingdom of God?

The practice

How might this work out in practice? Before we consider some particular illustrations there is another vital facet of our prayer-based petitioning. It concerns the reason for our requests, the motive behind the desires. Why are we seeking a particular outcome? What moves us to ask for a particular wish to be granted? Is the request self-centred or God-centred? Rarely are the motive and the subject of our prayers unrelated.

Consider an example. Should we pray for protection, guidance and help during the day, any

day, every day? Perhaps our immediate response would be: Yes, of course we should. Did not Jesus promise that God cares and provides for "the grass, which is to day in the field, and to morrow is cast into the oven"? And consequently, "how much more will He clothe you . . . ?" (Lk. 12:28).

Surely, however, there is a supplementary question that needs to be asked: Why is it we want to be protected, guided and helped? If it is so that we might continue to live our lives aright in the sight of God, witnessing to His gospel and being "an example of the believers" (1 Tim. 4:12), surely the petition will be accepted by God. Could this, however, be said in the case of the one who desires these blessings so that he might waste his "substance with riotous living" (Lk. 15:13) or yield to "the lust of the flesh, and the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life" (1 Jno. 2:16)? The one seeks first and foremost the Kingdom of God, and the other self-gratification. The one has a bearing on preparations for the Kingdom, the other does not.

So, equally important to what we ask for is why we ask for it.

Other examples

The Scriptures speak of prayers being made for the sick (Jas. 5:14,15). When we ourselves are ill and we pray for cure or relief, what lies behind our petition? Is it a desire that we might be restored to a good measure of health and strength so that the quality of life might be such that comfort and leisure are in no short supply? So that we might eat, drink and be merry? So that life is worth living for the fleshly pleasures it brings? Or is it so that we might be permitted a little longer to serve the Lord God, that we might

The patterns of prayer	
The first great petition	The second great petition
"Thy kingdom come" (Mt. 6:10)	"Give us this day our daily bread" (Mt. 6:11)
<p>Examples:</p> <p>"That . . . prayers . . . be made for all men; for kings, and for all that are in authority" (1 Tim. 2:1,2)</p> <p>"Pray for the peace of Jerusalem" (Ps. 122:6)</p>	<p>Examples:</p> <p>"Praying . . . that I may open my mouth boldly, to make known the mystery of the gospel" (Eph. 6:18,19)</p> <p>"The prayer of faith shall save the sick" (Jas. 5:15)</p>

honour and glorify Him or contribute to the spiritual wellbeing of our fellow-man? The latter has relevance to the things of the Kingdom, the other does not.

Should we pray for the safety of journeys to be travelled? Yes, but:

- not so that we might relieve ourselves of the responsibility of due care and attention
- not so that we have one less thing to clutter up our busy lives
- not so that flouting of traffic laws might have no ill consequences;

but rather:

- that injury and incapacity might not hinder an "abounding in the work of the Lord" (1 Cor. 15:58)
- that those near to us might not be distracted in their work in the Lord by worry and anxiety caused by the suffering of others.

What of guidance in seeking promotion in our employment, or for support during assessment and interview? Why do we want promotion or to change employment? Is it so that we might impress, be able to climb the ladder of social standing, to raise our standard of living to match those whom we regard as role models? Or is it so that we might be released from the over-demanding claims of the present position that are choking our spiritual growth?

Why might we seek support during the interview?

- so we might cover up inadequate preparation?
- to shift the responsibility onto God? or
- so we might perform in a manner which contributes to the decision which will be beneficial to our future work in the Truth?

For some of us the path to married life does not take the direction we might wish. Is the seeking of assistance to find a partner in marriage

something we should pray for? The answer lies again in the reason behind our desire. Is it:

- so that we might not be 'left on the shelf', bearing the stigma of not being wanted or loved?
- so that we might not be haunted by the thought that we are not sufficiently attractive?
- so we may be like the others when everyone else seems to be getting married?

Or is it:

- so that we might find a help meet for us to share the difficulties of progressing in the things of the Truth?
- so that, as a couple, we might reflect the ideals of the marriage of the Messiah to the bride, and in that way others might be profitably influenced?
- so that we might, as a unit, apply our talents more productively to the matters of the ecclesia and the Brotherhood than if we were single?

What about the situation of seeking a change of house, a new place of abode? Why do we want to move? Is it so that we might:

- get a more impressive house in a desirable location?
- be seen to be successful, living according to (or beyond) our means?
- fit in more with those with whom we share our working hours?

Or is it:

- to ease the burden of overcrowding which is inflaming tempers and not leading to harmonious Christlike living?
- so that we might become a lightstand in a location hitherto not illuminated by "the light of the world" (Mt. 5:14)?
- to support an ecclesia desperate for assistance?

- so that we might care for the aged, “the fatherless and widows in their affliction” (Jas. 1:27)?
- so we might be “given to hospitality” (1 Tim. 3:2) and be a means of directing the young who are in danger of losing their way?

Such examples are but a random selection from the myriad that might call for contemplation. In each case there may be “a way which seemeth right unto a man” (Prov. 14:12) and there is “the way of the LORD” (10:29). In each case the petitioning can be based upon the “fleshly mind” (Col. 2:18), minding “the things of the flesh” (Rom. 8:5), or upon “the Spirit of Christ” (v. 9), being “led by the Spirit of God” (v. 14). It is the challenge continually before us to “walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit” (v. 4), so that we might increasingly engage in ever more acceptable and effectual prayer.

The example of Paul

The New Testament Epistles give us a small insight into the subject of Paul’s prayers. It is possible to identify at least twenty-five examples of what Paul prayed for. A consideration of a selection of these will give us an opportunity to see the motives and aims that lay behind what he sought for in prayer.

Paul prayed that he “might have a prosperous journey . . . to come” unto his contacts at Rome (Rom. 1:10). Why? To spend a while in idle relaxation and as their friend enjoy the sights and sounds of Rome? No; rather, “that I may impart unto you some spiritual gift, to the end ye may be established . . . that I may be comforted together with you by the mutual faith both of you and me” (vv. 11,12).

Later in the epistle he expresses his desire that there be a unity among them: “Now the God of patience and consolation grant you to be likeminded one toward another” (15:5). This was not so there might be a convivial spirit amongst them, but “that ye may with one mind and one mouth glorify God, even the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ” (v. 6).

To the Ephesians he wrote: “I . . . cease not to give thanks for you, making mention of you in my prayers” (1:15,16); not for riches or political influence, not for their social and material well-being, but for their spiritual progress. It was so “that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give unto you the spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of Him: the eyes of your understanding being enlight-

ened; that ye may know what is the hope of His calling, and what the riches of the glory of His inheritance in the saints, and what is the exceeding greatness of His power to us-ward who believe” (vv. 17-19).

Writing to Timothy, Paul encourages the most wide-ranging of prayers: “I exhort therefore, that, first of all, supplications, prayers, intercessions, and giving of thanks, be made for all men”; and to this he adds: “for kings, and for all that are in authority” (1 Tim. 2:1,2). A well-organised society, a fairly managed economy, and an equitably administered justice system, should lead to “a quiet and peaceable life” (v. 2) for the majority. Paul has more in mind, however, than a tranquil general populace absorbed in their own interests. The “quiet and peaceable life” is qualified: “in all godliness and honesty” (v. 2). Again, his concern for the promotion of the disciples’ well-being is to the fore. It is a prayer that such conditions might exist as will allow them to develop and manifest a devout and dutiful reverence to the Almighty and an honest separation and dedication to His cause: “a proper sense of God and of our responsibility to Him for what we do with our lives” (v. 2, JBP).

Paul’s expressed concern for his brethren and sisters is seen to be, not primarily their wellbeing in things to do with personal comfort and ease, but their wellbeing in things to do with faith and love and hope in the Lord.

Praying as we ought

There are times when we might be in situations where there is more than one solution to our problem, more than one way of coping with the situation. For example, there are trends in the interrelationships of the sexes that often come to our attention through the media nowadays, where behaviour is condoned or strongly encouraged which is in opposition to Scripturally based teaching. What is our response? Are we to take up an enthusiastic confrontational stance, or quietly and firmly state the Scriptural standards and then withdraw from what might become “foolish and unlearned questions” (2 Tim. 2:23) with the possibility of bringing into disrepute the Word of God? What are we to pray for? The strength to contend or the wisdom to keep silence?

We cannot see into the future. We cannot fore-know the effect of these options available to us. We might not be able to appreciate the broader canvas and know the ramifications each action

might have, nor whether they would be beneficial or damaging to others. In such cases we might feel “we do not know how to pray as we ought” (Rom. 8:26, RSV).

Our response should not be, ‘We will not pray because we know not what to pray for’, but rather to pray in our weakness, drawing on those reserves of a Christlike spirit which have become part of our inner self because we have imbibed the mind of Christ from his example and the Word. Our prayers may be inarticulate, disjointed, conveying the impression of inadequacy and ignorance, but “he that searcheth the hearts knoweth what is the mind of the Spirit, because he maketh intercession for the saints according to the will of God” (v. 27).

He who was a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart is able to combine the “groanings which cannot be uttered” (v. 26) with the spirit that is within those who “love God” (v. 28) to present in acceptable form the otherwise inadequate prayers. It is an acknowledgement of our limited knowledge, understanding and wisdom when we qualify all our petitions with the desire that their granting be subject to the will of our God.

Persistence in prayer

Jesus warned his disciples against “vain repetitions” in their prayers (Mt. 6:7), the heaping up of empty phrases, but would he say that of the prayer repeatedly presented for the same thing but which is each time carefully, thoughtfully and differently phrased? Did he not give a parable “that men ought always to pray, and not to

faint” (Lk. 18:1), which concerned a woman who “by her continual coming” (v. 5) elicited the response she desired from the judge? The Lord’s conclusion was couched in these words: “shall not God avenge His own elect, which cry day and night unto Him, though He bear long with them?” (v. 7). It would appear that persistence in praying for the same thing is not discouraged. It is for the disciple to try to achieve the right balance between persistence and fervour, and to try to appreciate when God has given an answer which may not be the one we were hoping for.

So what should we pray for?

The Lord knows what we need before we ask, so it is a case of trying to appreciate our needs from His point of view. His desire is that all “the earth [should] be filled with the knowledge of the glory of the LORD, as the waters cover the sea” (Hab. 2:14). As His children, and, by His grace, as participants in that vision, we need the establishment of His Kingdom, the opportunities to make ourselves worthy and the forgiveness of our sins. What we ask for, and why, mirrors the level of our appreciation of the involvement of God in our lives, what we regard as the most important things in our life, and to what degree “the inner man” (Eph. 3:16) has taken on the characteristics of the one who “hath done all things well” (Mk. 7:37). The more we develop the mind “which was also in Christ Jesus” (Phil. 2:5), the more our prayers will consist of petitions right and proper, pleasing and acceptable, and the less we will be troubled by the thoughts of inadequacy and relevance of the petitions in our prayers.

Prayer is essentially an expression of faith. “He that cometh unto God must believe that He is, and that He is a rewarder of them that diligently seek Him” (Heb. 11:6). It must be presented in confidence that God has the ability to perform what is requested. “Let him ask in faith, nothing wavering; for he that wavereth is like a wave of the sea driven with the wind and tossed. Let not that man think that he shall receive anything of the Lord” (James 1:5-7) . . . The Lord taught “that men ought always to pray and not faint” (Luke 18:1). Paul exhorted . . . “pray always” (Eph. 6:18), “pray without ceasing” (1 Thess. 5:17). Faith will maintain prayers even in times when no answer is heard, and delay causes the heart to sicken. In such times there is inexpressible peace in “rolling your burden on to Yahweh”, in placing your problems into His hands, in learning to “wait upon Him”, in “standing still to see the salvation of Yahweh”. The Lord taught that the prayer of faith will be effective. He declared: “All things, whatsoever ye shall ask in prayer, believing, ye shall receive” (Matt. 21:22). But the “all things” referred to are those requested “in the name of the Lord Jesus” or those things that are according to his will and purpose. Thus: “This is the confidence that we have in him, that, if we ask anything *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).

H. P. Mansfield, *Making Prayer Powerful*