



PRAYING FOR OUR NEEDS AND THE NEEDS OF OTHERS

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When we pray—especially when we pray for our needs or the needs of others—we take great comfort in the fact that God has not lost control of the universe. He is not shocked or taken off guard by what has happened. He will not be manipulated by our situations; he will not be moved by our demands.

God declares “the end from the beginning and from ancient times things not yet done.” His counsel will stand and he will accomplish all his purposes (Isaiah 46:10). Not only has he written the beginning and end of the story, he has written every single word including all the details in between.

And he didn’t write himself out of the story. He has been and still is and forever will be involved in human history. He has been and still is and forever will be involved with us. Even more, he involves us in the working out of this plan. And one of the ways he involves us is through prayer. So, though God’s plan is set and will not change, one of the ways he accomplishes that plan is through our prayers (one of the things some theologians call “secondary causes”).

In his helpful little book on prayer called *Pray With Your Eyes Open*, Richard Pratt writes:

Communication with God is our way of tapping into the power of the Lord of the universe. It is something we can use to move history toward its end more effectively and dramatically more than any other human effort. In his sovereignty, God has made prayer a wonderfully powerful means by which we may interact with Him and effectively shape the course of history. When we petition God, we approach Him on the place of his involvement with secondary causes. We seek to change the world by calling on the One who actively orders the world day by day.

So, when we pray, we pray to the God of the Universe—the almighty, unchanging creator and sustainer of all things.

And when we pray, we pray at his invitation: “Call upon me in the day of trouble; I will deliver you, and you shall glorify me” (Psalm 50:15).

And when we pray, we pray in the power that is ours in Christ: “There is one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus” (1 Timothy 2:5).

And when we pray, we pray with his authority and with his confidence: “I write these things to you who believe in the name of the Son of God that you may know that you have eternal life. And this is the confidence that we have toward him, that if we ask anything according to his will he hears us. And if we know that he hears us in whatever we ask, we know that we have the requests that we have asked of him” (1 John 5:13-15).

So, when you pray for your needs or the needs of others, pray with confidence that you are praying at the invitation of God himself, in his power, and with his authority. Pray with the desire to see change. But also pray with a humble expectation, trusting ultimately in God's goodness, his control of the situation, and his love and care for your and others that far exceeds anything we could hope, provide, or imagine.

A Helpful Pattern for Prayer

One of the ways many of Jesus' followers have found it helpful to organize their prayers is around the acrostic ACTS. "A" stands for adoration. "C" stands for confession. "T" stands for thanksgiving. And "S" stands for supplication. It isn't the only way to pray. There is no command in the Bible to pray this way. Many, however, have found this to be a helpful way to pray.

Adoration

If you follow the pattern, you will start with adoration. This involves speaking back to God things you know to be true about him.

So, for example, you might pray a prayer of adoration as follows:

Lord, you have been our dwelling place in all generations. Before the mountains were brought forth or ever you had formed the earth and the world, from everlasting to everlasting you are God. (Psalm 90:1-2)

You hold in your hands the power of life and death. And that is an awesome thing to be feared. (Based on Psalm 90:3-11)

But even in that fear, we also know that those who dwell in the shelter of the Most High will abide in the shadow of the Almighty. Therefore, we will say to you, Lord, "My refuge and my fortress, my God, in whom I trust."

For you will deliver us from the snare of the fowler and from the deadly pestilence. You will cover us with your pinions, and under your wings we will find refuge; your faithfulness is a shield and buckler. We will not fear the terror of the night, nor the arrow that flies by day, nor the pestilence that stalks in darkness, nor the destruction that wastes at noonday. (Psalm 91:1-6)

O, where shall we go from your Spirit? Or where shall we flee from your presence? If we ascend to heaven, you are there! If we make my bed in Sheol, you are there! If we take the wings of the morning and dwell in the uttermost parts of the sea, even there your hand shall lead each one of us, and your right hand shall hold us.

If we say, "Surely the darkness shall cover me, and the light about me be night," even the darkness is not dark to you; the night is bright as the day and for the darkness is as light with you (Psalm 139:7-12). For you, O God, brings light to our darkness. (Psalm 18:28)

We love you, O Lord. You are our strength. You are our rock and our fortress and our deliver, our God, our rock, in whom we take refuge, our shield, and the horn of our salvation, our stronghold. (Psalm 18:1-2)

Prayer of adoration should encourage your faith and give you confidence in who God is and what he can do. It should also help shape your future prayers. For it helps remind you the greatness of the God you are praying to, it reminds you of his involvement with you, and it reminds you of his ability to act in response to your prayers.

Confession

From there, after you consider who God is, it should cause you to consider who are and how you are not like him. That is, as you consider God's greatness, it should remind you of the ways you haven't trusted in that greatness or have sought to make up for the places you thought God might be lacking by your faithless actions.

This should very naturally lead you to confession. Tell God the specific places you haven't trusted in him and his promises (through both your thoughts and actions); tell him the places you have disobeyed his laws. Agree with God about what you've done (it was wrong and your sin deserves death). Ask him to change you. And then leave the sin there with him, trusting that if you have looked to Jesus for the forgiveness of your sins, you don't have to bear the penalty for your sins, but instead that penalty was paid by Jesus himself. And confident in the completed and complete work of Christ, leave that sin there with God. Walk away, so to speak, confident in his forgiveness. As the Scriptures promise, "If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness" (1 John 1:9).

So, a prayer of confession might look like this:

Lord, I confess my desire to be in control of this situation. I confess that I want to make this turn out a certain way within a certain time. I confess the demands I've placed on you with regard to my own peace in this situation and the ways I've responded when you didn't act as I demanded.

Lord, this is so wrong. You have promised to never leave me nor forsake me. Jesus, you said I'm not to function out of an anxious spirit, but instead with a great confidence in your care for me and your control over my situation. But the anxiety still comes. The demands still follow the anxiety. And my self-centered actions often come when you don't do what I tell you to do.

Thank you, Jesus, for bearing the full penalty for my sins. By your Spirit bring about the change in my life I so desperately need. Jesus, make me more like you.

Thanksgiving

Then, move to a prayer of thanksgiving: Expressing to God your thankfulness for his past provision.

A prayer of thanksgiving may look like this:

God, thank you for the way you demonstrated your love for me when I was your enemy, by sending Jesus to die for me, so that I could become your child.

Thank you also for the countless ways you've demonstrated that love not only to me and to others. Thank you for the ways you've provided for my needs. Thank you for the ways you've protected me from harm. Thank you for the times you have not treated me as my sins deserved. Thank you, Jesus for coming to earth and dying, so that the darkness we all are feeling won't be the end of the day. Thank you God for raising Jesus from the dead, so that he, as the light of the world, will shine in the darkness and has overcome the darkness, forever.

Supplication

And then move to prayers of supplication. Allow your understanding of who God is and what he has done to encourage your prayers about what you want him to do.

So, a prayer of supplication might look like this:

God, we know you are with us wherever we go and you are with us no matter what we face. Now, Lord, let us feel the reality of your presence with us. Give us the faith to believe that you are with us and for us. And as we understand and believe in your never-ending presence with us, let us experience the peace that comes from you being with us. Let us call out to you in the midst of our trouble. And in the midst of our darkest nights, let us experience your peace, which is beyond all understanding. Let that peace guard our hearts and minds in Christ Jesus.

Jesus, we know that you called the weary and burdened to yourself and you, as Lord of the Sabbath, promised them rest. Jesus, allow us to come to you and find rest in you for our weary and troubled souls.

Jesus, we know that one day you will return and make everything right. We know that when you return, God will wipe away every tear from our eyes—forever. We know that when you return, things like sickness, sorrow, pain, and death will be felt and feared no more. And so, we ask you to come quickly. We ask you to speed the day of your return. We ask you to come quickly and make all things new.