

PRAYER IN DAILY LIFE

We've witnessed throughout the entirety of the Bible how great a treasure the gift of prayer is. The opportunity we have to speak with our heavenly Father is something that we should lean into during all of the moments of our life. Whether alone, with your children, or gathered together with fellow believers, prayer is an integral part of all of our relationships. In this section, we'll apply what we have learned from Scripture to the many different aspects of our walk of faith.

PERSONAL (PRIVATE) PRAYER

From the very beginning with Adam and Eve, God gave special attributes to human beings, and thereby created a means by which they could develop and deepen their personal relationship with Him. After the fall into sin, face-to-face communication was not possible, but God's desire to have an intimate relationship with humankind did not change.

Not only is prayer a way for us to communicate with God, but through prayer we also gain understanding and insight into the nature and being of God; in particular His love, grace, and presence in our lives. In these ways prayer becomes a cornerstone of our personal relationship with Him.

WHY SPEND TIME ALONE IN PRAYER?

As Christians, and with the busyness of life that so easily consumes our time and focus, it's necessary that we consider the importance of spending time *alone* with God in prayer. The more we understand why we should pray alone with God, the more likely it is that we'll feel compelled to spend significant time doing so. Let's look at Matthew 6:6:

Our prayers testify
of our priorities

...when you pray, go into your room, and when you have shut your door, pray to your Father who is in the secret place; and your Father who sees in secret will reward you openly.

Christ makes it clear here that solitude and prayer belong together if we desire to build our relationship with God. Christ also *showed* the importance of private prayer in His own life. On many occasions, He withdrew to quiet places so that He could spend time alone with His Father. Although He was both true God and true Man, this communication was of utmost importance to Him.

If this spiritual discipline was important to Christ, our Lord and Savior, it should also be important to us. Christ's prayers sustained Him through the challenges of His life on earth and enabled Him to fulfill His calling.

Paul also stressed the necessity of personal prayer on several occasions. In Romans 12:12, he tells the people that they should be *continuing steadfastly in prayer*. In addition, in Philippians 4:6, he says: *Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known to God*. The Bible continuously reminds us of the value of personal prayer. When we pray, we show our devotion to God. When we choose to spend the precious resource of our time with Him, we show Him how much we love Him and how much He means to us. Our prayers testify of our priorities.

HOW AND WHEN SHOULD WE PRAY?

In James 4:10, it says that we are to *humble ourselves before the Lord*. When we pray to God, we should do so with reverence and humility. We recognize the value and worth of our Lord – who He is and all that He's done – and the riches we so freely receive from Him. We also recognize that our ability to connect with God is a gift from Him.

Our Catechism states that prayer is not bound to any external physical form. While the intensity and fervency of our prayers can be increased by closing our eyes, folding our hands, and kneeling, these components are not necessary for every prayer. Often, words don't even need to be spoken aloud – all expressions from a fervent, humble heart find their way to God. Prayer can be much less complicated than we often times make it.



SOLITUDE AND SILENCE

...but the Lord was not in the wind...the Lord was not in the earthquake...[and] the Lord was not in the fire; and after the fire, a still small voice. 1 Kings 19:1-19

This Bible verse is taken from the account of Elijah going into the wilderness and up to Mount Horeb to experience the presence of God. But, Elijah is not the only example of solitude and silence in the Bible. In the New Testament, we often read of Jesus going off by Himself to pray and seek God's guidance (Matthew 14:23, Mark 6:46, Luke 6:12, Mark 1:35, Luke 5:16).

Solitude and silence, like all other disciplines, don't require more of our time – they require intention and practice. To practice solitude is *to choose to be alone and do nothing*, to give up accomplishment. And silence completes it. Until we enter quietness, the world around us still commands our attention and distracts us.

In solitude, we are free from human demands and can focus on God, in whom we want to *live, move, and have our being* (Acts 17:28). We have to let go. Psalm 46:10 reads, *Be still and know that I am God...* The Hebrew word for “be still” literally means to “let go of your grip.”

What happens in solitude and silence?

We **notice what is true**. If we return to Elijah in the wilderness, it says that he collapsed under a broom tree and slept. Then an angel woke him and told him to eat, to gain strength for the journey ahead. When God asked Elijah what he was doing in the wilderness, Elijah told God exactly where he was in life – the good, the bad, and the ugly – when he said: *I have been very zealous for the Lord God of hosts; for the children of Israel have forsaken Your covenant, torn down Your altars, and killed your prophets with the sword. I alone am left; and they seek to take my life* (1 Kings 19:10). When we have left behind our distractions and sit in silence, we can see ourselves for who we are. Whether it's gratitude, joy, anger, or grief – noticing and **giving space** to these feelings in the presence of God deepens our relationship with Him.

We can also see the same things happening when we read Psalms. David doesn't hesitate to express his very raw emotions and turmoil to God. But as we continue to read, we see that in these moments, David gains very real strength and comfort from God to carry on. As a shepherd, often alone with his sheep, David spent many moments in solitude and silence, sometimes speaking to his own soul, and perhaps giving himself time and space to develop the many beautiful emotions we read about in Psalms.

God's way of making Himself known to us in such moments is very individual and personal, and perhaps even inexplicable. But as we pray in this way, we learn to recognize His presence and guidance. We come to understand that God's love receives us just as we are.

Solitude and silence **give us perspective**, bringing us back to our Creator. As the Psalmist said, *When I consider Your heavens, the work of your fingers, the moon and the stars, which You have ordained, what is man that You are mindful of him...?* (Psalm 8:3-4). When we focus on the vastness and power of God, we begin to see ourselves in the right way. We begin to notice His hand in our lives. And we can again use the words of the psalmist, *I will praise You, for I am fearfully and wonderfully made; marvelous are Your works, and THAT my soul knows very well* (Psalm 139:14).



In the Parable of the Pharisee and the Tax Collector, Jesus showed that to condemn anybody or to be arrogant is not acceptable, and certainly not in prayer. To have their prayer heard by God, **one needs to approach God humbly**: *"God, be merciful to me a sinner!"* (Luke 18:10-14).

If we began to understand the wonder of every moment of life as a gift from the Almighty, we would begin and end each day with prayer. When we realize that He alone has provided our daily bread, we would always start every meal with an utterance of thanks to the Lord. Our prayers, however, should not only be confined to these specific moments of the day. David once said of the Lord, *His praise shall continually be on my lips* (Psalm 34:1). What a noble and worthwhile goal, that the praise of God be continually on our lips, whether in prayer or conversation.

At the beginning of the Parable of the Persistent Widow, Christ says that *men always ought to pray and not lose heart* (Luke 18:1). The lesson of this parable is that we are to be persistent in our communication with God. Over and over in the Bible, we're reminded that prayer should be something we do regularly and intensely. Paul admonishes the Thessalonians to *pray without ceasing* (1 Thessalonians 5:17). We could even understand prayer to be an ongoing conversation with God throughout the day.

THE CONTENT OF OUR PERSONAL PRAYERS

Finally, if we are to experience God when we pray, it's also important that we consider the content of our prayers. What should our prayers consist of? Thankfully, the Bible presents us many indications, as have been discussed. Psalm 95:6 teaches, *Oh come, let us worship*. Psalm 106:1 gives the instruction, *Oh, give thanks to the Lord, for He is good! For His mercy endures forever*. In Numbers 21:7, we read how Moses interceded for the people. And in Psalm 51:10-12, David gives us an example of how to make our requests before God, and what to request from Him.

In terms of content, prayer is generally defined by **worship, thanksgiving, intercessions, and petitions**.

It is always appropriate for our prayers to begin with **worship** and adoration, as God is the only One worthy of this. When we take the time to discuss with God who He is, all-powerful, all-knowing, and ever-present, our perspective begins to change. The One to whom we pray can do anything. He isn't just loving, He *is* love. He knows us and every detail of our lives, thoughts, and feelings, and He is always at our side. The more we ponder and experience His nature and characteristics, the more we realize that He is worthy of worship and praise. As we do this, we come to realize it is not necessary to explain every detail to Him or tell Him what to do and when. We can understand that we do not need to recount biblical stories to God because He is omniscient and knows them much better than we do. Instead, we have learned from our study that relating to God the wonders of His hand in our own lives shows that we have remembered and valued His goodness.

And so, we bring **thanks**. This is an extension of our worship. The more we realize all that God is, the more likely we are to then ponder all that He has done because of who He is. We acknowledge that His greatness and glory has repeatedly had an impact on us, and that it is from Him that all of our countless blessings flow.

This is beautifully expressed in the hymn, *Now Thank We All Our God*:

*Now thank we all our God,
with hearts and hands and voices,
Who wondrous things has done,
in Whom this world rejoices;
Who from our mothers' arms has blessed us on our way,
With countless gifts of love, and still is ours today.*

Through thanksgiving, the intimacy and personal nature of our relationship with God becomes very clear. He is the One who is directing our steps, and He is the source of all that we have.

We want to **intercede** in order to fulfill Jesus' teaching to love others as He has loved us (John 13:34). We follow the example of our Lord Jesus and put the needs of others before our own.

It's important that we realize that our prayers are a testament to our love, care, and concern for others. Jesus' Parable of the Sheep and the Goats shows clearly the importance of caring for others (Matthew 25:31-46). Before we can help others physically, we can often **start** by interceding for them in prayer. We develop a genuine concern for our brothers and sisters; intercessory prayer is just one manifestation of these feelings.

Finally, as we bring our **personal petitions** before the Lord, our perspective should be greatly changed. We recognize that God can help us and already has. Even though we may petition for things such as the preservation of our faith, protection, divine help, and the imminent return of Christ, we know that we don't need to bring every single petition of ours to the Lord.

**At times, just
walking through
God's creation and
expressing our
thoughts to Him can
allow us to experience
His presence in a
wonderful way.**



He already knows our hearts, and He is fully aware of all that we need, as Jesus taught in Matthew 6:8. Through prayer, we can show God that we place more value on fellowship with Him than on the things that we receive from Him.

It's also important for us to recognize that God is not obligated to **answer** our prayers. Consider what the psalmist wrote in Psalm 135:6 – *Whatever the Lord pleases He does, in heaven and in earth, in the seas and in all deep places*. In response to this Bible text, Chief Apostle Schneider stated: “We cannot impose our will on God through our prayers and offerings. Our prayers are inspired by those of Jesus Christ” (Canada – August 2019).

He further said: “We do not believe that God will give us everything we ask of Him. Nor do we believe that we can force God to do anything. We ask Him, and sometimes He gives us what we request, and sometimes He does not. But we trust His love... we can be sure that God will keep His promises” (Toronto, Canada, April 2018).

Not every prayer may contain all four components. God also hears our quick, structure-less prayers. Depression, conditions of anxiety, physical pain, grief, or deep suffering may make it impossible for a person to find the thoughts to formulate a prayer. Even in these cases, the supplicant is not cut off from God's help or nearness. Here we can take comfort from the words of Paul to the Romans:

*Likewise the Spirit also helps in our weaknesses. For we do not know what we should pray for as we ought, but the Spirit Himself makes intercession for us with groanings which cannot be uttered. **Romans 8:26-27***

Consider the prayer of the Lord Jesus on the cross: *Father forgive them for they know not what they do* (Luke 23:34). This was a short prayer, but it was effective because Jesus had a strong relationship with His Father. When we consistently take the time to build our relationship with our Father in regular prayer, we can be assured that He will hear and respond to any heartfelt expression.

In the Catechism, we read, “In prayer, the believer experiences: God is present, God hears, and God answers” (CNAC 13.1). Prayer is an experience with God! All too often, prayer is seen as one-way. However, for prayer to accomplish its purpose, we must understand that it is a conversation. As we talk with God, He communicates with us. God desires to make His presence known, make it evident that He hears and will provide us with answers, *in His time and in accordance with His will*. Thus, it becomes a great blessing to be able to come to Him in prayer.

It's important that we establish a private prayer life where we share our adoration, worship, thankfulness, intercessions, and petitions with our heavenly Father. In our private prayers, we express our souls in a very personal way. In recognition of God's omniscience, we are compelled through prayer to openly express to Him what lives in the depths of our soul. Personal or private prayer certainly does not need to adhere to any particular structure, and it arises from the momentary needs of the individual. It can be spontaneous, impulsive, open, honest, and of any length. When time and heart permit, personal prayers often evolve into a deeper dialogue between the one praying and the triune God.

OUR HEART: A HOUSE OF PRAYER

Then He taught, saying to them, “Is it not written, ‘My house shall be called a house of prayer for all nations’? But you have made it a ‘den of thieves.’” **Mark 11:17**

Jesus purified the temple by removing everything not belonging in a *house of prayer*. We can see the temple as an image of our heart, but also of the Church. Prayer is composed of worship, praise and thanks, petitions, and intercessions (cf. CNC 13.1.5). It is our task to remove everything standing in the way of a veritable prayer – in our own heart or in the congregation.

In order that our adoration is genuine, our heart must be exempt from

- *doubt* – how could we adore God if we doubted His omnipotence and His love?
- *prejudices* – we cannot praise the victory of Christ Jesus and the effectiveness of His sacrifice, and at the same time be intolerant. Instead of focusing on the faults of a sinner, we shall rather see in him a soul which the Lord can and wants to save!



Let us eliminate everything hindering us from bringing thanks:

- *cupidity* (greed or lust) – it brings about dissatisfaction, envy, and jealousy. It is legitimate to aspire to terrestrial riches, but in no way shall they derogate our relation to God!
- *arrogance* – the arrogant person is easily irritated because his merits are not being appreciated and his ideas not applied.

Our petitions have more weight if

- they are *fervent* – do we really fight for our salvation? Here and there, one discovers a tendency to spiritual laziness.
- they come from *united hearts* (cf. Mt 18: 19) – divisions, quarrels, and lacking a willingness to forgive reduce the effectiveness of our prayers.

Let us purify our hearts from all that harms our intercession:

- *egoism* – self-love shall not suffocate the love for the neighbor.
- *resignation* – it is never in vain to pray for one's neighbor.

CHIEF APOSTLE SCHNEIDER

April 2014, Sault Sainte Marie

CORPORATE PRAYER

Public or corporate prayer is distinct from private prayer in form, content, and length. This type of prayer occurs when we pray together with other people in settings like services, small groups, and in our family circles. One person speaks a prayer while everyone else actively listens.

To help listeners remain “actively listening,” the person praying should make their prayer of modest length. When praying in public, we are no longer praying on our own behalf, but for all who are gathered together. Like private prayer, corporate prayer comes from the heart, but the content should be relevant to all who are listening, and allow them to feel the holiness and presence of God. For this reason, it's important to take into account all who are present and to pray in a style that everyone will understand, inspiring all to say, “Amen!”

As we journey through the Bible, we can see how corporate prayer played a role in the lives of God's people.

In the Old Testament, David and Solomon's dedications before and after the building of the temple give us vivid examples of corporate prayers. Ezra epitomized corporate prayer, as he drew the people into his pleading with God in a very real way.