

"I want to be a man of prayer as long as I live!"

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Prayer is "talking to God in faith."¹ "Prayer is the heart's response to God's revelation of himself in his Word, the response to God's invitation to pray, the response to God's promise to answer his believers' prayers for Jesus' sake."² "We should think of prayer as the communication of our need, the affirmation of our dependence upon God, and the celebration of God's power in our lives."³ "Esteem prayer as something great and precious."⁴ "This personal conversing of the Christian with God is called prayer...Prayer has been fittingly compared to the heartbeat of physical life: it never ceases."⁵

There seems to be an endless number of definitions and descriptions of prayer. By combining all the quotes above into one single thought, maybe one could simply say prayer is just what a Christian does. A Christian prays. David was the man after the Lord's own heart. He said he would call on God as long as he lived (Ps 116: 2). By the Holy Spirit's inspiration he contrasted himself with lying and deceitful men by describing himself as "a man of prayer" (Ps 109:4). My new man compels me to say, *"I want to be a man of prayer as long as I live!"*

My Savior was a man of prayer. For him prayer was a habit, a constant way of life. The Scriptures record how he prayed from the first day of his ministry on earth until his last. Luke's Gospel especially stresses this truth. The Holy Spirit descended on Jesus at his baptism "as he was praying" (3:21). Before Jesus chose twelve of his disciples and designated them apostles, he spent an entire night praying to God on a mountainside (6:12). No doubt he was praying for these men, for their upcoming instruction, and for their ministries just three or so years away. Jesus offered his Father a prayer of thanks for five loaves of bread and two fish as 5,000 hungry men watched (9:16). The Father showed Peter, James, and John the glory his Son possessed by changing Jesus' appearance "as he was praying" (9:29). Praying is something Jesus just did

daily. "Jesus often withdrew to lonely places and prayed" (5:16). Jesus' life of prayer made such an impression on the men who accompanied him every day that they asked him to teach them how to pray. So Jesus taught them his own prayer, and he encouraged them to keep praying. His Father was always eager to hear and answer them too (11:1-13).

My Savior prayed earnestly at the most crucial times in his life. The night before he died he prayed and thanked his Father for providing the bread and wine through which his disciples would shortly receive his body and blood. That same night, according to John 17, he prayed for his Father to raise him from the dead four days from then. He asked his Father to protect his chosen apostles from the devil. He prayed that all believers—he was thinking of me too—would see his glory forever.

A short while later he wrestled and pleaded with his Father in the Garden of Gethsemane. There he instructed his disciples to pray that they would not succumb to the devil's temptations that night. Then he withdrew again by himself and prayed his own prayer: "Father, if you are willing, take this cup from me." Sweating and sobbing, he prayed with an intensity that only the God-Man knew. Even while he was wrestling with his Father in anguish, his own human will submitted to his Father's in perfect obedience. "Yet not my will, but yours be done." How important it is to realize that Jesus knew Isaiah 53. He was not submitting to some hidden will of God that was beyond his grasp. He knew his Father's will for him. "It was the Lord's will to crush him and cause him to suffer" as the payment for my sins and the sins of the whole world (Is 53:10). A man of prayer, Jesus prayed for me at this crucial time.

Jesus even prayed on the cross. He prayed Psalm 22. No other portion of Scripture so graphically details Christ's thoughts on the cross. In the first half of the Psalm, verses 1-21, his prayerful thoughts reveal an intense struggle between his spiritual anguish and his implicit trust

in God. He prayed from a heart torn apart by sin and God's ferocious judgment on it. In despair he cried out, "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" He also prayed from a heart that trusted God to deliver him. "O my Strength, come quickly to help me." Finally at his death he prayed from another Psalm. He prayed, "Father, into your hands I commit my spirit" (Ps 31:5).

The Psalms also reveal that the Messiah prayed about his resurrection. He prayed, "I will not die but live, and will proclaim what the LORD has done." After his resurrection, free from sin's guilt and declared innocent, he thanked God. "In my anguish I cried to the LORD, and he answered by setting me free...I will give you thanks, for you answered me; you have become my salvation" (Ps 118: 17, 5, 21).

Jesus prayed without ceasing. He gave thanks in all circumstances. He was a perfect man of prayer. He combined his praying with doing. His living, his praying, his dying and his rising again have become my rescue from my sins.

Now I want to be a man of prayer. I want to pray because prayer is a privilege won for me and for all believers by Christ. God did not hear the prayers of Israelites who refused to acknowledge their sins and seek his forgiveness: "When I called, they did not listen; so when they called, I would not listen" (Zech 7:13). As fervent and frantic as an unbeliever's prayers may be, God does not hear them. Sin separates a person's voice from God's ears. Only a baptized child of God, on whom the Holy Spirit has been generously poured out, can shout, "Abba, Father!" The passage, "I no longer live, but Christ lives in me" (Gal 2:20), applies also to my desire to pray. Christ lives in me, and I want to live and pray as he did. Pieper wrote, "Let us always bear in mind that according to the teaching of Scripture the Christians are doing exactly what Christ does."⁶

I want to pray because God promises to hear and answer my prayers. I have Jesus' word on it. *kai/panta o#a an aic#shte e0th#proseuxh#pisteubntej I hmyesqe.* "All things you ask in prayer you will receive by believing" (Mt. 21:22). Faith hears God's promise and responds. "I call on you, O God, for you will answer" (Ps 17:6). The new man wants what God wants. What pleases God pleases him. The new man prays trusting in God and submitting to his good and gracious will. I want to pray because God will give me all that I ask him.

God tells me where to direct my prayers. He reveals himself as the Father, Son and Holy Spirit. A child of God, who has been baptized into the name of the triune God, prays to that God. Scripture instructs believers to pray "in Jesus' name." Only on the basis of Christ's life, death and resurrection does a believer expect that God will bend the ear and listen to prayer. I cannot pray in my name. My reputation cannot bend God's ear. My sin separates me from God. Jesus, however, was without sin. As High Priest, Jesus took my sins on himself and took them away from me. I know God is gracious to me for Jesus' sake. So I do not make requests of him because I am righteous, but because of his mercy. Based on God's mercy and forgiveness, every believer joins Daniel in praying, "O Lord, listen!" (Dan 9:18-19).

God gives me the words and thoughts for my prayers. Certainly the Lord's Prayer contains everything a Christian can ask of God. Every prayer, however specific and detailed it may be, is really an elaboration on one of the seven petitions of the Lord's Prayer. The book of Psalms contains passage after passage that can be prayed along with the inspired writer. With words and thoughts from God in mind, knowing where to direct prayer, assured that God hears and answers, and realizing that prayer is a privilege, Christians respond in faith, "Let us then approach the throne of grace with confidence" (Heb 4:16). I want to pray.

Every circumstance in my life is an occasion for prayer. Whether the prayer silently proceeds from the heart or audibly passes through the lips, it is involved with every event. There may be times when I don't even know what to pray in difficult circumstances. Romans 8:26-27 reassures me. The Holy Spirit will help me and intercede for me, and God's will is done.

I want my life of prayer to have two facets. First, prayers of thanks and praise are certainly in order. I assume my Savior spent some time praying the Psalms when he withdrew to lonely places. If so, Jesus spent a good amount of time simply recounting back to God his attributes and his deeds. He spent time praising his Father's love, his justice, his wisdom, his patience, his faithfulness, and all his other attributes. He spent time praising his Father for his creation, his providence, his protection, his guidance, his deliverance, and all his other deeds. David told the LORD, "I love you" (Ps 18:1). Moses praised and thanked God for his judgment on the Egyptians and his powerful protection of his people (Ex 15). Hannah thanked God for giving her Samuel (1 Sam 2). Mary thanked and praised God for Jesus, her son and her Savior (Lk 1:46-55). Paul thanked Jesus for the ministry he had been graciously given (1 Tim 1:12). I want to recount back to him what he does for me, just as David did in Psalm 103:1-5. I want to praise and thank my God for the blessed death he is going to give me and for the resurrection that is coming my way at Christ's return. I want to tell my Father I love him.

Secondly, requests are in order. I have needs and wants, and God assures me he can take care of them. When praying for spiritual blessings, I can pray without saying "if." So often I need to confess my sins in a prayer to God. When I ask him to forgive me, I don't need to add, "...if that is your will." I know he wants to forgive me. I know he already has forgiven me. His Word, my baptism and his body and blood make that clear to me. So often I need to ask for his help when I am struggling against sin. I along with all Christians am well aware how effective

the devil is in sabotaging the lines of communication on the battlefield of temptation. He helps our flesh block out the Word, and he stifles our new man from praying. Either before the battle begins or even after the battle is engaged, I can pray. I don't need to ask God to help me if he wants. I know he does not want me to sin. I can confidently expect his full support.

There are other spiritual blessings I can pray for unconditionally. God urges me to pray for the Holy Spirit, for wisdom to know the Scriptures, for a loving Christ-like attitude, for a desire to take care of souls. If I have concerns about remaining faithful to him until death, I can pray that he keeps his promise and takes me to heaven. The public ministry carries with it the unique privilege and responsibility of praying for the souls of others. So closely involved in the public work of the church and in the private lives of God's people, my prayers can become very specific. An under shepherd prays for the Chief Shepherd to bless and keep the sheep—and to bring new sheep into the flock. He prays for the sheep by name.

I trust God that he will also take care of physical and material needs. It is certainly appropriate to pray for those as well. When praying for many of these things, the "if" will be included. God does not always tell me what his will is for me. His Word does not tell me where he wants me to live, whom he wants me to marry, where I should save and spend the money he gives me. He does not tell me if he wants a certain medical condition to clear up, if it is good that a loved one remain with me longer in the future or not. He does not tell me how my earthly life will end. I want to bring my requests to him in all physical matters, but I need to remember to leave the ways, timing, and ultimately the result up to him. "I say, 'You are my God.' My times are in your hands" (Ps 31:14-15). Perhaps it is best to follow the example of Mary and Martha. In a time of personal need, they simply presented the situation to Jesus. "Lord, the one you love is sick" (Jn 11:3). Jesus handled the situation just fine.

Yes, in my life I want to pray, praise and give thanks. Through Christ God has established a relationship with me that will last into eternity. He speaks to me through his eternal Word. The faith he has given me responds with prayer. I will talk with Jesus face to face one day. For now I talk with him in prayer. *I want to be a man of prayer as long as I live!*

¹ Arthur J. Clement, *Pray, Christian, Pray!* (Milwaukee: NPH, 1993), 12. Hereafter cited as Clement.

² *ibid.* 41.

³ *ibid.* 116.

⁴ Concordia Triglotta, quote from *Luther's Large Catechism*. (St. Louis: CPH, 1988), 707. Hereafter cited as LC.

⁵ Pieper, *Christian Dogmatics—Volume 3*. (St. Louis: CPH, 1953), 77. Hereafter cited as Pieper.

⁶ Pieper, 80.

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