

## Why do we pray?

## & Prayer for Healing?

*Prayer is the soul's sincere desire,*

So says the old hymn

*Prayer is the Christian's vital breath,  
The Christian's native air,*

But though they are true words, it does not mean we all actually do much praying... perhaps some of us do, but others are maybe a little asthmatic or fighting for breath!

Bill Hybels writes: *"God and I used to be rather casually related... we did not get together and talk very much."*

I know what he means... sometimes the last thing that happens is prayer. For others there may be a drying up of prayer - you used to talk to God a lot and now you don't.

But Prayer is not an optional extra, a luxury for the few who can afford it. It is a vital necessity that we must have at any cost. Jesus made it the one ingredient of his life that never got squeezed out.

It is not only our life-line in trouble, but the means we have been given to get to know our Heavenly Father.

So, in our passage from [Matthew ch6](#) Jesus says <sup>5</sup> *"And when you pray, not 'if you pray.'* He belonged to a people for whom prayer was a central feature of life and often a very visible one - perhaps more like Islamic prayer today.

We do not have the same opportunities or challenges of that style of society, but there are still lessons for us here. In prayer the only audience that matters is "The Audience of One."

So Jesus says of the hypocrites *they love to pray standing in the synagogues and on the street corners to be seen by others. Truly I tell you, they have received their reward in full.* <sup>6</sup> *But when you pray, go into your room, close the door and pray to your Father, who is unseen. Then your Father, who sees what is done in secret, will reward you.* <sup>7</sup>

I am not very good at spending time in the secret place, I find it easier to be an activist... but there is nowhere else like it and no substitute for it.

The only audience that matters is "The Audience of One." And you need to know Who He is and who you are to Him. As a Christian believer, He is your Heavenly Father and you are His dearly loved child - you may find it hard to grasp, but He likes you coming and talking with Him.

So, you do not need to talk too much, **do not keep on babbling like pagans**, says Jesus **for they think they will be heard because of their many words.** <sup>8</sup> **Do not be like them, for your Father knows what you need before you ask him.**

Prayer is not a transaction where you put in lots of the right words to get a desired outcome, it is so much harder and so much more rewarding, it is a relationship of the heart.

<sup>9</sup> **"This, then, is how you should pray** says Jesus: **" 'Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name,** <sup>10</sup> **your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven.** I could preach for hours on just this phrase, isn't it amazing? It tells me that God is not okay with much that is taking place in this world. Heaven is operating as it should be, but the same cannot be said of earth.

Sickness and death, hatreds and bitterness, conflicts and wars - these are not God's handiwork, nor His will for our lives. If we feel that they are unwelcome intruders, then we are right - they are!

But more than that, this phrase says that God has a plan to change things and that plan involves me. It actually involves you as well.

Through our prayers and through us, the Kingdom of God is to be released and the will of God is to be done on earth.

In **Luke ch10** we see something of what that looked like in Jesus' day when <sup>1</sup> **the Lord appointed seventy-two others and sent them two by two ahead of him to every town and place where he was about to go.** He then gives them very clear instructions.

<sup>8</sup> **"When you enter a town and are welcomed, eat what is set before you.** <sup>9</sup> **Heal the sick who are there and tell them, 'The kingdom of God has come near to you.'**

Yes, they were preparing the way for Jesus, but they were also declaring and demonstrating the Kingdom of God. That commission is one that we also have and people are gradually becoming aware of it and looking to see what is happening when people around the world are beginning to obey it again.

Certainly as Jesus told them <sup>2</sup> **"The harvest is plentiful, but the workers are few. Ask the Lord of the harvest, therefore, to send out workers into his harvest field."**

Back to Matthew ch6, it is only then, after crying out for Heavenly changes on earth and making ourselves available to help, that we get the opening to give our personal requests in <sup>11</sup> **Give us today our daily bread.** <sup>12</sup> **forgive us our debts,** <sup>13</sup> **lead us not into temptation, deliver us from the evil one.'**

The One who longs for Heaven to be seen more on earth and for us to bring about His will, is the One who knows what we need.

He knows what we need and He is committed to supplying our needs and equipping us in the face of the enemy. There is an enemy - a very real one - the devil or Satan, who sponsors the sickness and death, the hatreds and bitterness, conflicts and wars.

He loves to mess us up and mess up our relationship with our Heavenly Father. Fostering unforgiveness in us is a favourite move, so Jesus reminds us <sup>14</sup> *if you forgive others when they sin against you, your heavenly Father will also forgive you.* <sup>15</sup> *But if you do not forgive others their sins, your Father will not forgive your sins.*

When life is hard, when others sin against us, it is okay to want justice, but not vengeance. We are not asked to sweep our hurts under the carpet, but to come before Him with our pain and hand the hurt and the ones who have hurt us over to God, to want good for them - to forgive and let God take care of vengeance.

So... those are some of the reasons why we pray and prayer for healing as we have seen is bound up in the DNA of the Lord's Prayer. It is also something that we as disciples of Jesus are commissioned to do in the warp and weave of evangelism or good-newsing about Jesus in the world.

But let us look for a moment at the words from James and think about healing within the Church in particular.

**James ch5** writes in the context of a prayerful life...

<sup>13</sup> *Is anyone among you in trouble? Let them pray. Is anyone happy? Let them sing songs of praise.* To prayer and to praise are the normal things to do in life, as we go through hard times or good times. But what about prayer for healing...? Well that was also the normal thing to do... <sup>14</sup> *Is anyone among you sick? Let them call the elders of the church to pray over them and anoint them with oil in the name of the Lord.* <sup>15</sup> *And the prayer offered in faith will make them well; the Lord will raise them up.*

It was the normal thing and it could be the normal thing again. But it takes faith. Faith from the Church, faith from the sick person and faith from the elders or leaders.

Listen to a story from the life of Smith Wigglesworth: *I had a friend, an old Baptist minister who was a wonderful preacher. I spent much of my time with him. One day he came to me and said, "My wife is dying." I said, "Brother Clark, why don't you believe God? God can raise her up if you will only believe Him." He asked me to come to his house, and I looked for some one to go with me.*

*Brother Nichols, for that was his name, went with me and started praying. He asked the Lord to comfort the husband in his great bereavement and prayed for the orphans and a lot more on this line. I cried, "O my God, stop this man."*

But there was no stopping him and he went on praying and there was not a particle of faith in anything he uttered. He did stop at last, and I said, "Brother Clark, it's now your turn to pray. He started, "Lord, answer the prayer of my brother and comfort me in this great bereavement and sorrow. Prepare me to face this great trial."

I cried out, "My God, stop this man." The whole atmosphere was being charged with unbelief.

Do you see how they were going about it all the wrong way? It is very hard indeed to pray for a miracle if there is no faith. In the end it is Wigglesworth himself, who pours a whole bottle of oil over the sick lady and sees Jesus heal her.

We are not yet seeing everyone healed who asks for prayer, but we are seeing some. Without specific prayer for healing people were not experiencing God's healing. With specific prayer for healing some are being healed... we are heading in the right direction!

James also says: *If they have sinned, they will be forgiven.*<sup>16</sup> *Therefore confess your sins to each other and pray for each other so that you may be healed.*

Sometimes, only sometimes, there are links between sickness and sin. Sin can give the devil a foothold and he will create havoc. But where there is sin, the solution is clear, repentance, confession, forgiveness and prayer.