

Prayer: Our Most Powerful Professional Activity

Thomas Orr, PhD

Prayer is practiced by people around the world according to the customs and teachings of many different theologies that view the world in vastly different ways. And yet, too few professionals realize that prayer directed at someone who truly exists, who truly hears, and who truly has the power and authority to answer us is the most effective way to initiate significant improvements in ourselves, in our work, and in this world.

What is prayer? Prayer is conversation with God about our circumstances, our concerns, our failures, our successes, our hopes, and our needs. It also includes conversations about others and their needs.

As one who highly values religious freedom to believe or not believe in gods, God, or other divine beings, I do, however, want to acquaint my readers with what the Bible says about prayer since it is wise for every professional to become well informed about all of their religious and philosophical options so they can make choices that they can be fully confident will bring them and others the greatest possible benefits.

Here is what the Bible says about prayer.

Jeremiah 33:2-3 (NIV) ² *“This is what the Lord says, he who made the earth, the Lord who formed it and established it—the Lord is his name: ³ ‘Call to me and I will answer you and tell you great and unsearchable things you do not know.’*

My Understanding: God (our Creator and Lord) wants to communicate with us in order to teach us many things that are greater in truth and value than anything we can discover on our own through scientific research, religious meditation, or intellectual reflection.

Isaiah 59:1-2 (NIV) ¹ *Surely the arm of the Lord is not too short to save, nor his ear too dull to hear. ² But your iniquities have separated you from your God; your sins have hidden his face from you, so that he will not hear.*

My Understanding: God desires our prayers and is able to hear our prayers, but our sinful human nature distances us from God, since he is holy and cannot fellowship with evil without having to express his righteous wrath against it. It is, therefore, more loving of God to separate himself from us than to justly destroy us.

Psalms 51:5 (NIV) *Surely I was sinful at birth, sinful from the time my mother conceived me.*

Romans 3:9-12, 17-18 (NIV) ⁹ *...Jews and Gentiles alike are all under the power of sin. ¹⁰ As it is written: “There is no one righteous, not even one; ¹¹ there is no one who understands; there is no one who seeks God. ¹² All have turned away, they have together become worthless; there is no one who does good, not even one.... ¹⁷ and the way of peace they do not know. ¹⁸ There is no fear of God before their eyes.”*

My Understanding: After the first rebellion against God by Adam and Eve (our human ancestors), sin corrupted both our genetic makeup and our culture so that by nature and by nurture human beings have become repulsive to our holy God.

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Romans 3:21-26 (NIV) ²¹ ...*apart from the law the righteousness of God has been made known, to which the Law and the Prophets testify.* ²² *This righteousness is given through faith in Jesus Christ to all who believe. There is no difference between Jew and Gentile,* ²³ *for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God,* ²⁴ *and all are justified freely by his grace through the redemption that came by Christ Jesus.* ²⁵ *God presented Christ as a sacrifice of atonement, through the shedding of his blood—to be received by faith. He did this to demonstrate his righteousness, because in his forbearance he had left the sins committed beforehand unpunished.* ²⁶ *He did it to demonstrate his righteousness at the present time, so as to be just and the one who justifies those who have faith in Jesus.*

Romans 10:9-13 (NIV) ⁹ *If you declare with your mouth, “Jesus is Lord,” and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved.* ¹⁰ *For it is with your heart that you believe and are justified, and it is with your mouth that you profess your faith and are saved.* ¹¹ *As Scripture says, “Anyone who believes in him will never be put to shame.”* ¹² *For there is no difference between Jew and Gentile—the same Lord is Lord of all and richly blesses all who call on him,* ¹³ *for, “Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved.”*

My Understanding: The first prayer that God hears is a prayer of faith, which accepts Jesus’ punishment for our sins in place of us, so that we can be considered completely forgiven and holy, and thus be reconnected with God. This restored relationship with our Creator will begin restoring our human nature to right thinking and living. Here is a sample first prayer, similar to the one I prayed to God about one month before my 15th birthday when I became a Christian on a country road in Indiana.

Dear God,

Please forgive my ignorance of you, my disinterest in you, and my rebellion against you. I have been a sinful person since birth. But I know that you exist, that you love me, and that you sent Jesus to be crucified in order to pay the full punishment for my sin instead of me. I invite you to fill me, reform me, and become my Lord so that I can follow your perfect plans for me.

In Jesus’ name,¹

Amen

John 5:24 (NIV) *“Very truly I tell you, whoever hears my word and believes him who sent me has eternal life and will not be judged but has crossed over from death to life. (spoken by Jesus)*

2 Corinthians 5:16-18 (NIV) ¹⁶ *So we have stopped evaluating others from a human point of view. At one time we thought of Christ merely from a human point of view. How differently we know him now!* ¹⁷ *This means that anyone who belongs to Christ has become a new person. The old life is gone; a new life has begun!* ¹⁸ *And all of this is a gift from God, who brought us back to himself through Christ...*

¹ Prayers to God must be ended with “in Jesus’ name” (or something similar) since it is only by Jesus Christ’s sacrifice for us that we are made righteous and acceptable to God. In Japanese terms, we sign our prayer with Jesus’ *hanko* (name seal) rather than our own since it is the only seal that is acceptable to a holy God.

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1 John 5:13-15 (NLT) ¹³ *I have written this to you who believe in the name of the Son of God, so that you may know you have eternal life. ¹⁴ And we are confident that he hears us whenever we ask for anything that pleases him. ¹⁵ And since we know he hears us when we make our requests, we also know that he will give us what we ask for.*

My Understanding: Once we are reunited with God through faith in Jesus (his son and promised savior), God now hears all of our prayers and desires to converse with us through prayer—which involves both talking and listening. Because God loves us, however, he will only answer the requests that bring us good, and wisely overlook the ones that would bring us harm.

Specific Guidelines for Prayer after We Have Become Reconnected with God

Matthew 6:5-8 (NIV) ⁵ *“And when you pray, do not be like the hypocrites, for 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. ⁶ 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. ⁷ And when you pray, do not keep on babbling like pagans, for they think they will be heard because of their many words. ⁸ Do not be like them, for your Father knows what you need before you ask Him.*

My Understanding: Prayer is private conversation with God who created us and loves us more deeply than we can ever comprehend. It is not a performance to make us look righteous in front of others nor a religious act to make us feel good about ourselves.

Matthew 5:43-44 (ESV) ⁴³ *“You have heard that it was said, ‘You shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy.’ ⁴⁴ But I (Jesus) say to you, love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you.*

My Understanding: Prayer is an expression of love that we offer to God, not only for ourselves, but also for everyone else, no matter how pleasant or unpleasant these relationships may be. In fact, God frequently brings difficult people into our lives so that they will have someone to pray for them.

Mark 14:38 (NIV) *“...pray so that you will not fall into temptation. The spirit is willing, but the flesh is weak.”*

My Understanding: Although we begin to develop a new nature after we begin to love and follow Jesus, our old nature will die slowly. Therefore, we must pray that temptations to do wrong will not entice us beyond what we can endure.

Psalms 88:13 (NIV) *I cry to you for help, Lord; in the morning my prayer comes before you.*

My Understanding: It is wise to begin every morning with prayer so that we can live according to the wisdom and power that God wants to give us rather than suffer bad days because we foolishly relied on our former thoughts and strategies.

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Philippians 4:6-7 (NLT) ⁶ *Don't worry about anything; instead, pray about everything. Tell God what you need, and thank him for all he has done.* ⁷ *Then you will experience God's peace, which exceeds anything we can understand. His peace will guard your hearts and minds as you live in Christ Jesus.*

My Understanding: We should pray whenever we begin to worry because worry is a signal that we are trusting in something other than God and thus have increased the probability of failure.

James 5:13-18 (NLT) ¹³ *Are any of you suffering hardships? You should pray. Are any of you happy? You should sing praises.* ¹⁴ *Are any of you sick? You should call for the elders of the church to come and pray over you, anointing you with oil in the name of the Lord.* ¹⁵ *Such a prayer offered in faith will heal the sick, and the Lord will make you well. And if you have committed any sins, you will be forgiven.* ¹⁶ *Confess your sins to each other and pray for each other so that you may be healed. The earnest prayer of a righteous person has great power and produces wonderful results.* ¹⁷ *Elijah was as human as we are, and yet when he prayed earnestly that no rain would fall, none fell for three and a half years!* ¹⁸ *Then, when he prayed again, the sky sent down rain and the earth began to yield its crops.*

My Understanding: God wants us to fight hardships, sickness, sin, and natural dangers with prayer. Since planet Earth became corrupted through Adam and Eve's first rebellion against God, we must use believing, Christian prayer to make improvements, since we cannot do much on our own without God's divine assistance.

Jeremiah 29:7 (NIV) *"...seek the peace and prosperity of the city to which I have carried you into exile. Pray to the LORD for it, because if it prospers, you too will prosper."*

My Understanding: We must pray regularly for our cities, schools, workplaces, and other entities, as well as support their success in right thinking and living with whatever talents God has given us. If they prosper, so do we and everyone else. Therefore, it is to everyone's advantage for us to pray regularly for kings, presidents, directors, managers, ministers, governors, mayors, ambassadors, principals, teachers, professors, employers, coworkers, friends, classmates, neighbors, and anyone else who needs God's mighty power in order to follow God's best plans.

Matthew 7:7-11 (ESV) ⁷ *"Ask, and it will be given to you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you.* ⁸ *For everyone who asks receives, and the one who seeks finds, and to the one who knocks it will be opened.* ⁹ *Or which one of you, if his son asks him for bread, will give him a stone? ¹⁰ Or if he asks for a fish, will give him a serpent? ¹¹ If you then, who are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father who is in heaven give good things to those who ask him!*

Matthew 18:19-20 (ESV) ¹⁹ *Again I say to you, if two of you agree on earth about anything they ask, it will be done for them by my Father in heaven.* ²⁰ *For where two or three are gathered in my name, there am I among them."*

Matthew 21:20-22 (ESV) ²⁰ *When the disciples saw it, they marveled, saying, "How did the fig tree wither at once?" ²¹ And Jesus answered them, "Truly, I say to you, if you have faith and do not doubt, you will not only do what has been done to the fig tree, but even if you say to this mountain, 'Be taken up and thrown into the sea,' it will happen. ²² And whatever you ask in prayer, you will receive, if you have faith."*



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Mark 11:24 (ESV) *...I tell you, whatever you ask in prayer, believe that you have received it, and it will be yours.*

John 14:12-14 (ESV) ¹² *Truly, truly, I say to you, whoever believes in me will also do the works that I do; and greater works than these will he do, because I am going to the Father.* ¹³ *Whatever you ask in my name, this I will do, that the Father may be glorified in the Son.* ¹⁴ *If you ask me anything in my name, I will do it.*

Romans 12:12 (ESV) *...be constant in prayer.*

My Understanding: God wants us to pray constantly so that we can partner with him in fighting all of the evil and its consequences that we encounter in order to make the world a better place. This will not only demonstrate the ultimate superiority of God's righteousness, power, and sovereignty, but it will also train us in essential ways that are required for our maturity.

Ultimately, prayer is the most powerful tool we have to improve our world and our lives, which far surpasses anything we could ever accomplish on our own.

Note: The Bible translations I have quoted are the NIV (New International Version), the ESV (English Standard Version), and the NLT (New Living Translation).