

What Is Acceptable Prayer?

God speaks to us through the Bible. We speak to Him through prayer. In prayer, we make our thoughts known to the mind of God. No matter how much good we do, or how much we study God's Word, we still need His care and protection. This is the reason Paul told us to "*Pray without ceasing*" (1 Thessalonians 5:17). It is important that we know the answer to some basic questions about prayer.

Who can pray? Only God's children have the privilege of prayer (1 Peter 3:12; James 5:16). The privilege of prayer is for those who are "*in Christ.*" Does God hear the prayers of sinners? Yes, He hears them, but He does not answer them. However, God does help those who are seeking the truth (John 7:17). For example, Cornelius was not a Christian. He was a good man who believed in God. He wanted to be saved. God sent Peter to teach him what to do to be saved (Acts 10:1-11:18).

Why do we pray? Prayer is a way for us to enjoy fellowship with God (Acts 2:42). We pray for God's help when we need it (Hebrews 4:16). We pray because God has commanded us to pray (1 Timothy 2:8; Luke 18:1). We also pray to thank God for the the blessings we receive from Him (James 1:17).

Where do we pray? Can we pray only in the church building during worship? No, we can pray anywhere and everywhere. Two children were late for school. One said, "Let's stop and pray." The other said, "Let's run while we pray." We can pray whenever we need to. It does not matter where we are. Paul prayed while he was in prison (Acts 16:25). Jonah prayed while he was in the stomach of the great fish (Jonah 2:1). Daniel prayed in front of an open window in his room (Daniel 6:10). Hannah prayed at the tabernacle (1 Samuel 1:9-18). Jesus prayed in a garden (Luke 22:39-41). When the church assembled to worship, they prayed. "*And they continued steadfastly in the apostles' teaching and fellowship, in the breaking of bread and the prayers*" (Acts 2:42). "*Peter therefore was kept in the prison: but prayer was made earnestly of the church unto God for him*" (Acts 12:5).

To Whom do we pray? Roman Catholics pray to Mary, the mother of Jesus. Sometimes they pray to dead "saints." Other people pray to the spirits of their dead ancestors. But Jesus taught His disciples to pray to God, the Father (Matthew 6:9). We pray to the Father through (in the name of) Jesus Christ our Mediator (1 Timothy 2:5).

How should we pray? Must we kneel when we pray? No. The Bible records a number of different positions for prayer. We must pray in faith (James 1:6). We must pray to God with "*clean hands and a pure heart*" (Psalm 24:3-4). Our prayers must be in keeping with God's Will (Luke 22:42).

Does God answer prayer? Yes! He answered Elijah's prayer at Mt. Carmel (1

Kings 18:36-39). He gave Hannah a son in answer to her prayer (1 Samuel 1:9-20). In answer to the prayer of Hezekiah, He saved Judah from the Assyrians (Isaiah 37:15-36). God answers prayers in three ways. Sometimes He answers "Yes" when He knows it is best for us. When Hezekiah prayed to live, God gave him fifteen more years (2 Kings 20:1-6). Sometimes God answers "No" when He knows it is best for us (James 4:3; 1 John 5:14). Elijah prayed for God to take his life when Jezebel was seeking to kill him (1 Kings 19:4; 2 Kings 2:11). Paul asked three times to have his "*thorn in the flesh*" removed, but God did not remove it (2 Corinthians 12:7-9). Sometimes God says "Wait." Our request may be right, but it may be asked at the wrong time (1 Corinthians 1:25). This is one way we can learn patience (James 1:3). Abraham had to wait twenty-five years for the son God promised him. Moses had to wait for 40 years before God was ready for him to lead Israel to freedom.

Five Areas of Prayer

1. **Praise** (Luke 11:2). We praise God for His power, wisdom, glory, holiness, righteousness, mercy, and longsuffering. We show our respect and reverence in this way.

2. **Thanksgiving** (1 Timothy 2:1). We thank God for salvation, the joy of life, and for all the blessings He gives us. We must be thankful from our heart (Hebrews 13:15).

3. **Confession** (Luke 11:4; Psalm

66:18). Christians ask forgiveness for every sin they commit (1 John 1:7-9; Acts 8:22).

4. **Petition** (Philippians 4:6). We ask for the things we need, subject to God's will (James 4:3). If we ask for help to be better Christians, then we need to work to be better Christians.

5. **Intercession** (Colossians 1:9). We pray for others (2 Thessalonians 3:1).

We pray to God because He wants us to speak to Him. Prayer is an important part of a Christian's life. It is one of the blessings of being "*in Christ*" (Ephesians 1:3). Does God hear your prayers? If you are not a Christian, you do not have the privilege of prayer. If you are living in disobedience to God, He will not hear your prayers. All spiritual blessings are in Christ (Ephesians 1:3). In order to get into Christ, we must believe and be baptized (Mark 16:15-16; Galatians 3:26-27). Why not obey the gospel today so you can have God's assurance that He will hear your prayers?



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