

Prayer is one of our responsibilities in the spiritual battle in which we exist. If the Son of God during His earthly ministry knew the importance of talking with His heavenly Father, how much more do we need to make prayer an integral part of our lives. The idea of prayer should not at this point be new to even a young believer, since it has been discussed as simply talking to God. However, three questions will help us consider talking with God more carefully.

I. *Why can we talk to God?*

Talking with God is more than His knowledge of what we say, it is acceptance in His presence. Like the Persian king in the story of Esther, no one could approach without being summoned or accepted (*cf.* Esther 4:11). But God has extended this privilege to some and specifically to us who are His children. See Ephesians 2:18 for two truths about prayer and our freedom to come to God in prayer.

1. *Prayer is a privilege made possible by the saving death of Jesus Christ.* Only through the blood of Jesus are we brought near to God. No one has access to the King of the Universe unless the sin which separates us from His holy presence has been dealt with. The person who is in Christ has access because in Christ we have a righteous standing before God. His death paid the penalty for our sin.
2. *Prayer is a privilege for those who have the Spirit of God.* Those who come to God by faith in Jesus receive the promise of God's Holy Spirit. Because God's Spirit is in us, when we pray we are in God's presence. The Spirit also knows our thoughts and the Father's thoughts. Even when we ourselves do not know what to pray, the Spirit prays for us.

In the model for prayer which Jesus gave to his disciples is a recognition of this necessary, special relationship: "Our Father, who is in heaven." (*Cf., also* Luke 11:11, 13) Prayer is a privilege for those who through the death of Jesus Christ have become children of God.

II. *What should we talk to God about?*

1. *Confession* – Confessing our sin recognizes our need for a righteous standing before God without which we would not be accepted in His presence. Jesus taught us to pray, "forgive us our sins."
2. *Thanksgiving*

Thanksgiving is a natural outgrowth of confession, giving thanks for our forgiveness. Jesus told Simon the Pharisee a story to correct his attitude toward the actions of Jesus concerning a sinful woman (Luke 7:36-50). Her recognition of having been forgiven moved her. "He who has been forgiven loves little" (Luke 7:47 NIV). The more we realize how far we fall short of the glory of God, the more we realize how great is our forgiveness, and the more we express our loving thanks to our heavenly Father.

Thanksgiving is a foundational attitude which we all need to cultivate. Failing to give thanks and failing to glorify God for who He is are at the head of a long list of ever worsening sin in Romans 1 (see v 21). Giving thanks to God not only expresses our love to God, but may also help guard against further sin.

Giving thanks in everything should force us to look beyond our immediate response to circumstances. Paul's instruction to pray with thanksgiving was in the context of being anxious (Philippians 4:6). Even when circumstances cause us to be anxious and we keenly sense our helplessness, we are to give thanks to God. Thanking God in such times forces us to see the bigger picture, e.g., His past help, His relation as a loving heavenly Father, His purpose to mold His children into the likeness of Jesus Christ, etc. The apostle Paul regularly included giving thanks to God in his letters, even concerning the problem-filled Corinthian church (1 Cor 1:4).

Thanksgiving should naturally lead us to praise or adoration of God. Sinful man neither glorified God as God nor gave Him thanks. Giving thanks and glorifying God seem to go together.

3. *Adoration* – Praise or adoration of God is also frequently found in Paul's letters. In 2 Corinthians 1:3-4 he sees beyond his troubles to God's comfort and the equipping to comfort others. He praises God for being the God of all comfort. In the Psalms we find both direct examples of praise as well as models to follow to help us find further things for which to praise God.
4. *Supplication/intercession* – Supplication (or making requests, 1 Tim 2:1), when used together with intercession, generally seems to refer to making requests for oneself, whereas intercession refers to the making of requests for others. (Supplication is helpful for the long used acronym ACTS – Adoration-Confession-Thanksgiving-Supplication.) The Bible is our best source on what to pray. James gives us two challenges (James 4:2b-3). (1) "You do not have, because you do not ask God." (2) "You do not receive, because you ask with wrong motives." Since we struggle knowing our motives, ask God to reveal them.

III. *How should we talk to God?*

1. *Prayer is not for show* (Mt 6:5). Don't pray to be seen. Don't worry about pleasing people when you pray.
2. *Pray submissively.* Jesus prayed "Not my will, but your will be done." Praying in Jesus' name includes submitting ourselves to the character and will of our Lord as revealed in the Bible (*cf.* John 15:7).
Pray as Jesus taught, "Your will be done on earth [- in my life -] as it is in heaven."
3. *Pray expansively.* Our prayers should touch everything (Philippians 4:6) and pervade every situation (Eph 6:18a). Our prayer expands as far as we recognize our dependency upon God.

Prayer is one of those areas in which most Christians will agree in theory but many struggle in practice. Although the Bible speaks much on prayer, we have much freedom to time, place, or posture. If it helps, write. Or stand. Or pray aloud. The important thing is to talk to God. Take advantage of the privilege which we have and pray. "And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus." (Philippians 4:7 NIV)