

**ORÉMUS**



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# **God Does Not Work Alone**

## **- The Importance of Prayer -**

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A five part study for individuals or  
groups from  
**The Cross of Christ Ministry.**

All scripture references, unless otherwise stated, are from the *New International Version*.

**Rev. Graeme MacNeil**

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# Preface

The following lessons are from the Orémus Study Series run by **The Cross of Christ Ministry**. This book is a compilation of the five part series *God Does Not Work Alone - The Importance of Prayer*, which has been very popular through our mailing list. If you would like to join our community, you will find us at <http://www.tccm.cjb.net>.

May the peace of our Lord be with  
you always ...

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**Scripture Meditation**

"Show me your ways, O Lord,  
teach me your paths; guide me in  
your truth and teach me, for you are  
God my Saviour, and my hope is in  
you all day long.

*Psalm 25:4-5*

## **Introduction**

Today, society is what I call an 'instant society'. We are so used to having everything and anything that we want - almost instantly! We have instant access to information via the Internet, so why bother teaching children how to use books in a library? We have instant access to food; just pull into the drive

through and pick up a quick meal - so why bother spending time cooking a nutritious meal? We have instant access to so many things that it's amazing just how impatient we have become with ourselves, those around us and life in general. We're in the fast lane now - the super highway - so if you can't keep up; get off - right? Wrong!

Sure, a lot of the things that we have today, do make life much easier and some say simplified. But is it really simplified? Is life that simple? All these things are purely material - the things that we can see, touch, feel and buy with money or acquire by some other material means! Look around you and then sit

back and think for a moment. Just have a look at the things around you and what you have done today. There's someone missing in all this ... God! Did you think about God today? Don't be ashamed to admit it, be honest - chances are you probably didn't! When was the last time that you thought about God and what He has done for you? I think we're all a little guilty of this at one time or another.

Does everything always go well for you? Are all your days wonderful? At the end of the day when you sit down to relax, if you can relax, do you have a sense of achievement knowing that you have fulfilled your role in this earthly life? Admittedly, some of us do

occasionally get that feeling - and isn't it a wonderful feeling! But for many, each day just slides into the next, no real difference - monotonous. This monotony is because we have become too self-indulgent with life. We think that we have conquered life and that we are in control. You may say - "My life isn't monotonous! I do all sorts of things during the day." A fair comment, but think carefully - are they really that different or is life becoming a little too predictable? Believe it or not, the answer to escaping our self imposed importance and reliance - is prayer.

## **Why Don't People Pray?**

Unfortunately today, many people do not see the value of prayer. I suppose, if we look at it from their side, we can probably see why they think this. After all, praying is really not a natural thing for us to do and it doesn't really rank in the top ten important things for a lot of us to be doing each day. We do things and we expect results, immediate results. Prayer is not one those things that will necessarily produce immediate results for us and the whole concept of prayer is far removed from our everyday life. So, why don't people pray?

Now this is not to imply that people don't pray! I believe that all of us at one time or another have fallen to our knees

or lay in bed at night or have sat still and offered up that quiet prayer for help. However that tends to be the most common reason for many prayers - prayers when we want something or when we're in trouble. Does God really listen to this type of prayer - you know, the 'one-off' prayer? We'll consider that a little later.

There are many misconceptions about prayer and a lot of them frighten people off, so to speak. I'm sure that when some people think of praying, they envisage a sombre person kneeling for hours in isolation mumbling all the correct religious type words. They also associate prayer and praying with

groups of the type - 'say one thing, do another'. You've met them before, perhaps you know someone like them - the type of person who likes to sprout religious doctrine and appear holy, can quote scripture for any occasion but doesn't live the scripture themselves - the hypocrite - the Pharisee! This very fact is pointed out clearly by Jesus -

"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 men. I tell you the truth, they have received their reward in full."

*Matthew 6:5*

There are also other problems. Where

does prayer get you? What good does it do? Prayer time cuts into our life, and on the surface it appears to be a waste of time. But prayer is a discipline, it takes time. Surely even a few minutes a day in communion with our Creator; our loving Father, is deserving. Look at what He has given us and how little we give Him in return.

We say prayer imposes on our time, but in fact it doesn't. In a lot of ways the problem is really us - we don't like to think that we are not in total control of our lives.

**Control - What's This All About?**

Control is what, we as humans like! We like to be in control of what, when and how we do things. We like to control things and people, so that we know what will happen (or at least be assured of gaining something from it). Fortunately, (or unfortunately), life is just not that simple. The problem with gaining control is that everything then becomes predictable. Granted, some may like that, but life is not predictable - we all know that. We don't all work and think in harmony with each other.

Each one of us has different wants and gifts and we all act differently. What seems important to one of us, is not deemed important by the other. So the

overall effect is that we cannot control others. We can control materialistic objects, but we cannot control people in a Christian manner.

We all know what it's like to plan things in advance. For some reason we automatically assume that there will be 'that' future for us. One day, however, there will be no tomorrow in this earthly body of ours. Everything that we have planned will mean nothing and never come to fruition.

"Now listen, you who say, 'Today or tomorrow we will go to this or that city, spend a year there, carry on business and make money.' Why, you do not even know what will

happen tomorrow. What is your life? You are a mist that appears for a little while and then vanishes."

*James 4:13-14*

How true! The span of our life-time is insignificant compared to that of God who is not bounded by time!

Now God is not against planning, God has 'planned' *our* entire life, so to speak - He knows what we are going to do, when and how. Our problem with planning is that we rarely consider God in our plans. Whenever we ignore God we are really 'thinking' that *we* are in total control of our destiny - and the fact

is that some do think that way!

It's easy to do! Just think about how often you consider God in making plans ... probably not too often (take heart, we *can* get better, we're not beyond redemption). Our arrogance comes from the fact that we consider no one else, in particular God. Our pride comes from the fact that we wallow in self opinionated glory. Most of the time, the things we plan are only of earthly importance - planning is important though, without planning we may run up against problems we didn't even think of, *but* we should *never* think that our ability to plan is due solely to ourselves.

"Will the one who contends with

the Almighty correct him? Let him  
who accuses God answer him!"

*Job 40:1*

*Are we that daring to question and  
challenge God?*

**Thanklessness On Our part ... Love  
On His Part.**

Our thanklessness towards God comes  
from the wonderful gift that He gave us -  
choice. We have the ability to choose.  
We even have the ability to choose  
whether or not to believe in God! Does  
God strike us down if we choose not to  
believe in Him? No! ... Why?

God loves us all, we are His children

and He is our loving Father in heaven. He values us and cares about us - so much that He gave His only begotten Son for us.

The point is that we have to acknowledge God for who He is and not somebody that we call upon just when things go bad. We need to give the love that we haven't often given to God - something which He deserves. We know when this happens - that feeling of total submission, the realization of someone who has an undying love for us; one who is beyond comparison with anyone or anything we know of in earthly terms ...  
*This is God!*

He has confidence in us, yet we lack the confidence in God! Sometimes, I can just think of God saying to us - "Who do *you* really think you are?"

## **Confessing ... Does God Listen To The 'One-Off' Prayer?**

Confessing one's sins to another is not easy for us to do. I hear many people say that they do not need to do this - they can confess their sins to God; without going to church *or* without confessing to anyone else including a priest. But do they? It's all very well to say these things, but I doubt whether some ever do **REALLY** confess their sins. It's sort of a cop-out ... I ask them - 'What are you

afraid of?' ... and very often, no response ... their lack of commitment and guilt only compound their problems.

To 'see' the value of confessing our sins, we only have to think of how good we feel when we tell the truth to someone - especially when we may have been hiding something from them. When we do this, we have this overwhelming feeling of a great load being lifted from us and we get that fantastic inner feeling and knowledge that we *have* done something good - like a pat on the back from God!

Why is it so hard for us to confess our wrongs? What *are* we afraid of? *Who* are we afraid of? The fact is many ,

people do not appreciate just how much God detests sin.

If we look at the books of Leviticus and Deuteronomy, we find many instances where God has stated that He abhors sin and finds sin detestable. And why does God detest sin? Why has God gone to such extremes to pointedly spell out what is wrong and why?

"You are to be holy to me because, I the Lord, am holy, and I have set you apart from the nations to be my own."

*Leviticus 20:26*

So we *cannot* just pretend that our sins will be forgiven by just muttering to

ourselves 'Please God, I'm sorry.' - I'm afraid that just doesn't cut it with God! That's just too easy and ineffective, if we do that we are just deceiving ourselves and in turn, trying deceive God.

By confessing to another believer, we do a number of things:

- we overcome our own self-importance;
- we overcome our own feelings of greatest and invulnerability;
- we realize that we ARE sinners and NOT living God's laws;
- we openly show our respect and love for God;
- we show our humility;
- we show that we are accountable;

- we show that we are prepared to be judged by God for our sins;
- we realize that only God can forgive us.

All these things (and many more) make us better children of God - and God will be pleased with our total submission to His glory. We are here to glorify God's name, *not* to make a mockery of it.

It also means that we must get away from the simple statement of 'Please God, forgive me my sins.' As I said before, that's just TOO easy to say, and with the slightest influence from Satan, those words will run from our mouths easily. If we are to confess our sins, then be

honest and recall them all (to the best of our ability) - *name them*.

If we have taken something that is not rightly ours - then ask for forgiveness because we have *sotlen*, we are a *thief*. If we have not told the truth, then we *are* a *liar*. These words may seem harsh, but in reality that's what we are and when we use these words in accusation of ourselves ... it hurts! Then and only then, we *know* how God feels!

Confession *must* be meaningful if it is to help us and we *must* be honest with ourselves *and* with God - that's why we do it - to help us to be reconciled with God - and only we can do that. If we do not ask for forgiveness, we will not

receive it!

"Ask and it will be given to you; seek and you will find; knock and the door will be opened to you. For everyone who asks receives; he who seeks finds; and to him who knocks, the door will be opened."

*Matthew 7:7-8*

Ultimately, *it is up to us* to initiate the healing and forgiveness - it is when *we have* realized and recognized our sin that we can ask for forgiveness and in reality, unless we are prepared to humble ourselves and totally submit ourselves to God ... we will not be forgiven.

It is the unconfessed sins that keep us from God and make our prayers seem to us - worthless. We need to first of all break down the barriers that we have put up between God and ourselves before we can work in harmony with God's will. Then and only then will we have meaningful and powerful prayers! I believe that God *does* listen to our 'one-off' prayers, *but* we restrict His work by denying Him at other times.

*Our purpose in life is to seek God!*

## **Questions And Reflection**

1. In Matthew 6:5, (referring to the

hypocrites), what did Jesus mean by "I tell you the truth, they have received their reward in full."?

2. Do you have a routine prayer time? If not, would you make a genuine effort if you received guidance?

3. We are all guilty of being thankless toward God. How could you show that you love Him?

"Why do you look at the speck of sawdust in your brother's eye and pay no attention to the plank in your own eye? How can you say to your brother, 'Let me take the speck out of your eye,' when all the time there is a plank in your own eye? You

hypocrite, first take the plank out of your own eye, and then you will see clearly to remove the speck from your brother's eye."

*Matthew 7:3-5*

4/ We are all quick to judge, but have you ever judged yourself? If you were judge and jury (and dare I say, executioner), would you condemn yourself for your faults or try to help yourself? How might you start helping yourself?

5. Why is confessing sin so difficult for us? When was the last time you confessed your sins? If you have, how did you feel afterwards?

# Prayer

Heavenly Father

To many times we fail to acknowledge you in our lives. Many times we are not worthy of your love, yet no matter what we do, you still love and care for us. Help us to recognize and overcome our foolishness. Let us rejoice that we are your children and that you are our God. Show us through your word how to become personally committed to prayer and to open our hearts and let you enter our lives more fully. We ask this through Jesus Christ, your only Son and our Saviour.

Amen.

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# Part 2 - What Prayer Do I Pray?

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**Scripture Meditation**

"You want something but don't get it. You kill and covet, but you cannot have what you want. You quarrel and fight. You do not have, because you do not ask God. When you ask, you do not receive, because you ask with wrong motives, that you may spend what you get on pleasures."

*James 4:2-3*

## **Introduction**

Many of us pray, or at least we think we do! Now the point was not to start off with such a negative comment (and to a certain extent, scripture meditation), but

sometimes we all really lose sight of what prayer is about.

Prayer was not 'made' for God to find out what we would want or need. If we recall the words of our Lord after referring to the babbling like pagans -

"Do not be like them, for your Father knows what you need before you ask him."

*Matthew 6:8*

Well ... in the words of a typically spoilt child - If God already knows what we need, why doesn't He just give it to us? Why do we have to ask for it?

Indeed why? ...

## Why Does God Want Us To Pray?

God wants us to pray? Why? If you are a parent, you already know the answer to this question! If not, I don't think it will take too much imagination to figure out why.

As a parent, you have the utmost love for your children. No matter how badly they behave, how naughty they may be, you still love them dearly. You wouldn't give them up for anything (although sometimes you may be tempted), but ultimately, they are your flesh and blood and you would do anything to help and protect them.

Now what would happen if you gave your children everything that they wanted, and I mean *everything*? The new toys, plenty of pocket money, all the 'junk' food they asked for, the fancy clothes, the stereo system and so on. Would they develop any respect for these things? Would they have any respect for you? Sure, they may say to others - "My mum and dad are *the best!*", but are you really doing them a service? Unfortunately, some parents are just like this and generally speaking (not all the time), their children have no idea of value or respect for anything or anyone. Who is to blame? Whose sin is it? Surely if a parent is able to provide, then they should provide *and* provide

well! ... Not so! ... What sort of response do these sorry parents get now when they give their children gifts? *None!* Because it's expected.

I think you get the point - children need to learn what to ask for and how to ask for it. As children of God, we cannot expect to have everything we want. Unlike human parents, God will not and cannot fall folly to such desires and the self-indulgent wants of His children. He knows what will happen - in fact He knows that we will get ourselves into enough trouble as it is with the gifts He has already given us.

As mere humans, we are prone to like materialistic riches. If we think

carefully, all the things we have around us are of material worth; all the things that we would like are of material worth and all the things that we eventually get are of material worth. Our tendency is to forget our spiritual needs. Why?

Because God's promises aren't material - they're spiritual in nature and we can't just take them when we want them. In other words, they're a lot harder to come by. That's when Satan steps in and implants the desire and capabilities for us to 'acquire' what we want.

God wants us to pray because this is one way that we express our love and trust in God and by doing so, our trust in Him can increase. He can show us that the

spiritual gifts He has to give us are far more important than any material gift on earth.

God delights in us trusting Him, after all this is what He has always sought - for His children to return the love and trust that He has *always* given them. Too many times, we act as though we don't depend on anyone, that we're in control of the situation. This self-thought independence breaks our bond with God - our relationship suffers and in turn God's Spirit is grieved.

All children look toward their parents for love, trust and guidance. Their parents will provide everything for them, but they must do so with diligence

and not excessiveness. So too, God expects us to look toward Him for love, trust and guidance. He will provide, but He is careful with what He will give us. And how do we look for God? - In prayer!

"If you believe, you will receive whatever you ask for in prayer."

*Matthew 21:22*

*If you believe!* But it is not enough *just* to believe that God exists. We must believe in Him totally, we must commune with Him and show that we *Do* trust and love Him. We *must* show and demonstrate our total submission to Him.

What else can we achieve by prayer?  
What other reason is there? Our prayers  
are powerful! Heaven will not move  
until earth moves. God allows us to  
become involved with Him and to  
participate in the work of the kingdom -  
that is, *if* we want to be involved.

"I tell you the truth, whatever you  
bind on earth will be bound in  
heaven, and whatever you loose on  
earth will be loosed in heaven."

*Matthew 18:18*

Heaven will not move until earth  
moves first! After all, we are  
created in His image!

**Our Prayers Are Powerful!**

I don't think that people realize just how powerful their prayers can be, and those who lack faith have never really tried or persevered! They say that their prayers are never answered, but what sort of things are they asking for? Are they just performing the 'one-off' prayer? As we discussed in Part 1, there are many obstacles that can cut us off from God and it's up to *us* to rectify the situation - God will not do it for us, He will guide and strengthen us, but He can't confess *our* sins for us. Our Lord sent the Holy Spirit to counsel us, but often we ignore the

quiet voice of the Counselor.

"But I tell you the truth: It is for your good that I am going away. Unless I go away, the Counselor will not come to you. When he comes, he will convict the world of guilt in regard to sin and righteousness and judgment: in regard to sin, because men do not believe in me; in regard to righteousness, because I am going to the Father, where you can see me no longer; and in regard to judgment, because the prince of this world now stands condemned."

*John 16:7-11*

The Holy Spirit was sent for us, because Jesus knows that Satan will try to destroy us. It is with the guidance of the Holy Spirit that we can seek God. As Paul said in his letter to the Ephesians -

"And pray in the Spirit on all occasions with all kinds of prayers and requests."

*Ephesians 6:18a*

and as I tell people all the time -

"Our purpose in life is to seek  
God!"

It is only when we pray, that God will respond! Recall from Matthew when Jesus said -

"Ask and it will be given to you; seek and you will find; knock and the door will be opened to you. For everyone who asks receives; he who seeks find; and to him who knocks, the door will be opened."

*Matthew 7:7-8*

The effectiveness of our prayers DOES depend on certain aspects of our life. Consider some of them ...

- We must always pray

according to the will of God.

- We must have faith.
- We must confess our sins.
- We must humble ourselves.
- We must be obedient to the Father.
- We must pray constantly.

If people just realized how meaningful and powerful their prayers really are, I *know* that people *would* pray more often than they do. Prayer can bring about remarkable things, not only in our own personal life, but in the lives of others. It is remarkable for us because we have a deeper and more meaningful relationship with

God, and remarkable for others because what we ask for here on earth, heaven can then accomplish.

## **What Prayer Do I Pray?**

We have many prayers and devotions, all for a variety of purposes. Some for the enjoyment of praising God, others for requests, thanks, confession and petition. But what prayer do I pray?

Many times, we find that our inability to pray is because we don't know what to say. However, we must remember that the Holy Spirit is with us and is our

Counselor. He conveys our innermost feelings, thoughts and needs to God, even when we ourselves have trouble expressing them. God is constantly searching our hearts and knows our desires. So even when we don't know what to say, God still understands our needs. With prayer, we can always enjoy a loving communion with God.

"These people come near me with their mouth and honour me with their lips, but their hearts are far from me. Their worship of me is made up only of rules taught by men.

Therefore once more I will  
astound these people with  
wonder upon wonder; the  
wisdom of the wise will  
perish, the intelligence of the  
intelligent will vanish."

*Isaiah 29:13-14*

Above all things, God wants us to pray with our hearts. He is not really interested in our words (although words are important), but He does not want us to ramble on repeating mere formulae. If we are going to talk to Him, then it must be from the heart ... we must mean it ... we must pine for His company.

So does our prayer need to be

anything special? No! Our prayer should be natural - like a child. Now you may feel uncomfortable for a while, but after some time you will feel comfortable; our communion with God should be like a normal conversation. Speak to God as you would your dearest friends or your parents. Share with Him your secrets, your fears, your desires. You will be surprised at His response. For some reason, many of us feel that we need to make our prayers sound 'holy', so to speak. God is not interested in us trying to make our prayers sound like scripture. He knows when we are doing this ... and things just

don't sound right, we find it very unnatural and awkward. The last thing we want to do is to be discouraged so early on. I have had people say to me that their prayers sound childish ... perhaps they should. Never become discouraged.

Now there are no set formulae for prayers. If you were hoping to find some, then I'm afraid you're out of luck. Prayer comes from the heart and comes from the heart of the individual. We are all different in what we have done, what we would like to do and what we are going to do. Prayer is not something that you can recite like a script.

Praying scriptures is helpful and beautiful, but nothing is like the prayer from our hearts.

Of the many 'types' of prayer available to us, the prayer of *confession* and *seeking forgiveness* is probably the hardest for us, especially if you are not in the habit of praying often. This type of prayer can really tug at the heart-strings ... *if* we really mean it. I recommend this prayer to everyone who is serious about prayer. You don't really know just how 'bad' you've been until you sit quietly and contemplate what you've done. I know of some who shy away from

this type of prayer ... but what do they expect to achieve? You cannot hide yourself from God - there's no use pretending that He can't see you. He already knows! I think it's more the problem that, to coin an old phrase - 'the truth hurts' ... and so it does; especially if it is about us. Even more so if we are the ones accusing and laying blame upon ourselves. *but* how good do we feel after!!?? Be an active participant of this type of prayer ... I promise you, you will never regret having opened you heart and soul to God!

Our other prayer 'types' we will

consider in more detail in our later studies. These include prayers of -

- worship;
- praise;
- thanksgiving;
- petition;
- self-examination;
- deliverance; and
- intercession.

Different people, would no doubt classify prayer 'types' in a slightly different manner, but in general, all will fit one (or more) of the above.

**Easier Said Than Done!**

"Easier said than done!", you may say ... and so it is! No one said that this was going to be easy! Part of our problem derives from the fact that we tend to over-simplify things. You may feel that I've made it sound a bit too easy above. But you try it ... you sit down and try talking to God in a natural manner about what you've done to hurt Him - then tell me how easy it was!

No ... prayer from the heart is not easy.

I have said that there are not set formulae for prayers ... true, but fortunately there are guides.

I have spoken often about the acronym A.C.T.S.. There are many other 'guides' to aid in praying, but I have found that this one has been one of the most successful. I practise this form myself because I believe that it follows, very much the model prayer that our Lord gave us. (We will consider "The Lord's Prayer" in Part 3.)

## **A - Adoration**

Our adoration sets the tone for our prayer time, it reminds us who we are addressing and who we are in the presence of. This is when we praise God for His omnipotence. In

fact everything that we are thankful for; His faith in us, His mercy and His undying love and devotion for us; just to name a few.

## **C - Confession**

Unconfessed sin is the greatest block between us and God. God detests sin, no matter how small or trivial it may seem to us. Confess your sins and ask for God's forgiveness. Name your sins to the best of your ability. The benefits of confessing your sins will bring you closer to God and unleash the true power of prayer.

## **T - Thanksgiving**

This is when you give thanks for everything that you have received — good or bad. For what we may find good and bad respectively, may not be deemed that way by God. There is a big difference between being grateful and expressing thanks to God. Thank God for what you have, what you had, answered prayers, spiritual and relational blessings.

## **S - Supplication**

Remember, nothing is impossible for God! Provided you are sincere, you may request things. You must, however, make sure that these

requests are proper and they will not always be recognized. God knows what we want before we ask and He also knows what we need. Our requests must be in harmony with the will of God.

Now this format will gain you very valuable time with our heavenly Father, but do not be concerned about the amount of time. Time will grow with devotion and perseverance. You may start out at fifteen minutes, but fifteen minutes of quality time with God is surely worth it. In no time at all, you will find yourself spending an hour or more. This type of prayer time IS

possible!

## **Prayer Journals**

You have probably heard of prayer journals and wondered what they entail ... perhaps you already use one. I can tell you they are one of the single most important possessions one could have.

Prayer journals *do not* need to be elaborate or ornate books. Some of the professional journals are very beautiful, but they are not necessary as they often restrict you to how much (or little) you write (and if you're like me, I never want to

deface them with my atrocious handwriting). A simple notebook is all that is required.

I was given this suggestion once and it has worked well for me since. At the start of each day, I head up a page and write ...  
YESTERDAY ... from here I proceed through A.C.T.S.. This sort of procedure is excellent for a number of reasons.

We can look back on what we have written later.

You will find it very interesting (and heart rendering) sometimes to

re- read what you have written.

We can keep a record of what we  
have asked for.

How many times have you heard people say that their prayers are never answered? Now, have they *never* been answered, or have they simply forgotten what they had asked for? You will be so surprised just how often God does answer your prayers and with a permanent record we can see how often He does so.

We can determine whether we are  
in harmony.

Okay ... not all prayers are answered, so there must be a reason. Our record allows us to review what we have been asking for. Perhaps there is a pattern to what we ask for. Are we too greedy, too lazy, too spiteful. These and other things will stand out to us in a written record.

We can maintain concentration.

One of our biggest problems in prayer is the inability to maintain concentration. Our mind simply wanders off. One minute we're

talking to God, the next we're thinking of what we'll be doing on the week-end. By writing, we keep on task. (It is also important to be able to find a quiet place to journal. Try to avoid distractions.)

When it comes to confession, some do not feel comfortable with keeping a permanent record. I have to admit, it is not a nice thing to read all the bad things you've done - no one likes to be reminded. If you feel the same way, then write your confession on a separate piece of paper and destroy it later *but do not leave* confession out!

I always find it easier to write

things down than to say them. Once I've written everything, I can concentrate on my prayer. The journal entry you have just written *now* becomes your prayer and if you've been honest in your writing, then your prayer will be honest.

As you pray through your entry, you will inevitably add to what you have written. If this happens, let it - this is natural. When you have finished, just sit quietly and listen. Prayer is a two-way conversation - we don't need to do all the talking. In fact at certain times during your prayer, you may just stop and listen. Do not be perturbed if you don't

hear that 'quiet voice'. If you are a new-comer to prayer, it will take some time before you hear that 'quiet voice', but *do not* despair - nothing is impossible!

So now you need to put your 'want to pray' into action. Your first step, even if you've done this before ... confess your sins. Sit quietly and ask God for His forgiveness and mercy.

"First, prayer; then, atonement; in the third place - very much "in the third place" - action."  
*The Blessed J Escriva*

I will leave you with this beautiful

## prayer of Basil of Caesarea.

*O Lord and Master, I am unworthy both of heaven and of earth, because I have surrendered myself to sin, and become the slave of worldly pleasures. Yet, since you created me, and since you can shape me as you want, I do not despair of salvation; but made bold by your compassionate love, I come before you. Receive me, dear Lord, as you received the harlot, the thief, the tax collector and even the prodigal son. You love all*

*people, so pour your love upon me. Lift from me the heavy burden of sin, cleanse every stain of unrighteousness from me, and wash me white with the waters of holiness. Amen.*

## **Questions and Reflection**

1. Why do YOU think God wants us to pray?
2. Jesus says in Matthew 18:18 -  
"I tell you the truth, whatever you bind on earth will be

bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven."

What sort of things do we bind and loose on earth? How would these bind and loose the same in heaven?

3. Out of the prayer types that were listed, viz. worship, praise, thanksgiving, petition, confession, self-examination, deliverance and intercession - Do any one come across as being more important than the others? Would you rank them as equally important? Why or why not?

4. Do you use a prayer journal? If

so, do you use it everyday? How important is it for you to write something in it each day?

If you don't use a prayer journal, are you prepared to try one? If not, why? If so, start today!

5. After reading Basil of Caesarea's prayer, reflect upon it for a while and try to write something similar to God. If you like, use the same prayer and just change a couple of lines that would be better fitting to apply to yourself.

## **Prayer**

Caring and compassionate God

Look down upon us and shower us with your mercy Lord. We are all sinners and have fallen folly to Satan many times and yet you still love, protect and trust us. You made us in your Image and you wish us to be more like you - to attain that perfection you so much desire for us. Look not upon our sin when we fail, but forgive us and strengthen our faith. May your glory shine upon us as we develop and increase our faith, trust and love in you through our prayers.

We ask these things through Jesus Christ, our Lord and Saviour.

Amen.

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# Part 3 - Then Pray Like This ...

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Do We Pray Like This?  
Questions and Reflection  
Prayer

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*Domine, doce nos orare.*  
*(Lord, teach us to pray.)*

**Scripture Meditation**

"Then, this, is how you should pray: 'Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name, your kingdom come, your will be done on earth as it is in heaven. Give us today our

daily bread. Forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors. And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from the evil one."

*Matthew 6:9-13*

## **Introduction**

"One day Jesus was praying in a certain place. When he finished, one of his disciples said to him, 'Lord, teach us to pray, just as John taught his disciples.'"

*Luke 11:1*

The Lord's Prayer (Oratio

Dominica), is *the* basic Christian prayer. Jesus gave his disciples and us (we are also disciples of the Lord) this prayer as a model - a guide on how to pray. These words were given to Him from the Father and He gave them to us.

"When you have lifted up the Son of Man, then you will know that I am the one I claim to be and that I do nothing on my own but speak just what the Father has taught me."

*John 8:28*

Most of us would know the Lord's Prayer in the following form, which I will use throughout this lesson.

Our Father, Who art in heaven,  
Hallowed be thy name.

Thy kingdom come. Thy will, be  
done on earth as it is in heaven.

Give us this day, our daily bread.

And forgive us our trespasses, As  
we forgive those who trespass  
against us.

And lead us not into temptation, But  
deliver us from evil.

[For thine is the kingdom, And the  
power and the glory, For ever.]

Amen.

The final [doxology] is sometimes  
not always said immediately;

especially in a church service (there may be other short prayers of repentance or supplication before it). There are a number of variations of the Lord's Prayer, but this is mainly a re-wording, e.g. debtor --> trespasses; but in any version, the prayer holds the same content, meaning and purpose.

Unfortunately, the tendency is to memorize this prayer as a set formula that *cannot* be changed! It is repeated and *recited* mechanically without thought.

How many times have you heard the Lord's Prayer *recited* in church? They race through it as if it were a

competition ... to the point where I find it embarrassing. It's as if people are ashamed to pray.

We must *pray* this prayer, not simply recite it. It requires thought and meditation - its purpose being to awaken and stimulate our faith.

As a prayer, the Lord's Prayer is a beautiful prayer, it is a model on which we base all our prayers - sometimes called 'a summary of the gospel'.

"The Lord's Prayer is most perfect, because, as Augustine says (ad Probam Ep. cxxx, 12), 'if we pray rightly and

fittingly, we can say nothing else but what is contained in this prayer of our Lord.' For since prayer interprets our desires, as it were, before God, then alone is it right to ask for something in our prayers when it is right that we should desire it. Now in the Lord's Prayer not only do we ask for all that we may rightly desire, but also in the order wherein we ought to desire them, so that this prayer not only teaches us to ask, but also directs all our affections."

*St. Thomas Aquinas - Summa*

So, I don't believe that mere recitation of the prayer (as is) is the only thing we are supposed to do!

We have a lot more to think about than just the mere recitation of sixty- nine words ...

## **Our Father**

When Jesus said this, it was something very radical! The idea of calling God ... Father? How can you do this? Can you imagine the look on the Pharisee's faces!

When we say 'Our Father', of course we are referring to God. But we are not referring to Him in a possessive manner; rather in way to develop a new and meaningful relationship with Him. This mutual communion is something that God wants from us as His children. After losing us to sin in the beginning, He has always 'desired' us to seek Him throughout our lifetime on earth.

Through this seemingly simple statement, we acknowledge the promises that the prophets announced to fulfil the new and everlasting covenant through our

redeemer, Jesus Christ. In this way we are to overcome division and opposition in our lives and towards others. We *are* His people and He *is* our God. When we pray 'our', we bring before Him everything and everyone for what and whom He gave His only beloved Son.

'Our Father' does not divide the Trinity, we are addressing the Father of our Lord. When we pray to the Father, we do so to adore and glorify Him together with the Son and the Holy Spirit.

**Who Art In Heaven**

Many people say that heaven is a 'place', indeed they may be correct - we don't really know. But when people refer to heaven as a 'place', they can also make heaven and God seem very distant and away from us. We must always remember that God is not distant - He is always with us. He is greater than anything we could possibly imagine. St. Augustine put this point well -

"Our Father who art in heaven' is rightly understood to mean that God is in the hearts of the just, as in his holy temple. At the same time, it means that those who pray

should desire the one they  
invoke to dwell in them."

*St. Augustine - "De sermone  
Domini in monte"*

God *is not* distant! He is  
*everywhere* (omnipresent) ALL the  
time! Sin has kept us away from  
heaven. God cannot tolerate sin, no  
matter how trivial it may seem. For  
example, there is no such thing as 'a  
little white lie', it IS a lie - end of  
debate, we have sinned. When we  
pray to our Father in heaven, it is  
the conversion of our heart that  
brings us back to the Father - all  
prayer must come from the heart,  
not the head. Whether or not heaven

is an actual place is of no consequence when we pray. We do know that the Son *descended* from heaven and then *ascended* into heaven. We have also been told that our final home will be with the Father and that there are many rooms -

"In my Father's house are many rooms; if it were not so, I would have told you. I am going there to prepare a place for you."

*John 14:2*

The keys to heaven are in our heart ... when we find peace with ourselves, we will find peace and

be with God.

## **The First Petition**

### Hallowed Be Thy Name

With this statement, we begin our petitions to God. In fact the first three (thy name, thy kingdom and thy will) are all petitions for God's own sake. In none of these do we mention ourselves. This is what Jesus instructed us to do - we must worship God above all others.

Correctly speaking, only God hallows, that is, to make holy. But here the interpretation is a little

different. God's name *is* holy, *we* are not making God's name holy.

When we pray 'hallowed be thy name', we are recognizing God's name as being and always being holy. It is more a sign of adoration and praise for His name that we say this to fulfil the prayer of Christ.

"I will remain in the world no longer, but they still in the world, and I am coming to you. Holy Father, protect them by the power of your name - the name you gave to me - so that they may be one as we are one."

*John 17:11*

## The Second Petition

Thy kingdom come

The kingdom of God is proclaimed throughout the entire Gospel and comes through Jesus' death and resurrection. The kingdom of God is in our midst, perhaps we do not realize this - it has been coming since the Last Supper!

"He who testifies to these things says, 'Yes, I am coming soon.' Amen. Come, Lord Jesus."

*Revelation 22:20*

This is the cry of the Spirit - 'Come, Lord Jesus'. Christ will return in all His glory to bring us to completeness. He wants this for us, but we must also desire it - we *must* want this. We should all be able to say loudly and proudly - 'Thy kingdom come!'

So often, we do not think about the kingdom of God. We tend to think more about our own 'little kingdom' here on earth - and we place a GREAT deal of importance in it - much more than we should! What we have on earth will mean nothing in heaven. All our material possessions are useless to us. We

may think that all our possessions make our life very comfortable on earth ... and they may do so, but is it possible to live without most of them? I think that you will find it is! We are very spoilt children and succumb to Satan far too easily because he can offer us what we want on earth. He does not, cannot and will not offer us anything in heaven - only God can do that. God has made that promise and will stand by it - the rest is up to us!

### **The Third Petition**

Thy will, be done (on earth as it is  
in heaven)

"This is good, and pleases  
God our Saviour, who wants  
all men to be saved and to  
come to a knowledge of truth."

*1 Timothy 2:3-4*

God wants us to be in harmony with His will. He only wants the best for us, but often we do not see this - we are blinded by our own evil desires. Many times we do not help others or we shy away from this task for a number of reasons.

"A new command I give you:  
Love one another. As I have  
loved you, so you must love

one another."

*John 13:34*

By praying 'thy will be done', we hope to understand and follow the will of God. This is not easy for us because God is holy and we aren't - we do not always follow His laws - we are sinners.

For us to do the will of God, we must act, we cannot stand back and hope that others will do things. Perhaps they may, but we must also do our part. It is very much as James said -

"What good is it, my brother, if a man claims to have faith

but has no deeds? Can such  
faith save him?"

*James 2:14*

If we wish the will of God to be done on earth, then we must pray for this and we must also work for this - it is not something that is just going to happen for us. How heaven moves is governed by how earth moves. God will not do anything until we ask. Even though He knows what we need, unless we ask, we will never receive, because we have not knocked at the door and we have not sought the will of God.

## The Fourth Petition

Give us this day, our daily bread

'Give us' really brings out the point that we are His children. How many times have you heard young children say 'give me' or something similar? It may sound very rude and impolite, but his is how children ask for things. It is not always meant in an impolite manner. By saying 'give us', we are acknowledging that God is all-powerful and loving - our Father. Nothing is impossible for Him. We ask and we shall receive -

*provided* He wills it.

'Give us' is also prayed in terms of 'everyone'. We do not pray this for ourselves only. We pray this prayer for everyone - for their needs and wants. But like any loving father, we are not always going to get what we ask for or what we want. God is not suggesting that we are to be idle and just sit back and take, Take , *TAKE*. He is saying that He will always provide for us. It may not always come in the time, shape or manner that we expect, *but He will* provide for us.

Often, this line is interpreted as a physical or nutritious 'bread'. Bear

in mind that the Word of God is also known as 'bread'. In many cases, this petition can be for the Word of God to be spread to those who have not heard.

"Jesus answered, 'It is written: "Man does not live on bread alone, but on every word that comes from the mouth of God.'"

*Matthew 4:4*

So all Christians should make every effort to proclaim the good news to the poor. The want for bread could well be the want for Christ.

## The Fifth Petition

And forgive us our trespasses, (As  
we forgive those who trespass  
against us.)

This petition stands out among the others. Not so much in the first part, but in the second. 'And forgive us our trespasses' fits well with the other petitions, but 'as we forgive those who trespass against us'?? How well do *we* fit this mould?

As written, it would suggest to us that the first will not be satisfied *unless* the second is. We *must*

forgive others - regardless of what they do to us. When we can do this, then ours will be forgiven. It seems such a fleeting statement to make and we don't often take much notice of what it is actually saying. I don't think many people *do* understand what is being asked for here.

We cannot expect mercy from the Father if we do not show mercy and understanding to other. Forgiveness must be two-way; we need to break out of our take, Take, *TAKE* mould and be prepared to give, Give, *GIVE*.

Now let's not kid ourselves ... forgiveness is not easy. It is not a

matter of simply saying - 'I forgive you.' Think of the parents whose son or daughter has been killed by a drunk driver. Think of the many people who have had relatives murdered. Think of the woman who has been raped. Now tell me - How easy is it to forgive?

## **The Sixth Petition**

And lead us not into temptation,

Temptation is the root of our sins.  
We are tempted, succumb to the  
temptation and sin follows.

"When tempted, no one should

say, 'God is tempting me.' For God cannot be tempted by evil, nor does he tempt anyone; but each one is tempted when, by his own evil desire, he is dragged away and enticed. Then, after desire has conceived, it gives birth to sin; and sin, when it is full-grown, gives birth to death."

*James 1:13-15*

God wants to set us all free from evil, but we must also work with God to achieve this. He will not help unless we act first.

To avoid temptation is difficult for us - we are open to so much and are

easily distracted from spiritual activities. We are all very much like the 'doubting Thomas' - unless we see, we will not believe. Our continual battle with temptation is the fact that the temptation generally leads to something that we see, something material. By prayer, we are able to vanquish the deceiver and grow stronger.

## **The Seventh Petition**

But deliver us from evil.

"My prayer is not that you take them out of the world but that

you protect them from the evil one."

*John 17:15*

The word 'evil' here is not a something - it is a someone ... Satan. It is from Satan that all evil comes ... from the one who opposes God. Do not be deceived into thinking that Satan does not exist. He is *not* omnipresent, but he and his fallen *do* exist and it is they that delight in evil. They will do anything to destroy us and to thwart God's plans for us.

Satan is very powerful and very determined. It is foolish to go up against him by yourself - this is

why we pray. We can dismiss the presence of his evil by praying in and through Jesus' name.

## **Doxology**

The doxology brings us back to the start of our prayer, sort of like a full circle. We started with praise and adoration, through our petitions, confession, thanks and supplication - it is only fitting to finish again with thanks and praise for our Father.

In conclusion, we finalize our prayer with the glorification of His name, the coming of His reign and

the power of His saving will linking up with - 'thy name', 'thy kingdom' and 'thy will'.

## **Amen**

Our prayers finish with Amen - commonly, we understand Amen to mean 'so be it', but Amen is also said at the end of prayers to acknowledge what has been said before and that it is the truth - to confirm the words and invoke the truth of them, so a 'better' interpretation may be 'that which is true' - as our Lord has said many times - 'I tell you the truth ...'

## Do We Pray Like This?

The Lord's Prayer, Oratio Dominica, Pater Noster, Our Father, Padre Nuestro, Padre Nostro, Unser Vater ... in any language, it is *not* just a simple prayer to be recited thoughtlessly and mechanically.

We must think of what we are saying. Indeed, this is a trap into which we all fall at some time or another. Because we have 'learnt' the words, we tend to rattle them off - we can actually say the words without thinking about what we are

saying.

Prayer is not like this - we should never rush prayer. In the same manner that we read the scriptures, we should pray ... thoughtfully - be guided and learn. When we say a prayer without thinking about what we have said, we lose all meaning and purpose of the prayer - this is exactly what Satan wants of us - to make ours prayers meaningless.

Throughout our prayers, we must be constantly alert to Satan's attack on our concentration, but also ready and willing to hear the word of God through His Son and the Holy Spirit.

It is not common for some to 'alter' the Lord's Prayer, they think that it is set in stone and cannot be changed. *Do not* be like this, our Lord did not intend His words to be *the* only form of His prayer.

*"Then, this, is how you should pray: ..."*

The translation is very good, but read this carefully! Perhaps the King James Version makes more of this point -

*"After this manner therefore pray ye: ..."*

Jesus has not said 'this is how you

must pray' or 'this is how you will pray' - it is how we *should* pray - the suggestion is very different - in this manner, pray ...

Throughout this prayer, Jesus highlights for us and instructs us how we should pray and what we should pray for; it is our duty as children of God and ministers of Christ to pray this prayer often and with love for God, others and ourselves. And when we pray this prayer, pray it out loud - never be ashamed to let others hear you call God ... 'Our Father'.

*The Lord's Prayer is a 'summary of the gospel'.*

"How can we fail to appreciate the value of vocal prayer!"

*The Blessed J. Escriva - The Way*

## **Questions and Reflection**

1. Do you think that Jesus would have been surprised by His disciples when they asked Him to teach them to pray? Why, why not?
2. How often should we pray this prayer? Why?
3. How are giving and receiving

forgiveness related? Is it possible for one to exist without the other?

"When you have lifted up the Son of Man, then you will know that I am the one I claim to be and that I do nothing on my own but speak just what the Father has taught me."

*John 8:28*

4. Jesus says He speaks 'just what the Father has taught me'. The Lord's Prayer was given to us by Jesus from the Father. What does this prayer tell you about the Father and about yourself?

5. In the following prayer, I have

used the words of the Lord's Prayer. Why don't you try to write a prayer and pray it using the Lord's Prayer as a basis. In many cases, when we follow the Lord's Prayer, our prayer will take on a far different and personal meaning for us.

## **Prayer**

Let us pray in confidence to the Father using the words that our Saviour gave us ...

Caring and compassionate God, our creator and Our Father in heaven, all glory and honour is yours. It is

right for us to give you thanks and praise always. Hallowed be your name for your name is holy, it is the name above all others and every knee will bow in adoration. We wait for your kingdom to come because you have promised this and your covenant with us will never be broken; even though we break ours to you many times. Your will, will be done on earth as it is in heaven because this is what you desire for us. Heaven moves when earth moves as we pray in unity and harmony with your will. Humbly we request that you give us this day, our daily bread as we endeavour to totally consecrate

ourselves to you. Help us to increase our faith so that we knowingly submit ourselves to your will. We do not live by bread alone, but upon the nourishment your holy Word. And forgive us our trespasses, though they be many and guide us seek discipline and forgiveness; as we forgive those who trespass against us. Let us look kindly toward our brothers and sisters and avoid the temptation to judge one another. Make us an instrument of your love and mercy and move us to feed the hungry; to give drink to the thirsty; to clothe the naked; to shelter the homeless; to visit the sick and to visit the

imprisoned. Help us to recognize our sins and lead us not into temptation, for our world is filled with temptations of the flesh, but deliver us from evil as we strive to reflect upon your spiritual gifts. For yours is the kingdom we will enter, and the power and the glory of your name will be for ever upon our lips.

Amen.

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# Part 4 - From The Heart

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# Scripture Meditation

"For where your treasure is,  
there your heart will be also."

*Matthew 6:21*

## Introduction

You may recall from 1 Samuel when the Lord asked Samuel to anoint the next king of Israel after He had rejected Saul. Samuel erred in his thoughts by looking at outward appearances. This is the Lord's response when Samuel assumed Eliab to be the one -

"But the Lord said to Samuel,  
'Do not consider his  
appearance or his height, for I  
have rejected him. The Lord  
does not look at the things man  
looks at. Man looks at the  
outward appearance, but the  
Lord looks at the heart.'"

*1 Samuel 16:7*

How many times have we been  
guilty of this? By judging the  
outward appearance, we may  
overlook the qualities of people  
that are not always easy to see.  
Appearance is not a true indication  
of how true a person really is.

God does not judge by

appearances. We cannot hide our true self from God. Others may see our outward appearances and actions, but only God can see our hearts.

When we pray, we must be sincere - we cannot pretend to pray!  
Sometimes people do ... they say words and it sounds like they are praying, but unless it comes from the heart it means nothing. God knows this!

## **Searching Our Hearts**

"In the same way, the Spirit

helps us in our weakness. We do not know what we ought to pray for, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us with groans that words cannot express.

And he who searches our hearts knows the mind of the Spirit, because the Spirit intercedes for the saints in accordance with God's will."

*Romans 8:26-27*

God searches our hearts because only God can do this and truly know what we need. Sometimes we think that we are searching our hearts whereas in fact we are searching our mind.

In the course of everyday, we have many thoughts jostling about in our minds; some good, some bad and other that we are not sure of. This is what makes it so difficult for us when we try to find some quiet-time. It's hard for us to empty our minds because of the things we've been doing during the day and all the different things we have planned for later. Many of the things we think about are not spiritual in nature, they are of this earth only ... to satisfy the flesh. We have a lot of trouble getting out of this mode and it is all but impossible sometimes. We are not naturally of a spiritual world - we

long for it, pray for it and know we will enter into that world - but ours is a materialistic world.

In this world practicalities and logic play a great role and these two are a great cause of trouble for us. Most times we tend to try to think things out logically. I'm afraid being practical and logical does not always help us out when it comes to prayer. Because we use our minds activity most of the time, we forget how to use our heart.

The previous passage from Romans tells us that the Spirit intercedes for us. Why is this? The Spirit intercedes for us because He is our

counselor and as Christians we have a longing to be made whole ... to be perfect. Perfect, not in the sense of here on earth or what others may think of us; e.g. physical, intellectual, social; but perfect in the eyes of God. We long to experience life as God intended it to be so, not how we make it. Our problem is that sometimes, or many times, we are unable to express this in words.

We all know what it's like to be lost for words, but when we really long for something, something important to us, especially that which is spiritual - we don't know

how to express this longing! It is in these times of helplessness, frustration or weakness that the Holy Spirit will intercede for us to convey our feelings to God. The Holy Spirit lives within us, in our very hearts and takes up our feelings, make them His and conveys them to God on our behalf - these are the 'groans words cannot express'.

The Greek - *stenagmos*, here literally means to groan or groanings. At first it may seem a rather strange word to use, but think carefully. What happens when you really want something and are

unable to express it in words or action? ... You utter something! You're not really sure what it was, but it's a reaction that comes from you, not words, a sort of groan, perhaps some sort of inexpressible cry, scream, shout or even something guttural. Now I'm not saying the Holy Spirit speaks like this, but I think you get the idea.

These are the sort of things that happen when we are using our hearts. Our hearts do not always express things in words, but in something much deeper that perhaps only God can understand. A lot of times when this happens,

we don't understand why we made those groanings, because now the mind is taking over and trying to be logical. The mind is not sensitive to the groanings of the heart.

Is it possible for us to search our own hearts, or is this something that only God can do? I truly believe that we can search our own hearts and in some ways search others, but it is difficult to do because we constantly battle the ideas of the mind.

To search others hearts we much first be able to search our own and be at peace with ourselves. We must love ourselves forgetting all

of our faults because God loves us as His son or daughter. This what we seek from God - His love. We already have it, but the day to day hustle and bustle make it less and less obvious to us. We must go to our secret closet and find ourselves through prayer.

Many of our problems evolve from us. We devalue ourselves or think that we're not up to scratch, so to speak. We are constantly comparing ourselves with others and then becoming disillusioned when we don't meet our self-imposed expectations. God does not want us to do this. He wants us

to accept ourselves as we are. He made us in the shape, form and manner that is best. He gave us talents in many areas to be used to glorify Him.

We must be happy within ourselves and with ourselves, we are all different but precious to God, no two of us are the same, not even identical twins - they may look the same in their appearances, but they are very different inside - in their hearts. Too often our mind rules our heart or our logic tells us that our heart is wrong. We must learn to use our hearts more - to love ourselves, others and God.

# How Do I Know If I Pray From The Heart?

People ask this and commonly the response is, "You will know." I have to agree, this is true, but not everyone experiences the same thoughts and feelings. So how would one know? This is not an easy question to answer.

The question is very much like, "How do you know love?" and this is part of our first question. We must know or recognize this love before we will know if we are praying from the heart.

Many think that this love is something that knocks you head over heels when you meet it! Do you remember when younger when you thought you met *the* person? You constantly think of them, you can't concentrate, you *have* to be with them ... Well you think it's love, but really? ... lust anyway! This is not the love we have for God. By loving God, He does not want us to be distracted from our duties now. Love for God is very different. Yes, we will think of God throughout the day, *but* we are not totally distracted from our life. The reason this is so is that everything we do is to glorify God. It is to

show Him that we CAN make good use of our talents for His purpose. When we have a love for God, we are not prone to evil tasks - sure we may sin - but we do not do things that are intrinsically evil or things to harm others.

Everyone has this love for God! Yes, *everyone*! I firmly believe this. The tragedy for some is that they *choose* to ignore it and hope it will go away. They have been smitten by Satan! And as I have said before, if you harm the Holy Spirit and continually push Him away - He will leave. Then we no longer have a love for God *or* our

self.

God loves us all as His children - we make so many mistakes, yet He will always love us and continue to try and reach out for us - *unless* we make the choice to not recognize Him. Many of us though have difficulty returning this love to God who rightly deserves it - at least we think that we don't return His love. *But* we do ...

We return this love through prayer and how we treat others ... treat everybody as if they were Christ Himself.

When we make the effort of taking

time to spend with God, we are praying from the heart. It may not seem that way at first, but it is this quiet- time that is important, even if we don't say very much. As for how you know ... physically? You *will* know! You may experience many different feelings, sadness or happiness. But the best feeling is when you come from your secret closet ... you DO feel different! It IS something difficult to express, but once you've experienced it, you will never want to lose the feeling. You in communion with the Holy Spirit praying a prayer of love to God ... this is praying from the heart!

## Treat Everyone Like Jesus

"A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another. By this all men will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another."

*John 13:34-35*

Have you ever tried this? If not you will certainly be amazed at what happens. For a while you may need to make a concentrated effort to do so, but this is only because we are not used to doing so ... to treat

everyone like Jesus Himself.

Jesus is in everyone you meet, everyday ... think about this and you will find it true. He is in everyone just as He is in me and you. What did Jesus do? Jesus helped everyone! He was not afraid to be with the unclean or with the sinners. These were His children - all of them, regardless of their deficiencies in any respect. This is how we have to be like ... *Now!* *AND IT IS NOT EASY.* If we cannot love ourselves then we cannot love another. Jesus demonstrated this love for us and now He expects us to follow His example.

The next time you meet someone,  
look into their eyes ... you will find  
Him!

## **The Unique You**

I would like to share a short prayer  
with you that was sent to me by a  
dear friend. It indirectly looks at  
how we treat ourselves. This  
prayer states everything in the  
positive side, whereas we  
generally approach it from the  
negative side.

### *AN AFFIRMATION OF FAITH*

I love myself unconditionally,

because God loved me first and loves me now as his child I praise God for God's love.

It's good to be me. I'm very happy to be me, I'm loved. Therefore I'm loveable. I praise God for myself.

I never devalue myself with destructive self-criticism. I praise God for my value.

My body is a temple of the Holy Spirit. I accept it, I like it, I praise God for it and I rejoice in it's ever increasing wholeness.

I rejoice in my own uniqueness and give others the same right. I praise God for my uniqueness.

I have unconditional warm regard  
for all people at all times. I praise  
God for them.

Does any of this sound familiar?  
We can be so cruel to ourselves  
without even really trying. It is no  
wonder that some poor unfortunate  
people lead themselves down the  
path of self-destruction ... they fail  
*themselves* because they don't live  
up to their *own* expectations.

Isn't it about time you treated  
yourself a little bit better? All this  
comes from the mind, not the heart.  
Let us start using our hearts more  
often.

"I will sprinkle clean water on you, and you will be clean; I will cleanse you from all your impurities and from all your idols. I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit in you; I will remove from you your heart of stone and give you a heart of flesh. And I will put my Spirit in you and move you to follow my decrees and be careful to keep my laws."

*Ezekiel 36:25-27*

I think that sometimes, some of us may suffer from having a heart of stone - cold and unfeeling,

unbreakable and impenetrable -  
something that doesn't know love  
but only hate, despise and self-pity.

## **Who Are You? ... Inside And Behind The Mask ...**

Do you ever pretend to be someone  
or something that you really aren't?  
If we answer this question honestly,  
I think that we will all say yes! One  
of our unfortunate tendencies is to  
act differently in public than we do  
at home - or when nobody is  
looking.

Why do we pretend? Isn't this just  
another way that we deceive

ourselves?

As Christians, we have to be careful that we do not allow this to happen. It can be our downfall - people *will* watch and scrutinize our behaviour and how we react to different situations and people. They will be forever trying to catch us out ... to see if we are genuine in what we say and do.

However, too often we wear a mask! We don the mask in some cases to hide our true self from other people. Why? What are we really afraid of? Is there something inside of us that makes us *want* to hide how we act?

In many cases we are unknowingly (sometimes knowingly) trying to conform to the expectations of society and this is how people can become so entangled in the web that they start to lose their own identity. Perhaps you know of someone this has happened to ... perhaps this happened to you. If so, then you know how difficult it is to gain control again. When it happens, we will lose sight of God. We don't realize it at the time, but this is what has happened. We have become so caught up in the falseness about us and others that we start to live the lie and

gradually start to separate ourselves from God ... we start to think less and less about Him and give less and less credit to Him. We are finding too much pleasure through our earthly existence.

It is not until we suddenly wake up to what has happened that we can work to rectify our problems. At such times we may think God has left us ... *NOT SO* ... we have left God. He is still with us, it's just that our conformity, ambition and earthly passion has blinded us of His existence.

We conform to too many of the evils of society because society

makes our life comfortable! The mind has successfully ruled over the heart ... again!

Consider these words from The Blessed J Escriva -

"Ambition: to be good myself, and to see everyone as better than I."

"Your greatest enemy is your own self."

Let's stop pretending ... we have nothing to be ashamed of. Let us stop hiding our true self from people. Let our hearts rule the love for others, ourselves and God. *LET*

*US BE HONEST!* Let us not blame God for our folly.

Much of our world is surrounded by evil or darkness. God's promises and love shines in the darkness.

"The light shines in the darkness but the darkness has not understood it."

*John 1:5*

If we can cut through all the evil, we *will* find the light, the goodness of God. However, many of us, are quite happy in the darkness (we ARE the darkness), and we ignore the

sometimes faint glimmer of  
light that we see. We need to  
come closer to the light

Professor Julius Sumner  
Miller put this well -

"A tiny spark can set the  
world aflame and the  
light of a single candle  
can pierce the darkness."

When we approach this light -

"If any of you lacks  
wisdom, he should ask  
God, who gives  
generously to all without  
finding fault, and it will

be given to him."

*James 1:5*

So when we lack wisdom and wear our mask (fall or begin to fall into temptation), if we ask God, we receive His help and by doing this, we will be able to remove the mask, avoid temptation and in turn strengthen our faith. Such is the truth of God!

"Never make a decision without stopping to consider the matter in the

presence of God."

*The Blessed J*

*Escriva - The Way*

## **God Is Not Against Pleasure**

"People will be  
lovers of  
themselves, lovers  
of money, boastful,  
proud, abusive,  
disobedient to their  
parents, ungrateful,  
unholy, without  
love, unforgiving,

slanderous, without  
self-control, brutal,  
not lovers of the  
good, treacherous,  
rash, conceited,  
lovers of pleasure  
rather than lovers of  
God - having a form  
of godliness but  
denying its power.  
Have nothing to do  
with them."

*2 Timothy 3:2-5*

These were Paul's words  
to Timothy. How many  
do we find in ourselves?  
How many do we find in

others? Our selfishness and imposed self-importance really strikes home to the heart when we read these words aloud. Each word pieces the Lord's heart, just as it pieces ours! We can do so much more harm to the Holy Spirit than those crude nails ever did to our Lord's limbs!

Believe it or not, we *do* find pleasure in each of these things - not directly, but because others are normally the brunt of our

pleasure. Our pleasure can cause all of those evil things that Paul so clearly pointed out to Timothy. The type of pleasure that brings about these effects are definitely those that God does not like - and is it any wonder?!

Many people may have an image of God to be one who is strict and to be feared - because of this image, it becomes representative of Christ and so people think of

Christ in the same way. I do not doubt in any way that God can be strict and at times we should be fearful of His power - and so we should, especially when we know that we have sinned - something that is detestable to God. However, I do not believe He is intent in stifling every human sensation.

God is not against pleasure ... I truly believe that God has received

great pleasure from the good that we all do. Pleasure does not always have to be a derivative of evil. Provided it is deserving, then there can be no offense to God.

If we cast our minds back to Leviticus, on some ten occasions ...

"... an aroma pleasing to the Lord"

has been used, and indeed these things were pleasurable to God, otherwise He would not

have stated so.

Admittedly, I may be drawing on an added meaning to 'pleasing', but I do believe that our Father did take pleasure in these things - He requested that His children perform these tasks and He told them that these *would* please Him. In the same light, what is a pleasure to God - should also be a pleasure for us to perform.

Pleasure can come from

many sources.

Unfortunately, most of our pleasure is derived from our evil desires. I don't know ... there's something about us that lurks which gives us pleasure for unknown or unusual reasons - not all of these are good. Sins of the flesh appeal to us - the appeal of Satan's ability to give us material worth is sometimes a lot stronger than the appeal for the unseen rewards promised by God.

"He who loves  
pleasure will  
become poor;  
whoever loves wine  
and oil will never  
be rich."

*Proverbs 21:17*

This is not to say that  
everyone who likes a  
glass of wine will never  
be rich. Every verse must  
be taken in context!

*Overindulgence* in wine  
(and oil) was a sign of  
the wealthy who flaunted  
their wealth. These  
people would (and will),

never be rich in spirit or in the eyes of God - this type of pleasure (as with all derived from earthly or material wealth) is not acceptable to God.

Obviously only the good can be acceptable - this is how we are meant to live as children of God. Pleasure can be divine, *provided* it is from a worthy source.

Jesus himself, enjoyed good company - broke bread with many (whether sinner or not).

He was not one to deny the human sensation of pleasure. And as Jesus himself found pleasure in some activities, so too we may also find pleasure in some activities. If we imitate Jesus, then the pleasure found *is not* from evil.

The biggest difference between what we ask for and what Jesus asked for, is that we ask for things that benefit ourselves only! I know this is a little harsh - we are not

all this way inclined, but we need to learn to ask for the *right* things, for the *right* reason at the *right* time - and we need a lot of practice in this respect! When we do, we will have that wonderful inner feeling - pleasure - for the *right* reasons!

One of the greatest pleasures we will experience is the ability to pray from the heart ... yes, from the heart. We have to be able to put away all of our earthly

pleasures and thoughts  
for those few moments  
with God. This is  
achieved by  
perseverance and I pray  
that all of us can  
persevere ... through  
prayer.

## **Questions and Reflection**

1. Some people say that they can form their opinion of someone after their first meeting. Do you think that this is

really possible? Why,  
why not?

2. Read "An Affirmation  
of Faith" again. Do you  
think that you can apply  
this prayer to yourself?  
What steps might you  
take?

3. Have you ever hidden  
behind a mask  
(honestly)? How did you  
break out and find your  
true self again?

"He who loves  
pleasure will  
become poor;

whoever loves wine  
and oil will never  
be rich."

*Proverbs 21:17*

4. How do *you* interpret  
this proverb?

5. : "Treat everyone like  
they are Jesus." I would  
like you to *really* try this  
- you will be amazed just  
how differently you will  
see people and how you  
will treat them. Record  
some of your  
experiences.

**Prayer**

## Caring and loving Father

Too many times Father we hide ourselves - not for good reasons, but for evil. Self-deceit, ambition and deception to others. Help us to break out of this way and to radiate our true self and love towards others and you. Help us to love ourselves and to value ourselves and the gifts that you have bestowed upon us. Help us to appreciate ourselves and

others and to give thanks to you. Open our eyes to the truth, take away the darkness and lies that we have built upon. We are your children Father and you are our God ... touch our hearts and release us to proclaim your glory.

We ask all these things through Jesus Christ, your only Son and our redeemer.

Amen.

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# Part 5 - Abba, Father

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Somebody Else ...  
This Is Just The  
Beginning  
Questions and Reflection  
Prayer

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## **Scripture Meditation**

"Therefore,  
brothers, we have  
an obligation - but it  
is not to the sinful  
nature, to live  
according to it. For  
if you live  
according to the

sinful nature, you will die; but if by the Spirit you put to death the misdeeds of the body, you will live, because those who are led by the Spirit of God are sons of God. For you did not receive a spirit that makes you a slave again to fear, but you received the Spirit of sonship. And by him we say, "Abba, Father." The Spirit himself testifies

with our spirit that  
we are God's  
children. Now if we  
are children, then  
we are heirs - heirs  
of God and co-heirs  
with Christ, if  
indeed we share in  
his sufferings in  
order that we may  
also share in his  
glory."

*Romans 8:12-17*

## **Introduction**

Paul's letter to the Romans is powerful; in fact, so powerful that it inspires spiritual renewal!

How often do we need 'spiritual renewal'? Sometimes we may think ... constantly ... and to a certain extent that is correct! Many times we abandon our spiritual pursuits for one reason or another, but God has never abandoned us.

Often we think that our problem is the way we

do things ... the way we pray. Sometimes it is, but most times it's not. If we are honest with ourselves, we could pray at anytime in the day, regardless of what we are doing. Is it boredom, repetition or just lack of perseverance?

No-one said that praying would be easy. Jesus did not say that prayer was easy or would come naturally. Prayer is a discipline and like any other discipline, requires

practice to become a habit. Once a habit ... prayer naturally becomes part of our life.

What we *do* lack is perseverance. We are not known for our perseverance in things. If the going gets tough, or if we become disillusioned, or if we don't get immediate results - we think it is a waste of our time and we give up. Why do we give up so easily? What earthly desires bind us so

strongly as to think that spiritual desires are not important?

Can WE honestly cry out "Abba, Father" and mean it? I know that we all can!

This word in Romans - Abba - has caused some debate over its meaning. It is Aramaic for 'Father', but it is not quite as formal as that. It's more akin to 'dad' or 'daddy'. Many people (and scholars) have difficulty with this meaning, but an

equivalent translation into English *is* difficult. The important thing to remember is that it has a loving and affectionate meaning; and we need to develop this same intimate relationship with God ... *our* Father.

## **Perseverance ... Our Stumbling Block**

I suppose that it depends on our interpretation of 'perseverance' and we may all vary a little on its

interpretation.

Personally, I don't think of this word with the meaning of 'grin it and bear it'. This turn of phrase would normally indicate something that we don't particularly want to do, but are forced to do, that is, we don't have any real choice in the matter, or it's forced upon us by someone or something else. Indeed, some problems appear to be like this. I think that the interpretation is more like endurance and

patience. By being more patient we are more able to understand what is happening or why it is happening, and in turn, we are able to endure the trial with a more mature outlook.

In some trials, we are prone to become emotional and not think clearly or carefully and then the problem does become 'grin it and bear it'. We do this to get it over and done with, but don't learn anything from

it. If we don't learn to be patient, we repeat the same process time and time again without taking stock of what we did before and so we do not become complete. We don't become complete because we repeat the same mistakes and so we will always be lacking - in the knowledge that could have been learnt from previous trials.

Trials or tests could also be a way by which our faith is being tested. That

is, to test how genuine OUR faith (as it stands currently) really is. They could also be God's way of leading us closer to His perfection. As Jesus says -

"Be perfect,  
therefore, as your  
heavenly Father is  
perfect."

*Matthew 5:48*

So perseverance, in this sense, produces a stronger faith. A stronger faith, not only in God, but also ourselves; knowing

that we are capable of overcoming and surviving these trials. It allows us to sit back and think about how we have, and will deal with things in the future.

This type of perseverance is important to Christian faith in a number of ways.

(i) We will learn to accept trials and tribulations knowing that we are able to deal with

them. (We did once, we can do it again!)

(ii) We will be able to see that trials are for a reason. (Not necessarily clear at the time.)

(iii) Realize that "God cannot be tempted by evil, nor does he tempt anyone" (James 1:13).

(iv) Know God's love for us.

(v) The more our faith is tested, the more questions we ask and the better we will come to understand and love God, because we are not always

privileged to God's  
reasons.

We are all capable of  
triumph over any trial,  
but we do not always  
perseverance - we give  
up. Why do we give up?  
Because we lack the  
patience and  
understanding of how we  
can make good out of  
evil.

I think that this task will  
always be difficult for us,  
(as mere humans), but it  
is something that we can  
aspire to. We can try to

become more complete,  
this is our ultimate goal  
of perfection - to be more  
like Jesus!

"Ask and it will be  
given to you; seek  
and you will find;  
knock and the door  
will be opened to  
you. For everyone  
who asks receives;  
he who seeks finds;  
and to him who  
knocks, the door  
will be opened."

*Matthew 7:7-8*

Jesus tells us that He understands us, but if we don't look or ask for help then we cannot expect an answer. It is true that a lot of people come to this point (asking God for help) only as a last resort. That is, everything else has failed, so what have we to lose? But this is not what God wants. I know that God hears our request, but I can also imagine Him thinking - 'child you must ask for the right reasons, not just because everything else

has failed'. Too many of us treat God as a type of slot machine; put in a few prayers, say amen and our prayers are answered ... WRONG!

"Those whom I love  
I rebuke and  
discipline."  
*Revelation 3:19*

Yes, God will help, but we must 'prove' our faith to Him. We ask and we receive only when we place complete, unconditional trust in God. We must be

prepared to follow Him  
regardless! No 'if's or  
'but's - He's not interested  
in half-hearted promises  
- it's everything or  
nothing at all.

So yes, this is a promise  
from God, but how many  
of us are really up to  
making that promise? It's  
nice to think that we  
could (and really we  
are), but oh ... the  
hesitation! Why? -  
Because we still have  
that element of doubt -  
our faith still needs

strengthening, and as I have said before, we are essentially naturally-born doubters. Too many times we agree to keep our promise ... and then we break it, *BUT* God *NEVER* breaks His promise. His is an unconditional love; something that we always strive for, but is always that little bit too far out of reach. God knows this and this is why He is always encouraging us not to give up. God knows us better than we

will ever know  
ourselves. He knows  
exactly what we're like  
and His supreme patience  
and love will never find  
fault with us. We are His  
children and He will  
continue to wait for us,  
be patient with us and  
love us -

**UNCONDITIONALLY!**

**How Do We Persevere?**

Unfortunately, there are  
not rules for how to  
persevere at a task. Of

course the task is made easier if we enjoy it to start with. The reason that we continue with certain activities is because we are good at them - we enjoy them, and in a way they come naturally. The secret is that most times they come *naturally*. We are happy to put in the effort because we can *see* the results - sometimes immediately, or we have a very good idea how things will turn out. This *is not* the case with

prayer. Granted, some people have a 'talent' for prayer, but in reality, not many of us do and because it doesn't come naturally, we are not prepared to put in the effort.

Prayer is very different from anything else we may do. It does not have anything to do with our earthly desires for a start. During our prayer we may make requests for earthly things, but there's something very different

going on here.

We must have a desire to pray, to commune with our almighty Father, we must have a want and a love for God. When we have these things we happily make the effort ... we will persevere!

Prayer will help perseverance and perseverance will help prayer! - Each will help the other.

**Can We Be Perfect?**

I made mention earlier about the goal of perfection. So can we ever be perfect? Well the answer to that one is yes AND no!

Will we be perfect *one day* ... when we come into God's kingdom. Perfect in **EVERY** respect, but here on earth ... NOW ... we are not - nor will we ever be ... we will never obtain true perfection in our earthly lives - all we can do is but try.

Through each trial and tribulation, we will learn something more about yourself. Each time we do something wrong - we learn something about our self. Often we do not remember and so we are no closer to perfection than what we started. When we are able to recall and to recognize sin and avoid it; we are on our way to perfection.

Our ability to persevere through trials and temptations is like

purification by fire! God allows these things so that we may cleanse ourselves of the many earthly and evil desires that we have. To enable us to realize that what materialistic things we have here on earth is not important in heaven. It is our salvation that is of prime importance to God. He dearly wants us to be like Him.

**Our Many Prayers All  
Mean One Thing ...  
Love of God**

During our prayer life,  
we pray many different  
'types' of prayer. Among  
these are

- \* worship,
- \* praise,
- \* thanksgiving,
- \* petition,
- \* self-examination,
- \* deliverance,
- \* intercession and  
one we have already  
considered
- \* confession.

What do all these prayers

amount to? Simply ... our love for God. Through our many avenues of prayer we are always expressing our love for God. Not all of the prayers may seem 'loving', but they indicate our total belief and trust in God our Father.

## **Worship ...**

We worship God for many reasons. All of these reasons have to do with His characteristics as our Creator. We

worship Him for His omnipotence (absolute and infinite power), His omniscience (infinite knowledge and knowing all) and His omnipresence (being everywhere at the same time). We are nothing in comparison with God and we are nothing without God. He has the power and authority to dismiss us or to love us. God desires that all of us will come to Him and consecrate ourselves to Him.

## **Praise ...**

To praise God is to glorify and extol the attributes of God. We acknowledge His presence before us, just as He acknowledges our presence before Him. He too, praises us when we succeed through avoiding sin - just as we praise Him for helping us to avoid sin.

## **Thanksgiving ...**

In prayers of thanksgiving, we

acknowledge God as our Father. He treats us in the manner that we would expect any loving father to treat his children. God is the highest degree of love and as His children, we thank Him for the gifts we receive whether they be good or bad.

There is always a purpose for what we have been given ... we don't always realize what it is at the time.

**Petition ...**

One of the most common forms of prayer that we use is that of petition. We always want something ... Petition is always for ourselves - we ask for things that we would like. We are at a loss sometimes when we don't get what we want, but petition is a very 'exacting' prayer - very difficult! It requires that we are in harmony with God's will - something that is very difficult for us to achieve. However ... we *can* achieve that

harmony.

## **Self-Examination ...**

To criticize yourself is not easy. In private is a little easier, but in public or before God is difficult. We are not naturally that way inclined ... *it hurts too much!* Self-examination *is not* confession.

Confession, as we know, is 'owning up' and accepting the consequences of our sin ... accepting God's

punishment for breaking His laws. Self-examination is to realize how different we are from Christ. Our aim is to be like Christ - by examining ourselves, we find just how lacking we are. How we treat others, how we treat ourselves ... how we treat Jesus. Again we will see how very imperfect we are.

## **Deliverance ...**

Our prayers of deliverance *are not*

thanksgiving or petition prayers. prayers of deliverance are *how* it happened. Now this depends whether or not we remember our requests in the first place - a common reason for why people think that God does not answer prayers ... *we forget* what we asked for! That's why it's important to keep a record of our prayers and requests.

**Intercession ...**

I believe that everyone *can be* an intercessor - many disagree. To intercede on behalf of someone else is one of the greatest signs of selflessness. In fact intercession may be for someone that you may not necessarily know. It is important to remember that we *never* intercede on own behalf ... this prayer is for others.

## **Confession ...**

Confessional sins, we

have dealt with in a previous lesson, but a reminder won't go astray. This is probably **the** most difficult thing for us to do regularly and honestly. We are always tempted to skip out of it. Why? Because we don't like how we see ourselves - what we are really like, what we have done and why we have done it! It is one thing to admit to doing wrong, it is another to be prepared to accept the consequences ... this is

confession. And God is the one we are answerable to for *only* God can forgive sins!

We have many types of prayers, but unless we are sincere, then our prayers are meaningless ... we know this *and* God knows this. We *must* pray; it is through prayer that we will achieve our salvation. Let's not kid ourselves, it is no point just going through the motions. In fact this type of praying will not last

very long ... no one prays  
just to 'show off' to others  
(don't be a Pharisee) ...  
prayer is a very private  
activity ... between us  
and God.

**Listen to God ... Read  
His Word Every Day!**

"Jesus answered, 'It  
is written: "Man  
does not live on  
bread alone, but on  
every word that  
comes from the  
mouth of God.'""

## *Matthew 4:4*

The Bible is of number one importance to any Christian's life, for within it lies the treasury of the Word of God. The Bible IS absolute truth, it *is not* a collection of nice, made up stories as some think! The authority of the Bible is like God - ultimate and unquestionable!

It is important for us to read parts of the Bible EVERYDAY. There is no need to stick to a

reading plan; often a reading plan can be unrealistic especially if you try to read the Bible in too short a time span. Reading plans over one year or more though; are very good. It is even better if you have a good study guide or lesson too. However, it is much simpler for some to read parts of it each day, maybe just at night before we sleep.

Some people use the 'random' method. That is,

they simply open the Bible up randomly at any page and read a few verses from there on. Although this is good, it does not serve to completely understand what the writers have said. Of more use is to decide upon a book to read and read it entirely before moving on.

By not reading carefully, we do not listen to His word and we do not learn what God is trying to teach us. We also leave

ourselves open to taking scripture out of context and misapplying it in our everyday life.

I prefer to read from the start of the Old Testament through to the end of the New Testament, but this does not suit everybody. The choice is really yours, but you should endeavour to read the entire Bible ... a little bit each day AND I would recommend a study on many of the books.

We have so much to learn

from God. The more we read the Bible, the more we will learn and understand. God talks to everyone through His word ... the Bible.

**We Are A Child Of God  
... Unique ... Not  
Somebody Else ...**

The one thing that God wants us to be is the person He created us to be ... not somebody else ... OURSELF and in turn, be like Him.

Sometimes we act like others without realizing it. We meet someone, we see someone or we hear of someone that inspires us and we try to take on their characteristics ... and it just doesn't work. We end up being a very bad impersonator ... not ourselves. Often we may live this way for many years and realize what has happened - people can have a great influence upon us.

In some ways we are like

this in our imitation of Christ ... very poor ... but He is THE one who we desire to be like. Jesus' characteristics are within all of us already. We must try to find and harness them through our own being, NOT by pretending to be someone else.

We are unique and we all have our good points and bad, but God created us that way for a reason ... to seek Him throughout out life.

The following prayer is attributed to Pope Clement XI. I think it is probably one of the most beautiful prayers we have (there ARE many more). This prayer captures something about our longing for Christ, to truly be part of Him and with Him. It also brings across the uniqueness of each of us as we pray this prayer. Pope Clement petitions the Lord for many of the same things that we do ourselves. How beautiful it would

be to truly achieve  
everything this prayer  
requests ... take this  
prayer to heart, practice  
what it says and we too  
may call ... "Abba,  
Father."

*The Universal  
Prayer [Composed  
in 1721 by Pope  
Clement XI]*

Lord, I believe in  
you: increase my  
faith. I trust in you:  
strengthen my trust. I  
love you: let me  
love you more and

more. I am sorry for  
my sins: deepen my  
sorrow.

I worship you as my  
first beginning, I  
long for you as my  
last end, I praise  
you as my constant  
helper, and call on  
you as my loving  
protector.

Guide me by your  
wisdom, correct me  
with your justice,  
comfort me with  
your mercy, protect

me with your  
power.

I offer you, Lord, my  
thoughts: to be fixed  
on you; my words:  
to have you for their  
theme; my actions:  
to reflect my love  
for you; my  
sufferings: to be  
endured for your  
greater glory.

I want to do what  
you ask of me: in the  
way you ask, for as  
long as you ask,  
because you ask it.

Lord, enlighten my  
understanding,  
strengthen my will,  
purify my heart, and  
make me holy.

Help me to repent of  
my past sins and to  
resist temptation in  
the future. Help me  
to rise above my  
human weaknesses  
and to grow stronger  
as a Christian.

Let me love you, my  
Lord and my God,  
and see myself as I

really am: a pilgrim  
in this world, a  
Christian called to  
respect and love all  
whose lives I touch,  
those in authority  
over me or those  
under my authority,  
my friends and my  
enemies.

Help me conquer  
anger with  
gentleness, greed by  
generosity, apathy  
by fervour. Help me  
to forget myself and  
reach out towards

others.

Make me prudent in  
planning,  
courageous in taking  
risks. Make me  
patient in suffering,  
unassuming in  
prosperity.

Keep me, Lord,  
attentive at prayer,  
temperate in food  
and drink, diligent  
in my work, firm in  
my good intentions.

Let my conscience  
be clear, my conduct

without fault, my  
speech blameless,  
my life well-  
ordered.

Put me on guard  
against my human  
weaknesses. Let me  
cherish your love  
for me, keep your  
law, and come at  
last to your  
salvation.

Teach me to realize  
that this world is  
passing, that my true  
future is the  
happiness of

heaven, that life on  
earth is short, and  
the life to come  
eternal.

Help me to prepare  
for death with a  
proper fear of  
judgment, but a  
greater trust in your  
goodness. Lead me  
safely through death  
to the endless joy of  
heaven.

Amen.

**This Is Just The  
Beginning ...**

Many of our earthly desires come to an end, but prayer is not one of those things. Once we adopt prayer as an integral part AND important part of our life, it will never stop.

People can pray for you, that is, intercede - and perhaps there are those who do now; but ultimately you are the one who must pray for yourself. Prayer can be

fulfilling and at times,  
full of sorrow at others.  
Our prayer life will  
follow our emotions  
closely, because of this  
our perseverance will be  
very rewarding.

To pray is to come closer  
to God, to know God  
better and to understand  
what is happening to us  
and those around us. To  
realize that there are  
reasons for what is  
happening on this earth;  
to realize that God is  
never absent - that He is



respect to yourself? What does it mean to you ... personally?

3. I know of people who have prayed many years ... ten years or more for a friend to come to Christ! Can you imagine the faith, dedication, perseverance and patience? Do you think that you would be capable of doing something like this? If not, what do you think would discourage or hold you back?

4. Do you read a little of

the Bible each day? If not, what sort of things discourage you from doing so? If so, how does this help you each day?

5. All of us at one time or another have been influenced by someone else. Sometimes there is good and bad in this. List what positive and negative aspects there are to this. Should we persevere in trying to be someone other than ourselves? Why not?

**Prayer**

Caring and loving Father  
Inspire us all as we read  
your Scriptures and to  
meditate on every word  
so that we may learn to  
be more like you. We beg  
for your understanding  
and to enable us to put  
Your word into practice.  
Lord, be in our hearts,  
our heads and our  
understanding. Guide us  
in our actions, our  
thoughts and words so  
that we may be an  
example to others in the

ways of Christ. Be with us always as we walk this path in life with you. We will stumble many times, but we trust and love you and we know that you will be there to help us always.

You have given us everything Lord, you have given all to us. Help us in some small way now to give back to you the trust, love and faith that you so much deserve.

We present ourselves to

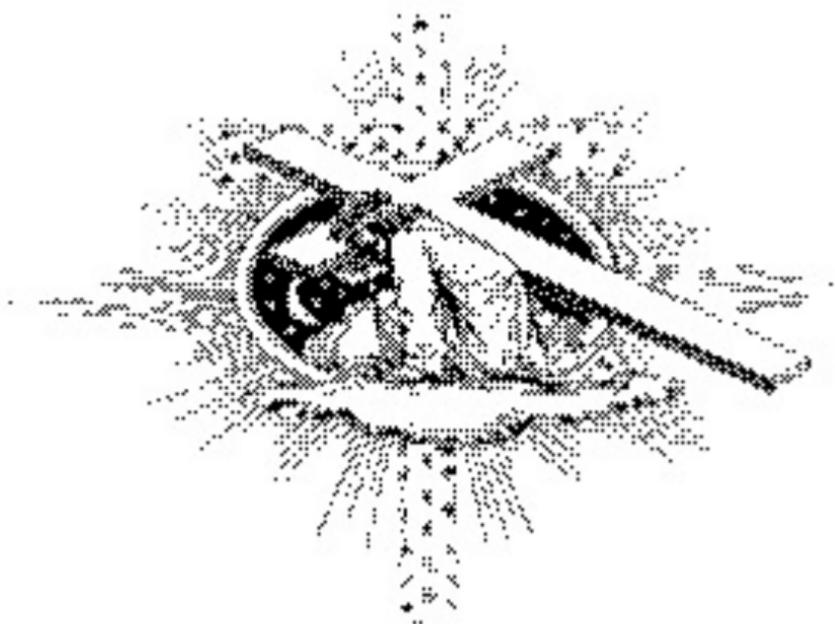
you Lord in our weakness  
and humility. Look not  
upon our sins Lord, but  
on our faith; as weak as it  
may be at times. Help us  
to persevere and to come  
to you as your children  
and you as our loving  
Father.

We ask these things  
through Christ our Lord

...

Amen.

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# About TCCM

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*The Cross of Christ Ministry* (TCCM), is the prayer and educational ministry of *The Cross of Christ Church* in Queensland, Australia.

Various studies will be published in due time. Most of these studies and devotionals are compiled from the ministry's mailings. Our ministry web site is located at <http://www.tccm.cjb.net>.

These studies have been produced by Rev. Graeme MacNeil in an effort to

help people to understand themselves  
and to follow God's Word.

In His service ... TCCM

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