

Teach Us To Pray

Open your Bible, and turn to a single example where someone prayed to God, then concluded “in Jesus’ name, amen”. Can’t find it? Not even one?

Then open your Bible and find one example of people holding hands, particularly holding hands in a circle, while praying. No luck?

Then look for a place where someone prayed to Jesus. Go on – take your time. Can you find a single example in the entire Bible of someone praying *to* Jesus after His resurrection?

How about a place where someone prayed “not my will, by thy will be done”. Ah yes – you found one example in **Luke 23**. But was that prayer answered? Back up and read the context, where Jesus was asking “let this cup pass from me”. He was asking God NOT to sacrifice Him the next day. Was that prayer answered?

Find a place where someone prayed with hands together pointed upwards like a steeple. Find a command to pray with your eyes cast down. Find a place where someone prayed kneeling by their bed before they went to sleep. Or a place where someone recited “the Lord’s prayer”, the prayer of Jabez, or **Psalms 23**. Or where a prayer before meals was commanded. Or where, before and after church services, opening and closing prayer was said.

Can you find any of these things in your Bible? Where did they come from? Why does most of modern Christianity – including probably you, yourself – believe them? These and many, many other questions are answered in the long-delayed lesson...

LESSON 37: TEACH US TO PRAY

It makes sense to start in the most obvious place of all, with what’s called “the Lord’s prayer”, and look at what it ACTUALLY says. Turn to **Luke 11:1**. The disciples wanted to learn to pray – just like us! So read **verses 2-4**. This version is incomplete, so using the principle that the Bible adds to itself, find the rest of the story in **Matthew 6:9-13**.

This was the only specific instruction on how to pray found in the entire Bible. And since it was given in direct response to the disciples’ request “Lord, teach us to pray!” we can assume it was a fairly complete recipe for prayer. So I have a question: if this was a perfect prayer, *why didn’t Jesus teach us to say “in Jesus’ name”?*

Jesus didn’t pray “in My Father’s name, amen”. He didn’t tell us to pray and conclude our prayers with the phrase “in His name”, or “in Jesus’ name”. And yet **every Christian on Earth does so! WHY??**

Are we forgiven through His name? **Acts 10:43**. Should we pray in His name? **Hebrews 13:15**. Should we baptize in His name? **Acts 2:38**. Should the Gentiles trust in His name? **Matthew 12:21**. Should we believe on His name? **John 1:12**. Do we receive life through His name? **John 20:31**.

These are a small sample of the many examples where things are commanded to be done in Jesus name, **and yet among all of them, there is no single example of ANYONE concluding their prayers with the words “in Jesus name”**. The scriptures command prayers to be MADE in His name. But not prayers where the *PHRASE* “in His name” is used! There is a difference!

Is it possible (even though it’s wrong, is it POSSIBLE) to be baptized into someone ELSE’S name? **1 Corinthians 1:13-15**. This proves that these are not simply some magic words that must be said to make a prayer work, because no one would think that baptizing, or for that matter praying, “in Paul’s name, amen” would help!

IN HIS NAME

We mentioned briefly in Lesson 19 that doing something in someone else’s name simply means to do it *in their place*. As if they themselves were doing it. If I were to send you shopping and gave you my credit card and my authority to use it, then you would be shopping “in the name of Nathaniel Burson”.

If you were an ambassador sent by the ruler of your country to negotiate a treaty with some foreign country, your ruler would have to give you authority to do so; the authority that tells the foreign government that whatever YOU say, your ruler will back up. That you have the right to speak on his behalf, and whatever agreements you reach, he will honor. And when you sign your name to the agreement, it is the same as if he himself had signed it. Because you acted **in his name!**

That is all it means to act in someone else’s name. Now sometimes you will certainly need to clarify to this foreign government that you are making these statements as a proxy of your ruler. So saying, “I agree to these terms, *in the name* of the President of the USA”, would be perfectly fine – but here’s the important part – **you can only say that IF YOU REALLY CARRY HIS AUTHORITY!**

But if you ambush the ambassador, steal his identity, and then try to conduct business in his ruler’s name – well, sure – you can say the words and sign the agreements, **but your ruler won’t back up your statements because you are an impostor!** And if you get caught, both countries will want a piece of your hide!

So when millions of false Christians pray “in His name” every single day, **they are impostors who do not carry the authority of Christ and have no right to speak in His name – for all those who name the name of Christ MUST depart from iniquity! (2 Timothy 2:19).**

What happens when someone claims Christ’s authority, **but doesn’t actually have it? Acts 19:11-17**. This raises several questions; were these “exorcists” just charlatans, spreading some smoke and pixie dust and claiming to cast out devils? Or were they at times successful, and did they have some limited power?

There were clearly well known exorcists in Jesus’ day according to **Matthew 12:27**. It is possible that these “children” of the priests were those same sons of Sceva, who was a high-ranking priest. Regardless, Jesus implied that they were not merely frauds, since He did say devils were cast out by their methods, and used that to justify His own actions.

Nonetheless, when these sons of Sceva took it upon themselves to use JESUS’ name to cast out demons, that was a different story. They were not baptized, knew nothing of Jesus except what they’d heard Paul

say; and they were trying to use His name as an incantation as so many do today. The NAME has no magic powers; it's the AUTHORITY that Jesus gives you to act in His name that has the power!

When they tried to cast out devils "by Jesus whom Paul preacheth", how did the devil reply? **Acts 19:15**. This evil spirit KNEW Jesus! He KNEW Jesus had authority over him, and that he HAD to obey Him! Likewise, he knew PAUL had that same authority to act in Jesus' name, and that he HAD to obey him no matter what! But these sons of Sceva were not on the list of people that spirit had to obey! Where is that list kept? **Luke 10:17-20**.

Somewhere in heaven is a book of names of people that are authorized to act in God's name and to use His power – possibly (speculation alert!) it is the book of life. Regardless, the names of Sceva's sons were not written in that book, as Paul and the other disciples' names were, so they had no power over the spirit realm *and the evil spirit knew it!* "And so," as a friend of mine once put it, "he slapped 'em silly and stole their clothes!"

But being authorized isn't necessarily done through other men, not even in God's church. Read **Mark 9:38-39**. We are told very little about this man, so we can't say exactly what the situation was. But for whatever reason, this man chose not to walk with the rest of the disciples. Yet Jesus authorized the use of His authority anyway. This goes to show that no matter how perfect your "church group" is, God often works outside of it in scattered groups or individuals worldwide, for reasons you studied in Lesson 26.

To summarize this segment, doing something in the name of Nathaniel Burson means you do it as my proxy; with my authority; and what you do and the agreements you make will be binding on me. Doing something in the name of Jesus means you are doing it as HIS proxy, with HIS authority, and the agreements you make, He will stand behind and make good. Now doesn't that make **Matthew 16:19** and **Matthew 18:18** make more sense?

If someone hears or rejects someone who speaks in Jesus' name, is it like they hear and reject Jesus Himself? **Luke 10:16**. If they reject Jesus, do they reject His Father as well? **John 5:23**. When the apostles spoke God's words, was it as if God was personally teaching them? **2 Corinthians 5:20**.

Just as we don't come in our own name, but in Jesus' name, in whose name did Jesus come? **John 5:43**. As whose proxy was Jesus working – in whose name were the works done? **John 10:25**. In whose name did He pray? **John 17:11**.

But the interesting part is, even though Jesus prayed in His Father's name, and despite dozens of recorded specific miracles, Jesus never once said "in the Father's name, amen" at the end of His prayers! **Because that isn't what it means to pray "in His name"! It doesn't mean to SAY the words; it means to ACT on His authority!**

What did it mean for Jesus to work in the Father's name, and not His own? **John 6:38, John 4:34**. Whose will did Jesus seek to fulfill? **John 5:30**. Why did Jesus do that? **Psalms 40:7-8**. Do many false prophets (and false Christians) today pretend to speak in Jesus' name? **Matthew 24:5**. Do many false prophets come "in their own name"? **John 5:43**. Will those false Christians who pretend to speak by Christ's authority deceive many? (Last two passages). And ironically, one of the ways they deceive them is to teach them to pray using the words "in His name"!

WHAT IS PRAYER?

Before we get too deep into this, we need to look at the word prayer. When you hear the word, you probably imagine some Protestant image of an incredibly penitent person kneeling at the foot of a bed, or a cross, or

in a church; with their hands folded into a steeple and their head cast down. Would it surprise you to learn that the word “prayer” has no special religious meaning?

Do people pray to other living humans in the Bible? **Acts 16:9**. Do people pray to rulers? **Acts 24:3-4**. Did Jesus pray to other living people? **Luke 5:3**. Did Paul pray to 276 carnal sailors? **Acts 27:34**. So you see, the word “pray” doesn’t specifically mean prayer to God. It isn’t some holy word. It’s just a word for making a request, a plea, or even a simple question.

Now, it has BECOME a very specific word that only refers to prayers to God in our day, but when the English Bible was translated it was very common to say, “pritheer [I-pray-thee] give me a dime good sir”. I say this to give you some perspective and hopefully to strip away some of the mystical trappings from prayer. Bottom line, when you pray, you are asking some person, somewhere, for something.

And just as in this world, when you send a request you need to know WHO you’re sending it to; WHAT you’re asking for; and give the person some REASON to give it to you. If you were asking me for something, you would “pray” to ME, asking FOR a ride to the airport, BECAUSE you gave me a ride last month.

That’s not hard to understand; it’s real-world stuff. Now just elevate that to the spiritual level; you’re going to pray to GOD, asking FOR someone to be healed, BECAUSE Jesus gave you the authority to do so (because you’re acting in His name).

THY WILL BE DONE?

Everyone in the world believes this is commanded; that every true Christian prayer should contain the words “thy will be done”, to remind yourself that you want GOD’S will to be done, and not yours. But that is NOT what the Bible says – and praying for it will ensure that God DOESN’T answer your prayer!

Read **Luke 11:2** and **Matthew 6:10**. There, Jesus commands us to pray “thy will be done”, right? No! Look again! He commands us to pray “*Thy kingdom come. THY WILL BE DONE IN EARTH, as it is in heaven!*”

“Thy will be done” is NOT an isolated phrase – it is part of a sentence! Christ was not saying “I want bread, I want forgiveness, I want delivered from evil, *but NOT MY WILL, but THY WILL be done!*”! He was praying for God’s Kingdom to come because **when it comes to rule this Earth God’s will WILL be done!**

The phrase is only used in one other place in the Bible. And the fascinating thing... it’s the only prayer Jesus ever prayed that wasn’t answered! Read **Matthew 26:36-42**. Look at exactly what Jesus prayed for. He wanted “this cup” – the symbol He had just used to represent His sacrifice (**verses 26-28**) – to pass from Him. In other words, He wanted a way out of the sacrifice! He didn’t want to go through with it!

He didn’t have to do it, you know. Even at the end, He had only to ask and receive all the help He needed (**Matthew 26:53**). He had never sinned. He could be caught back up to heaven and join His Father again **and that’s exactly what He was asking for!** Of course, we wouldn’t have had a sacrifice then and we’d all be dead in our sins. We wouldn’t even have had grace, so the whole world would probably have ended. No big deal.

Had Jesus said, “I don’t want to be sacrificed, amen”, **THAT WOULD HAVE BEEN GRANTED!** Twelve legions of angels would have whisked Him out of there! But Jesus didn’t say that! He said, “I don’t want to be sacrificed... **BUT NOT MY WILL, but thy will, be done!**” In other words, He told God NOT to answer His prayer **and so God didn’t!**

He sought a way out of His problem, but the only ways He could think of would ruin the plan Jesus and His Father had been working on for tens of thousands of years. Jesus KNEW this wasn't what the Father wanted. But He also knew the Father loved Him more than the plan and would have answered His prayer even if it meant throwing everything else away. So He told His Father what He wanted **but then told the Father NOT to answer His prayer if He had to wreck the plan to do so!** And since the Father always heard Him, that's exactly what He did!

Those are the only two examples of "thy will be done" in the Bible. One is simply misquoted, and the other is grossly misunderstood. But think about it! If you DON'T pray... whose will is being done? God's, right? If you DO pray, what are you doing? Asking God to follow YOUR will INSTEAD OF HIS! Otherwise, what's the point of praying??

You're trying to get God to answer YOUR prayer, obey YOUR request, give you YOUR desire – not His! **If you want God to do His will, then keep your mouth shut and that's exactly what He'll do!** He doesn't need your *PERMISSION* to do His will, does He??

The whole POINT of prayer is to CHANGE GOD'S MIND. Lesson 36 explained why we do that, and what we can learn from the process. So why would you mess that up by praying and asking God to do a bunch of things... then concluding "but wait God, ignore this whole prayer – just do what You were going to do anyway!?" That's what you are doing when you say, "not my will, but Thine, be done"!

HOLDING HANDS

There is not a single scriptural example of this practice, because it didn't come from the Bible at all, but straight from paganism. Joining hands into a circle symbolized the circle of the sun-god, a circle made around a campfire (which represented their sun-god), and other thoroughly pagan practices. I won't spend any more time on it here because this is a Bible study course; and all the Bible has to say about it is contained in **Jeremiah 10:2** and **Deuteronomy 12:30-32**.

TO WHOM DO WE PRAY?

We already know that the holy spirit – actually, the holy *spirits* of Jesus and the Father – are just an extension of God's presence, something like God's telephone line. Because of this, we don't pray to the holy spirit. We pray THROUGH the spirit – we use God's telephone line to contact God – but we don't pray TO the spirit.

But do we pray to Jesus? Did people pray to Jesus while He was alive? **Mark 5:17-18, John 4:31**. But should we pray to Jesus today? **John 16:23-27**. **We do not pray to Jesus! We pray to the FATHER only.** What does Jesus do? **Romans 8:34**. Whom do we ask for things? **John 15:16**. And when we ask the FATHER for things, and the Father grants our request, who actually FULFILLS the request? **John 14:13**.

There is a very clear, very specific process that happens in heaven when we pray. A very rigid chain of command and sequence of events that happens every time a prayer is made. And it's all there to be uncovered in the Bible if people would only look. And it's actually much more intricate than I am showing you here, but I don't want to overcomplicate it at this point.

HOW SHOULD WE PRAY?

There are no specific rules about the manner of prayer in the Bible. There *are* many examples of prayer – but they are mostly conflicting examples. For instance, should we kneel in prayer? **1 Kings 8:54**. Should we bow down before we kneel? **Psalms 95:6**. Should EVERYONE pray in this fashion? **Isaiah 45:23**. Did Jesus kneel to pray? **Luke 22:41**. Did Peter? **Acts 9:40**. Did Paul? **Ephesians 3:14**.

On the other hand, did Solomon – just after kneeling in prayer – STAND and pray? **1 Kings 8:55-57**. Did God bind Himself to answer prayers that people made to the temple while standing? **2 Chronicles 20:9**. Did Jesus tell us to pray while standing? **Mark 11:25**. Did some pray while sitting? **Nehemiah 1:4**.

On the other hand, did people go beyond kneeling and pray flat on their faces? **Genesis 24:52**. Did Jesus? **Mark 14:35**. Did they bow their heads to the ground? **Genesis 24:26, Exodus 4:31**. But did others raise their heads to look up while praying? **Job 22:26**. Did Jesus look up? **Matthew 14:19**. Did others look down? **Ezra 9:6**. Did others also spread out their hands? **Psalms 28:2**. Is that how Paul wanted everyone to pray? **1 Timothy 2:8**.

As you can see, the information appears very contradictory – most people walk away from this study scratching their heads and figuring that it doesn't really matter, just "do what feels right". But there's more to it than that, and as always, the truth is really quite simple. **All the complication dissolves the second you grab prayer, rip it out of the mystical realm and apply it to the real world that you can understand!**

Let's suppose you're praying, not to God, but to a fair and righteous – but at times, stern – boss. Now suppose you made a huge blunder on the job that will cost him thousands of dollars. When you go to your boss, what will your attitude be? Head held high? Looking him in the eye? Proud, arrogant, sure of yourself? You'd better not! You've just cost him a bunch of money through your own foolishness!

No, you'll go to him humbly, staring at your shoes, quietly taking the dressing-down he gives you knowing it's less than you deserve and you'll be lucky if you aren't fired! But you might remind him of all the years you've served him, all the money you've made him in the past, and your commitment to never let a mistake like this happen again; and if you really have been a good employee, he'll probably let it slide.

On the other hand, consider the reverse; you just did something that will make your boss a great deal of profit; there will be no shoe-staring this time. You'll be looking him in the eye, expecting your praise and perhaps even a bonus for your hard work. **Doesn't that make sense??**

Now back to the spiritual application – when people have sinned, are they ashamed to look God in the eye? **Psalms 40:12**. But how SHOULD we pray to God? By that I mean, what is our GOAL, how do we WANT to approach His throne? **Hebrews 4:16**.

It's very simple. In the verse cited above, **Ezra 9:6**, Ezra was ashamed to look God in the eye. Why? **Verses 1-14**. Why didn't they stand and face God? **Verse 15**. Another excellent illustration is **Luke 18:10-14**. Setting aside for now the hypocrisy of the Pharisee, this is an excellent comparison of how the righteous approach God with how sinners approach God.

The Publican stood, but "would not lift up so much as his eyes unto heaven". He knew he was a sinner, so he went before God staring at his shoes. The Pharisee, believing himself to be righteous and beloved by God, also stood – but evidently DID lift up his eyes unto heaven. Thus a clear contrast between the two attitudes that resolves most of the "contradictions" in the examples about prayer.

But this last example raises an important question of hypocrisy. To return a final time to our human boss analogy, suppose you made a huge mistake **but then strode boldly before your boss, acting as if you had done well**. Suppose your attitude was not one of contrition, but of "how dare you judge me?? Let's see YOU do better!" How would your boss react?

Apply that to God again; when the Pharisee, who in fact was a hypocrite and probably a worse person than the Publican, strode "boldly before the throne of grace", that irritated God, and God didn't forgive his sins

because he hadn't acknowledged them – in fact, he thought he'd done well! Whereas the penitent attitude of the Publican was heard.

And that brings us back to Israel. Were they embarrassed by their sins when they prayed to God? **Jeremiah 8:12**. Were they boldly praying to God and expecting His help, while grossly breaking all His laws? **Micah 3:11**. Are those who deny and hide their sins blessed? **Proverbs 28:13**.

The conclusion then, is to let your attitude in prayer reflect the truth. Have you sinned? Then go before God with a downcast gaze. Have you sinned grievously? Then on your knees, or fall all the way on your face if that seems right. If you don't do this, if you act like you're more righteous than you are, you'll irritate God.

On the other hand, have you faithfully obeyed God? Then look Him in the eye! Go **BOLDLY** before the throne of grace, knowing that you have fulfilled God's requirements and that He cannot help but fulfill His promises! **If you don't do this, if you act like you're a horrible sinner when in fact you're quite righteous, then you'll be robbing your faith of most of its power.**

This is important! This is a vital key to faith most people overlook. You *need* to be self-critical. You *need* to demand a lot from yourself. But when you succeed in avoiding sin, overcoming it, or in doing any good thing *you need to acknowledge that too!* This life is emotionally difficult sometimes, and when you deserve encouragement, you need to give it to yourself just as much as you need the criticism at other times!

A large portion of faith is BELIEVING that you have done well. You have to BELIEVE you are fighting a good fight and BELIEVE you are faithfully obeying God to the best of your knowledge in order to go boldly before the throne of grace.

And if you ARE faithfully obeying God, but are constantly abusing yourself thinking about what a horrible sinner you are (when really, you aren't), then you won't have the faith you deserve. If you've done well, you need to act like it, and remind God of His promises to you. If you've done badly, you need to act like that and beg God to forgive you. It's not complicated at all.

HOW OFTEN SHOULD WE PRAY?

Here again, the examples are contradictory. In **Daniel 6:10**, Daniel prayed three times a day. David says the same thing in **Psalms 55:17**. Yet in **Psalms 119:62**, David says he also prays at midnight, which would be a fourth time. Later in the same chapter in **verse 164**, David says he prays SEVEN times a day! So which is right – three or seven? It is clear that Daniel's ritual prayers were only three times a day; **Psalms 55** seems equally clear. Yet just as clearly, **Psalms 119** shows seven prayers.

Just to cite a few more examples of random times of day, Jesus prayed well before dawn in **Mark 1:35**, and three times after midnight in **Matthew 26:36-44**. The Jews had a time of prayer at 3 PM according to **Acts 3:1**; Peter prayed at noon in **Acts 10:9**. There are many other examples that could be tied to a specific time if you tried hard enough. The point is, there are a lot of different times cited.

To make it worse, we have examples of constant prayer! How often did David bless the Lord? **Psalms 34:1**. How often did Paul pray for people? **2 Timothy 1:3**. Did he command us to do the same? **1 Thessalonians 5:17**. Did Jesus tell us to pray constantly? **Luke 18:1**.

Actually no, He didn't. All of these examples in this last paragraph are often abused by people trying to paint a mystical picture of constant prayer they can't understand, much less make work, of "an attitude of incessant prayer and constant contact with God". Hooley.

Excepting **Psalms 34**, all those verses are simply awkward archaic translations. When Jesus said that we “ought always to pray”, it doesn’t literally mean that you are ALWAYS praying. It means that you shouldn’t GIVE UP, but keep trying – which is the clear point of the parable.

When Paul said, “pray without ceasing”, similarly, he meant that he KEPT DOING IT, not that he never paused for a breath between prayers and never stopped to eat. Merely that, when he DID pray, he ALWAYS mentioned them.

Psalms 34:1 is the only exception, where it really does mean what it says – but not quite as literally as it’s interpreted. Again, rather than meaning he never stopped for a breath, it simply means that when he DID talk, it was always about the Truth; always to show God’s glory and spread His understanding.

But surely he still slept, ate, and ruled a kingdom in between “blessing the Lord at all times”. It just means whenever he did anything or said anything, it was to make God’s way of life appear as glorious as it truly is to other people.

It is impossible to resolve all these examples because *God doesn’t care how often you pray!* If He did, He would have put a simple commandment in there to pray on a certain schedule like Catholics, Muslims, and most pagan religions do. He didn’t do it **because it doesn’t matter to Him. Pray when you need to. When you don’t need to pray... don’t.**

HOW LONG TO PRAY?

In today’s false Christianity, you’re encouraged to pray every day, several times a day: for 10, 30, or 60 minutes, depending on whom you ask and how “devout” they are (or want you to think they are). You may have noticed the Bible never mentions a recommended prayer length at all, and there is a reason for that.

Does it matter if you pray too often, or too long? Does God like to hear long prayers when you have nothing to say? **Mark 12:40**. Does God like long prayers for no reason? **Matthew 23:14**. Does He like it when you say the same thing over and over? **Matthew 6:7-8**.

Praying just to hear yourself pray is just as annoying to God as it is when your little child says the same thing to you over and over. When you’re in the grocery store and your child says “Can I have candy now? Can I have candy now? Can I have candy now?” – and maybe 10 or 20 more times – it surely will annoy you and disincline you to give them the answer to their prayer! (It also means you need Biblical parenting lessons, but we’ll get to that in another lesson.)

In exactly the same way, these verses easily and obviously condemn “hail Mary, full of grace”, “our Father which art in heaven”, “now I lay me down to sleep”, the apostle’s creed, the doxology, and so on. **Any prayer that doesn’t come from your heart, anything you just read out of a book and repeated to God, is meaningless to Him. Especially when you say it over and over every day!**

But I want to make a more subtle point, about these “long prayers for pretense” and “vain (empty, worthless) repetitions”. Suppose you commit to pray for 30 minutes every day. Now unless you are a very busy person with a lot of problems, you’re going to run out of things to say after a few days.

And soon, these egg-timer prayers require you to say less and less important things to fill up the long minutes; after a while, they degenerate even more until you’re only saying one or two new things, then the same tired old words every day; “thank you for the sunshine today; please help mom have a good day at work; take care of the hungry; bless the president, governor, senators, congressmen, judge, mayor, sheriffs, building inspectors, dog-catchers, garbage-men...” and so on.

Now let's face it; does God REALLY need you to ask Him to bless all those people? Does He REALLY want you to say a few words about everyone you've ever met and ask Him to "bless" all your Facebook friends? Seriously! Does He? What possible good has been served by blanket-blessing everyone you know? What possible good has been done by reminding God to do the same things you asked Him to do yesterday – and which He had already promised to do anyway?!

Read **Matthew 6:25-30**. Here, Jesus criticizes people's lack of faith and asked them, "why do you worry about having food/drink/clothes?" Now, if He criticized them merely for "taking thought" about these trifling things, **how much more would He criticize them for PRAYING to Him about it! Much LESS to imagine that He WANTS them to pray about every little thing!**

He says people who worry about this have LITTLE FAITH – and that's just *worrying*, not being so worried they feel they have to pray about it! So how does Jesus conclude His criticism? **Verses 31-34**. God has PROMISED to take care of these things, IF you "*seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness*". It's a done-deal! God doesn't have to ANSWER the prayer. He ALREADY answered, and gave you His COMMITMENT to see to it that you don't go hungry and naked!

...provided of course, that you "keep His commandments, and do those things that are pleasing in His sight" (1 John 3:22). If you DO that, then God is going to DO what He promised. Asking Him to do it AGAIN, asking Him to RENEW His unbreakable promise shows you didn't trust Him the first time He made it! And THAT shows a lack of faith in Him and His word!

Now, we all lack faith from time to time. And there are certain situations where you're really going to wonder "is God going to get me out of this one?" **And it's no sin to pray when you're scared about these things and think you need to attract God's attention to your plight**. It's simply evidence of a lack of faith that you need to work on. **But the goal is to have such confidence in God that you never feel that fear, much less need to pray** to remind God about it. That is true faith, and there will be much more on that in the next lesson.

Meanwhile, back to our point; when you ask God to "watch over us on the highway today", **that promise has already been given! (Psalms 91:11-12)**. You don't need to pray and ask God to give it again! Repeating it shows you don't trust the promise He already made, or don't trust that it already applies to you – either way, it's a lack of faith. Likewise, when you ask God, "make sure we have enough to eat", **that promise has been given. It doesn't need to be given again. You either believe God's word or you don't.**

When you ask Him to "bless people" indiscriminately, you're asking Him to do something He is *already* doing as much as He can (**Matthew 5:45**). They're already getting grace to overlook the worst of their sins, and basic blessings like rain; that's all He can do to "bless everyone" in their current state. What more would you want from Him? To ignore their rampant sins? To deny them the fruits of those sins and the opportunity to learn from them?

To pry their minds open and force truth into it, and risk them rejecting it and facing eternal death? To overrule their independence and make their decisions for them? Would any of this truly help anyone? The last lesson showed that you need to have some REASON, some PURPOSE served by asking for blessings on random semi-strangers.

Also, we covered praying for rulers in Lesson 23, page 11; the command was given that you could pray for rulers "[so] that we may lead a quiet and peaceful life". So without *that* long list of people to pray for, without random strangers, and without praying for things God already promised to do... it's pretty hard to fill up a half-hour!

The only other thing you could do would be to “count your blessings”. This is usually interpreted as listing, either verbally or in prayer, all the things they’re thankful for. Despite its incredible popularity, the phrase is not in the Bible. The closest thing to it would probably be **Psalms 103:2** – which really isn’t that close at all. Of course, there is a place for thankfulness, which we’ll get to in a moment.

PRAYER IS A MEANS TO AN END

When you ask any modern Christian why they pray, they’ll say it “helps them get to know God”, that it “is two-way contact with their Creator”, that it “gets their mind off of themselves and onto other people”, or some similar phrase.

But is it really “two-way contact” if one of you does all the talking? Does rambling along at God for half an hour or more in prayer **REALLY help you get to know HIM?** Does it really get your mind **off yourself** to talk to God about YOUR problems, YOUR life, YOUR friend’s needs, **and what YOU want?**

Again, and this is one of the fundamental keys to understanding God... demystify this! God is your spiritual Father, so apply the same thinking to your physical Father, and see how it works. Most Biblical problems make more sense if you think about them this way.

Let’s imagine that at the breakfast table every morning while your Dad reads the paper, you regale him with a half-hour of inane chatter about things he either already knows, or doesn’t care about, and he never responds except perhaps an occasional grunt. **Do you REALLY know him any better now than you did before?** Did you REALLY have a fulfilling two-way contact with your father? Of course not!

Now suppose you talk to your Dad this way “Good morning Dad. Thank you for marrying Mom so you could have me, thank you for this food, thank you for the clothes I’m wearing, thank you for working so hard, thank you for the roof over my head, thank you for...” for a half an hour or so. After, at most, the first few times, that’s going to get rather tedious to your Dad, isn’t it? And to you, too?

Does he really need you to constantly, daily, give him prolonged thanks for merely **doing his duty? Aren’t all those things his duty? 1 Timothy 5:8.** What is the job of the greatest among you? **Mark 10:44.** And if someone merely does his duty, is that worth a lot of special notice? **Luke 17:9-10.**

I’m not saying you should never thank your parents for things; but the whole point of thanks is showing appreciation for doing MORE than what was expected or required of them! Do you owe someone thanks for doing something they were paid to do? **Luke 6:32-34.** You owe them thanks only when they do MORE than required by the contract! (**verse 35**).

It has become customary in our society to thank everyone for just about everything. Because of this, it really doesn’t mean much any more. It’s become a mere formality, empty of emotion. **The same thing happens when you thank God for making sure you got a good-tasting sandwich at the deli or heard a good song on the radio!** The phrase just loses all meaning if you abuse it like that.

God gives rain on the just AND on the unjust (**Matthew 5:45**). Time and chance – good and bad luck – happens to all men (**Ecclesiastes 9:11**). So every sunny day and every gap in traffic and every shady parking space you find was not specifically prepared for you by God; nor does God need any thanks for that which God did not do.

Most of these are simply random events, for which God is not responsible, beyond the simple fact of creating the universe – which He did for Himself, not for you! (**Revelation 4:11, Proverbs 16:4**). So you hardly owe Him thanks for that, do you? For creating something for *His* pleasure?

Similarly, as mentioned before, God has already promised to take care of your food, clothes, and so on; along with many hundreds of other promises in the Bible. Just as with your physical father, once you develop a relationship of trust with Him – by obeying the commandments and watching Him fulfill His promises – there is no need to thank Him for doing no more than He is required to do.

After all, you are God's child; and if God DIDN'T take care of you, He would be "*worse than an infidel*" – in His own words! (**1 Timothy 5:8**). Are parents OBLIGATED to take care of their children? **2 Corinthians 12:14**. Does God not say that He will do a much better job than your parents did? **Matthew 7:7-11**.

So there are certain things God is obligated, by His own words, to do. He deserves appreciation for this in exactly the same measure that you deserve appreciation for being a responsible parent. So general appreciation for what He does is appropriate; but a detailed list of thanks – especially a daily list! – is absurd. Save your thanks for the special things He does, the things He didn't have to do, so that they don't just become empty words.

DOES GOD NEED THANKS?

There is certainly a place for giving God thanks, and acknowledging what God has done for you. But the false Christianity tends to take it to a nauseating extreme. God is emotionally secure. He doesn't need you to love Him, thank Him, worship Him, or praise Him. He was around an unimaginable eternity before you were born, and He got by without you just fine. This isn't to say God doesn't want you to love Him; but He isn't so insecure that He *needs* it.

But there is a being who DOES need praised on an hourly basis. There *is* someone who needs to be thanked for every breath he takes. Someone so insecure that he is desperate for your flattery, your attention, your worship; he also goes by the name Jesus, but he is the FALSE Jesus.

The false Jesus believes the greatest reward he could give anyone would be to stare into his face for all eternity – the beatific vision. He believes this because his heart was lifted up because of his beauty (**Ezekiel 28:17**). He thinks it's perfectly reasonable to "reward" faithful saints with the task of saying "holy, holy, holy" and throwing their crowns down in front of his throne over and over for all eternity.

And, most relevantly to our point, this false Jesus believes it's a great thing for you to waste an hour a day thinking about how glorious he is and thanking him for every thing that has ever happened to you, whether he was responsible or not. He loves hearing about how wonderful he is! **And the more time you waste thanking him, the less time you are spending learning how to be more righteous and more faithful!**

But the true God wants you to thank Him, not for His benefit, but **for yours**. In the Bible, thanks are usually mentioned casually, simply "he gave thanks". But think about it; when the Bible says "he prayed"; that doesn't tell you WHAT he prayed; how he prayed; merely that he DID. So when it says someone "gave thanks", it doesn't say what he gave thanks FOR, or HOW, it merely says that he did.

Today, they just read that and "give thanks" by saying "thank you, God". But that's equivalent to hearing "he prayed", and using that as your example and just saying "I pray, God". Does that accomplish anything? Of course not. And every time there is any sort of a detail given about giving thanks, **there are always SPECIFICS involved!** Not just a generic "thank you Lord for creating the universe" or "thank you for Your many blessings"!

Did Jesus thank God for SPECIFICS? **Matthew 11:25**. Is it good to thank God? **Psalms 92:1**. But does thanking God justify you? **Luke 18:10-14**. When Jesus condemned the men for not giving glory to God, was there a powerful reason why they SHOULD have thanked God? **Luke 17:11-18**. When Jesus thanked God

for things, did powerful miracles usually happen? **Matthew 15:36, John 6:11**. The only other time was the Passover service (**Luke 22:17-19**), which was clearly an exceptional event.

But why did Jesus thank God? **John 11:41-43**. This the key to all this! Jesus said **there was no reason for Him to say thanks! He said He ONLY did it so the people would know that God had done the miracle and not Him!** Why was that important? **Psalms 30:12**. It was important that the credit Jesus would receive for raising the dead fell, not on Jesus, but where the praise belonged – on God! That’s why He publicly gave thanks!

It’s very easy for a prophet to be perceived as a God – just see how Paul was treated in **Acts 14:8-12** and **Acts 28:3-6**. And each time Jesus gave thanks **it reminded the people that Jesus wasn’t the Almighty**. He was just speaking for Him. **BUT IT SERVED A PURPOSE!** Saying thanks wasn’t an empty pretentious shell of piety; it was a conscious act for a valid reason!

Giving thanks, whether privately or publicly, should serve that same purpose; it should remind you and anyone else involved that God did this, not your own power or holiness (**Acts 3:12**). God doesn’t need your thanks; but you need to remember that you don’t have much that wasn’t given to you (**1 Corinthians 4:7**). That is the **PURPOSE** giving thanks *should* serve.

TOO MANY PRAYERS

I realize that I’m overturning every single word you’ve ever heard about prayer – and I’m far from done. I know most of this borders on blasphemy. **But the plain fact is, people pray too much**. They’ve convinced themselves that God wants their constant opinion about everything under the sun, and that simply isn’t true.

You’re starting to get a grasp of the purpose of prayer now, and what you’re learning is that prayer is a chance to give God your opinion, and have Him use His power to put your idea into practice so you can see firsthand why that is/isn’t a good idea.

It’s not obvious at first, but what you’re really doing is improving the quality of your judgment in God’s eyes. In other words, by offering God good advice, He’ll have more respect for your advice in the future. This makes it more likely He’ll answer you next time.

Whom do *you* have more respect for – a friend with an air headed opinion about everything they see, whether they know anything about it or not? Or a friend who keeps their mouth shut unless they know what they’re talking about? Who are you more likely to listen to when they give you an important piece of advice? **Is it really so hard to imagine that God feels the same way about your prayers?**

Let’s take a case-in-point; church prayer lists. Most churches have them, and they contain everybody from chronically ill church members to unconverted family members and random homeless people someone saw on the way to church. So let’s suppose that, like most supposed Christians, you pray for someone on this list.

What you’re doing is telling God to help this person. But why should He? If He wanted them helped just “because”, then He’d have already done so! So when you offer God your opinion, you have nothing to back it up with. You don’t know the person. You know nothing about them. You don’t know why this happened to them, if they’ve repented – basically, you can’t make an intelligent decision about **WHAT** should happen at all. So what does God say about that sort of opinion? **Proverbs 18:13**.

The primary purpose of prayer is to learn how to make good judgments. If your judgment is to heal this person about whom you know nothing... that **CAN’T** be a good judgment because you are judging a matter before you’ve heard it! What would God consider a wise way of handling this situation in your prayers to

Him? **Proverbs 17:28**. This directly applies to prayer! If you haven't got enough information to make a well thought out decision, **either get the facts or stay out of it! (Job 13:5)**.

God doesn't want, and He certainly doesn't need, uninformed opinions offered solely because someone's name was put on a prayer list. When someone asks you to pray for them, you are under no obligation to do so just because they asked. And that leads me to another subject...

"PRAY FOR ME"

"Why? For what?" These questions should be your first response to their request. In the Protestant world, it just means that, during the half-hour you're supposed to be praying; you put their name on the list and remind God to "help them". But as you're learning, God needs a REASON to do that. It doesn't necessarily *have* to be a *good* reason, but it has to make *some* sense, at least to you. So a sample conversation with someone who wants your prayers might go...

"So, what do you want me to pray for?" <insert generic answer here>. "Why do you suppose God hasn't already done that?" <insert shocked/defensive answer here>. "When I pray, I expect God to answer. He does that because I ask for specific things for specific reasons. Can you give me a reason why God should give you this? God says that there is no curse without a cause. What did you do to cause this curse?" <insert bitter how-dare-you-judge-me, who-do-you-think-you-are here>.

If they just want one more person mentioning their name to God in a prayer that goes straight to God's junk mail box, there are millions of people out there who would LOVE to help. Considering they're asking you, a relative stranger, they probably already have several dozen people spamming God with empty-headed requests. One more really won't make any difference.

But your prayer should be different. You should expect God to answer your prayers. But if you develop that sort of a relationship with God, it will be because He values your advice – or, at least, He values the lessons you learn from your well-thought out advice! So if God answers your prayers, it will be for a reason – because you usually ask for things that make sense!

So, if they want your help, they'll have to submit to an investigation of WHY this happened – which, in my experience, no one really wants – they just want you to pray for them without judging them. But since the act of praying IS a judgment, and the whole POINT of prayer is to LEARN how to make judgments... you can't make them happy and have God answer your prayers, too.

This is what I think the ideal method of handling prayer requests is. Certainly not the ideal method of making friends – but if that were why you took this course, you would have dropped out long ago. Sometimes I ignore prayer requests – I get quite a few in the comments section from new subscribers. But I ignore them because I've already prayed for those people. What they need most, far more than whatever physical thing they want prayer for, is understanding of the truth. They need to understand what caused their suffering and how to fix it.

Without that, you could heal them every day and they'd just keep causing it. You could give them a million dollars and they'd be broke again in six months. You could give them a happy home and they'd be divorced with children that hate them in a few years. **Until they learn to obey the law, you cannot bless them and have it stick!**

So what they truly need is understanding. That is what I have prayed for, for every person who finds this course: a chance to understand. I don't ask, or want, God to force them to embrace truth when they prefer deception. I only want them to have a chance to hear the truth and either accept or reject it.

Until they've had that, there is no point in praying for anything else – unless, by praying for them, they would have a better chance to understand the truth. Shocking, strange, and harsh words – but this is the way it is.

A CONVERSATION WITH GOD?

People often justify their excessive prayer as “talking with God”, as if it were a conversation. But unless God talks back – verbally – it's not a conversation. It's a monologue. It doesn't help you get to know each other unless you're both talking, and I don't know any sane person to whom God speaks on such a familiar level.

As a disclaimer, I'll say that there is nothing to prevent God from doing so, in principle; but I've never witnessed it, and those who told me that God spoke to them were, at best, deceiving themselves. At worst, they were being deceived by evil spirits. How can we be sure? Because “*we know that God does not listen to sinners, but if any one is a worshiper of God and does his will, God listens to him*” (**John 9:31 RSV**).

Thus, someone who has heard of the Sabbath and yet continues to keep Sunday is not being heard by God. He might be ignorant and still be heard by God; but once the knowledge of the truth comes, that sin revives and he spiritually dies until repentance (**Romans 7:9-13**). So if he has heard the truth and rejected it, **there is no way it is God who is answering his prayers.**

And if he isn't just imagining it, and the prayers really ARE answered... it means they're being answered by some OTHER spiritual power... perhaps the false Jesus whom they're praying to and whose commands they're obeying?

And the reality is, that this is an evil time and we're an evil people. We are all of us calloused to sin from the cradle and Jesus spoke well of us when He said, “*when the Son of man comes, will he find faith on earth?*” (**Luke 18:8**). It IS possible to overcome that nature and establish a purity of heart that allows God to speak to us “*face to face, as a man speaketh unto his friend*” (**Exodus 33:11**), even today – but I haven't done it and I've never met anyone that I believe has.

The point is, God grades on a curve, somewhat; He knows we're in literally the most evil time in the world's history – worse than before Noah's flood, worse than Sodom – and cuts us a lot of slack for that. But that doesn't mean we're clean enough to hang out together like He and Moses did. And that means the best of us see God through a glass darkly (**1 Corinthians 13:12**), and when God “speaks” to us, it's done very subtly, usually through the promptings of the holy spirit or through a friend or even an enemy.

I don't mean to imply there aren't dramatic answers to prayer, not at all. I've seen some incredible things happen. But when it comes to God SPEAKING to you... that's different. God says that's a LOT rarer (**Numbers 12:5-8**).

God says He'll usually speak through prophets in dreams and visions, but with Moses He said “*I speak ... plainly, and not in dark sayings*” – implying that when He speaks to the “normal” prophets, He does NOT speak plainly, and DOES speak in “dark sayings” that are hard to be understood. So imagine how He must “speak” to us, in faint impressions and through friends who suggest ideas and through ideas we aren't quite sure how we got.

This seldom happens during prayer. It usually happens when you least expect it. So prayer is *not* two-way contact with God. It's one-way contact, and for the vast majority of people who think they're Christians, it's not even that. When God SPEAKS to you, you'll know. It'll be like **Matthew 3:17**, **2 Corinthians 12:9**, or **Revelation 1:9-11**. Until then, your prayers are strictly a one-way conversation.

WHY GOD HIDES

While we're on the subject, let's look at another very important question; WHY is it only a one-way conversation? WHY does God often answer us only indirectly, subtly, without openly giving us our request in a flash of light? You may be thinking we've answered this question in other lessons, by explaining that it is because God dare not show Himself openly, or risk our eternal lives if we reject such flagrant proof. And that is part of the answer – but not all of it.

With prayer, we introduce a new variable, for God must not only hide Himself from the world's gaze... but also hide *His power working in you from the world's gaze*. Not merely because of grace, but because of something even more important: representation.

God can answer a given prayer in many ways. Suppose you pray and say “God, my family is hungry; we need a dollar for food”. Now, off the top of my head there are about a half-dozen ways God might answer that.

1. A dollar might miraculously pop into your hand out of thin air. Surely this is within God's capabilities.
2. A bird might have seen a dollar in the bushes, picked it up for nest material, and happened to drop it so it fell into your hand just after your prayer.
3. While praying, a stranger might walk up to your door, knock and hand you a dollar without a word and leave.
4. A few hours later, someone pulls up and offers to buy some junk in your yard for a dollar.
5. On the way to the store the next day, you may see a dollar caught in the weeds.
6. You may get tired of waiting, go out, have unusually good luck finding a job and get a dollar that way.

God might have been involved in each of these cases. And I've witnessed, seen Biblical evidence, or heard reliable testimony about most of them happening, with slight variations. So why would God answer a prayer one way one time, and a different way another? Again – representation.

See, when you ask for a dollar, and immediately one pops into your hand – what is your first thought going to be? “Wow, I should've asked for ten!” Just kidding. Seriously, your first thought after you recover from the shock is likely to be “God must be happy with me! I'm doing all I need to do to please God!” But how do people who may have been nearby react to your miracle?

What do people think when they see a powerful answer to prayer? **1 Samuel 12:18**. What did Israel think of Moses after the miracles in the Red Sea? **Exodus 14:31**. What did the early church think of the Apostles after the deaths of Ananias and Sapphira? **Acts 5:11-13**. How did God make the people respect and obey Joshua? **Joshua 3:7-4:14**.

Likewise, anyone who happens to be with you and witnessed your prayer being answered so dramatically will surely think “Wow! I need to act exactly like him to get God to hear my prayers!” (**John 9:31-33**). **Therefore God cannot give you such power unless and until you are qualified to represent Him on that level!**

If the goal is just to help you out of pit you've dug for yourself, option #5 or #6 above will do just fine. And when you tell an unbelieving friend "I prayed for a dollar, and God gave me a job", he'll think "yeah, whatever. Maybe He did and maybe He didn't". Thus, he has no particular reason to believe you're a perfect example of holiness and must be followed.

Whereas the same unbelieving friend would probably become a Christian on the spot if he saw #1 or even #2 happen before his eyes; even if it happened to you privately and you told him about it later, if he trusted your word sufficiently he would still be powerfully persuaded to hear you out about "this God stuff you're always talking about".

But God won't use you to represent Him in that fashion – He simply can't – unless He can trust you to set a good example for this other person who will look up to you as an example of the ideal Christian. Therefore, you must BE that example for God to magnify you as one.

As always, this is not complicated. It's exactly how you yourself would run a business, a family, or a government. The better example you set for others (and for yourself as well, if that makes any sense), the more obviously God's power in you can be displayed. The worse your example, the more God must "hide" in any answers He gives you, so that you and others don't think you're the perfect Christian.

Now there is one exception to this rule; it is that **God can often work with us powerfully even when we are sinning through grace**. We might be very ignorant, yet very sincere, and thus get a very powerful response **even when we aren't a good example of the truth!**

He might privately give you some powerful miracle; but He won't allow you to be "lifted up in the eyes of the people" as Joshua was. If it is done at all, it will be done in such a way that no one around you will be hurt by the fact. Whether that is because they won't believe you, or because you won't tell them, or because your example, bad though it may be, would still be of great benefit to them to follow.

How did God tell us to spot those "who believe"? **Mark 16:17-18**. How did God "confirm" their words? **Verse 20**. Why did God give Jesus signs? **Acts 2:22**. How were the apostles confirmed? **2 Corinthians 12:11-12**. The bottom line is, any clear, obvious answer to your prayer is God, in effect, doing what He did to Jesus in **Matthew 3:17**. *For that to happen, it has to be true.*

AMEN

This has been called (though I doubt it is) the most recognizable word on Earth. Originally a Hebrew word, it was copied directly into Greek, then into English and most other languages in the world. Anywhere that there are Christians, the word "amen" has gone, mostly untranslated from the original Hebrew.

As usual, however, no one has any real idea what *amen* means or why they say it. The Hebrew word means "verily, truly, faithfully, etc.". How did God command Moses to use it? **Deuteronomy 27:9-26**. Notice in particular that last verse; "*cursed be he who does not confirm the words of this law by doing them*" (**RSV**).

How was *amen* used? **1 Kings 1:33-36**. Notice how the king said something, then the person who WASN'T speaking showed his agreement with the speech by saying "*Amen! May the LORD, the God of my lord the king, say so*" (**BBE**). So by saying "amen", this person was including himself in this statement, and asking God to back up what the king had said. This is important!

How did Jeremiah use it? **Jeremiah 28:6**. Saying "amen" basically just means, "may the Lord do as you said". It basically CONFIRMS the words of the person who spoke and binds you to them in prayer. Should you say "amen" if you don't understand what was said? **1 Corinthians 14:16**.

You'd think I'd tire of saying this, but it's really absurdly simple. Suppose you and I are together, and I pray about something that affects both of us; I'm the one doing the speaking. You're just standing there. If you say nothing, then it is strictly MY prayer. If God likes me, it will be answered. If not, it won't be. You're not involved, either way.

But by saying "amen" after my prayer, you are telling God you AGREE with my prayer, and that He can consider it YOUR prayer as well as mine. Think of a prayer as a letter one person writes to God; he signs his name at the end of the letter, **and everyone who says amen is signing THEIR name below his on the same letter/prayer.**

The danger of this is, what if you sign your name to an evil prayer? Or merely a stupid one? You lose credibility in God's eyes, by "following a multitude to pray evilly" (paraphrased from **Exodus 23:2**). In most groups I've seen, since not a single word in this lesson was understood by the people praying, I could not in good conscience sign my prayer to their petition.

Mind, I wasn't praying *against* them. I just wasn't praying WITH them. Whether God answers it or not, that's not my problem; I merely don't want my name attached. Therefore, I didn't *amen* such prayers. The situation reminds me vaguely of **Proverbs 1:10-16**. This may seem overly harsh to you, but it is scarcely an exaggeration of what truly lays in the heart of most public prayers – this is a scriptural opinion, which you can see by comparing **James 4:1-4** and **Matthew 23**.

Those people making these public prayers certainly were white and holy on the outside; but inside of those men who made "long prayers for pretense" there were dead men's bones and all manner of uncleanness. This has not changed, if anything it has gotten worse in 2,000 years of false Christianity.

But back to the point, *amen* is a word you use to say, "so be it" *to someone else's prayer!* How many examples of prayers ending in amen do you find in the Bible that are NOT group prayers? Think about it. Can you come up with any? There are dozens of examples of private, amen-less prayers in the Bible that no one has ever paid any attention to. Where are the dozens of examples of amen being used after a prayer that is private?

For example, see **Daniel 9:4** – in the subsequent prayer, *amen* was not used. In fact, before the prayer could be finished it was answered (as God promises to the righteous in **Isaiah 65:24**), so clearly no magical phrase like "amen" was needed to make the prayer "valid". For another example, see **1 Samuel 2:1-10**. No *amen*. There are literally dozens of such examples.

When *amen* is used, it's like when the priests said "Cursed be he who..." and the people answered "Amen!" which CONFIRMED THE WORDS the priest had spoken! Making those words a part of the PEOPLE'S vow, not merely a commandment from the priest.

When *amen* is used, it's as part of a group prayer, like in **Matthew 6:9-13**. Most think this is a personal prayer, but just read it and see: "OUR father... give US... forgive OUR debts... etc. amen". Not one "I". All plurals. Thus, Jesus finished the example with "amen", for those who were not speaking to chime in.

Do spirit beings say amen? **Revelation 5:12-14**. Is Jesus called "the Amen"? **Revelation 3:14**. Because of the use of *amen* as a closing statement by the people, it represented the last word – literally. Just as Jesus said He was the "Alpha and the Omega, the first and the last" (**Revelation 1:11, Revelation 22:13**).

Alpha and Omega were just the first and last letters in Greek. In the English alphabet Jesus would have said, "I am the A and the Z". Although granted that doesn't have quite the same ring about it. The point of the symbol is that the *amen* was the end; just as Jesus is "the aim of the law" (**Romans 10:4, Murdoch**), which

is poorly translated in the KJV as “the end of the law”. Having the nature of Jesus in us is the *amen* of the law, the final result and goal of the law.

In a similar sense, most books in the NT closed with the words *amen*, both symbolically closing the subject (as *amen* does a group prayer), as well as inviting those who read the book to “confirm it”. The Israelites confirmed the blessings and cursings by saying “amen” (but this doesn’t mean every time you read Romans, you have to say “amen!” to confirm it yet again).

So should you say *amen*? Sure, when it’s appropriate. When you’re praying with other people, or confirming something someone else said. When you’re praying alone – there is no scriptural example of it that I can find. And many, many examples of it not being done in private prayers.

The world, used to magic charms and spells and enchantments, is desperate to find the perfect way to pray, hoping that if they can get the words just right and the direction of prayer just so and the amount of time and frequency perfect and then pray while rubbing the right “holy” artifact (cross, rosary, rabbits foot, etc.)... then God will HAVE to answer them, regardless of their obedience and faith. And that is impossible. None of those things matter. Everything you need to know about prayer is in **1 Peter 3:12**.

HOW DID JESUS PRAY?

The majority of the modern attitude of prayer is justified by the writings of Paul, as most wrong ideas are. The unlearned and unstable have always twisted Paul’s writings, and they’re particularly difficult in the subject of prayer.

But when there is a gnarly problem, the best way to solve it is to go back to the one and only perfect example we have and see how Jesus acted and what Jesus did. This is why Paul told us to follow him ONLY AS he followed Christ (**1 Corinthians 11:1**). Paul’s examples are good, but as you’ve seen several times now, Paul’s examples were not perfect. They were PROFITABLE for us, but that doesn’t mean we should mimic his mistakes; we should learn from them instead.

To get a new perspective on this, let’s focus on our perfect example, let’s see exactly HOW Jesus put His teaching into practice. That will be the last word on prayer. Usually when Jesus is mentioned praying, it merely says Jesus went somewhere “to pray” (**Matthew 14:23**, **Mark 1:35**, etc.). But there is a clear example of a complete prayer Jesus made in **John 17**. The entire chapter is a prayer, so read it with that in mind.

Remember, we’re not really looking at the CONTENT of the prayer, but the METHOD Jesus used. What do you notice? You should notice a complete absence of a “formula” prayer. This bears little resemblance to the supposed “sample prayer” in **Matthew 6:9-13**. Instead, Jesus ADDRESSES His prayer, by saying “Father”; then makes His REQUEST saying “glorify thy Son”, then gives God a REASON to answer this prayer “that thy Son also may glorify thee”.

That is the only ironclad formula for prayer found in the Bible; your prayer needs a WHO, WHAT, and WHY, and nothing else. After giving that, Jesus goes on to expound on the details of His request in the remainder of the chapter, being careful to be clear about exactly what He is and what He ISN’T asking for (**verses 9, 15, 20**). Notice the complete absence of an “in His name”, or an “Amen”.

The other lengthy example was a bit later the same night, in **Matthew 26:36-46**. Again, not a single “amen”, or “in His name”, or a “which art in heaven”, etc. A complete absence of everything that today’s Christians would think necessary to have a prayer answered. Instead, Jesus prayed to God by speaking the truth in His heart, no more, no less. You can’t pray a better prayer than that.

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

The reason there are no guidelines on how often to pray, or how long to pray, in the Bible... is because the PRAYER is not the goal! **God doesn't care about how, where, or when you pray.** In fact, there is no clear command to pray at all (although some statements of Paul could be interpreted that way).

Regardless, it is clear that prayer is supposed to ACCOMPLISH something. Move a mountain. Heal a leper. Raise the dead. Feed 5,000 with seven small fish and some scraps of bread. Open a mind (possibly your own), get wisdom, deliver you from your enemies, or thank God for things that were "above and beyond" the agreement you've made with Him.

Prayer is not the goal. Those things are the goal. You should pray enough to accomplish your goals; to receive whatever it is you desire. When that's finished, stop praying. Pray again when you need something again, or when you need to thank God for something again. Is that really so hard to grasp?

Anything more is simply making long prayers just for the purpose of making long prayers, and pointlessly repeating the same things over and over. You may not be saying a "hail Mary", but if you're asking God every time you pray to do the same things He's already promised to do... are you not repeating something for no reason? Unless God is deaf, or exceedingly forgetful, what is the point?

So use prayer when you have a reason to use it. Daniel and David were involved in running kingdoms that had millions of citizens. There were plenty of questions to ask God, plenty of guidance to look for, plenty of problems to pray about. So there were good reasons for them to pray 3-7 times a day! For you and me – not so much. Our problems are petty by comparison, and for the most part, easily solved.

Prayer is merely a TOOL to make a request known to God. It isn't about how long you pray, how often you pray, in what direction you face, whether you stand, sit, or run, whether it's before breakfast or before bed. The only way those would matter is if PRAYER was your goal! If you just had to "get your thirty minutes of prayer in today", then these things might be important.

But if you're focused on that, then you've already lost sight of the true goal; the great purpose that can be accomplished by prayer. The purpose, which is the same as the purpose of every other tool God gave us, is so that we can be made in His image and after His likeness.

Prayer imparts, one bit of understanding at a time, the divine nature to us. It allows us to exercise our senses by use to discern good from evil, and to prove exactly what the good, acceptable, and perfect will of God is. This is the PURPOSE of prayer, and why God commanded us...

Philippians 4:6 *Be careful for nothing; but in every thing by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known unto God.*

This work is completely non-denominational and is meant to fulfill Christ's great commission to "*preach the gospel to every creature*" (**Mark 16:15**). **This publication is not to be sold**; "*freely ye have received, freely give*" (**Matthew 10:8**).

The Bible tells us to PROVE ALL THINGS, and The Simple Answers encourages people to do just that. If you cannot PROVE what you believe, you have no right to believe it! Many of the things we print are shocking because they are different from what you've heard, but if something we say offends or upsets you, we hope you will take the time to set aside your preconceived ideas and PROVE your point from the Bible to see if you truly have been right all these years.

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