



The Doctrine of Prayer

For What Should We Pray?

I. PRAYER IS TO BE MADE FOR THE SPIRITUAL MAN

A. The importance of making request for the spiritual aspects.

1. The majority, if not all, of requests on any church's prayer sheet are for physical needs. Health, jobs, bills, etc., dominate the requests to the Lord.
2. Certainly, one reason for this is due to the fact that we are uncomfortable making known any spiritual needs.
3. It is easy to request that the Lord heal an ailment but very difficult to ask others to request the Lord help us be more charitable. Making known a spiritual need requires a level of honesty and vulnerability that has become unacceptable; however, focusing only on the physical should be unacceptable.
4. The scripture is our authority and provides us with many examples of prayer and many requests unto the Lord, of which, some are for physical needs but there are many for spiritual needs.
5. For us as Christians to focus only on our physical needs is truly shallow and ignorant. There is not a Christian on this earth who does not have spiritual needs and areas that need growth.
6. The scriptures give admonition for the purpose of spiritual growth and maturity and very little admonishment for the purpose of physical betterment.
7. Our purpose in this life is to bring God glory (Revelation 4:11) and the way by which we do that is fearing God and keeping his commandments (Ecclesiastes 12:13). Fearing God and following his commandments are accomplished in our inner man, which is spiritual.
8. We need to be requesting the Lord to help us grow in specific areas as pertaining to spiritual needs so that we can fulfil our purpose in bringing glory to God.

B. Let us consider these few examples from the scriptures of the saints and their requests of God for the spiritual needs.

1. Request forgiveness
 - a. David requested forgiveness (Psalm 51)
 - (1) David sinned against the Lord in all he did to Uriah and Bathsheba (2 Samuel 11:1-25).



- (2) The Lord was greatly displeased with David and sent Nathan the prophet to condemn and convict David (2 Samuel 12:1-12).
- (3) David acknowledged his sin and repented (2 Samuel 12:13) and his prayer unto God is recorded for us in the scriptures in Psalm 51.
- (4) This prayer records many aspects that need to be considered when requesting forgiveness.
 - a) David acknowledged his guilt and remorse with phrases like “Wash me from mine iniquity, and cleanse me from my sin.” (Psalm 51:2), and “I acknowledge my transgressions” (Psalm 51:3) and “Against thee, thee only, have I sinned, and done this evil in thy sight” (Psalm 51:4).
 - b) We see his plea for forgiveness when he said “blot out my transgressions” (Psalm 51:1), “Purge me” and “wash me” (Psalm 51:7), and “Hide thy face from my sins, and blot out all mine iniquities” (Psalm 51:9).
 - c) He also requested mercy of the Lord stating “Have mercy upon me” (Psalm 51:1) and “Deliver me from bloodguiltiness” (Psalm 51:14).
 - d) Not only did David confess and request forgiveness but he desired a restored relationship with God. This desire is found in Psalm 51:10-12.
 - e) Lastly, David committed to serve the Lord and praise him when he said “Then will I teach transgressors thy ways” (Psalm 51:13) and “O Lord, open thou my lips; and my mouth shall shew forth thy praise.” (Psalm 51:15).
- b. Daniel requested forgiveness (Daniel 9:3-19)
 - (1) During the Babylonian captivity, Daniel prayed unto the Lord after understanding the word of God (Daniel 9:2).
 - (2) These are some of the points we can see from Daniel’s prayer.
 - a) First, Daniel was greatly grieved over the sin. So much so that he set his face to seek the Lord “by prayer and supplications, with fasting, and sackcloth, and ashes” (Daniel 9:3).
 - b) Before, he confessed any sins, he gave God praise saying “O Lord, the great and dreadful God, keeping the covenant and mercy to them that love him, and to them that keep his commandments” (Daniel 9:4).



- c) Then, he expressed his understanding that the people's sin was no light thing. He said "We have sinned, and have committed iniquity, and have done wickedly, and have rebelled," (Daniel 9:5).
 - d) At that point, he proceeded in specifically confessing the sins for which he was sorry (Daniel 9:5-6).
 - e) In fact, over and over he acknowledged how they sinned against God (Daniel 9:7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 13, 16).
 - f) At the same time that he acknowledged their wrongdoing, he proclaimed the Lord's righteousness (Daniel 9:7, 14, 16), forgiveness and mercy (Daniel 9:9).
 - g) Daniel was not bitter against God for his judgment but rather made known that God was correct and faithful to his word for judging them (Daniel 9:11-14).
 - h) Finally, Daniel asked "O Lord, hear; O Lord, forgive" (Daniel 9:19).
- c. These two prayers of confessing sin and requesting forgiveness teach us very important principles that we should follow.
- (1) They teach us that we need to request forgiveness with a sincere and broken heart for our sins.
 - (2) They teach us that we need to specifically confess our sins to the Lord and not just pray generally for the Lord to forgive us.
 - (3) They teach us that we should desire to have fellowship restored with the Lord due to the breach because of our sin.
 - (4) They teach us that we should still offer God praise.
 - (5) Are we as remorseful as we ought to be for our sins? Do our hearts break because of our reproach against a holy God?
 - (6) It would seem that we have become too comfortable with our sins by comparison with Saints of old. Our hearts need to again grieve over our sins.
 - (7) The Bible teaches us "If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness." (1 John 1:9).
2. Request spiritual understanding
- a. The psalmist so greatly desired spiritual understanding that he cried out to God, "give me understanding according to thy word." (Psalm 119:169)



- b. Paul and Timothy requested spiritual understanding for others (Colossians 1:9).
 - (1) The need for the Colossian believers to have spiritual understanding was extremely important and became a regular matter of prayer for Paul and Timotheus.
 - (2) In fact, Paul and Timotheus faithfully prayed for them after learning of their faith in Christ Jesus and specifically “since the day we heard it, do not cease to pray for you”.
 - (3) The desire of Paul was “that ye might be filled with the knowledge of his will in all wisdom and spiritual understanding”.
 - c. Let us learn to pray for ourselves and also for others that the Lord would give spiritual understanding and discernment with which we can better serve the Lord and bring him glory.
3. Request abounding love
- a. Another of Paul’s frequent prayers was for the Philippian believers.
 - b. He specifically told them that “And this I pray, that your love may abound yet more and more in knowledge and in all judgment;” (Philippians 1:9).
 - c. How often do we pray this for ourselves and for others? How frequently do we even hear such a prayer request given?
 - d. Abounding love should be something that we regularly are praying for.
4. Request abiding in the will of God
- a. This time we have the example of Epaphras and what he prayed for the Colossian believers.
 - b. Colossians 4:12 tells us that Epaphras laboured “fervently for you in prayers”.
 - c. And what was so important that he would spend so much energy labouring, making request to God on other’s behalf? His desire was “that ye may stand perfect and complete in all the will of God.”
 - d. He was greatly concerned with these believer’s not following the will of God, that he made it his job to pray for them and so much so that Paul felt he needed to make this known to the Colossian believers.
 - e. Do we fervently labour in prayer?
 - f. If so, what is that we are labouring for? Is it health, wealth, prosperity, etc.?



- g. These are not the things that were of great importance to Epaphras but rather it was the spiritual things and this should be our burden as well.
5. Request wisdom
- a. Paul said that after heard of the Ephesian believers' faith in the Lord Jesus that he ceased "not to give thanks for you, making mention of you in my prayers;" (Ephesians 1:16).
 - (1) There are a few things listed in the following verses that Paul prayed for these believers.
 - (2) None of the things that he stated he prayed for them was for any physical need.
 - (3) The first item that he sought the Lord for them was that he "may give unto you the spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of him" (Ephesians 1:17).
 - (4) One of their needs that Paul recognized was for a spiritual need, specifically wisdom!
 - (5) How often we put the physical before the spiritual.
 - b. James also admonished believers to pray for wisdom.
 - (1) Within the first four sentences of James' epistle, he felt compelled to implore the recipients to make request of God.
 - (2) This could have been for any number of physical needs but what James was compelled to admonish the people to pray for was for wisdom, a spiritual need.
 - (3) James 1:5 says "If any of you lack wisdom, let him ask of God,".
 - (4) He saw it as a great problem if an individual lacked godly wisdom and thus, he implored the people to immediately make request of God to grant wisdom.
 - (5) We should share James' burden and beseech the Lord for our spiritual need of wisdom.
6. Request boldness
- a. Again, we read of a spiritual prayer request of Paul's; although, this time he asked others to pray for him instead of him praying for them.
 - b. His need, found in Ephesians 6:19-20, was "And for me, that utterance may be given unto me, that I may open my mouth boldly, to make known the



mystery of the gospel, For which I am an ambassador in bonds: that therein I may speak boldly, to make known the mystery of the gospel,”.

- c. Twice he mentioned his spiritual need of boldness for the Lord.
 - d. We know of many physical needs that the Apostle Paul could had and although he did pray for his physical need (2 Corinthians 12:7-8) this is not the subject that he coveted their prayers for.
 - e. He made an urgent prayer request known to others and it was for boldness in the Lord.
 - f. This shows that his spiritual needs were the most important aspect for others to be praying for him.
7. Request the salvation of the lost
- a. Although the scripture does state to pray for the peace of Jerusalem (Psalm 122:6) Paul also states his prayer request for Israel in Romans 10:1.
 - b. Here he expresses his “heart’s desire and prayer to God for Israel is, that they might be saved.”
 - c. Greater than any of their physical need of protection is their spiritual need of salvation and this is the focus of Paul’s prayer unto God for Israel.
 - d. The example is given to us and we need to be concerned with the greatest need for the lost, which is salvation.
8. Request for holy conversation
- a. Another example of what Paul prayed for is given to us in 2 Corinthians 13:7.
 - b. Paul said “Now I pray to God that ye do no evil; not that we should appear approved, but that ye should do that which is honest, though we be as reprobates.”
 - c. His request to God was for their spiritual condition that they would abstain from evil and instead seek and do that which is honest.
 - d. To do no evil would certainly include our thoughts. We can work hard on our actions to be right but the desire is that we would do that which is honest out of our hearts which is spiritual.
 - e. The Bible teaches “But as he which hath called you is holy, so be ye holy in all manner of conversation” (1 Peter 1:15).
 - f. Our prayer should be that we would “walk worthy of the Lord unto all pleasing” (Colossians 1:10) and that we would do so from our hearts.



- C. Truly, the above is just some examples of the spiritual needs for which we should pray. Ultimately, all of the teachings and instructions given to us in the scripture are spiritual needs we should be praying for. Things such as charity, patience, temperance, godliness, faith, unity, fleeing temptation, avoiding the appearance of evil, obedience, gentleness, kindness, humility, etc. Spiritual needs are truly the most important and lasting requests we can make unto God.

II. PRAYER IS TO BE MADE FOR THE PHYSICAL MAN

- A. The importance of making request for the physical aspects.

1. The most important things we ought to be making request for are spiritual; but that does not negate the importance of making request for the physical in our lives.
2. Be certain that the Lord cares about us and that which we go through in this life.
3. The scripture makes it clear that he would have us bring everything to him in prayer, including for the physical. Consider 1 Peter 5:7 “Casting all your care upon him; for he careth for you.”
4. Our cares in this life assuredly come from physical situations whether it pertains to health, relationships, employment, finances, etc., and according to the scripture the Lord cares about us and the things that trouble us.
5. What an incredible blessing it is that the God of all creation looks down and concerns himself with our affairs and desires that we pray to him about them!
6. Not only should we be prayerful about the physical aspects of our own life but we must be prayerful about the physical aspects of our fellow brethren’s lives.
7. Time and time again in the epistles, the apostle Paul made request that others would be praying for him and those with him (1 Thessalonians 5:25, 2 Thessalonians 3:1).
8. If we do not faithfully pray for one another then we are not being obedient to Galatians 6:2 and 1 John 4:7.
9. All of us face daily situations, interactions, problems, and conditions that we need to take to the Lord in prayer seeking his intervening, guidance, and help.
10. Let us be well rounded in making request of the Lord and seek him for both the spiritual and the physical.

- B. Let us consider these few examples from the scriptures of the saints and their requests of God for the physical needs.



1. Request for a spouse – When Abraham’s servant went to find a wife for Isaac, he did not just ask the first woman he saw but instead requested the Lord to lead him to the exact woman that God had for Isaac (Genesis 24:12-14).
2. Request for children
 - a. The example of Isaac and Rebekah
 - (1) Isaac and Rebekah were married but unable to have children “because she was barren” (Genesis 25:21).
 - (2) It was their desire to have children and for Isaac’s lineage to continue and for this reason “Isaac intreated the LORD for his wife” (Genesis 25:21).
 - (3) In this case, the husband sought the Lord that his wife would be able to conceive “and the LORD was intreated of him, and Rebekah his wife conceived” (Genesis 25:21).
 - b. Another example of praying for a child is found in Hannah
 - (1) Elkanah had two wives whose names were Hannah and Peninnah and Peninnah had children but Hannah had none (1 Samuel 1:2).
 - (2) Hannah was in great sorrow because she was barren and she wept (1 Samuel 1:7).
 - (3) This great sorrow and desire of her heart for children led her to the Lord and she prayed requesting the Lord to give her a child (1 Samuel 1:11).
 - (4) It was the will of God for Hannah to have a child, “Wherefore it came to pass, when the time was come about after Hannah had conceived, that she bare a son, and called his name Samuel” (1 Samuel 1:20).
3. Request for safe travels
 - a. The example of the apostle Paul
 - (1) Paul informed the saints at Rome that he ceased not to make mention of them in his prayers (Romans 1:9).
 - (2) He also specifically stated that he made request of God that God would give Paul a prosperous journey unto the Romans (Romans 1:10).
 - (3) This request came from a longing to see them and to impart some spiritual gift unto them (Romans 1:11).
 - (4) It is important to note that Paul specifically made request for a prosperous journey “by the will of God”. He was allowing for the



possibility that God's will may be different than his own and thus was yielding to God's greater will.

- (5) Also, in this case it was Paul that prayed for himself that he would have a prosperous journey and the purpose of this journey was spiritual in nature.

b. A second example from the apostle Paul

- (1) In Romans, Paul specified that he was praying for himself to have a prosperous journey whereas in Philemon 22, he expected another to pray for him.
- (2) In this verse Paul asked Philemon to "prepare me also a lodging", indicating that Paul hoped to journey to see Philemon.
- (3) He asked Philemon to prepare this lodging "for I trust that through your prayers I shall be given unto you."

c. So, we have examples in the scripture to pray for ourselves and others to have safety in travel.

d. Practically speaking, we can request safety for one another and ourselves in our everyday commutes and when the Lord provides safety, we can glorify him and edify one another for our great God's faithfulness.

4. Request for troubling situations

a. The example of Jonah

- (1) Jonah was in the midst of great trouble in the belly of the whale. Of course, it was his own disobedience that put him there.
- (2) The only answer for Jonah's trouble was to seek the Lord in prayer which is recorded in Jonah 2.
- (3) It was in the midst of the trouble that Jonah prayed according to verse 1, "Then Jonah prayed unto the LORD his God out of the fish's belly."
- (4) In the following prayer he expressed to God his despair and understanding that it was the Lord that placed him there (Jonah 2:2-8).
- (5) At the end, though, he praised the Lord, "Salvation is of the LORD." (Jonah 2:9).

b. The example of Paul in bonds

- (1) Paul had been bound as a prisoner in Rome. This is clearly stated a few times in the passage.
 - a) "So that my bonds" (Philippians 1:13)



- b) “waxing confident by my bonds” (Philippians 1:14)
 - c) “supposing to add affliction to my bonds” (Philippians 1:16)
- (2) Paul was certainly in a troubling situation yet he was not in despair for he knew and trusted that there were others praying for his salvation, namely the saints at Philippi.
- (3) Verse 19 shows his hope: “For I know that this shall turn to my salvation through your prayer, and the supply of the Spirit of Jesus Christ,”.
- c. These examples teach us to turn to the Lord when we fall into troubling situations and put our hope in him and give him praise.
 - d. They teach us to be prayerful for ourselves but also to be faithful to pray for others going through troubling situations.
 - e. We have no problem crying out to the Lord for ourselves but we hardly care for our brethren when they go through difficulties. This is to our shame and we must be compassionate and care for others through prayer.
5. Request for food – The Lord Jesus set the example of requesting God for our daily provisions when he taught his disciples how to pray and specified “Give us this day our daily bread.” (Matthew 6:11)
6. Request for protection from the ungodly
- a. Paul requested the Thessalonian believers to pray for him and those with him (2 Thessalonians 3:1).
 - b. Part of what he asked these believers to be praying for them was “that we may be delivered from unreasonable and wicked men: for all men have not the faith.” (2 Thessalonians 3:2).
 - c. As they were faithfully serving the Lord, they were faced with opposition from ungodly men and they needed others to pray that they would be delivered from such men.
 - d. We all face people that want to see us fall and would like us to stop serving the Lord and we should be praying for one another that the Lord would help protect us from such individuals and not falter in our service to him.
7. Request for the destruction of the enemies of God
- a. This request may be hard to accept but there is more than one instance in the scripture where men of God prayed and asked the Lord to destroy the wicked people opposing them and God.
 - b. Jeremiah the prophet gives us one such example in Lamentations 3:64-66.



- (1) He referred to his enemies in verse 52, “Mine enemies chased me sore” and these enemies were the subject of his request in verses 64-66.
 - (2) This man of God was faithfully serving the Lord and his enemies caused him great mischief, ultimately opposing God to which Jeremiah requests, “Persecute and destroy them in anger from under the heavens of the LORD.” (Jeremiah 3:66).
 - c. Keep in mind, that Jeremiah himself took no physical action against his enemies but sought the Lord to handle them for him.
8. Request for health
- a. The example of Paul
 - (1) Paul had an ailment that was causing him great difficulty which he said was “a thorn in the flesh” (2 Corinthians 12:7).
 - (2) Whatever this thorn was, it was a pain to him and made him weak.
 - (3) It was such a pain for him that he said “For this thing I besought the Lord thrice, that it might depart from me.” (2 Corinthians 12:8).
 - b. The example from James
 - (1) James 5:14 says, “Is any sick among you? let him call for the elders of the church; and them pray over him, anointing him with oil in the name of the Lord:”.
 - (2) The elders are to pray for the sick individual and the next verse tells us, “And the prayer of faith shall save the sick”.
 - c. These examples teach us that the Lord certainly cares about our physical ailments and that we should pray to him regarding them.
 - d. We see that we should pray for our own selves but again we see the precedent to be praying for others who are sick.
 - e. Ultimately, we must pray with the understanding and submission to the Lord’s will and accept his answer, as was the case with Paul not being healed in 2 Corinthians 12.
9. Request for our interactions with people
- a. Nehemiah gives an excellent example of “continuing instant in prayer” (Romans 12:12).
 - b. He shows us that we can even pray and make request of God for and in the midst of our interactions with people.



- c. Nehemiah was before the king Artaxerxes and the king noticed Nehemiah's sad countenance and asked why he was so (Nehemiah 2:1-2).
 - d. Nehemiah explained the reason why he was forlorn (Nehemiah 12:3) and the king responded "For what dost thou make request?" (Nehemiah 12:4).
 - e. The king and Nehemiah were in the middle of a back-and-forth conversation and were face to face. Yet, while having this conversation, Nehemiah still sought the Lord and made request.
 - f. Nehemiah was just asked a question but he needed God's help and the passage says, "So I prayed to the God of heaven." (Nehemiah 1:4)
 - g. This most certainly was a quick prayer and the pause likely not significant enough to be perceived by the king but while Nehemiah was talking to the king, he was also talking to God regarding his interaction with the king.
 - h. We should follow Nehemiah's example and request the Lord to help us with our interactions with other people. These interactions also include opportunities to witness (Colossians 4:2-3).
10. Obviously, this is not an all-inclusive list of what we should make request for. 1 John 5:14-15 states that "if we ask any thing according to his will" and "whatsoever we ask, we know that we have the petitions that we desired of him." The point is to ask anything but according to his will. There is no limit to what we can pray for but we must understand that our requests are to be submitted and according to his will. God is not a genie and we should fear to treat him so.