

Prayer – The Breath That Keeps Us Alive Spiritually

One of the first things that a doctor or nurse does to a baby the moment it is born is to slap it on the back to start it breathing.

From that moment on in order to remain alive the baby must continue to breathe.

Breathing then continues naturally right through human life.

As adults it is something we do without really thinking, unless we are under physical stress, then we realise the desperate need to breathe deeply.

Just a few minutes without breathing we die.

Prayer is the way we breathe spiritually

If we haven't yet begun to breathe spiritually on a regular basis, then this study is like a pat on the back to get us started.

What is prayer?

Prayer is simply talking with God.

Isaiah 1:18 [Living Bible] *“Come, let's talk this over! says the Lord; no matter how deep the stain of your sins...”*

Even if we sin God still wants to hear our prayers, how much more when we are seeking to please Him.

Psalms 116:1-2 [Living Bible] *“I love the Lord because He hears my prayers and answers them. Because He bends down and listens, I will pray as long as I have breath.”*

One of the amazing things the Handbook For Life, the Christian Bible, tells us is God desires to converse with us.

God wants to hear our thoughts and desires

Psalms 139:1-4 [NIV] *“O LORD, you have searched me and you know me. You know when I sit and when I rise; you perceive my thoughts from afar. You discern my going out and my lying down; you are familiar with all my ways. Before a word is on my tongue you know it completely, O LORD.”*

God already knows our thoughts before we utter them in words.

Why does God want us to speak then in prayer to Him?

Prayer is not for God's benefit but for ours.

God desires we utter these thoughts, put them into words so that the Holy Spirit can then remind us of the words of Jesus Christ and we can then see where our thoughts need renewing.

Isaiah 55:6-9 [NIV] *“Seek the LORD while he may be found; call on him while he is near. Let the wicked forsake his way and the evil man his thoughts. Let him turn to the LORD, and he will have mercy on him, and to our God, for he will freely pardon. **“For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways,” declares the LORD. “As the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways and my thoughts than your thoughts.”**”*

When we call on God in prayer, knowing that many of our thoughts and attitudes need to be made more like His.

God in His mercy and great patience will gradually, through the work and influence of the Holy Spirit in us, renew the way we think to become parallel to His way of thinking.

Hebrews 10:22 [NIV] *“let us draw near to God with a sincere heart in full assurance of faith, **having our hearts sprinkled to cleanse us from a guilty conscience and having our bodies washed with pure water.**”*

Our conscience is governed by the way we think.

We need to draw near to God in prayer, taking full advantage of the cleansing power of Christ’s blood [“*sprinkled*” refers to the blood of a sacrifice being sprinkled on the alter in the Holy place].

With prayer there must be the study of God’s Word.

His Handbook For Life, the Christian Bible, to wash away the wrong thoughts.

We are not on our own when we pray.

Romans 8:26-27 [NIV] *“In the same way, the Spirit helps us in our weakness. We do not know what we ought to pray for, but **the Spirit himself intercedes for us with groans that words cannot express.** And he who searches our hearts knows the mind of the Spirit, because the Spirit intercedes for the saints in accordance with God’s will.”*

There will be times when we cannot find words that express our thoughts and desires in prayer.

This is when the Holy Spirit, who knows us better than we know ourselves, will intercede on our behalf before the throne of God.

The Holy Spirit sees beneath our stumbling words, and knows the longings of our heart.

It is these deep feelings and desires that God wants to hear and for us to focus on for our own benefit.

Prayer is very important.

We may ask is prayer very important if God already knows what is in our heart and mind?

I ask you, *“is breathing important?”*

Just as normal breathing brings oxygen and strength into our body, so prayer opens up our life to the presence and power of God.

Prayer will help us mature spiritually.

Prayer will deepen our relationship with Jesus Christ and bring about changes in our life.

Prayer really does make a difference.

When should I pray?

1 Thessalonians 5:17-18 [NIV] *“pray continually; give thanks in all circumstances, for this is God’s will for you in Christ Jesus.”*

It is this constant prayer and thanksgiving that will bring eternal joy to our lives.

Joy that circumstances cannot take away from us.

Matthew 6:5-6 [NIV] *“And when you pray, do not be like the hypocrites, for they love to pray standing in the synagogues and on the street corners to be seen by men. I tell you the truth, they have received their reward in full. **But when you pray, go into your room, close the door and pray to your Father, who is unseen.** Then your Father, who sees what is done in secret, will reward you.”*

Each day needs a prayer time when we find a place that is away from the influence and distraction of this world.

I have such a place, it is nothing grand, it is a shed at the bottom of our garden, well insulated from the noise of the world outside.

My nearest neighbours do not disturb me for my special place is right next to the local church graveyard!

Here in my special place I am surrounded with God’s Word, translations of the Christian Bible and the study books of great theologians who have been inspired by the Holy Spirit.

This is where I find peace and joy in the presence of my Saviour Jesus Christ and constant companionship of the Holy Spirit.

This is where Jesus and the Holy Spirit reveal to me the great love, compassion and patience my spiritual Father has for me, His created child.

This is the most important time and place in my life.

What should we say in our prayers?

Matthew 6:9 [NIV] *“This, then, is how you should pray: “Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name,”*

In answer to this question Jesus Christ gave His disciples a pattern of prayer to help them pray effectively.

Before we can put this pattern of prayer into effect we need to know that God is going to hear and accept our prayers.

Isaiah 59:2 [NIV] *“But your iniquities have separated you from your God; your sins have hidden his face from you, so that he will not hear.”*

My sins, known or unknown, have separated me from God the Father, so He cannot hear me.

1 John 1:9-10 [NIV] *“If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness. If we claim we have not sinned, we make him out to be a liar and his word has no place in our lives.”*

Confess all our known sins, those we have overlooked or are unaware of, and any sins of omission, where we knew what we should have done but didn't.

Ask then for the sacrifice of Jesus Christ be a substitute for our deserved death.

Romans 4:18, 21-24 [NIV] *“Against all hope, Abraham in hope believed and so became the father of many nations, just as it had been said to him, “So shall your offspring be.” ... “being fully persuaded that God had power to do what he had promised. This is why “it was credited to him as righteousness.” The words “it was credited to him” were written not for him alone, but also for us, to whom God will credit righteousness, for us who believe in him who raised Jesus our Lord from the dead.”*

Ask that, like Abraham, our faith in what Jesus Christ has done for us, may cause God to credit some of Jesus Christ's righteousness to us.

Undeserved and unearned, just an additional expression of the love God the Father has for us His created children.

Then cleansed of sin and credited with Christ's righteousness we can stand in the presence of God and ask for what we need most.

Luke 11:13 [NIV] *“If you then, though you are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father in heaven give the Holy Spirit to those who ask him!”*

The active presence of the Holy Spirit.

Now our prayers will be heard by God the Father, and we can apply the pattern that Jesus Christ gave to His disciples.

Matthew 6:9-15 [NIV] *“This, then, is how you should pray: “Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name, your kingdom come, your will be done on earth as it is in heaven. Give us today our daily bread. Forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors. And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from the evil one.’ For if you forgive men when they sin against you, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. But if you do not forgive men their sins, your Father will not forgive your sins.”*

We **start** our prayers by **acknowledging who God the Father** is and expressing the wonder and awe we feel when we centre our thoughts on Him.

Appreciate His love, compassion, mercy, faithfulness, patience, power and sovereignty.

Thank God for having called us and opening our eyes and minds to understand the very purpose of life as a human being.

Thank God for sending Jesus Christ His Son to be our Saviour and now our High Priest.

Thank Him for the companionship of the Holy Spirit.

Renew our surrender to Him and our desire to be used by Him to cause His Kingdom to be formed on earth in ourselves and all other Christians.

Thank God for providing our daily needs to keep our bodies, minds and spirit alive.

Ask God for protection from the evil influence of Satan and the society that he rules at this time, in which we have to live.

Forgive all who have hurt us and caused us pain physically or mentally.

Share with God the needs of the day ahead, mention any situations where we need His special intervention.

Finish our prayers with **more thanks and praise.**

Does God always answer our prayers?

When we come to God with a sincere heart God always answers our prayers.

But we need to understand that He may answer our prayers in a way we do **not** expect.

God may answer our prayers with a “*yes*”.

Sometimes God may answer our prayers with a “*No*”, because He knows that what we are asking for would **not** be good for us, or that He has something better for us in mind.

Sometimes God may answer our prayers with a “*Wait*”.

What we ask may be in line with His will for us but it is not yet the right time for Him to answer “*Yes*”.

Some people think that because God has **not** answered their prayers in the way they want Him to that He has **not** heard them, or that He does **not** love them.

As long as we have confessed our sins and asked for forgiveness, and approach His throne in a humble attitude of mind God does always hear our prayers, and answers them according to His best plan for us.

As a Christian we will never grow spiritually unless we are breathing spiritually through constant prayer with our Creator and sustaining God.

Let prayer be the basis of everything that we do in our lives.

Memory Verses:

Psalms 116:1-2 [NIV] *“I love the LORD, for he heard my voice; he heard my cry for mercy. Because he turned his ear to me, I will call on him as long as I live.”*

Next time we will consider the other ingredient that sustains our physical and spiritual life: Food!