

PRAYER
Jeremiah 29:7
By Raymond White

Humans talk all the time. It is our nature to be almost constantly communicating verbally with someone — if not someone else then with ourselves, or no one. We even talk in our sleep. But talk, we must, because words are our symbols for our whole life experience.

Some words are important, some very important, and others not important at all. But what are the *most* important words that our mouths can ever utter? They are those words that we speak to God. By the words of our prayers, we enter the presence of God and there are no words more important than that.

The Bible has a great deal to say about prayer; indeed, all of our notions about prayer come from the Bible and so, for your reading pleasure, here is a list of prayer verses to help you along with your prayer life.

[1] PRAYER WORKS

Psalms 50:15 And call upon me in the day of trouble: I will deliver thee, and thou shalt glorify me.

Some overzealous people will say things like “thank him but don’t ask him.” That’s foolish because God wants us to ask him for help and he promises to respond. And also, that’s what the word prayer means, to request. The archaic “I pray thee” means “I’m requesting.” So the whole point of a prayer is, by definition, to ask God for something.

2 Chronicles 18:31 And it came to pass, when the captains of the chariots saw Jehoshaphat, that they said, It is the king of Israel. Therefore they compassed about him to fight: but Jehoshaphat cried out, and the LORD helped him; and God moved them to depart from him. :32 For it came to pass, that, when the captains of the chariots perceived that it was not the king of Israel, they turned back again from pursuing him.

In this story, Jehoshaphat was being pursued by enemies. He stopped to pray, and when his pursuers heard him pray, they realized that he was not the man they wanted, not Ahab so they turned their attention elsewhere.

Is that a prayer answered? I don’t know, but he certainly was delivered *because* he prayed. Prayer works. We don’t always know why, in fact, I’d wager, we seldom know why.

Job 42:10 And the LORD turned the captivity of Job, when he prayed for his friends...

Most people know the opening scene of the story of Job and the story’s happy ending. But few know *why* the story had a happy ending. Here’s what happened.

God allowed Job to be smitten with every kind of disaster. Then Job received bad advice from three of his friends. Then God entered the conversation and was decided to kill Job's three friends because of the bad advice they were giving to Job.

But God did not kill Job's friends, and the reason he did not was because Job, amidst all his suffering, turned his attention away from himself and his own problems and prayed *for them!*

The result of that prayer was twofold: God did stay his anger against Job's friends and God turned Job's life around, healed him, gave him more children, and made him once again successful in business.

The point of the story is that when you pray for others, you are blessed.

[2] GETTING GOD'S ATTENTION

Proverbs 15:29 *The LORD is far from the wicked: but he heareth the prayer of the righteous.*

God does have a preference, there is a pecking order. People who live in God's will, their prayers get heard first and answered first.

Jeremiah 29:12 *Then shall ye call upon me, and ye shall go and pray unto me, and I will hearken unto you. :13* *And ye shall seek me, and find me, when ye shall search for me with all your heart.*

It's the "with all your heart" that influences God. There is something about intensity and fervency that motivates him. That motivates you too, doesn't it? If someone asks you a favor, aren't you more likely to agree if they are pitching their cause? Like: "I really, really, *really*, need to borrow the car tonight. Oh please, please, *pleeeze!*" Yes, groveling gets annoying, but it gets your attention. It gets God's attention too. Like the old saying: It's the squeaky wheel that gets the oil. If you don't care, why should God?

John 14:13 *And whatsoever ye shall ask in my name, that will I do, that the Father may be glorified in the Son. :14* *If ye shall ask any thing in my name, I will do it.*

John 15:7 *If ye abide in me, and my words abide in you, ye shall ask what ye will, and it shall be done unto you.*

John 15:16 *...whatsoever ye shall ask of the Father in my name, he may give it you.*

John 16:23 *...Whatsoever ye shall ask the Father in my name, he will give it you. :24* *hitherto have ye asked nothing in my name: ask, and ye shall receive, that your joy may be full.*

This is a very broad promise, “whatsoever” and “ask what ye will” covers a lot. But then, this blank check promise was not made to everyone, but to his disciples, those who abide in him, those he knew he could trust with such power.

In a legal sense, it’s like power of attorney. You can give absolute power over your affairs to someone else. But when you do, you had better be really sure that you can trust that person to do what you are allowing them to do in your name.

[3] THINGS TO PRAY FOR

2 Chronicles 20:4 And Judah gathered themselves together to ask help of the LORD.

Judah was being invaded by several different enemies at once. It was certainly reasonable to ask God for victory in battle.

Nehemiah 9:32 Let not all the trouble seem little before thee.

It is reasonable to point out to God that our problems are non-trivial. If you are really hurting, say so. If you take a pain to a doctor he might ask you, “On a scale of 1 to 10, how bad does this pain really hurt?” And by that means you can convey to your doctor how physically stressed you really are.

It’s the same with God. When you take a problem to God, how much of a problem is it really? Tell him. If it’s not “little” he needs to know.

Psalms 57:5 Be thou exalted, O God, above the heavens; let thy glory be above all the earth.

We pray for ourselves, we pray for our families, we pray for our friends, we pray for suffering strangers. All that is well and good. But do we every think to pray for God — that he should get what *he* wants? After all, Jesus did pray, “thy will be done.”

Psalms 144:13 That our garners may be full, affording all manner of store: that our sheep may bring forth thousands and ten thousands in our streets. **:14** That our oxen may be strong to labour; that there be no breaking in [no burglars] nor going out [no run away animals] that there be no complaining in our streets [a good quiet safe neighborhood].

Here’s a list of things you might ask God for. God, we don’t want to go hungry, we want to be successful in our jobs and careers, we want to be not harmed by burglars and other crooks, we don’t want our animals to run away or to lose money in our investments, and we want our neighborhood to be safe and a nice place to live. If all of that isn’t stuff, I don’t know what is.

- ☛ *Jeremiah 29:7* And seek the peace of the city whither I have caused you to be carried away captives, and pray unto the LORD for it: for in the peace thereof shall ye have peace.

Here's something worth praying for: the peace and success of your city, your state, your country. Pray for it (good laws, good crops, good weather), and *seek* it which means get involved: vote, run for office, do what you can to get your city working right.

By the way, these were cities where the Jews lived unwillingly, as captives. God is saying, yes, pray even for those cities. You may not like where you live. Maybe you can afford no better. But the better off that place is, the better off you are. So, wherever you are, pray for and work for the betterment of that place.

For my Mormon readers, I'll throw in this verse. Everyone else can ignore it.

Alma 34:20 Cry unto him when ye are in your fields, yea, over all your flocks. :21 Cry unto him in your houses, yea, over all your household, both morning, mid-day, and evening. :22 Yea, cry unto him against the power of your enemies. :23 Yea, cry unto him against the devil, who is an enemy to all righteousness. :24 Cry unto him over the crops of your fields, that ye may prosper in them. :25 Cry over the flocks of your fields, that they may increase.

Pray for your crops and your flocks, pray for your job and your business, pray for your family and each family member, pray against your enemies that they will have no power over you, pray for your investments that they may produce good yield. So, when someone says you shouldn't pray for things, well you know what to do with that advice.

[4] BUT GOD KNOWS BETTER

1 Kings 8:36-39 Whose heart thou knowest.

There is a lot that you think you might pray for, a lot I think I might pray for. But do understand that God knows our hearts better than we do, and he knows what we need better than we do.

Ephesians 3:20 Now unto him that is able to do exceeding abundantly above all that we ask or think...

Do keep in mind, that whatever you ask of God, he has something better for you. His answer to your prayers really is, "Is that all you want? Hey, I can do better than that."

1 Corinthians 2:9 ... Eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man, the things which God hath prepared for them that love him

Further, we don't even know the right questions to ask. We don't speak God's language so the Holy Ghost translates our prayers for us. The Holy Ghost is saying in essence, "God, this is what this petitioner really means."

Romans 8:26 *Likewise the Spirit also helpeth our infirmities: for we know not what we should pray for as we ought: but the Spirit itself maketh intercession for us with groanings which cannot be uttered.*

So go ahead and ask. God will respond to your poor prayers with better than you could ever have hoped for. That doesn't make prayer useless, it makes prayer wonderful.

[5] HOW SHOULD WE PRAY?

Genesis 32:24 *And Jacob was left alone; and there wrestled a man with him until the breaking of the day. :26 And he said, Let me go, for the day breaketh. And he [Jacob] said, I will not let thee go, except thou bless me. :30 And Jacob called the name of the place Peniel: for I have seen God face to face, and my life is preserved.*

This is Jacob's conflict with God, their wrestling.

What was this battle all about? The text doesn't say why Jacob and God were sparing, but I'll give you my opinion. I believe they were quarreling over the birthright that Jacob had stolen from Esau. It was not Jacob's birthright, it was Esau's.

So, does Jacob get to keep it? Well, Jacob won the battle, so God surrendered. Sometimes it is not Satan you have to battle with, but God.

Psalms 141:2 *Let my prayer be set forth before thee as incense; and the lifting up of my hands as the evening sacrifice.*

Incense goes up. Raised hands (not folded) go up. Now, I don't know if God is really "up there" but from our perspective he is, and our attitude should be towards where we think he is. After all, a prayer is reaching for him.

Jeremiah 42:20 *For ye dissembled in your hearts, when ye sent me unto the LORD your God, saying, Pray for us...*

Dissemble means to hide one's true purpose. What your words are saying and what your heart is feeling are two different things. God does not respond well to that sort of thing.

Luke 11:5 *And he said unto them, Which of you shall have a friend, and shall go unto him at midnight, and say unto him, Friend, lend me three loaves; :6 For a friend of mine in his journey has come to me, and I have nothing to set before him? :7 And he from within shall answer and say, Trouble me not: the door is now shut, and my children are now with me in bed; I cannot rise and give thee. :8 I say unto you, Though he will not rise and give him, because he is his friend, yet because of his importunity he will rise and give him as many as he needeth.*

Luke 18:2 *... There was in a city a judge, which feared not God, neither regarded man: :3 And there was a widow in that city: and she came unto him, saying,*

Avenge me of mine adversary. :4 And he would not for a while: but afterward he said within himself, Though I fear not God, nor regard man; :5 Yet because this widow troubleth me, I will avenge her, lest by her continual coming she weary me.

These two parables have the same message: the way to get God's attention is to stay at him. The second parable has an additional message: the widow was not at all concerned that the judge was unjust, she had no judgment to pass. All she cared about was that he was the right person to help her.

Too many people all want to judge God — “a loving God wouldn't allow this or that to happen.” Blaming God for life's problems is a fool's game. It accomplishes nothing to tell God what he ought or ought not to do, other than he really ought to help you because you could really use his help.

And, for my Mormon readers, there is this:

Moroni 7:6 ...except he shall do it with real intent it profiteth him nothing.

[6] LANGUAGE OF PRAYER

Too many Christians think that the only proper language for prayer is King James English with its archaic “thee”s and “thou”s. That is nonsense in my opinion. If King James English feels more reverent to us, then what felt reverent to King James? Nothing, of course. He prayed in the common language of his time. And so should we.

I was ranting about this one day in Santa Cruz and a friend of mine, brother Pope, shared a thought that modified my thinking a bit. He suggested that while formal is not always required (I claim it is never required), there is a difference between familiar and casual, and casual is never appropriate.

I agree with that. While we should use modern English, it should be proper English, not riddled with slang and other presumptive speech. You should talk to God as you would talk to anyone who is your superior who deserves your respect. When you are interviewing for a job, would you dare be flippant? You can be, but you won't get the job. Why? Because such talk shows your callous disregard for *station*. The issue is this: Who's the boss anyway? And an employee who thinks he is his boss's equal and makes that apparent by presuming too much, is heading for an early pink slip.

Now, when you are talking to God, remember who you are talking to and adjust your language accordingly.

[7] WHEN SHOULD WE PRAY?

1 Samuel 12:23 God forbid that I should sin against the LORD in ceasing to pray for you: but I will teach you the good and the right way.

If it is a sin to stop praying for someone you care about, then that pretty much tells you when you should pray: as often as that person needs your prayers.

***Psalms 119:164** Seven times a day do I praise thee because of thy righteous judgments.*

Seven times a day? Well, let's not make a ritual out of it because ritualizing a thing makes it pointless. The point is: often. Prayer should not be a rare thing but a common thing.

***Isaiah 26:16** LORD, in trouble have they visited thee, they poured out a prayer when thy chastening was upon them.*

We pray when we're in trouble, fair enough. But the flip side is that God gets our attention by creating troubles for us. If the only time God hears from you is when you have a problem, then you can understand why you always have problems.

[8] DOES GOD HEAR YOUR PRAYERS?

***Daniel 10:12** Then said he unto me, Fear not, Daniel: for from the first day that thou didst set thine heart to understand, and to chasten thyself before thy God, thy words were heard, and I am come for thy words.*

From day one, God heard Daniel's every pray. Day one of what? From day one of when Daniel set his heart to understand. When you first begin to struggle to understand God, God hears you.

[9] DOES GOD NOT HEAR YOUR PRAYERS?

***Lamentations 3:8** Also when I cry and shout, he shutteth out my prayer.*

God doesn't have to hear your prayers if he doesn't want to. Even Jeremiah at times felt abandoned.

***Lamentations 3:44** Thou hast covered thyself with a cloud, that our prayer should not pass through. **:57** Thou drawest near in the day that I called upon thee: thou sadist, Fear not. **:58** O LORD, thou hast pleaded the causes of my soul; thou hast redeemed my life.*

But the real point is that when God seems to not be hearing, he is hearing. Just because you think you are abandoned, doesn't mean you are abandoned.

[10] DOES GOD EVER REJECT YOUR PRAYERS?

***Psalms 66:18** If I regard iniquity in my heart, the Lord will not hear me.*

***Psalms 78:36** Nevertheless they did flatter him with their mouth, and they lied unto him with their tongues. **:37** For their heart was not right with him, neither*

were they steadfast in their covenant. :38 But he, being full of compassion, forgave their iniquity...

This is interesting. Sometimes even a false prayer gets answered. That's kind of scary because we at times pray for some really stupid stuff. And if God answers those prayers, we might later wish he hadn't.

***Psalms 109:7** ...let his prayer become sin.*

***James 4:3** Ye ask, and receive not, because ye ask amiss, that ye may consume it upon your lusts.*

Some prayers are actually sinful, asking God for things that we should not be seeking. God is quite within his right to simply say no.

***Isaiah 16:12** And it shall come to pass, when it is seen that Moab is weary on the high place, that he shall come to his sanctuary to pray; but he shall not prevail.*

God does not answer every prayer. We don't even expect or want God to answer every prayer, certainly not the prayer of our enemies who wish us harm.

***Isaiah 59:2** But your iniquities have separated between you and your God, and your sins have hid his face from you, that he will not hear.*

***Jeremiah 11:11** ... though they shall cry unto me, I will not hearken unto them.*

***Jeremiah 14:11** Then said the LORD unto me, Pray not for this people for their good.*

Did it ever occur to you that God might say, "Don't pray for them"? Well, that's what God is saying to Jeremiah. Some people really are slated for damnation and God doesn't want to be cornered into changing his mind by some well intended prophet who has influence that God cannot ignore. Do remember who these people were that God was condemning: they were baby killers, sacrificers of infants, passing them "through the fire" — **Jeremiah 2:37, 7:31, 19:4-5, 32:35**.

God is not required to forgive. If he was, it wouldn't be an act of mercy. And since he doesn't have to forgive, don't intentionally get on his hit list. You never know when he just might seal your fate. For baby killers, their fate may already be sealed. How can they ever get forgiveness for torturing unborn babies to death? I find it hard to pray for them, don't you? Maybe that's the spirit telling me, "Don't bother." At least, that's what God said to Jeremiah.

***Luke 20:47** Which devour widows' houses, and for a shew make long prayers: the same shall receive greater damnation.*

The only thing such prayers get from God is damnation.

[11] SHOULD YOU EVER PRAY AGAINST YOUR ENEMY?

Nehemiah 4:4 Hear, O our God: for we are despised: and turn their reproach upon their own head, and give them for a prey in the land of captivity. :5 And cover not their iniquity and let not their sin be blotted out from before thee: for they have provoked thee to anger before the builders.

This is the opposite of the Jesus' prayer, "Forgive them for they know not what they do." Here, Nehemiah says, "God, *don't* forgive them." But then there was Jonah who was quite happy to condemn Nineveh, but then God forgave them anyway and found himself having to justify his mercy to his own prophet. Go figure. I suppose God just give his own some real latitude. Stephen forgave Paul. If he hadn't (and he didn't have to) imagine what the church would have lost.

Psalms 69:24 Pour out thine indignation upon them, and let thy wrathful anger take hold of them.

Wow! This is not Stephen and this is not Jesus. I hope nobody (certainly no Christian) has ever uttered such prayer against me. And do remember that God sometimes answers prayers that you later wish he had not answered.

Psalms 83:9 Do unto them as unto the Midianites; as to Sisera, as to Jabin, at the brook of Kison.

Strong words. If you ever utter such words to God, you'd better make sure you really, really, really mean them.

Psalms 109:8 Let his days be few; and let another take his office. :9 Let his children be fatherless, and his wife a widow.

Another very strong prayer.

Isaiah 37:21 Then Isaiah the son of Amoz sent unto Hezekiah, saying, Thus saith the LORD God of Israel, Whereas thou has prayed to me against Sennacherib king of Assyria: :33 Therefore thus saith the LORD concerning the king of Assyria, he shall not come into this city, nor shoot an arrow there, nor come before it with shields, nor cast a bank against it. :34 By the way that he came, by the same shall he return, and shall not come into the city, saith the LORD.

Hezekiah prayed against his enemy and that pray was answered by a prophet and the answer was fulfilled entirely. Not only did Sennacherib not conquer Jerusalem, he never even got close enough to lay siege. He did indeed return home without firing a shoot.

So, should you every pray against your enemies? In this case, such a prayer paid off.

Jeremiah 11:14 *Therefore pray not thou for this people, neither lift up a cry or prayer for them: for I will not hear them in the time that they cry unto me for their trouble.*

I don't want you to pray for them, I don't want to hear you praying for them, I don't want to hear their prayers, I won't listen. "I can't hear you — la-la-la!"

Jeremiah 11:19 *But I was like a lamb or an ox that is brought to the slaughter ... they had devised devices against me...:20 ... let me see thy vengeance on them: for unto thee have I revealed my cause. :22 Therefore thus saith the LORD of hosts, Behold, I will punish them: the young men shall die by the sword; their sons and their daughters shall die by famine.*

Jeremiah 12:3 *...pull them out like sheep for the slaughter, and prepare them for the day of slaughter.*

Wow! Jeremiah really wants God to pull the trigger. Jeremiah is not in a forgiving mood, no "forgive them for they know not what they do," nothing like Stephen's "lay not this sin to their charge." What Jeremiah want is revenge.

Jeremiah 18:21 *Therefore deliver up their children to the famine, and pour out their blood by the force of the sword; and let their wives be bereaved of their children, and be widows; and let their men be put to death; let their young men be slain by the sword in battle.*

This is a pretty fierce prayer. Jeremiah is at the end of his rope.

Jeremiah 20:12 *...let me see thy vengeance on them...*

Jeremiah is not a forgiving sort. Or if he had been the forgiving sort, he isn't an more. Personally, I see his point. There are people I want to sic God on.

Lamentations 3:64 *Render unto them a recompence, O LORD, according to the work of their hands. :65 Give them sorrow of heart, thy curse unto them. :66 Persecute and destroy them in anger from under the heavens of the LORD.*

I want revenge! These would be idle words from just anyone, but not from a prophet who influences God to actually do it.

I know this has been a nasty subject: praying that God will condemn and that God might actually honor such prayers. We should first understand that it is so. Your prayers matter, even your not-so-kind prayers. And we should also understand that since kindness is not automatic, therefore when kindness is offered, only a fool would pass on it.

Jesus forgives a lot. Where that great kindness comes from is one of the great mysteries. But it's there; it's available. So take it.

[12] PRAYERS THAT GOD DOES NOT ANSWER

It's tempting to believe that God answers all prayers. That's a generous idea but it's not true and it's not scriptural. Here's a short list of prayers that God's refuses to answer.

James 4:3 *Ye ask and receive not, because ye ask amiss, that ye may consume it upon your lusts.*

Isaiah 1:15 *And when ye spread forth your hands, I will hide mine eyes from you; yea, when ye make your prayers, I will not hear: your hands are full of blood.*

Proverbs 1:28 *Then shall they call upon me, but I will not answer; they shall seek me early, but they shall not find me.*

I know, it's disappointing that God is not a magic genie, a divine servant that just grants wishes every time we snap our fingers.

[13] PRAYERS THAT GOD DOES ANSWER

But God does answer prayers, of course he does, that's why we pray. But he expects a few things from us. Here's a short list of prayers that God does answer.

James 5:16 *The prayer of the righteous man availeth much.*

Matthew 21:22 *...all things that whatsoever ye shall ask in prayer, believing, ye shall receive.*

Matthew 6:11 *Give us this day our daily bread.*

And for Mormon readers, there's this:

Alma 32:24 *Cry unto him over the crops in your fields, that ye may prosper in them. :25 Cry over the flocks in your fields, that they may increase.*

It's wonderful to know that God answers our prayers. But did you know he does even better than that? God does not limit his blessing to just what we can think to ask for. He also gives you what you didn't ask for, because you couldn't ask for, because you didn't think of it.

Ephesians 3:20 *Now unto him who is able to do exceeding abundantly above all that we ask or think.*

1 Corinthians 2:9 *Eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man, the things which God hath prepared for them that love him.*

You think you know what you want and you ask God for it, but God is basically saying, “Nice prayer, but you’re not asking for enough. I can do better for you.” That’s amazing, that God can give me more than I can think to ask for, because I can think of a lot. But God says he can do more. Okay, bring it on God.

[14] WHY SHOULD WE PRAY?

1. Prayer is commanded by God

Luke 18:1 „men ought always to pray and not to faint.

2. Prayer protects us from sin

Luke 22:46 Pray lest ye enter into temptation.

3. Prayer glorifies God

John 14:13 ...that the Father may be glorified...

4. Prayer blesses us

Job 42:10 And the Lord turned the captivity of Job when he prayed for his friends.

5. Prayer works

James 5:16 ...The effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man availeth much.

[15] WHEN DOES GOD ANSWER?

1. Sometimes immediately

Isaiah 65:24 Before they call I will answer and while they are yet speaking I will hear.

2. Sometimes later

Luke 18:7 And shall not God avenge his own elect, which cry day and night unto him, though he bear long with them?

[16] HOW SHOULD WE PRAY SO THAT GOD WILL ANSWER?

1. Pray in Christ’s name

John 14:13 Whatsoever ye shall ask in my name, that will I do.

2. Pray believing

Matthew 22:21 And all things, whatsoever ye shall ask in prayer, believing, ye shall receive.

3. Pray with a pure heart

Psalms 66:18 If I regard iniquity in my heart the Lord will not hear me.

4. Pray persistently

Luke 11:8 ...because of his importunity he will rise and give him as many as he needeth.