

## What is prayer?

*WordWeb* defines prayer as “The act of communicating with a deity (especially as a petition or in adoration or contrition or thanksgiving); reverent petition to a deity; an earnest or urgent request”.

Prayer is the act of communicating with deity but not just any deity – the One True God. There is only one God of all creation, of the universe. Prayer to any other source will avail nothing.

**De 4:35 "To you it was shown that you might know that the LORD, He is God; there is no other besides Him.**

**Isa 44:6 "Thus says the LORD, the King of Israel And his Redeemer, the LORD of hosts: 'I am the first and I am the last, and there is no God besides Me.**

The nineteenth section in Psalm 119 begins with several verses devoted to David's prayers to God.

**Ps 119:145 I cried with all my heart; answer me, O LORD! I will observe Thy statutes.**

**Ps 119:146 I cried to Thee; save me, and I shall keep Thy testimonies.**

**Ps 119:147 I rise before dawn and cry for help; I wait for Thy words.**

**Ps 119:148 My eyes anticipate the night watches, that I may meditate on Thy word.**

Psalm 119:145 begins with the words, “I cried with all my heart”.

The word for cried means to call out to someone. Notice how David cried – with all his heart. This makes me think of the difference between actual crying for a reason and whining. Whining is making a noise so others notice how unhappy you are. If you've ever experienced a three year old doing this, you get the picture!

God doesn't want just our lip service. Those prayers memorized that are repeated over and over almost as a mantra may make us feel as if we're doing something good, but do we even know what we're saying? Is this type of prayer coming from a heart or from a mind that has learned to put words together that sound good? Words are only words. Prayer is not an exercise we take part in; prayer is a tangible way of speaking to God with the expectation that He hears us and answers us.

Consider the different types of conversations you might have with people. Some you're fully engaged in, others are only informational and sometimes our conversations can be obligatory. Hopefully, we are fully engaged when praying to God, expecting truths from His word to affect our daily lives. Going to God with a heart of gratitude and recognized need is so much more than an obligation.

When we talk about the heart, we are speaking of the feelings, the will, the intellect and the center of who we are. Effective prayer to God needs to be with

an understanding of who He is, who we are, and what He has done for us. In order to pray we need to be righteous before Him having accepted the gift of eternal life.

**Pr 15:29 The LORD is far from the wicked, But He hears the prayer of the righteous.**

**Jas 5:16 Therefore, confess your sins to one another, and pray for one another, so that you may be healed. The effective prayer of a righteous man can accomplish much.**

We have the example of praying with understanding. Often, people will say they are praying for something, or even praying for us. That's good! **But, just who are they praying too? Is it the God who saves them? Do they know the truth of the Gospel and the power of prayer offered to an Almighty God?**

The Psalmist pleads with God to answer him, to hear him. David knows God hears him and because of God's work in his life, David will be able to keep God's commands. David's **whole heart** is committed to prayer before God and he goes to God with **a heart of obedience** – desiring to keep God's statutes.

It's much like us praying to God, in a heartfelt petition, to help us continue on even when it's really difficult. It's like saying 'I come before you God with all I am, please assure me of your work in my life so that I may keep walking forward'.

**Ps 119:10 With all my heart I have sought Thee; do not let me wander from Thy commandments.**

**Are your affections and heart completely devoted to God? Do we cry to God in earnest? Does our petition include a desire to obey God's commands?**

**Ps 62:8 Trust in Him at all times, O people; Pour out your heart before Him; God is a refuge for us. Selah.**

We see another element of David's prayer in Psalm 119:146.

**Ps 119:146 I cried to Thee; save me, and I shall keep Thy testimonies.**

The Psalmist understands his need for God's work in his life, hence the request, 'save me'.

**Consider. What is the most important part of our relationship with God? What is our relationship with God based on?** His perfect love for us caused Him to send Jesus, His only Son, to suffer and die to pay the penalty for our sin. We need only to accept His gift of grace and desire to live in obedience. God is the only one who can save us.

"Save me" from the dangers which surround me, from the enemies that pursue me, from the temptations which beset me, from the sins which accuse me."  
*Treasury of David*

David is once again crying out to God in prayer and this time he requests God to save him, to defend and deliver him, to help him. **And what is the Psalmist's end to his request? "I shall keep Thy testimonies".**

Even though the Psalmist experienced danger and persecution from all around him, his main object in praying for God to save him was that he might be able to follow God's commands and live a life worthy of his calling. There is no thought of 'save me so I can do whatever I want or like', only 'save me so I can honor You'.

**When we pray, what is our object – to request God's supply so that we might serve Him more, or to request His comfort so we can continue serving ourselves?**

"Brief as are the petitions, the whole compass of language could not make them more comprehensive." "Hear me." The soul is in earnest, the whole heart is engaged in the "cry." "Save me" -- includes a sinner's whole need -- pardon, acceptance, access, holiness, strength, comfort, heaven, -- all in one word -- Christ. The way of access is not indeed mentioned in these short ejaculations. But it is always implied in every moment's approach and address to the throne of grace. "Hear me" in the name of my all prevailing Advocate. "Save me" through him, whose name is Jesus the Saviour." --*Charles Bridges*.

**Ps 5:2 Heed the sound of my cry for help, my King and my God, For to Thee do I pray.**

"Save me. From my sins, my corruptions, my temptations, all the hindrances that lie in my way, that I may "keep thy testimonies." We must cry for salvation, not that we may have the ease and comfort of it, but that we may have an opportunity of serving God the more cheerfully." --*Matthew Henry*.

In **Psalm 119:145-146**, we have the Psalmist continuing in prayer with an earnest cry to God with his whole heart in order that he might be able to keep God's commands even in the midst of adversity, not to gain his own desires, but to please God by following Him. The Psalmist understood completely where his help came from, who his strength was, and his need for God's saving grace. As we continue on to the next few verses we are given an idea **when** David prays.

**Ps 119:147 I rise before dawn and cry for help; I wait for Thy words.**

**Ps 119:148 My eyes anticipate the night watches, that I may meditate on Thy word.**

**ALL THE TIME!**

You may be thinking, 'I'm not a morning person, though'. Certainly not as early as the implication in this scripture. Perhaps we need to look deeper at the intent of our Psalmist. He anticipated his time in prayer so highly that it caused him to rise early. So much was his desire to spend time with God that he simply couldn't wait till morning light! And his desire continued on into the night so that when you would have expected him to sleep, he was still awake and in prayer with the God he loved.

**Isn't it true that when something is really on our mind, we have trouble sleeping? Where do you turn? What do you do?** Perhaps the answer is the example we see in David – go to prayer. God hears us at any time.

Prayer was so vital to David's relationship with God that it encompassed his day and night. We see the same devotion to prayer in Job's life.

**Job 23:12 "I have not departed from the command of His lips; I have treasured the words of His mouth more than my necessary food."**

There are several accounts recorded for us of Jesus being devoted to prayer.

**Lu 6:12 And it was at this time that He went off to the mountain to pray, and He spent the whole night in prayer to God.**

**Mr 1:35 And in the early morning, while it was still dark, He arose and went out and departed to a lonely place, and was praying there.**

The *Treasury of David* says of Psalm 119:147, "His supplications had become so frequent, fervent, and intense, that he might hardly be said to be doing anything else from morning to night but crying unto his God."

In verse 147, it says "I wait for Thy words". Wait can be translated hope, to be patient, to trust. This hope is a certain hope, not one that may or may not transpire, but a definite trust that God will answer prayer.

Hope is a necessary part of sincere prayer. **Consider. If we had no certain hope of God answering our prayers, how would our communication with God change?** To be sincere in our prayer we must believe that God will hear us and will answer us. This doesn't mean we will get what we ask for – we don't even know what we really need – but, it does mean God will answer in His time and His way for His glory and our good. This we can be certain of. When we believe the answers are in God's hands, we have cause for an earnest need of prayer, to come before Him with expectation of His blessings.

When I was young, I learned to pray to many different statues. I didn't trust these pieces of stone and marble for anything, I just followed what I was taught. There was certainly no real expectation of gaining from these prayers but perhaps in my understanding there was a certain amount of blessing bestowed on those who did these things. My prayers were half-hearted at best and absolutely without a genuine belief and trust that anything would happen. I did not have the hope our Psalmist speaks of in Psalm 119:147.

Waiting expectantly for God's answers to prayer is what compels us to fervent prayer! **Do you view prayer as something you are supposed to do or is it a necessary part of your life?**

"I wish that when I first open my eyes in the morning, I may then, in soul ejaculatory prayer, open my heart to my God, that at night prayer may make my bed soft, and lay my pillow easy; that in the daytime prayer may perfume my clothes, sweeten my food, oil the wheels of my particular vocation, keep me company upon all occasions, and gild over all my natural, civil, and religious actions. I wish that, after I have poured out my prayer in the name of Christ, according to the will of God, having sowed my seed, I may expect a crop, looking earnestly for the springing of it up, and believing assuredly that I shall reap in time if I faint not." --George Swinnock.

Psalm 119:148 says, "My eyes anticipate the night watches". Following is an explanation of what is meant by night watches.

“The Jews divided the night into three watches, which began at what we call six o'clock in the evening, and consisted each of four hours. The Romans taught them afterwards to divide it into four watches of three hours each; and to divide the day and night into twelve hours each; wherein different guards of soldiers were appointed to watch. At the proclaiming of each watch the psalmist appears to have risen and performed some act of devotion.” *Adam Clarke's Commentary*

Whether we are called to be up at a specific time or go to bed at a specific time doesn't seem to be the path of this verse. However, the reminder to be in continuous prayer is clear. The word meditate is also used in reference to spending time in God's word. This conveys the idea of pondering over the word. Thinking upon the word over and over was what caused David to have hope even when it was difficult. **How do we know this?** Because he has continually referenced his cry to God along with his desire to keep God's commands. **What was the fuel that kept our Psalmist going?** Truth.

In the *Treasury of David*, the Psalmist is described as an “ardent, earnest, and painstaking student” of God's word. When we consider meditating on something, it means to think deeply over a period of time, to reflect on information we have. When applied to the word, this is so much more than checking off a box, completing our reading for the day.

Throughout Psalm 119, there are several instances of requesting understanding. As we cry to God with our hearts, seeking His answers, trusting in His work, and desiring to obey His commands; as we continuously pray and meditate on God's word, He will give us understanding. What a privilege it is to know our Savior more and more!