

HOW TO PRAY

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PRAYER

When a person "says prayers" he is doing something prompted by the things happening around him. He is repeating words and phrases that are suitable for some time or circumstance such as mealtime, or the beginning of a meeting. Saying prayers is not a bad thing to do, but it is not enough.

True prayer begins with a yearning in the soul, a reaching out for spiritual contact with God. True prayer grows in strength and value as the Holy Spirit enlivens and guides the yearning soul.

The ultimate of true prayer comes as one is able to submit oneself completely to the Lord God whom he has come to love; then what is prayed for, and how one prays are given by the Holy Spirit. This prayer is the obedient response of a little child who, with wonder, awe and gratitude, worships the true and living God. Of himself, the child of God doesn't know what to ask for. But through spiritual insight he sees the hand of his Father in all things. His bosom swells with gratitude as he glimpses the wondrous work of godliness. As he is given, he asks for those things which are good in the sight of his God; and gives praise and thanks in the same manner. The theme of it all is the phrase used by the Savior: "Thy will, not mine, be done."

"And if ye are purified and cleansed from all sin, ye shall ask whatsoever you will in the name of Jesus and it shall be done. But know this, it shall be given you what you shall ask." (D&C 50:29,30)

It may seem strange that in certain prayers one might simply repeat what he or she is given to say by the Holy Spirit unless one realizes that true prayer is worship. Its essence is a feeling of the heart. The measure of a prayer is the intensity and depth of that feeling. Does one hunger to do good in this world? Does that feeling fill his soul? Is he oblivious to everything else but the fact that he is in the presence of his beloved Master? Does he cry out from anguish at the realization of his own nothingness contrasted with the goodness of God? Does he receive the Holy Spirit as a consuming fire to burn out the dross within, almost unto the consuming of his flesh?

If these things take place, the child of God is achieving and experiencing what the scriptures call "mighty prayer."

While it is true that this may not happen every day, or even very often, what poverty of soul entraps one who has never felt the fire of mighty prayer! Having achieved full worship even once colors and heightens every prayer thereafter for the remainder of one's life.

To pray, then, one must receive of the Holy Spirit and worship in spirit and truth. The more he can deliver himself, body and spirit, to what the Spirit shows him is good, the more humble is his prayer. The more he can focus all that he is, and has, the more mighty that worship.

It is small wonder that prayer is at its greatest when private and individual. No wonder the life of a faithful saint is a constant communion with the Master, no matter what else is happening.

"Behold, I went to hunt beasts in the forests; and the words which I had often heard my father speak concerning eternal life, and the joy of the saints, sunk deep into my heart. And my soul hungered; and I kneeled down before my Maker, and I cried unto him; yea, and when the night came I did still raise my voice high that it reached the heavens." (Enos 3-4)

MEDITATION

The helpmate of mighty prayer is meditation. When meditating, one tries to lessen his involvement with the world for a time in order to concentrate on something within himself, on ideas and feelings. As a person prays sincerely, with the Holy Spirit as his guide, that Spirit will bring to him many thoughts and feelings. This is part of the process of revelation. To take full advantage of this revelation, one would do well to mull over a matter at length, piecing what one already knows together with the new insights received.

It is one thing to have a revelation. It is quite another to understand and obey. Understanding comes in the process of careful, prayerful reflections, pondering what one has received.

To simply say a prayer is often like asking for food, being blessed with a tasty meal, but then merely sniffing it and leaving it on the shelf. Though greatly blessed, such a person would be little nourished. So it is with those who pray and do not meditate. They may gain much but be little edified.

Meditation cannot be taught, because it is something personal and private; it is the venturing of the soul into the unknown. But it can be learned by anyone who has the courage to think for himself.

A likely initiation to meditation is to ponder upon the scriptures. Banish all commentaries...forget hearsay teachings. What does the Lord actually say? What does the Spirit whisper as to how this passage or that doctrine should be understood? Where two scriptures appear at first reading to be contrary, what is the real intent of each?

Such an adventurer soon makes a marvelous discovery. In the midst of the tumult of human interpretation there is a rock! He cannot see it, for it is spiritual, but he can plant his feet firmly upon it. Then when the winds of opinion beat upon him he is no longer tossed to and from, but rests firmly on the rock. He now has a foundation for his

salvation. He has found the rock of revelation from the Savior.

In pondering the scriptures our venturer has found the Holy Spirit to be an able and willing guide. Flashes of insight come. Now he sees how God can be both just and merciful. He rejoices to learn how God can govern and control all things yet man can be free. He is overcome as he glimpses what the Savior has done for him. Now, having his own light, he is a new person, a little child born again in the image of the Master.

Having learned to think, to meditate on the scriptures, the venturer is now prepared to meditate upon the spiritual gifts that come in connection with his own prayers. Under these conditions, mighty prayer is so rich an experience that he can hardly contain it. Ideas, hopes and feelings tumble into his mind, then are spiritually fit together into the fabric of a new life. They become the warp and woof of his robe of righteousness as he prepares to meet the Bridegroom.

DECEPTION

As a spiritual experience, and as an access to spiritual life, prayer is like anything else of great power. When misapplied, the harm possible is equal to or greater than the good that can be gained. We must realize that Satan also delights in giving people "revelation". The possibility exists in prayer that Satan may attempt to pawn off his influence as a substitute for the ministrations of the Holy Spirit. When people pray in such a way that it can become a spiritual experience, Satan stands ready to counterfeit. Some telltale evidences of his influence are feelings that we should give in to the desires of our flesh, that we should act contrary to the teachings of the scriptures, or that we should seek the honors of men, or the rewards of the world. But the real test is not that simple, for there are times when the Lord wants us to do things differently than others are commanded to do, or he may lead us to have the honors of men and rewards of the world. At times like this, we must be sure that it is the Lord that whispers to us.

One learns to discern the voice of the Spirit through experience. By following spiritual guidance, one can learn to tell the difference between the enticings of the Holy Spirit and the temptations of the adversary. Learning to differentiate between the two influences is perhaps the most essential feature of the transformation of the natural man into the saint. Only then can one show in his life that full and heart-felt faith which he must achieve if he is to please God.

It is the heritage of every child in the stakes of Zion to learn from his father and mother how to recognize and live by the still, small voice of the Spirit, thus to know how to worship in mighty prayer. As the children of Zion come to know the voice of the Lord, then can they unite in those mighty prayers that are part of bearing off the kingdom in triumph.

THE FRUIT

True and mighty prayer should lead, above all, to the doing of righteous deeds. We

should seek to translate the spiritual gifts we have received into the blessing of others.

Righteousness is blessing others.

As we pray, we are filled with compassion for the poor, the needy, and for those who sit in darkness; being filled with love, we then go and do the things that we have been shown to do. In so doing, his pure love becomes our pure love for others.

If we worship in spirit and in truth, in mighty prayer and in righteous deeds, every problem in the world will find a happy ending. Thus it is that the stone cut out of the mountain without hands will roll forth until it fills the whole earth with love, the pure love of Christ.