

## How To Pray

February 26<sup>th</sup> has been designated as a special Day of Prayer at Canaan Bible Chapel. From 8:00 AM to 4:00 PM people have agreed to be praying throughout the day for the many needs of our church and its ministries, and individuals and families.



Almost everyone – whether they believe in prayer or not – has an opinion on prayer: why should we pray? how do we pray? when do we pray? what do we say? and should we stand, sit, kneel? If you Google the term "books on prayer" in 0.17 seconds you will get almost 60,000 hits on where you can find something read on prayer. If you expand your search to "List of books on prayer" you are treated to 1,600,000 hits in 0.20 seconds. So where do we start?

Jesus taught us to pray in Matthew 6. In verses 5–6, Jesus teaches us *how to pray*:

*"5And when thou prayest, thou shalt not be as the hypocrites are: for they love to pray standing in the synagogues and in the corners of the streets, that they may be seen of men. Verily I say unto you, They have their reward.*

*"6But thou, when thou prayest, enter into thy closet, and when thou hast shut thy door, pray to thy Father which is in secret; and thy Father which seeth in secret shall reward thee openly."*

Then, in verses 7–13, He teaches us *what to say*:

*"7But when ye pray, use not vain repetitions, as the heathen do: for they think that they shall be heard for their much speaking.*

*"8Be not ye therefore like unto them: for your Father knoweth what things ye have need of, before ye ask him.*

*"9After this manner therefore pray ye: Our Father which art in heaven, Hallowed be thy name*

*<sup>10</sup>Thy kingdom come, Thy will be done in earth, as it is in heaven.*

*<sup>11</sup>Give us this day our daily bread.*

*<sup>12</sup>And forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors.*

*<sup>13</sup>And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil: For thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory, for ever. Amen."*

Bill Hybels, founding and senior pastor of Willow Creek Community Church in Illinois, is well-known for his relevant and insightful Bible-based teaching. In his book, *Too Busy Not To Pray*, Hybels recounts what he learned about prayer at a conference, attended by a number of high-level Christian leaders and teachers. The conference subject matter was intense, and he had to strain to keep up with the theological and philosophical issues being discussed. Finally, lunch time came, and a group of professors and other leaders retreated to a nearby restaurant called "A Hole In The Wall." A professor was asked to pray, and as they bowed their heads, Hybels thought, *"This prayer is going to sound like theology class."*

And then the theologian began to pray. "Father," he said, "I love being alive today. And I love sitting down with brothers in the Hole InThe Wall, eating good food and talking about Kingdom business. I know You are at this table, and I'm glad. I want to tell you in front of these brothers that I love You, and I will do anything for You that You ask me to do."

He went on talking like that for another minute or two. When he said "Amen", Hybels thought, *"I have some growing to do."* God is not interested in stock phrases and impressive theological language. Psalm 62:8 says, "Pour out your hearts to Him."

In time, Hybels discovered three principles to effective prayer:

1. Pray secretly
2. Pray sincerely
3. Pray specifically

*Praying in secret* has practical reasons – it keeps distractions at bay. It can be any place you choose to be alone with just God. And continued visitation to that place solely for the purpose of prayer, can eventually create an atmosphere of being in a holy place.

Secondly, it is just you and God. No worries about eloquent phrases, emotional lapses, or privacy.

*Praying sincerely* is something that comes naturally in times of duress and helplessness. We plead with God to intercede in our circumstances. But doing so as we go about our normal routine is no less prayerful (or powerful) and given a little effort, can begin to come naturally. We teach children to pray for meals by saying, "God is great, God is good, and we thank Him for our food. By His hand we are fed. Give us, Lord, our daily bread." That's fine for children, but as mature Christians we should be setting aside time before each meal in sincere thanks for whatever is on the table (including leftovers). In a world and current economy where jobs are scarce and food prices rising, anything that God provides deserves our sincerest appreciation – and we should tell Him so.

*Praying specifically* is what Jesus wanted for us when He taught us to pray in Matthew 6: 7–13. From our relationship to God, to worship, thanksgiving, confession of sin, protection from evil and victory over temptation, The Lord's Prayer should be our template.

### **I've Got To Talk to Somebody, God**

Marjorie Holmes, one of America's favorite inspirational writers, won the hearts of people around the world with her books on conversational prayers. In her classic, *I've Got to Talk To Somebody, God*, Holmes writes about all of life and speaks to the many pains and joys a woman experiences in her everyday living. She knew, as mother of four, that time to pray alone was a luxury, if not impossible. Her husband was a workaholic and left her to raise the children and keep the home balanced and running most of the time.

She found that, throughout the day, she could incorporate prayer in her routine and activities. Raising a family before the days of permanent press fabrics meant there was always a big basket of ironing on hand. Marjorie learned to use the simple and boring chore to pray for the person belonging to each piece as she ironed it. On those cold winter nights, while fighting frozen slush in the grocery parking lots, she began to thank God that they had work, and could buy food, and live in a country where so many choices for food existed.

Holmes came under fire by some for 'taking the sanctity and reverence' from prayer. She emphasized that when possible, we need to be alone with God in a quiet, focused

way. But in the meantime, the opportunities to thank God, worship Him and ask of Him were everywhere, everyday.

### **Start Over**

If you have discovered something lacking in your prayer life, start over. Don't become encumbered with the how-to books and what you see others do when they pray. Don't go back to what you have been used to in praying. Find the time to put everything else out of your mind, and just sit quietly. There is no reason to rush into prayer. In fact, it is in the quietness of our hearts and minds that God speaks. When you feel the need, just say something to God. Talk about what is on your heart. Acknowledge who He is, and offer yourself to be His instrument. He will take it from there.

<sup>1</sup>Bill Hybels, *Too Busy Not To Pray*, Downers Grove, IL, Intervarsity Press, pp. 44-46, 1988

<sup>2</sup>Marjorie Holmes, *I've Got To Talk To Somebody*, God New York, NY, Walker and Company, 1968