

Welcome to **Discipleship training On The Air**. In this teaching series you may learn to become a disciple of Jesus Christ. A teacher will teach from the Bible that a disciple of Jesus prays. As you listen to this programme, make notes in a notebook or record the programme.

Jesus says, "Ask and it will be given to you" (Matthew 7:7). Paul says, "Pray continually" (1 Thessalonians 5:17). And James says, "The prayer of a righteous man is powerful and effective" (James 5:16). The Bible teaches much about prayer. The fourth series of 8 teachings is about "The practice of prayer". The four topics are: "A disciple is motivated to pray", "A disciple is sensitive to the physical aspects of prayer", "A disciple persists in prayer" and "A disciple is convinced about the effects of prayer". Every topic will be in two parts. Today we will learn about "A DISCIPLE IS SENSITIVE TO THE PHYSICAL ASPECTS OF PRAYER - PART 1". In part 1 we will consider "the postures in prayer", "the places of prayer" and "the time and length of prayers". Christians often ask the following questions. What is the correct posture of prayer? Should I kneel or stand when I pray? What is the right place to pray? In a church or in a lonely place? How often and how long should I pray? We are going to look at many Bible passages that speak about these things. Write the Bible references down so that you can read them again.

POINT 1. THE POSTURES IN PRAYER

The Bible nowhere prescribes only one correct posture during prayer. When you read the Bible, you find different positions of the arms, hands and of the body as a whole. All of these postures are permissible as long as they symbolise the reverent and upright attitude of the worshipper. Here are most of the postures in the Bible:

The first posture of prayer. Standing. In Genesis 18:22 Abraham remained standing before the Lord when he prayed.

The second posture of prayer. Spreading hands out or lifting hands heavenward. In Isaiah 1:15 God speaks to disobedient and corrupt people and says, "When you spread out your hands in prayer, I will hide my eyes from you." In 1 Timothy 2:8 is written, "I want men everywhere to lift up holy hands in prayer, without anger or disputing." In the Old Testament the people of God lifted up their hands to the throne of God when they called to God for help (Exodus 17:16, Psalm 28:2, 141:2), when they asked a blessing of God for the people (Leviticus 9:22, Luke 24:50), when they poured out their hearts full of grief to God (Lamentation 2:19), when they confessed their sin to God (Lamentation 3:41-42), when they praised God (Psalm 63:4, 134:2) and when they responded with "Amen! Amen!" (Nehemiah 8:6). Thus, the lifting of the hands heavenward was a *very common way* of praying for Jewish men. In the early church there were still many Jewish converts and in order and manner of worship the first Christian churches followed the customs that prevailed in the Jewish synagogue.

The third posture of prayer. Bowing the head. In 2 Chronicles 29:30 is written that after they sang praises to the Lord with the words of the Psalms, the Levites "bowed their heads and worshipped."

The fourth posture of prayer. Lifting the eyes heavenward. In Psalm 123:1-2 is written, "I lift up my eyes to you whose throne is in heaven. As the eyes of slaves look to the hand of their master,so our eyes look to the Lord our God, till he shows us his mercy." After the last Passover with his disciples, Jesus looked towards heaven and prayed for his disciples (John 17:1).

The fifth posture of prayer. Kneeling. In Luke 22:41 we read that Jesus knelt down in the garden of Gethsemane and prayed. In Acts 9:40 Peter knelt down in a house and prayed. In Acts 20:36 Paul and the elders of the church knelt down and prayed. And in Acts 21:5 the disciples including their wives and children knelt on a beach and prayed. From Ephesians 3:14 we get the impression that Paul usually knelt down when he prayed.

The sixth posture of prayer. Falling down with the face to the ground. In Deuteronomy 9:25-26 Moses lay prostrate before the Lord and prayed that God would not destroy Israel who had made an idol. The prophet Ezekiel fell face down terrified when he saw a vision of the glory of God and when he saw a vision of God's destructive power in judgement (Ezekiel 1:28, 9:8). In Matthew 26:39 we read that Jesus fell with his face to the ground when he prayed for the second time in the garden of Gethsemane. And in Revelation 11:16 the twenty-four elders fell on their faces and worshipped God.

Seven. Other postures in prayer. In 1 Kings 18:42 the prophet Elijah climbed to the top of Mount Carmel, bent down to the ground and put his face between his knees and prayed. And in Luke 18:13 the tax collector stood at a distance, not daring to look up to heaven and beating his breast when he prayed.

All these postures and positions in prayer sometimes occur in various combinations. In Luke 18:13 the tax collector stood and beat his breast. In 1 Kings 8:22 king Solomon stood and spread out his hands towards heaven. In John 11:38,41 Jesus stood and looked up to heaven. In 2 Chronicles 6:13 king Solomon knelt down

and spread out his hands towards heaven. In Numbers 22:31 the false prophet Balaam bowed low and then fell face down. The favourite method of prostration among people in the East has always been falling upon their knees, gradually inclining the body and bowing the head until it touches the ground. In Nehemiah 8:6 all God's people lifted their hands and then bowed down with their faces to the ground.

All these postures are appropriate. The standing position indicates reverence. The lifting up of hands indicates utter dependence on God. The spreading out of hands, with arms outstretched and palms turned upward, indicate expectation of receiving something from God. The bowing of the head indicate worshipping God. The lifting of eyes heavenward indicates submission to God. Kneeling down indicates humility and adoration. Falling down with face to the ground indicate awe in the presence of God. Beating the breast indicate a feeling of unworthiness. The present custom of closing the eyes and folding the hands is of uncertain origin, but may be considered permissible if it is properly interpreted as indicating shutting out everything in order to pray to God. **Conclusion.** The Bible nowhere prescribes only one correct posture during prayer. All the various prayer postures in the Bible are appropriate, providing that the motivation and attitude are right. Each posture expresses a different attitude, like reverence, dependence, expectation, worship, submission, humility and adoration, awe and unworthiness. The decision about which prayer postures are appropriate in your church should be made in unity and in love. According to Romans 14 and 15, you should include the considerations of the weak in faith.

POINT 2. THE PLACES OF PRAYER

Where should Christians pray?

First. In the Old Testament, the appointed place of prayer was the temple. In Isaiah 57:7 is written, "My house will be called a house of prayer for all nations." This proves that already under the Old Covenant, God intended people from all nations to bind themselves to the Lord and to worship him (Isaiah 57:6). However, people in the Old Testament also prayed inside their houses (Psalm 59), outside on the battlefield (Psalm 60), in the desert (Psalm 63) or on a mountain (1 Kings 18). In the New Testament the teaching becomes much more clear.

Second. In the New Testament there is public and private prayer. In Matthew 6:5-6 Jesus teaches, "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." King Solomon's public prayer to dedicate the Temple in 2 Chronicles 6, the public confession of Israel's sin in Nehemiah 9 and the Christian's public prayer in Acts 4 show that the Bible does not condemn *public prayer*. Both Jesus and the apostle Paul prayed in the presence of other Christians. What Jesus condemns in Matthew 6 is *to make a show of your prayers*. One Pharisee in Luke 18 stood in the front in the temple in full view of everyone present praying his so-called "private" prayer! Other hypocrites chose to stand and pray on the corners of the busiest streets at the hour of prayer. Jesus condemned the people whose motive was to be seen by the people and to be admired by them. Jesus teaches to pray your *private prayers* in a private room, where you can be alone and even shut the door to pray undisturbed. Don't try to make yourself conspicuous. However, Jesus' emphasis is *not on secrecy, but on sincerity, not on the place of prayer, but on the motive of the mind and the attitude of the heart*.

Third. Different places of prayer. Other places of prayer in the New Testament are on a mountain (Luke 6:12), in a lonely place (Mark 5:16), at a riverside outside the city gate (Acts 16:13) and in the house-church (Acts 12:12).

Fourth. Not the place, but the motive for prayer and the attitude in prayer is important. In John 4:21-24 Jesus taught the Samaritan woman that the time had arrived that people would no more pray on the mountain of Samaria or in the temple in Jerusalem. He taught that with his death and resurrection the time had come that people would pray to God "in Spirit and in truth". The place "where" a person prays is no more important. What is important is to "whom" one prays and "how" one prays! Prayer should be directed only to God the Father, the God who revealed himself in the Bible and in Jesus Christ. And Christians should pray according to the truth of the Bible and under the control of the Holy Spirit. Again the motives and attitudes of prayer are important, not the place.

Conclusion. The Bible nowhere prescribes one place as the only appropriate place to pray. What is important is not the place of prayer, but the motives and attitudes with which one prays.

POINT 3. THE TIME AND LENGTH OF PRAYERS

When should Christians pray?

First. The Jews prayed at fixed times of the day. In the Old Testament, among the Jews there were set times of prayer, when the pious Jews were expected to attend to their devotions. According to Psalm 55:17 (and Acts 3:1) there were morning, afternoon and evening prayers. The prophet Daniel kept faithfully to these set prayer times. In Daniel 6:10 we read, “Daniel went home to his upstairs room where the windows opened toward Jerusalem. Three times a day he got down on his knees and prayed, giving thanks to his God, just as he had done before.” However, in the New Testament there is more clear teaching about this question.

Second. Jesus did not pray at fixed times of the day. In the New Testament, Jesus gave Christians an example by praying during different times and different situations of the day. In Mark 1:35 we read, “Very early in the morning, while it was still dark, Jesus got up, left the house and went off to a solitary place, where he prayed.” To pray in solitary places was a regular habit of Jesus. Another very important habit of Jesus was to make some time to pray during his workday. In Luke 5:15-16 we read, “The news about Jesus spread all the more, so that crowds of people came to hear him and to be healed of their sicknesses. But Jesus often withdrew to lonely places and prayed.” Jesus would pray before mealtimes (Matthew 14:19) and sometimes when he had to make a very important decision, he prayed all night (Luke 6:12).

Third. How much time should Christians spend in prayer? In Matthew 6:7-8 Jesus teaches, “And when you pray, do not keep on babbling like pagans, for they think they will be heard because of their many words. Do not be like them, for your Father knows what you need before you ask him.” Non-Christians pray on and on because they think that the more, the longer and the louder they pray, the greater will be their chance of success in receiving what they desire. That is what the priests of Baal did in 1 Kings 18. They prayed and raved from morning till noon. The three fixed times of prayer of the Jews did not impress God, because the Jews lived in sin (Isaiah 1:15). The prayer wheels of the Buddhists serve to turn out an unceasing stream of prayers to the gods. Strings of beads are used by several different religions to count the number of prayers a devotee says. But Jesus commands, “Do not be like them!” God knows our needs the best of all and he desires that we come to him for help. He hears our prayer requests the first time we pray. We should not pray the same request over and over in one prayer.

Fourth. Not the length, but the faithfulness in prayer is important. It is important to notice that the most striking and fervent prayers recorded in the Bible are very *short prayers*! The prophet, Moses, prayed, “Please forgive their sin - but if not, then blot me out of the book you have written” (Exodus 32:31-32). King Solomon prayed, “Give your servant a discerning heart to govern your people and to distinguish between right and wrong” (1 Kings 3:6-9). The prophet, Elijah, prayed, “God of Abraham, Isaac and Israel, let it be known today that you are God in Israel and that I am your servant and have done all these things at your command” (1 Kings 18:36-37). Jabez prayed, “Oh, that you would bless me and enlarge my territory! Let your hand be with me, and keep me from harm so that I will be free from pain” (2 Chronicles 4:10). The governor, Nehemiah, gives a good example of praying a short prayer just before he meets people to discuss business (Nehemiah 2:4-5). The tax collector prayed, “God, have mercy on me, a sinner!” (Luke 18:13). A dying thief prayed, “Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom” (Luke 23:42). The martyr, Stephen, prayed, “Lord, do not hold this sin against them” (Acts 7:60). The apostle Paul prayed several short prayers in Ephesians 3:14-19, Philippians 1:9-11 and in Colossians 1:9-12.

The Bible does not condemn *long prayers*. Moses lay prostrate before the Lord for forty days and forty nights, during which time he often prayed (Deuteronomy 9:25-26). The Israelites spent a quarter of a fasting day in confession and in worshipping God (Nehemiah 9:3). Jesus spent a whole night in prayer, before he made a very important decision. The next day he chose his team of disciples (Luke 6:12). What Jesus condemns is the making of long prayers *for a show*. People who pray for a show will be severely punished (Mark 12:40).

Rather than praying long, the apostle Paul emphasises *praying faithfully*. In Romans 12:12 he commands, “Be faithful in prayer.” Pray regularly, pray before you make decisions, pray before you meet people, pray for all believers, etc. Also in 1 Thessalonians 5:17 Paul says, “Pray continually.” What does Paul mean? He means that *there should be no decline in praying regularly in the midst of all the circumstances of your life*. It means the same as “to acknowledge God in all your ways” and “to commit to God whatever you do” (Proverbs 3:6, 16:3).

Conclusion. The important lesson is not how long you pray, but how faithful you are in your prayers. Pray for every circumstance in your life, pray before you speak and act and pray regularly for others.

ASSIGNMENT FOR NEXT WEEK

First. Evaluate your motives and attitudes with regard to prayer. Do you pray to impress people by your prayer postures, place of prayer or time you spend in prayer? Then, change your motives and attitudes. Be faithful in praying. Follow Jesus' example and pray in the morning. Pray before you make decisions and before you meet with people. Make time to pray short prayers, especially during your work.

Second. See the workbooks “Go and make disciples” and Internet on www. Etc

Third. Listen on short wave radio every SATURDAY to WEDNESDAY to “Discipleship training on the air”.