

Greetings in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ! In this edition I'll be discussing the subject of Prayer. It has been a couple of months since the previous edition and I hope you're doing well. With this edition I hope to ramp up once again to a more regular cadence.

I would encourage you to go to <https://thechurchofjesuschrist.info> as I continue to update the site. I have links to several specific features below. Let me know what you think, whether you have any suggestions, or any requests.

As always, I'm extending an invitation for submissions to be published in The Gospel Notes Newsletter (TGNN). Additionally, if you have a subject or a question that you would like to have covered in a future edition of TGNN, feel free to send me a note and I'll do my best to address it.

The primary criteria for inclusion of articles are these:

1. It should be oriented towards the Gospel of Jesus Christ.
2. It should use the scriptures as a source of information.
3. It should include references for any quoted 3rd party sources.
4. It should not be political.

If you have a testimony to share, please send that to me and let me know if you would like it to be included in a future edition of the newsletter. Please keep in mind the four criteria listed above where applicable.

You can view previous editions of The Gospel Notes Newsletter (TGNN) in PDF (Portable Document Format) at <https://thechurchofjesuschrist.info/TheGospelNotesNewsletter>

Or you can access other educational/informational/inspirational resources at <https://thechurchofjesuschrist.info/Resources>

You can find the current preaching schedule for the Springfield, Missouri Restoration Branch at https://thechurchofjesuschrist.info/Resources/Service_Schedule.php

If you do not wish to receive the newsletter, please let me know. All responses to me will be treated confidentially unless you tell me otherwise.

Enos

1 Behold, it came to pass that I, Enos, knowing my father, that he was a just man, for he taught me in his language and also in the nurture and admonition of the Lord.

2 And blessed be the name of my God for it.

3 And I will tell you of the wrestle which I had before God before I received a remission of my sins;

4 Behold, I went to hunt beasts in the forest; and the words which I had often heard my father speak concerning eternal life and the joy of the saints sank deep into my heart.

5 And my soul hungered; and I kneeled down before my Maker, and I cried unto him in mighty prayer and supplication for mine own soul;
6 And all the day long did I cry unto him; yea, and when the night came, I did still raise my voice high, that it reached the heavens.
7 And there came a voice unto me saying, Enos, thy sins are forgiven thee, and thou shalt be blessed.
8 And I, Enos, knew that God could not lie; wherefore, my guilt was swept away.

Psalms 5

1 Give ear to my words, O Lord; consider my meditation.
2 Hearken unto the voice of my cry, my King and my God; for unto thee will I pray.
3 My voice shalt thou hear in the morning, O Lord; in the morning will I direct my prayer unto thee and will look up.

Alma 6:11 Nevertheless, Alma labored much in the spirit, wrestling with God in mighty prayer, that he would pour out his Spirit upon the people who were in the city, that he would also grant that he might baptize them unto repentance;

Across several religions you will find that prayer is a common element, each differing both at whom the prayer is directed and how the prayer is to be offered. As Christians we are very much blessed to have a lot of scriptures to give us guidance in this very important form of worship. Have you thought much about it though?

Many of us are introduced to prayer as a simple conversation between ourselves and the Lord. As we mature, though, we find it is more than that. As Paul wrote in his first epistle to the Corinthians, thirteenth chapter, “When I was a child, I spake as a child, I understood as a child...” and so it would seem that when we are children we pray as children. Unlike the remainder of the verse, we are never told to put away this part of our worship. Instead, it grows into something more than it was when we first learned of the Lord.

Let’s make no mistake though – prayer *is* a conversation. Like any relationship, it starts somewhere. It is not like those that speak babbling tongues that no one understands – or as Paul mentioned in 1 Corinthians 14, “For ye shall speak into the air.” Part of any conversation is for both the speaker and the hearer to understand what is said, lest at any time confusion sets in.

Rather, a fundamental part of a prayer-conversation is that the speaker understands that the hearer is not being given gibberish. That also means that the hearer – God – must be able to hear what is spoken. That is to say, if you don’t believe anyone is listening, then why would you pray? And if you understand that God *is* listening, it means you also understand that he is everywhere. He is omnipresent.

We implicitly accept these truths because it only makes sense to do so, otherwise you might be praying to some entity that is too far away to hear, or that has a language barrier that is impossible to bridge.

These are fundamentals of belief, and they coincide with our acceptance that if we didn't accept these things to be true, we would be in unbelief and our prayers would be vain and therefore unproductive. But we have sufficient scriptural evidence to show that God does hear our prayers, whether it was thousands of years ago in the middle-east, or hundreds of years ago on sailing ships, or today where you sit and read this. You have accepted that God exists, that he exists everywhere, and that he can understand what you are saying regardless of the language you are using. You have also accepted that he has sufficient intelligence to be able to interpret what you are saying in your prayer and that he has power sufficient to act upon those things you request of him.

You can see then that prayer is not only conversation, it is also a form of worship because it is an acknowledgement that God is a living God and that he is superior in every way.

When you pray it is often because you feel a need or desire to do so. Sometimes when you have a conversation with someone it is because you need to express what is on your mind and in your heart. Sometimes it is to ask for something to be done. Sometimes it is just because there is no one else that you feel will understand what is troubling you, or what your desires are. When you can trust that particular someone with the most important parts of who you are it is a very personal and intimate kind of relationship.

Some of our leading scriptures for this article tell us something else about prayer – it is not for the faint of heart.

Enos expressed his prayer as being similar to a wrestling match of sorts. He wrestled in mighty prayer because he wanted – needed – to receive a remission of his sins. That brings up something very important to understand.

Do you suppose that Enos was having an argument with God during his prayer? Was he making threats or trying to get some advantage over God? The thing is this – his wrestle was not with God. Let's read that part again:

“And I will tell you of the wrestle which I had before God...”

What was he wrestling with?

I'm of two minds about this – the first being that he was wrestling with himself to decide what kind of person he was willing to be in order to be forgiven of his sins. The second is that it was a struggle against his own nature. After his father passed away, he had a lot to think about, and it came to be the time for him to lead the people and he, like Solomon so many years before when he asked the Lord for wisdom so that he could wisely judge Israel,

Enos wanted to do things right since it was his turn to carry on the prophetic role as keeper of the records. Up to this time he could live in his father's shadow, but now he was about to be given those same great responsibilities.

Enos had to acknowledge his own sins. When he spent that night in prayer, it was a very big task to objectively look at his life and see that the things he was willing to do before were simply unacceptable to God. He knew the law, he was not an unbeliever by any stretch of the imagination, but rooting through all of the things he knew about himself and recognizing that they were going to have to be changed if he wanted forgiveness of sins was a great battle. His wrestling prayer must have been what God wanted to hear because God spoke with him and gave him assurance that he had been forgiven.

Afterwards, Enos' prayer changed from those things about himself on to things about others. Like they say on every safety briefing on an airline flight, if the masks drop due to low air pressure, fix your own mask first before you help others. If you are not a partaker of the salvation of the Lord, you will not very easily be able to help others.

Many times in our lives it is not the work itself that has to be done that is the most difficult, but rather it is the decision to do that work that weighs most heavily upon us. In Enos' prayer, it was not just a request for forgiveness, but it was a life-changing set of decisions that he committed himself to. Mental, or as the case may be, spiritual effort of this type is often more wearying than any kind of physical exertion.

I don't suppose that every prayer Enos offered after this one night of wrestling was a continual set of wrestling matches. It did, however, mark a major change in his life.

As we look down through time to the wrestle Alma had with God, and let there be no confusion about it this time, Alma says he wrestled with God in prayer ("Nevertheless, Alma labored much in the spirit, wrestling with God in mighty prayer..."), we see the second part of what it means to pray: to ask for intercession on behalf of others with the fullest part of your spirit.

What does that mean though? This spiritual wrestling match seems not much different than that described by Enos, except that Alma was doing it so that God "...would pour out his Spirit upon the people who were in the city, that he would also grant that he might baptize them unto repentance;"

I've heard it argued that all you need to do is ask God to do something and he will do it. That's not quite what the scriptures say, and if it were true all sorts of chaos would be erupting upon the world, the likes of which has **never** been seen before.

I've also heard it said that if you ask God and it is his will for it to be done, it will just be done and there is nothing more to be said about it. While that is true to a point, where does faith play a role in whether your prayer will be answered?

It's important to keep in mind that God is not our servant; rather, we are his. A servant does not order his master, nor should we expect to be able to order God around at our simplest whim.

What a servant can do, however, is give a compelling reason for his master to grant his desire. We see this very plainly in the life of Moses when Israel had sinned very greatly to the point that the Lord was ready to wipe them out and start with someone else.

Exodus 32

9 And the Lord said unto Moses, I have seen this people, and behold, it is a stiff-necked people;

10 Now, therefore, let me alone, that my wrath may wax hot against them and that I may consume them; and I will make of thee a great nation.

11 **And Moses besought the Lord, his God, and said, Lord, why doth thy wrath wax hot against thy people, which thou hast brought forth out of the land of Egypt with great power and with a mighty hand?**

12 **Wherefore should the Egyptians speak and say, For mischief did he bring them out, to slay them in the mountains and to consume them from the face of the earth? Turn from thy fierce wrath. Thy people will repent of this evil; therefore, come thou not out against them.**

13 **Remember Abraham, Isaac, and Israel, thy servants, to whom thou swarest by thine own self and saidst unto them, I will multiply your seed as the stars of heaven, and all this land that I have spoken of will I give unto your seed, and they shall inherit it forever.**

14 And the Lord said unto Moses, If they will repent of the evil which they have done, I will spare them and turn away my fierce wrath; but behold, thou shalt execute judgment upon all that will not repent of this evil this day. Therefore, see thou do this thing that I have commanded thee, or I will execute all that which I had thought to do unto my people.

We see from this that Moses made a compelling case that was two-fold. It is true that the Lord does not have a short memory, so we know that the promises he made to Israel must be satisfied, so Moses was not there to remind some forgetful god about a long-term promise. It is said in another place that Christ is able to raise up children to Abraham out of stones if needed so as to fulfill all his promises (Matthew 3:36 "And think not to say within yourselves, We are the children of Abraham, and we only have power to bring seed unto our father Abraham; for I say unto you that God is able of these stones to raise up children unto Abraham."). No, Moses was there to give a compelling reason to not destroy these particular Israelites. God accepted this reasoning and promised mercy if they would repent.

The second element in the two-fold case is that Moses wanted there to be no possible reason that the nations among which they traveled could have a legitimate case to

disbelieve in God or his promises. In essence, Moses wanted God to have the glory for all the wonderful things that he had both done and would do for his people.

This was not a light conversation between God and Moses. Not in the least bit. Moses wrestled with making a good presentation before God to make the case for preserving Israel and to do so while magnifying the Lord's name and reputation.

Moses prayed.

In like fashion, Alma prayed to preserve the people of his nation also. It is on occasions like this that you might have trouble giving a justifiable reason for **wanting** good for a people that have spit on you or stoned you or cast you out. It is a fight against our own nature by taking on the nature of Christ. Deciding to be something better than yourself. It is a spiritual battle against your own worst inclinations. And if you have no such inclinations of your own against others then the justification you offer the Lord may be that his name would be made more glorious with the triumph over satan.

Alma himself had been the recipient of the effects of such powerful prayers when his father prayed that he would be converted. The result of that prayer was that an angel came to straighten him out.

Mosiah 11

163 And as I said unto you, as they were going about rebelling against God, behold, the angel of the Lord appeared unto them; and he descended as it were in a cloud; and he spake as it were with a voice of thunder, which caused the earth to shake upon which they stood;

164 And so great was their astonishment that they fell to the earth and understood not the words which he spake unto them.

165 Nevertheless, he cried again, saying, Alma, arise, and stand forth. For why persecuteth thou the church of God?

166 For the Lord hath said, This is my church, and I will establish it; and nothing shall overthrow it, save it is the transgression of my people.

167 And again, the angel said, Behold, the Lord hath heard the prayers of his people and also the prayers of his servant Alma, who is thy father;

168 For he has prayed with much faith concerning thee, that thou mightest be brought to the knowledge of the truth.

169 Therefore, for this purpose have I come to convince thee of the power and authority of God, that the prayers of his servants might be answered according to their faith.

170 And now, behold, can ye dispute the power of God?

171 For behold, doth not my voice shake the earth?

172 And can ye not also behold me before you?

173 And I am sent from God.

It isn't hard to understand how much of a trial this must have been for Alma's father, knowing that his son was amongst the worst offenders in their campaign to destroy the church of God. Yet being who he was and who God is, Alma's father prayed for him knowing that this very kind of conversion experience was possible. Do you think Alma's father wrestled much with God in prayer about getting his son to turn away from his wickedness and rejoin the fold of God?

There is another truth to find about prayer that may not be so intuitively obvious from the scriptures, but prayer serves a very distinctive purpose for both us and those we pray for: ***we receive the Holy Spirit by prayer.***

Whenever there is a baptism, a blessing, the sacraments, an ordination, the laying on of hands, or any other task that the Lord has given us as sacred things, there is the operation of prayer. In each of these tasks, a prayer is offered and the Spirit acts as he sees fit.

If you pray that someone will be healed, and they are healed, it is the Spirit which heals. If you pray that someone will be converted, and they are converted, it is the Spirit which has rested upon them to give them convincing evidence for repentance, faith and baptism. If someone is ordained to the priesthood, a prayer is offered and the Spirit ordains them.

The list goes on, but it is sufficient for our purpose to simply say that the Spirit is given by prayer.

When you receive the Holy Spirit, it changes you. You may not suddenly become wealthy, healthy or the talk of the town, but a change is wrought that makes a difference, and sometimes that "something" is to just bring you comfort, consolation, peace, or a change of heart about a decision you need to make. Sometimes you receive great joy!

Is it possible for these things to happen without prayer? Possibly, but do you want to risk missing out on what the Spirit can give you?

Prayer is a lot of things, and it is a conversation, but it is so much more than that. You should try it if you haven't, but if you have, here is your incentive to do it more: you are better for doing it than you are for not. It is one of the first steps to a life with Christ.