Prayer Basics: How Should We Pray?

“Have a Heart-to-Heart Talk with God”

Introduction

An unemployed man had a job interview at the local zoo. When he arrived at the zoo office, the zoo manager closed the door and said in whispered tones, “Before we proceed, I need you to swear that you will not divulge anything I am about to say to you.”

Curious, the man quickly agreed.

“Well,” the manager began, “a couple days ago our gorilla—the star of the zoo—suddenly died. Now we have a problem. There’s no way we can afford another gorilla, but the zoo is in serious trouble without him.” At that point the manager pulled out a gorilla suit. “What we’d like you to do is wear this during the day, entertain the kids, eat bananas, and basically play the role of a gorilla. And we need you to start immediately, before people get any more suspicious.”

Since the job paid well, and the man really needed the work, he accepted. For the first few days he was a little shy about his gorilla act, offering a weak “oooh oooh oooh” once in a while and scratching under his armpits. Then he spied a vine hanging from the tree in his cage. As he began to swing on that vine, a crowd gathered.

Energized by the excitement, it wasn’t long before the man felt the “showman” in him coming out for all to see. The higher he swung, the more the kids screamed and the parents gasped. Soon he was swinging far over the lion pit next to his cage. Then the unthinkable happened. Just as he was stretched out over the pit, at the height of his swing, the vine broke and he plunged in with the big cats. As he lay there dazed, one of the lions charged forward and leaped on him. Forgetting his gorilla role, the man began screaming, “Help! Help! Get me out of here!”

At that moment the lion froze, then whispered frantically, “Shut up, you idiot, or you’ll get us all fired!”

Obviously, most of us have never had to dress up in a gorilla suit. But there are times when we’re forced to play roles, to show ourselves in ways different from what we really feel, or even be someone we’re not comfortable being. We put up a strong front for family and friends when we’re hurting inside. We offer our best effort at work, even when we’re sick enough to be home in bed. And when that neighbor or store clerk is seriously rude, how often do we respond pleasantly even when we’d much rather express our inner emotions—if only a little bit?

But prayer certainly does not fall into the category of role playing. We don’t have to look or speak according to some standard of spirituality. God invites us to pray with total sincerity and transparency. He wants us to share our deepest thoughts, freely acknowledging our need of Him. Yet He also calls us to express total confidence in Him. In short, when we’re faced with the question of how God wants us to pray, we can reply simply, “I will have a heart-to-heart talk with God.” Here are a couple of points to guide you in the “how” of prayer.

Sermon Body

1. Go to God in Humility. (Matthew 6:9; Isaiah 45:18,21; Psalm 103:13) Before rushing into the request portion of our prayers, it is important to humbly acknowledge God as our all-powerful Creator. We must remember that He is our wise Father, and He sees the whole picture, not only of our lives but of all creation. Humility in prayer recognizes that His will is best for us. He will work according to His plans in His timing.
2. **Pray with Confidence and Faith. (Ephesians 3:12; Hebrews 11:1)** This does not mean we go to God arrogantly, with an air of presumption or a sense of entitlement to His blessings. Rather, in confidence we say, “God, I know You can do anything.” Likewise, in trust we then declare, “God, I know I can leave everything in Your hands because You do all things well.

3. **Be Persistent in Prayer. (Psalm 34:15; Luke 18:1-8; Romans 12:12; Ephesians 6:18; Colossians 4:2)** Sometimes our confidence in prayer can be challenged when either the answer is long in coming or we simply lose zeal for praying. In those times we need the promises and reassurances of Scripture that God is indeed in control and faithful, and prayer does remain a vital part of what it means to be a Christian.

4. **Pray with Power. (Romans 8:26-27; Ephesians 6:10-18)** There is no greater dynamic in effective prayer than the power of the Holy Spirit. Simply put, the Spirit helps us pray no matter the battles we’re facing. It is this divine power that makes prayer so much more than just human words bouncing off the ceiling. We will see fruit in our prayer lives when we call out to God for a mighty move of His power to change lives, intervene in situations, restore relationships, guide decisions, and heal broken hearts and spirits.

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*Developed in part from “Prayer Basics: How Should We Pray?” a downloadable teaching resource on prayer, available free of charge from the National Prayer Center web site, www.prayer.ag.org.*

*Prepared by the Assemblies of God National Prayer Center www.prayer.ag.org*
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