

What is Prayer or Talk to Your Friend

Have you ever been unable to breathe? When I was a young boy there was a Horse Chestnut tree across the street from my home. It was a great climbing tree—tall with big branches! But, the first branch was more than six feet off the ground (when you're only three feet eleven inches tall, that's a problem). Once I fell from that first branch and landed flat on my back. The wind was knocked out of me. This had never happened to me before. It was a panic sort of situation. I couldn't breathe and I hurt. I thought I was going to die!

Sometimes, we *try* to hold our breath. One summer, during my college years, a friend and I did "overseas mission service" in Hawaii (hey, someone had to do it). We often were able to arrange our schedules to go snorkeling in the afternoons (we worked hard mornings and evenings). On one such occasion, I saw something at the bottom I wanted. It didn't appear too far down so I took a deep breath and dove. It was further than I realized.

As I approached the bottom my body screamed "breathe." I lost interest in whatever it was that I had gone down for and frantically headed for the surface—it seemed a lot further coming up than it had going down! At the surface I drew in a deep breath anticipating the feeling of air only to discover that my snorkel was still full of water!! While it is true that water is largely composed of oxygen, it doesn't feel the same in the lungs.

How important is breathing to you? I discovered it's really important to me!! After much contemplation, I have found the following facts about breathing to be true:

When you breathe normally you tend not to notice it. Even so, the oxygen you are taking in is supporting your life.

If something gets in the way of breathing, the only security is to drop everything else and take care of it—if you stop breathing for very long other things stop being important!

What you breathe is important. Breathing is to bring *oxygen* into your body. Breathing the wrong things can be fatal. Breathing is the only means of getting *oxygen* into your body. *Oxygen* sustains life.

We are made for more than breathing. We are not just a giant lung—our bodies are made for activity. Unless we breathe, nothing else matters much. When we breath, all sorts of opportunities are available.

For the most part you have to breathe for yourself. Life can be supported in an emergency by respirators or mouth-to-mouth resuscitation; however, the goal of even these procedures is to get *you* breathing again.

One big breath in the morning along with some little breaths at mealtime is not sufficient to sustain life!

In 1 Thessalonians 5:17, Paul says to "pray continually." Sounds a bit like breathing doesn't it? Perhaps that's why some Christian authors refer to prayer as the "Breath of the soul." Could prayer be as important to our spiritual life as breathing is to our physical life? Could the facts we noticed about breathing hold true for praying as well? Look at them again with that in mind; then, turn the page to see what the Bible has to say.

"Do not fret or have any anxiety about anything, but in every circumstance and in everything, by prayer and petition (definite requests), with thanksgiving, continue to make your wants known to God. And God's peace [shall be yours, that tranquil state of a soul assured of its salvation through Christ, and so fearing nothing from God and being content with its earthly lot of whatever sort that is, that peace] which transcends all understanding shall garrison and mount guard over your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus." Philippians 4:6-7 (The Amplified Bible)

Jesus, our Example and Friend, prayed and taught His disciples to pray. As you learn more about Jesus and prayer keep one thing in mind—He was perfect and He felt the need to pray! What does this say about our needs?

1. When did Jesus pray?

Matthew 14:21-23

Matthew 26:36

Mark 1:33-35

Luke 5:16

Luke 6:12

Jesus prayed before He entered into important events (choosing the disciples, raising Lazarus, crucifixion, etc.), after great successes (baptism, feeding 5,000, etc.), and regularly in between. Prayer was an important part of Jesus' life—He even prayed for you! (John 17:20).

2. What did Jesus have to say about prayer?

Mark 14:38

Luke 6:28

Luke 11:9-13

John 14:12-14

Philippians 4:6-7 gives some practical council regarding prayer. (You might want to read it in several translations.)

3. According to this passage, what should you talk to God about?

4. According to this passage is prayer a “last-ditch” effort or a place to begin? Explain.

5. What promise does Jesus make to you through this passage?

Since the basis of Christianity is friendship with Jesus, prayer is communicating with God as we would with a friend. Share with Jesus your wants, your joys, your sorrows, your cares, and your fears. (Cast all your anxiety on Him because He cares for you.— 1 Peter 5:7).

Ephesians 6:10-18 describes the Christian life in terms of warfare.

6. What commands are given in this passage?

7. As Christians, who do we struggle against? Are you stronger than that power?

8. After we are all suited up in our “spiritual armor” what is the battle plan? (vs. 18)

Prayer is so important that it is the focus of Satan's attack and needs to be protected by an impressive array of “spiritual armor.” Our success in developing and maintaining a relationship with Jesus depends largely on prayer. Prayer is keeping in touch with our Friend. Prayer is connecting with the Source of every good gift. Prayer is spiritual warfare against the supernatural powers of evil. Our battle plan is prayer!

9. There are many passages and promises related to prayer in the Bible. This shows how much God wants to communicate with us! What promises are contained in the following verses?

2 Chronicles 7:14

Psalms 91:15

Isaiah 65:24

Romans 8:26

10. How can you put 1 Thessalonians 5:16-18 into practice?

This week, use the passages in John to “listen” for Jesus’ voice speaking to you. Pray about these things. For instance, if you are convicted of sin in your life—don’t deny it, talk to Jesus about it! If you see something to be thankful for—thank Him for it! If you find something that troubles you—ask Him about it. If you are facing a difficult situation—share it with Him and ask Him to show you from His word how to handle it! Talk to God and Jesus like you would talk to a friend—because you are talking to a friend!

Begin each session with prayer - maybe something like this: “Lord, help me to come to know you better as we spend time together...”

Read the passage - several times noticing as many details as you can.

Imagine the setting - put yourself in the picture. Try to imagine the sounds, smells, sensations.

Summarize the passage - in your own words.

Apply the passage - what message is God giving you?

Meditate and pray - meditate on how this passage makes Jesus more real. Talk to Him about the passage and about using the information you have learned.

Passages for This Week:

John 7:1-13

John 7:14-24

John 7:25-44

John 7:45-52

John 8:1-11

John 8:12-30

John 8:31-41

Gingerly planting His bare feet on the cold stone floor, He rises and begins dressing, careful lest He should wake the other members of the yet sleeping household. Stepping into a pair of sandals, He reaches for his outer garment, then quietly opens the door and moves out into the darkness. The stars, twinkling remotely in the black sky, do not betray the imminence of dawn. As He makes his way through the city He thinks of the throngs of people who will soon fill the now quiet streets. Day after day He has walked among them and with them, seeking to befriend the friendless, comfort the lonely, and to help wherever possible. Day after day He has walked and worked in loneliness; always in the midst of crowds, yet somehow still alone ... so far from home.

He reaches the outskirts of the city now and continues walking, descending through fields and pastures towards a valley below the city. Walking. He has walked much in the past few years. Driven by a burden for humanity He has moved from city to city—encouraging, listening, understanding, bringing hope. Yet little human encouragement offers consolation to his weary heart. True, a handful seem to appreciate His efforts ... appreciate Him. But even they do not really understand.

Crossing the valley, He begins to ascend the mountain on the other side. The mountain. How often He has come

here! How often He has enjoyed the beauty that abounds here! His steps slow as the path steepens, yet He is scarcely aware of physical exertion, for He is consumed by a burden that weighs upon His heart—a burden to see the complete happiness of those around Him. This is His joy. But He seems so alone in His efforts to help. Always alone. It is at times such as this when He especially longs for the companionship of others ... if only one other. Another who appreciates. Another to understand, to offer encouragement.

A great weariness seems almost to overwhelm Him. If only ... He lurches forward, stumbling over an unnoticed rock in the path and falls to the ground. No one but the birds behold His prostrate form. No one witnesses his struggle to rise and then fall again, as though toiling under an overwhelming load.

Perspiration, such as no exertion ever caused mingles with tears in finding its way down His face, where it falls upon the grass that cushions His head. Early—morning dew casts a damp cover, as if nature weeps with Him, sharing the mental anguish that oppresses this lonely, human form.

Gasping as one who runs a long race, He buries His face in the grass, arms outstretched on the cold ground. His fingers dig slowly into the sod. Clutching handfuls of moist soil, He pulls Himself to His knees and with a voice barely audible says, “Father. Oh, My Father.”

Only the trees see the crumpled Figure with bowed head. Only the hushed song-birds hear the sobs that pour from His very soul. And only nature witnesses as peace settles upon the kneeling form.

As the rich colors of purple, crimson and gold bathe the mountain top in resplendent glory, a Figure is silhouetted against the dawn. Standing alone, the world’s Redeemer pauses for a moment, gazing upon the still-sleeping city below, then begins walking *back*, strengthened for another day.

"And Jesus went unto the Mount of Olives. And early in the morning He came again into the temple." John 8:1-2

Matthew 14:21-23 “Now those who had eaten were about five thousand men, besides women and children. Immediately Jesus made His disciples get into the boat and go before Him to the other side, while He sent the multitudes away. And when He had sent the multitudes away, He went up on the mountain by Himself to pray. Now when evening came, He was alone there.”

Matthew 26:36 “Then Jesus came with them to a place called Gethsemane, and said to the disciples, “Sit here while I go and pray over there.”

Mark 1:33-35 “And the whole city was gathered together at the door. Then He healed many who were sick with various diseases, and cast out many demons; and He did not allow the demons to speak, because they knew Him. Now in the morning, having risen a long while before daylight, He went out and departed to a solitary place; and there He prayed.”

Luke 5:16 “So He Himself often withdrew into the wilderness and prayed.”

Luke 6:12 “Now it came to pass in those days that He went out to the mountain to pray, and continued all night in prayer to God.”

John 17:20 “I do not pray for these alone, but also for those who will believe in Me through their word”

Mark 14:38* “Watch and pray so that you will not fall into temptation. The spirit is willing, but the body is weak.”

Luke 6:28 “bless those who curse you, and pray for those who spitefully use you.”

Luke 11:9-13 “And I say to you, ask, and it will be given to you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you. For everyone who asks receives, and he who seeks finds, and to him who knocks it will be opened. If a son asks for bread from any father among you, will he give him a stone? Or if he asks for a fish, will he give him a serpent instead of a fish? Or if he asks for an egg, will he offer him a scorpion? If you then, being evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to those who ask Him!”

John 14:12-14 “Most assuredly, I say to you, he who believes in Me, the works that I do he will do also; and greater works than these he will do because I go to My Father. And whatever you ask in My name, that I will do, that the Father may be glorified in the Son. If you ask anything in My name, I will do it.”

Philippians 4:6-7 “Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known to God; and the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus.”

1 Peter 5:7 “Casting all your care upon Him, for He cares for you.”

Ephesians 6:10-18* “Finally, be strong in the Lord and in his mighty power. Put on the full armor of God so that you can take your stand against the devil’s schemes. For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms. Therefore put on the full armor of God, so that when the day of evil comes, you may be able to stand your ground, and after you have done everything, to stand. Stand firm then, with the belt of truth buckled around your waist, with the breastplate of righteousness in place, and with your feet fitted with the readiness that comes from the gospel of peace. In addition to all this, take up the shield of faith, with which you can extinguish all the flaming arrows of the evil one. Take the helmet of salvation and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God. And pray in the Spirit on all occasions with all kinds of prayers and requests. With this in mind, be alert and always keep on praying for all the saints.”

2 Chronicles 7:14 “If My people who are called by My name will humble themselves, and pray and seek My face, and turn from their wicked ways, then I will hear from heaven, and will forgive their sin and heal their land.”

Psalms 91:15 “He shall call upon Me, and I will answer him; I will be with him in trouble; I will deliver him and honor him.”

Isaiah 65:24* “Before they call I will answer; while they are still speaking I will hear.”

Romans 8:26* “In the same way, the Spirit helps us in our weakness. We do not know what we ought to pray for, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us with groans that words cannot express.”

1 Thessalonians 5:16-18* “Be joyful always; pray continually; give thanks in all circumstances, for this is God’s will for you in Christ Jesus.”

(Unless otherwise mentioned, all quoted scripture is from the New King James Version)

** New International Version*