

Pray Always

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Prayer becomes more meaningful as we counsel with the Lord in all of our doings, as we express heartfelt gratitude, and as we pray for others.



My message in the last general conference focused upon the gospel principle of asking in faith in prayer. Today I want to discuss three additional principles that can help our prayers become more meaningful, and I pray for the assistance of the Holy Ghost for me and for you.

Principle #1. Prayer becomes more meaningful as we counsel with the Lord in all our doings (see Alma 37:37).

Simply stated, prayer is communication to Heavenly Father from His sons and daughters on earth. “As soon as we learn the true relationship in which we stand toward God (namely, God is our Father, and we are his children), then at once prayer

becomes natural and instinctive on our part” (Bible Dictionary, “Prayer,” 752). We are commanded to pray always to the Father in the name of the Son (see 3 Nephi 18:19–20). We are promised that if we pray sincerely for that which is right and good and in accordance with God’s will, we can be blessed, protected, and directed (see 3 Nephi 18:20; D&C 19:38).

Revelation is communication from Heavenly Father to His children on earth. As we ask in faith, we can receive revelation upon revelation and knowledge upon knowledge and come to know the mysteries and peaceable things that bring joy and eternal life (see D&C 42:61). The mysteries are those matters that can only be known and understood by the power of the Holy Ghost (see Harold B. Lee, *Ye Are the Light of the World* [1974], 211).

The revelations of the Father and the Son are conveyed through the third member of the Godhead, even the Holy Ghost. The Holy Ghost is the witness of and messenger for the Father and the Son.

The patterns used by God in creating the earth are instructive in helping us understand how to make prayer meaningful. In the third chapter of the book of Moses we learn that all things were created spiritually before they were naturally upon the earth.

“And now, behold, I say unto you, that these are the generations of the heaven and of the earth, when they were created, in the day that I, the Lord God, made the heaven and the earth,

“And every plant of the field before it was in the earth, and every herb of the field before it grew. For I, the Lord God, created all things, of which I have spoken, spiritually, before they were naturally upon the face of the earth” (Moses 3:4–5).

We learn from these verses that the spiritual creation preceded the temporal creation. In a similar way, meaningful morning prayer is an important element in the spiritual creation of each day—and precedes the temporal creation or the actual execution of the day. Just as the temporal creation was linked to and a continuation of the spiritual creation, so meaningful morning and evening prayers are linked to and are a continuation of each other.

Consider this example. There may be things in our character, in our behavior, or concerning our spiritual growth about which we need to counsel with Heavenly Father in morning prayer. After expressing appropriate thanks for blessings received, we plead for understanding, direction, and help to do the things we cannot do in our own strength alone. For example, as we pray, we might:

- Reflect on those occasions when we have spoken harshly or inappropriately to those we love the most.
- Recognize that we know better than this, but we do not always act in accordance with what we know.
- Express remorse for our weaknesses and for not putting off the natural man more earnestly.
- Determine to pattern our life after the Savior more completely.
- Plead for greater strength to do and to become better.

Such a prayer is a key part of the spiritual preparation for our day.

During the course of the day, we keep a prayer in our heart for continued assistance and guidance—even as Alma suggested: “Let all thy thoughts be directed unto the Lord” (Alma 37:36).

We notice during this particular day that there are occasions where normally we would have a tendency to speak harshly, and we do not; or we might be inclined to anger, but we are not. We discern heavenly help and strength and humbly recognize answers to our prayer. Even in that moment of recognition, we offer a silent prayer of gratitude.

At the end of our day, we kneel again and report back to our Father. We review the events of the day and express heartfelt thanks for the blessings and the help we received. We repent and, with the assistance of the Spirit of the Lord, identify ways we can do and become better tomorrow. Thus our evening prayer builds upon and is a continuation of our morning prayer. And our evening prayer also is a preparation for meaningful morning prayer.

Morning and evening prayers—and all of the prayers in between—are not unrelated, discrete events; rather, they are linked together each day and across days, weeks, months, and even years. This is in part how we fulfill the scriptural admonition to “pray always” (Luke 21:36; 3 Nephi 18:15, 18; D&C 31:12). Such meaningful prayers are instrumental in obtaining the highest blessings God holds in store for His faithful children.

Prayer becomes meaningful as we remember our relationship to Deity and heed the admonition to:

“Cry unto God for *all* thy support; yea, let *all* thy doings be unto the Lord, and whithersoever thou goest let it be in the Lord; yea, let *all* thy thoughts be directed unto the Lord;



yea, let the affections of thy heart be placed upon the Lord forever.

“Counsel with the Lord in *all* thy doings, and he will direct thee for good; yea, when thou liest down at night lie down unto the Lord, that he may watch over you in your sleep; and when thou risest in the morning let thy heart be full of thanks unto God; and if ye do these things, ye shall be lifted up at the last day” (Alma 37:36–37; emphasis added).

Principle #2. Prayer becomes more meaningful as we express heartfelt gratitude.

During our service at Brigham Young University–Idaho, Sister Bednar and I frequently hosted General Authorities in our home. Our family learned an important lesson about meaningful prayer as we knelt to pray one evening with a member of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles.

Earlier in the day Sister Bednar and I had been informed about the unexpected death of a dear friend, and our immediate desire was to pray for the surviving spouse and children. As I

invited my wife to offer the prayer, the member of the Twelve, unaware of the tragedy, graciously suggested that in the prayer Sister Bednar express only appreciation for blessings received and ask for nothing. His counsel was similar to Alma’s instruction to the members of the ancient Church “to pray without ceasing, and to give thanks in all things” (Mosiah 26:39). Given the unexpected tragedy, requesting blessings for our friends initially seemed to us more urgent than expressing thanks.

Sister Bednar responded in faith to the direction she received. She thanked Heavenly Father for meaningful and memorable experiences with this dear friend. She communicated sincere gratitude for the Holy Ghost as the Comforter and for the gifts of the Spirit that enable us to face adversity and to serve others. Most importantly, she expressed appreciation for the plan of salvation, for the atoning sacrifice of Jesus Christ, for His Resurrection, and for the ordinances and covenants of the restored gospel which make it possible for families to be together forever.

Our family learned from that experience a great lesson about the power of thankfulness in meaningful prayer. Because of and through that prayer, our family was blessed with inspiration about a number of issues that were pressing upon our minds and stirring in our hearts. We learned that our gratefulness for the plan of happiness and for the Savior’s mission of salvation provided needed reassurance and strengthened our confidence that all would be well with our dear friends. We also received insights concerning the things about which we should pray and appropriately ask in faith.

The most meaningful and spiritual prayers I have experienced contained many expressions of thanks and few, if any, requests. As I am blessed now to pray with apostles and prophets, I find among these modern-day leaders



of the Savior's Church the same characteristic that describes Captain Moroni in the Book of Mormon: these are men whose hearts swell with thanksgiving to God for the many privileges and blessings which He bestows upon His people (see Alma 48:12). Also, they do not multiply many words, for it is given unto them what they should pray, and they are filled with desire (see 3 Nephi 19:24). The prayers of prophets are childlike in their simplicity and powerful because of their sincerity.

As we strive to make our prayers more meaningful, we should remember that "in nothing doth man offend God, or against none is his wrath kindled, save those who confess not his hand in all things, and obey not his commandments" (D&C 59:21). Let me recommend that periodically you and I offer a prayer in which we only give thanks and express gratitude. Ask for nothing; simply let our souls rejoice

and strive to communicate appreciation with all the energy of our hearts.

Principle #3. Prayer becomes more meaningful as we pray for others with real intent and a sincere heart.

Petitioning Heavenly Father for the blessings we desire in our personal lives is good and proper. However, praying earnestly for others, both those whom we love and those who despitefully use us, is also an important element of meaningful prayer. Just as expressing gratitude more often in our prayers enlarges the conduit for revelation, so praying for others with all of the energy of our souls increases our capacity to hear and to heed the voice of the Lord.

We learn a vital lesson from the example of Lehi in the Book of Mormon. Lehi responded in faith to prophetic instruction and warnings concerning the destruction of Jerusalem. He then prayed unto the

Lord "with all his heart, *in behalf of his people*" (1 Nephi 1:5; emphasis added). In answer to this fervent prayer, Lehi was blessed with a glorious vision of God and His Son and of the impending destruction of Jerusalem (see 1 Nephi 1:6–9, 13, 18). Consequently, Lehi rejoiced, and his whole heart was filled because of the things which the Lord had shown him (see 1 Nephi 1:15). Please note that the vision came in response to a prayer for others and not as a result of a request for personal edification or guidance.

The Savior is the perfect example of praying for others with real intent. In His great Intercessory Prayer uttered on the night before His Crucifixion, Jesus prayed for His Apostles and all of the Saints.

"I pray for them: I pray not for the world, but for them which thou hast given me; for they are thine. . . .

"Neither pray I for these alone, but

for them also which shall believe on me through their word; . . .

“. . . that the love wherewith thou hast loved me may be in them, and I in them” (John 17:9, 20, 26).

During the Savior’s ministry on the American continent, He directed the people to ponder His teachings and to pray for understanding. He healed the sick, and He prayed for the people using language that could not be written (see 3 Nephi 17:1–16). The impact of His prayer was profound: “No one can conceive of the joy which filled our souls at the time we heard him pray for us unto the Father” (3 Nephi 17:17). Imagine what it might have been like to hear the Savior of the world praying for us.

Do our spouses, children, and other family members likewise feel the power of our prayers offered unto the Father for their specific needs and desires? Do those we serve hear us pray for them with faith and sincerity? If those we love and serve have not heard and felt the influence of our earnest prayers in their behalf, then the time to repent is now. As we emulate the example of the Savior, our prayers truly will become more meaningful.

We are commanded to “pray always” (2 Nephi 32:9; D&C 10:5; 90:24)—“vocally as well as in [our] heart[s]; . . . before the world as well as in secret, in public as well as in private” (D&C 19:28). I testify that prayer becomes more meaningful as we counsel with the Lord in all of our doings, as we express heartfelt gratitude, and as we pray for others with real intent and a sincere heart.

I witness Heavenly Father lives and that He hears and answers every earnest prayer. Jesus is the Christ, our Savior and Mediator. Revelation is real. The fulness of the gospel has been restored to the earth in this dispensation. I so testify in the sacred name of the Lord Jesus Christ, amen. ■