

Using the Supernal Gift of Prayer

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Prayer is a supernal gift of our Father in Heaven to every soul.



This conference began with a profoundly moving presentation of the classic hymn “Sweet Hour of Prayer” by the magnificent Mormon Tabernacle Choir. The familiar lyrics remind us that prayer is the source of comfort, relief, and protection, willingly granted by our loving, compassionate Heavenly Father.

The Gift of Prayer

Prayer is a supernal gift of our Father in Heaven to every soul. Think of it: the absolute Supreme Being, the most all-knowing, all-seeing, all-powerful personage, encourages you and me, as insignificant as we are, to converse with Him as our Father. Actually, because He knows how

desperately we need His guidance, He commands, “Thou shalt pray vocally as well as in thy heart; yea, before the world as well as in secret, in public as well as in private.”¹

It matters not our circumstance, be we humble or arrogant, poor or rich, free or enslaved, learned or ignorant, loved or forsaken, we can address Him. We need no appointment. Our supplication can be brief or can occupy all the time needed. It can be an extended expression of love and gratitude or an urgent plea for help. He has created numberless cosmos and populated them with worlds, yet you and I can talk with Him personally, and He will ever answer.

How Should You Pray?

We pray to our Heavenly Father in the sacred name of His Beloved Son, Jesus Christ. Prayer is most effective when we strive to be clean and obedient, with worthy motives, and are willing to do what He asks. Humble, trusting prayer brings direction and peace.

Don’t worry about your clumsily expressed feelings. Just talk to your compassionate, understanding Father. You are His precious child whom He loves perfectly and wants to help. As you pray, recognize that Father in Heaven is near and He is listening.

A key to improved prayer is to

learn to ask the right questions. Consider changing from asking for the things you want to honestly seeking what He wants for you. Then as you learn His will, pray that you will be led to have the strength to fulfill it.

Should you ever feel distanced from our Father, it could be for many reasons. Whatever the cause, as you continue to plead for help, He will guide you to do that which will restore your confidence that He is near. Pray even when you have no desire to pray. Sometimes, like a child, you may misbehave and feel you cannot approach your Father with a problem. That is when you most need to pray. Never feel you are too unworthy to pray.

I wonder if we can ever really fathom the immense power of prayer until we encounter an overpowering, urgent problem and realize that we are powerless to resolve it. Then we will turn to our Father in humble recognition of our total dependence on Him. It helps to find a secluded place where our feelings can be vocally expressed as long and as intensely as necessary.

I have done that. Once I had an experience that caused me immense anxiety. It had nothing to do with disobedience or transgression but with a vitally important human relationship. For some time I poured my heart out in urgent prayer. Yet try as I might, I could find no solution, no settling of the powerful stirring within me. I pled for help from that Eternal Father I have come to know and trust completely. I could see no path that would provide the calm that is my blessing generally to enjoy. Sleep overcame me. When I awoke, I was totally at peace. Again I knelt in solemn prayer and asked, “Lord, how is it done?” In my heart, I knew the answer was His love and His concern for me. Such is the power of sincere prayer to a compassionate Father.

I have learned much about prayer by listening to President Hinckley

offer supplications in our meetings. You can also learn from him by carefully studying the exceptional public prayer he offered at the conclusion of the October 2001 conference for Father's children throughout the world. He prayed from his heart, not from a prepared manuscript. (For convenience that prayer is reproduced at the end of this message.)²

Study that prayer, and you will find that there are no vain repetitions, no posturing to impress others, as sometimes occurs. He combines simple words eloquently. He prays as a humble, trusting son who knows well his beloved Father in Heaven. He confides in the certainty that His answer will come when most needed. Each prayer is tailored to its purpose, with a clear statement of what needs resolution, as well as ample expression of gratitude for specific, recognized blessings. His spontaneous prayers are like crafted gems, a silent witness to the fundamental place prayer has occupied in his life for many, many years.

How Are Prayers Answered?

Some truths regarding how prayers are answered may help you.

Often when we pray for help with a significant matter, Heavenly Father will give us gentle promptings that require us to think, exercise faith, work, at times struggle, then act. It is a step-by-step process that enables us to discern inspired answers.

I have discovered that what sometimes seems an impenetrable barrier to communication is a giant step to be taken in trust. Seldom will you receive a complete response all at once. It will come a piece at a time, in packets, so that you will grow in capacity. As each piece is followed in faith, you will be led to other portions until you have the whole answer. That pattern requires you to exercise faith in our Father's capacity to respond. While sometimes it's very hard, it results in significant personal growth.



He will always hear your prayers and will invariably answer them. However, His answers will seldom come while you are on your knees praying, even when you may plead for an immediate response. Rather, He will prompt you in quiet moments when the Spirit can most effectively touch your mind and heart. Hence, you should find periods of quiet time to recognize when you are being instructed and strengthened. His pattern causes you to grow.

President David O. McKay testified, "It is true that the answers to our prayers may not always come as direct and at the time, nor in the manner, we anticipate; but they do come, and at a time and in a manner best for the interests of him who offers the supplication."³ Be thankful

that sometimes God lets you struggle for a long time before that answer comes. Your character will grow; your faith will increase. There is a relationship between those two: the greater your faith, the stronger your character; and increased character enhances your ability to exercise even greater faith.

On occasion, the Lord will give you an answer before you ask. This can occur when you are unaware of a danger or may be doing the wrong thing, mistakenly trusting that it is correct.

It is so hard when sincere prayer about something you desire very much is not answered the way you want. It is difficult to understand why your exercise of deep and sincere faith from an obedient life does not grant the desired result. The Savior taught, "Whatsoever ye ask the Father in my name it shall be given unto you, *that is expedient for you.*"⁴ At times it is difficult to recognize what is *best* or *expedient* for you over time. Your life will be easier when you accept that what God does in your life is for your *eternal* good.

You are asked to *look* for an answer to your prayers.⁵ Obey the Master's counsel to "study it out in your mind."⁶ Often you will think of a solution; as you seek confirmation that your answer is right, help will come. It may be through your prayers, or as an impression of the Holy Ghost, and at times by the intervention of others.⁷

This guidance about prayer given to Oliver Cowdery can also aid you: "Behold, . . . you have supposed that I would give it unto you, when you took no thought save it was to ask me.

". . . You must study it out in your mind; then . . . ask me if it be right, and if it is right . . . your bosom shall burn . . . ; therefore, you shall *feel* that it is right."⁸

Then the answer comes as a *feeling* with an accompanying conviction. The Savior defines two separate ways:



“I will tell you in your *mind* and in your *heart*, by the Holy Ghost.”⁹

Answers to the mind and heart are messages from the Holy Ghost to our spirits. For me, response to the mind is very specific, like dictated words, while response to the heart is generalized, like a feeling to pray more.¹⁰

Then the Lord clarifies, “But if [what you propose] be not right you . . . shall have a stupor of thought.”¹¹ That, for me, is an unsettling, discomfoting feeling.

Oliver Cowdery was taught another way in which positive answers come: “Did I not speak *peace* to your mind concerning the matter?”¹² The feeling of peace is the most common confirming witness that I personally experience. When I have been very concerned about an important matter, struggling to resolve it without success, I continued those efforts in faith. Later, an all-pervading peace has

come, settling my concerns, as He has promised.

Some misunderstandings about prayer can be clarified by realizing that the scriptures define principles for effective prayer, but they do not assure *when* a response will be given. Actually, He will reply in one of *three* ways. First, you can feel the peace, comfort, and assurance that confirm that your decision is right. Or second, you can sense that unsettled feeling, the stupor of thought, indicating that your choice is wrong. Or third—and this is the difficult one—you can feel no response.

What do you do when you have prepared carefully, have prayed fervently, waited a reasonable time for a response, and still do not feel an answer? You may want to express thanks when that occurs, for it is an evidence of His trust. When you are living worthily and your choice is consistent

with the Savior’s teachings and you need to act, proceed with trust. As you are sensitive to the promptings of the Spirit, one of two things will certainly occur at the appropriate time: either the stupor of thought will come, indicating an improper choice, or the peace or the burning in the bosom will be felt, confirming that your choice was correct. When you are living righteously and are acting with trust, God will not let you proceed too far without a warning impression if you have made the wrong decision.

Gratitude for the Gift of Prayer

An important aspect of prayer is gratitude. Jesus declared, “And in nothing doth man offend God . . . save those who confess not his hand in all things, and obey not his commandments.”¹³ When we contemplate the incomparable gift of prayer and the limitless blessings that flow from it,

honest appreciation fills our mind and heart to overflowing with thanksgiving. Should we not, therefore, continually and profoundly express to our beloved Father, as well as we are able, our unbounded gratitude for the supernal gift of prayer and for His answers that meet our needs while motivating us to grow?

I testify our Father will always answer your prayers in the way and in the time that will be for your best eternal good. In the name of Jesus Christ, amen. ■

NOTES

1. D&C 19:28.
2. "O God, our Eternal Father, Thou great Judge of the Nations, Thou who art the governor of the universe, Thou who art our Father and our God, whose children we are, we look to Thee in faith in this dark and solemn time. Please, dear Father, bless us with faith. Bless us with love. Bless us with charity in our hearts. Bless us with a spirit of perseverance to root out the terrible evils that are in this world. Give protection and guidance to those who are engaged actively in carrying forth the things of battle. Bless them; preserve their lives; save them from harm and evil. Hear the prayers of their loved ones for their safety. We pray for the great democracies of the earth which Thou hast overseen in creating their governments, where peace and liberty and democratic processes obtain.
"O Father, look with mercy upon this, our own nation, and its friends in this time of need. Spare us and help us to walk with faith ever in Thee and ever in Thy Beloved Son, on whose mercy we count and to whom we look as our Savior and our Lord. Bless the cause of peace and bring it quickly to us again, we humbly plead with Thee, asking that Thou wilt forgive our arrogance, pass by our sins, be kind and gracious to us, and cause our hearts to turn with love toward Thee. We humbly pray in the name of Him who loves us all, even the Lord Jesus Christ, our Redeemer and our Savior, amen" ("Till We Meet Again," *Liabona*, Jan. 2002, 105; *Ensign*, Nov. 2001, 90).
3. In Conference Report, Apr. 1969, 153.
4. D&C 88:64; emphasis added; see also vv. 63, 65.
5. See D&C 6:23, 36; D&C 8:2-3, 10; D&C 9:9.
6. D&C 9:8.
7. See Spencer W. Kimball, *The Teachings of Spencer W. Kimball*, ed. Edward L. Kimball (1982), 252.
8. D&C 9:7-8; emphasis added.
9. D&C 8:2; emphasis added.
10. See Enos 1:3-5, 9-10.
11. D&C 9:9.
12. D&C 6:23; emphasis added.
13. D&C 59:21.

The Nourishing Power of Hymns

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Hymns play an essential role in spirituality, revelation, and conversion.



This magnificent choir gives inspiring sermons. In fact, "some of the greatest sermons are preached by the singing of hymns."¹ My testimony and conversion to the restored gospel were strongly influenced by singing the hymns of Zion as a young boy. I grew up in the small town of Mapleton, Utah, and attended meetings in what is known today as the "old white church." My 95-year-old mother still lives in Mapleton. When I visit her, I drive past the "old white church," and a flood of sweet memories fills my mind. Among them is the converting power of the hymns we sang in priesthood, Sunday School, and sacrament

meetings. My experiences were similar to that of President Hinckley when, as a deacon, he attended a stake priesthood meeting with his father. They sang "Praise to the Man."² Later he would say, "I had an impression that has never left that Joseph Smith was indeed a prophet of God."³ I believe that many of our Saints experience this again and again. Hymns play an essential role in spirituality, revelation, and conversion.

Hymns Invite the Spirit

Hymns are "an essential part of our church meetings. [They] invite the Spirit of the Lord."⁴ They often do this quicker than anything else we may do. President J. Reuben Clark Jr. said, "We get nearer to the Lord through music than perhaps through any other thing except prayer."⁵

Two missionaries teaching an older couple in their home in Peru were interrupted by the arrival of the couple's son, his wife, and three children. The elders explained who they were and what they were doing. The son was suspicious of the missionaries, resulting in an awkward moment. The junior companion prayed silently, "Heavenly Father, what do we do?" The impression came to sing. They sang "I Am a Child of God."⁶ The Spirit touched the hearts of this family of