

THE GIFT OF PRAYER

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Modern technology has provided society with marvelous means of communication with each other around the globe. The same technology can sometimes be abused if it is not used properly or it can be frustrating if it does not meet our needs. It can be abused by obscene or frivolous calls. Taped commercial messages or answering machines can frustrate our attempts to make effective use of our phone. Prayer is like our modern communication – it is a great blessing if it is used frequently, wisely, and appropriately. But if neglected or abused, effective communication with our Heavenly Father can be severely weakened. Heavenly Father wants us to keep our lines of prayer open to him.

An oft repeated injunction in the scriptures is "to pray," or to seek and ask God, a behavior which draws God's children nearer to him (D&C 4:7). Prayer provides direction and comfort in our journey through life as we draw nearer to God. "Pray always," we are told, that we may "come off conqueror" as we choose good and conquer evil (D&C 10:5; cf. Moroni 9:6). Lacking the strength to prevail alone, we need to humble ourselves and seek help from God. In addition, prayer develops our understanding and testimony of gospel truths as the Holy Ghost bears pure witness as we ponder and pray in our scripture study. For many reasons, God has ordained that we should pray and has promised us that he will answer our prayers.

Jesus constantly admonishes us to "pray always." In English, "always" is the contraction of the phrase "all the way." As we journey 'all the way' through life, we should remember that "to pray" means "to entreat or petition" God. If we want to effectively petition someone (such as our boss for a pay-raise or a neighbor for a special favor) we would surely spend some mental effort in pondering how we should communicate our desires with the person. In a similar manner, we should exert sincere thought prior to praying with our Heavenly Father. Indeed, we should be carrying a prayer in our heart at all times (Luke 21:36; 3 Ne 18-18-21; D&C 81:3).

Our prayers should be both simple and sincere. A **simple prayer** is the means by which the minds of the Father and the child are brought into connection with each other. A **sincere prayer** takes the contact one step further and brings their wills into harmony with each other. We do not pray to change God's will, but to become sensitive to his desires so that we might request and receive the comfort, direction, and other insights which he gives to those ready, worthy, and desirous to receive them. Some blessings from God, especially those of a spiritual nature, are conditional upon our asking for them, and if we ask, we will be answered (see Matt 7:7; James 1:5,6). This requesting function of prayer reflects the ancient origin of the term **prayer**, which derives from the Latin root *precari*, meaning "to entreat." As we bring our will into contact and harmony with God, we simply and sincerely entreat him for those things that he desires for us.

Young children in the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints are taught the four basic steps of prayer: we **address God** as our Father in Heaven; we **thank him** for our blessings; we **ask him** for the things we need; and we **close our prayer** in the name of Jesus Christ. In the Lord's Prayer in the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus adds two other important elements often found in our adult prayers: **praising God** for his goodness, love, and glory; and **confessing our weaknesses** and sins before God. One might ask, "What is the difference between 'thanking' God and 'praising' God. Many of the biblical psalms are poems or hymns in the attitude of prayers directed to God. Two frequent and similar types of psalms are those of 'thanks' and 'praise' to God. The thanksgiving psalms recognize God for 'what he does' and the praising psalms recognize God for 'who he is.' Another prayer element alluded to in the Lord's Prayer is found in our sacramental prayers – **expressing commitment** and devotion to Heavenly Father and Jesus Christ (D&C 20:77, 79). Except for the natural location of the introductory and closing parts of a prayer, there is no set order for the elements of a prayer.

The following is a suggested order of these steps that might be reflected in many of our prayers:

Opening -- addressing our Heavenly Father

Praise -- recognizing God's goodness and divine attributes

Thanksgiving -- voicing appreciation for blessings received

Confession -- admitting our transgressions, sins and weaknesses

Petition -- asking for personal and others' temporal and spiritual needs

Commitment -- expressing our pledge, support and sincere devotion to God's work

Closing -- concluding in the name of Jesus Christ, the redeemer of Heavenly Father's plan

True prayer requires earnest desire, mental concentration, and spiritual energy. It is God's appointed means towards obtaining the his highest blessings (BD, p 753). Regular, sincere prayer is the single, most powerful **spiritual quality which brings us onto the path of spirituality and also keeps us in the way of righteousness.**

(Adapted from *Principles and Practices of the Restored Gospel* by Victor L. Ludlow, pp 67-72, 80-81.)

FASTING & REJOICING

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“That thy fasting may be perfect ... that thy joy may be full.” (D&C 59:13)

“Is not this the fast that I have chosen ... that ye break every yoke.” (Isa. 58:6)

The practice of periodic abstinence from food and drink for devotional purposes has been documented since early times. The Bible and the Book of Mormon attest to fasting in several forms, public or private, institutionalized or spontaneous. In a revelation to the Prophet Joseph Smith, the Lord commanded the Latter-day Saints to “continue in prayer and fasting from this time forth” (D&C 88:76).

Church members fast together generally on the first Sunday of each month, in preparation for fast and testimony meeting. They usually abstain from food and drink for two consecutive meals, attend Church services, and donate a fast offering for the care of the needy. Additionally, an individual, family, or congregation may fast for a specific cause such as one who is sick or otherwise afflicted. An individual may desire the intimate communication with deity engendered by a prayerful fast when preparing for a difficult task or significant change in the circumstances of life. A person may fast when seeking spiritual enlightenment or guidance in decision making, strength to overcome weakness or endure trial, comfort in sorrow, or help at other times of special need.

General principles of the fast include prayerful preparation concerning the subject of the fast and frequent contemplation and meditation throughout to achieve oneness in purpose and spirit with the Lord; a quiet, humble, and cheerful conduct befitting one seeking blessing or spiritual enlightenment (Matt. 6:16-18; cf. 3 Ne. 13:16-18); and a prayer of gratitude and thanksgiving when ending the fast.

Rich blessings are promised to those who fast and help the needy (Isa. 58:8-9). Self-control, communion with the Lord, and spiritual strength and power accompany a sincere fast. The spirit of the fast is aptly represented in latter-day scripture: “Verily, this is fasting and prayer, or in other words, rejoicing and prayer” (D&C 59:14).

(By Dawn M. Hills in *Encyclopedia of Mormonism* edited by Daniel H. Ludlow, 2:500-01.)

Some Simple Steps for an Effective, Spiritual Fast: A Time of “Fasting and Rejoicing”

Plan: prepare in advance for the fast; review some principles of the law of the fast.

Purpose: have a special focus in your fasting; seek to “break a yoke” (Isa. 58:6, 9) for yourself or others.

Prayer: sometime later on *Saturday*, begin the fast with a prayer; “fasting without prayer is starvation.”

Abstain: refrain from food and drink for two consecutive meals, usually the first two meals on Sunday.

Spiritual: maintain an appropriate attitude and spirit throughout the whole fasting period.

Study: set aside *Sunday* time for scripture study; focus and work on the purpose of your fasting.

Attend: observe Church services; be attentive to spiritual promptings concerning your fasting purpose.

Pay: donate a generous fast offering for the care of the needy, covering at least the cost of two meals.

Ponder: set aside a period of time for personal mediation on the purpose and focus of your fast.

Prayer: conclude the fast with a prayer of gratitude, remembering those in temporal and spiritual need.

Genuine fasting is hungering and thirsting after righteousness (footnote a, D&C 59:13).

It is a time of **physically fasting while spiritually feasting.**

It should be a time for rejoicing (D&C 59:14).

(Adapted from *Principles and Practices of the Restored Gospel* by Victor L. Ludlow, pp. 317-19.)

See also: Topical Guild – “Fast, Fasting” (p. 139) and Bible Dictionary – “Fasts” (pp. 671-72).