

# PRAYER WARRIOR

***"...but in everything by prayer, and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known unto God, and the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, shall keep your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus" (Philippians 4:6-7)***

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*"But you, when you pray, go into your room, and when you have shut your door..." (Matthew 6:6)*

Each one of us has a concern, need or request; something to worry about regarding career, finance, health, children, marriage, or even one's spiritual life. History records incidents of important people who had similar needs and requests. Some examples from the Old Testament are Hannah, Samuel's mother and Jacob, son of Isaac. Elizabeth, John the Baptist's Mother from the New Testament, and Ephomea, St. Mina's Mother who was barren and wanted desperately to have a child. What did those people do with regard to their problems? Those people knew exactly what to do. They turned their eyes to heaven where the Almighty resides and put forth their requests before Him. As Christians, what should we do in similar situations? In three main points, St. Paul in Philippians 4:6-7 prescribes exactly what should be done: *"Be anxious for nothing"*

We should not be anxious for, nor worry about our concerns or needs. Worry by default is lack of faith; and is therefore a sin. A true faithful believer should not worry about anything that goes on in his life. Our Lord rebuked His disciples several times saying, *"Why are you fearful, O you of little faith?"* (Matthew 8:26). If we strongly believe that we are God's children and trust that He can provide for all our needs and answer our requests, then there will be no room in our hearts for worry. In the parable about the sewer, some of the seeds fell on ground full of thorns. Our Lord Jesus Christ explained to His disciples that the thorns stood for worries of the world, love for riches, and pleasures of this earthly life (Luke 8:14). Just as thorns choke seeds preventing them from bringing forth life, so will worry choke faith that is originally meant to dwell and flourish in our hearts thus hindering the work of God and His Holy Word in us. Good examples of pillars of faith that did not worry in the midst of immense trouble but exhibited tremendously strong faith are Daniel in the den of lions, the three brave young men in the furnace of fire, St. Paul and Silas in the jail in Philippi, St. Peter in the jail in Jerusalem, to name a few examples.

*"but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving"*

Rather, let these requests be made known to God in a certain specific manner: through prayers,

supplications, and thanksgiving. The promise of fulfillment is clear in our Lord's word: *"Ask and it will be given to you; seek, and you will find; knock and it will be opened to you"* (Matthew 7:7). However, under the wrong assumption that since God is omnipotent, omniscient who sees and knows everything, some think that there is no need to pray. Such wrong thinking renders redundant God's command to pray. Although it is true that God knows all our needs, He still wants us to ask for them in prayers *"For everyone who asks receives..."* (Matthew 7:8). He would not grant us our needs unless we ask. The story recorded about St. Anthony and his struggle with demons clearly illustrates this point. After the demons had beaten St. Anthony up leaving him almost dead, he cried to the Lord asking Him why He had deserted him and given him over to the demons. The Lord reminded St. Anthony that he had not called upon Him during the tribulation. St. Anthony learned the lesson that even during the most difficult moments he was not to expect God to interfere with His mercy and help without asking. God wants to teach us the art of praying.

In his verse to the Philippians, St. Paul mentions three conditions for granting requests:

## **Prayer:**

Praying is a means of communication by which we transmit our requests to God letting Him know what we need. Perfect prayers depend on five requirements:

**1. Place:** It is important to have a place dedicated to praying. Our Lord Jesus Christ says, *"But you, when you pray, go into your room, and when you have shut your door..."* (Matthew 6:6). A lot of people interpret this verse symbolically only. However, Our Lord meant it literally as well. Praying needs a quiet place where we can communicate with God and concentrate on our relationship with Him away from distraction and worldly engagements. Our Lord Jesus Christ knew very well the importance of a prayer-dedicated place. That is why whenever He wanted to pray he went out to the wilderness or to a deserted place in order to keep away from distraction and give the Father His undivided

attention. Sad to say, nowadays, this prayer-dedicated place has been replaced with any place; and people get satisfied with praying in the car, at work, while carrying out chores. It is good to pray while doing all these things. However, that should not be all we pray nor all where we pray.

**2. Time:** Time is such a precious commodity against the amount of which the value of everything is measured. If that is the case, then it behooves us to give our Creator, the One in whom *"we live and move and have our being"* (Acts 17:28) the best and the most valued of our time. Praying when we are tired, exhausted, and ready to close our eyes to sleep cannot be called giving God quality time. No one knew the importance and hence the fruit of giving quality time to prayer like the Psalmist David; *"O God, You are my God; early will I seek You"* (Psalm 63:1) and *"Seven times a day I praise You, Because of Your righteous judgments"* (Psalm 119:164) and so he increased in his time giving until He could boldly say *"But I give myself to prayer"* (Psalm 109:4). He ended up becoming one with praying which is praying all the time, night and day.

**3. Words:** There are no better words to pray with than the Word of God *"My eyes are awake through the night watches, that I may meditate on Your word"* (Psalm 119:148). Inspired by the Holy Spirit, the Psalmist David knew that the words he was composing were God's Words, meant to be used for praying. That is why all the Traditional Churches have a prayer Book called *"the Book of Hours"* or *"Agpeya"*. It is exactly the Holy Book of Psalms distributed over the hours of the day and is the Prayer Manual. This way we will be praying according to God's will. St. James explains the state of the art in his verse, *"You ask and do not receive, because you ask amiss"* (James 4:3). Therefore we need to learn the words of prayer. Unfortunately people started to neglect using this book relying on their own understanding, not knowing that gradually they are bound to lose the art and essence of praying.

**4. Teacher:** The person of the Holy Trinity to Whom is assigned the task of teaching is the Holy Spirit. Among the things that the Holy Spirit teaches to the body of Christ is how to pray; *"Likewise the Spirit also helps in our weaknesses. For we do not know what we should pray for as we ought, but the Spirit Himself makes intercession for us with groupings which cannot be uttered"* (Romans 8:26). So, before we pray we have to ask the Holy Spirit to guide us, intercede on our behalf and teach us the words of prayer for we do not know how to pray as we should. In the Midnight Prayer we ask God to teach us how to stand before him and how to offer Him the appropriate doxology. Thus, before we pray, we pray to the Holy Spirit to teach us and train us in His school of praying.

**5. Willingness:** We may feel the desire to pray.

However, there is a big difference between desiring and willing to pray. The first, if not followed with the latter, can end where it started without being fulfilled. Satan uses all means and ways to keep the desire to pray unfulfilled by prompting laziness, preoccupation with material things or even with our weaknesses and sins. If we keep on listening to his suggestions and yield to his enticements, day after day, we will discover that we have not only lost the willingness but also the desire to pray. Whenever you feel moved by the Holy Spirit to pray, respond to that calling willingly and promptly. When you do that you will reap the fruit of praying and encourage the Holy Spirit to work more within you.

**Supplication:** Supplication is the spirit or mood of humbleness with which we pray. There is no better example of someone praying in a spirit of supplication than our Lord Jesus Christ Himself in Gethsemane, the night before His crucifixion, where he knelt and prayed fervently and humbly. In the litanies of the church, while offering the incense, we offer a lot of supplications to God praying: *"again, let us ask God the Father, the Pantocrator, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. We ask and entreat your goodness..."* All of this asking and entreating is done in a spirit of humbleness. That is why in Vespers and Matins the priest does not stand in the middle, but at the side of the altar, taking the position of a beggar possessing no courage nor boldness, but with supplication and humbleness he entreats God to receive his requests and listen to his prayers. Prostration is another form of humbling ourselves before God. Supplication also implies persistence and continuity in praying. The parable given by our Lord Jesus Christ of the widow and the unfair judge (Luke 18:1-8) best illustrates the importance as well as effectiveness of supplication in prayer. Although he was an unjust man, yet because of her repeated asking, the heard hearted judge got her what she wanted. So much so would our merciful, loving Father in heaven grant us our supplications when we repeatedly present them to Him.

**Thanksgiving:** Giving thanks to God for granting us our requests is as important as praying for the request itself. Our Lord confirms the importance of thanksgiving. Of the ten people sick with leprosy whom our Lord had cured (Luke 17:12-19), only one came back to thank God in the temple. Our Lord Jesus Christ made a note of that and the Holy Spirit recorded it in the gospel by St. Luke for all generations to read and understand the importance of thanksgiving. The will of God for us is summarized in the coming three interrelated, interdependent points:

- o Praying without ceasing
- o Rejoicing always
- o Giving thanks (1 Thessalonians 5:16-18)

That is about all we need in our spiritual life; because

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when we have a request, we will pray about it. When God answers our prayers, we will rejoice. Therefore prayer leads to answers, answers give birth to joy, joy gets translated into thanksgiving and thanksgiving is offered in the form of prayers. There is nothing more destructive than a spirit of grumbling and complaining. Joy and thanksgiving will never find their home in the heart of someone full of grudge, complaint and lack of forgiveness.-

*"let your requests be made known unto God"*  
If we know exactly who our God is, then we will understand fully well why St. Paul tells us not to be anxious about anything, but put our full trust in Him. Our God is: Loving, righteous and just who did not spare His only begotten Son to redeem the world from the power of Satan (Romans 8:32). Sovereign, always fair to everyone, knows no compromise and wishes to save the unbeliever and bless the believer. Eternal, with no beginning and no end.. Omniscient, knowing all the repercussions of every event in our lives, future as well as past. Omnipotent, with infinite power keeping all His promises. Omnipresent, being present everywhere at all times. Immutable, being the same yesterday, today, and tomorrow. Veracious, telling the truth all the time being Himself the Truth.

When we remember all these attributes that belong to our God, we will not find it difficult to expel fear and anxiety from our hearts, putting our confidence in Him and so reap the fruit of that confidence. What then will the result be? St Paul gives the answer:

*"And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, shall keep your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus."*

This is the gift and reward of praying. If the peace of God surpasses understanding, then it is indescribable. But if words cannot describe this peace, perhaps attitudes can. St. Paul experienced it while in jail in Philippi and wrote his epistle about Joy and his famous verse *"Rejoice in the Lord always"* (Philippians 4:4). St. Peter experienced it in jail too to the extent that the angel had a

hard time waking him up to deliver him out of jail before Herod could kill him. St. Steven, the first martyr, experienced it and could boldly ask forgiveness for his persecutors while welcoming death with a shining face. St. Mena's face was radiating with this peace that surpasses understanding. Who can grant this type of peace but God through prayer.

It is not necessarily the case that when we pray God will immediately answer our prayers, nor is God under any obligation to grant us all our requests; nor is His gift of peace contingent upon that. God has his own reasons and explanations for granting or withholding our requests. St. Paul had a thorn in his flesh about which he prayed three times to have it removed. However, God's response to that request was *"My grace is sufficient for you, for My strength is made perfect in weakness"* (2 Corinthians 12:9) and St. Paul never got rid of it but still enjoyed the peace that surpasses understanding, *"Therefore I take pleasure in infirmities, in reproaches, in needs, in persecutions, in distresses, for Christ's sake. For when I am weak, then I am strong"* (2 Corinthians 12:10). God's glory finds its presence in our weaknesses and infirmities because then and only then His greatness and our weakness will become distinct, His support will become obvious, and hence His name will be duly glorified. For that reason when St. Paul said, *"Let your request be made known to God,"* he did not guarantee nor confirm fulfillment of our requests. What he did guarantee was the peace and the protection that this magnificent, indescribable type of peace gives to our minds and hearts through Christ Jesus.

May this joy filled and peace-impregnated verse that St. Paul wrote while in jail in Philippi be imprinted in our hearts and minds reminding us to:

*"Be anxious for nothing but in everything by prayer, and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known unto God, and the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, shall keep your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus"* (Philippians 4:6-7).

