

## FROM THE PULPIT

# Personal prayer is a direct line to God

**By Brad Bryant**

FOR THE PANTAGRAPH

The word "prayer" has many meanings, depending on who you talk to:

► For some people, prayer is a foreign concept, practiced by others, for some unknown purpose;

► For others, prayer is the simple words you say as a child, before going to sleep at night: "Now I lay me down to sleep...";

► For many, prayer is a mechanical set of words we were taught earlier in our life: "Our Father, who art in Heaven..." or a repeated "grace" said before meals;

► Some people use prayer only in their times of greatest crisis, when they feel most alone and out of control.

I suggest that the God who intentionally created you, and put you in this time and place, wants a deeper relationship than that with you. Prayer is your opportunity to "talk" to God — a God who is always listening and wanting to hear from you.

God already knows what you need, so prayer is not for him, it is for you! Prayer is an opportunity to admit that WE are not in control of our life situations; that we cannot fix all of the brokenness in our own lives and those around us. It is our chance to ask God to step in and bring the blessing that he already has in mind for the situation. God respects our freedom to choose (either good or bad), and many times, he will not intervene in a situation until we invite him — through prayer.

Prayer is also an opportunity for us to "listen" to God. This is a step that many people

skip, not because they don't think it's important, but because they've never learned the spiritual disciplines of how to "listen" to God. God has words of wisdom and counsel to offer to you, to help you and those around you with various situations in your life. Your God loves you so much, that He doesn't want just a one-way "postcard" prayer, but rather a "let's sit down and explore this together" chat. Prayer time should be a discussion between two friends, sharing hurts, hopes, joys and failures — with both telling and listening. This is how to build relationship between you and the God who loves you unconditionally!

The Scriptures are full of examples of prayer — as different people, from different times, brought their needs before the eternal God. Jesus offered a very powerful prayer to God, in the Garden of Gethsemane, the night of his arrest and subsequent execution, where he prayed for unity: that all believers "may be one, just as you are in me and I am in you. May they also be in us". (John 17:20-21 NIV) This is a unity that we all must continue to strive for. But it shows a prayer "from the heart" — sharing with God what is important to you, and asking God to bless those situations, according to His plan.

Where and with whom we pray also are important. Some situations need verbal, public prayer, following the promise that "where two or more come together in my name, there I am with them" (Matthew 18:20). But it is also important to understand that sometimes, as Jesus also taught (Matthew

6:6), private and silent prayer is required, because only God knows your thoughts as you pray silently — Satan does not have the power to know your thoughts. So sometimes, when you're in the midst of a significant spiritual battle, silent and personal prayer can be a powerful way to communicate with God.

Jesus invites you into relationship with him. The purpose of Christ-centered churches is to give you other believers in your life, who can help you make better decisions and encourage you along the path toward him. If you have a church family, allow them to support your journey. If you've been trying to "do it alone," then seek out and find a church family, centered in the living Jesus Christ, who can provide the loving, healing support that you need, to help you learn new, better ways to pray, and enabling God to bless you in new ways.

*Brad Bryant is a missionary serving the 31 Community of Christ congregations in the Central and Southern Illinois area. Contact him at [brad.bryant@hp.com](mailto:brad.bryant@hp.com).*