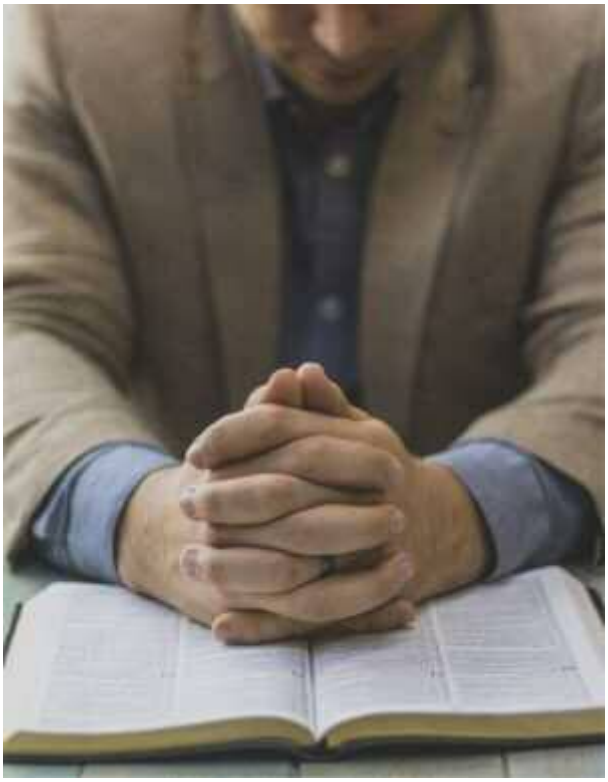

I recently asked the readers of my newsletter to respond and let me know what kinds of things I could address that would be helpful to them. One person responded with a concern that it was difficult to make prayers meaningful. I should know better than to ask questions that will come back and bite me, but I never seem to learn my lesson. I also have had difficulty with feeling that my prayers weren't very meaningful.

I assumed I would have to dig deep into the Conference talks and read eight or ten of them to find enough material to piece something together in the form of a response to this reader, and for myself. But no. When I listed the 260+ Conference talks on prayer the first thought that entered my mind was to start with the current prophet and move out from there. So I did. As it turns out there is enough information on prayer from President Nelson's April, 2018 talk to write the entire article. Who'd a thunk? I've only read that talk about six times already. I thought I knew it backwards and forwards, until I read it with the purpose of learning about prayer, that is.

Basics of Prayer

I am not trying to write the definitive paper on prayer here, but to ask some questions or pose some situations you can use to examine your own prayer routine and perhaps find ways to make your prayers more fruitful in your life.

Sometimes prayer can seem like magic in that we may not fully comprehend how it works, yet amazing things happen, almost as if by magic. When our Father in Heaven sent us to earth to continue our eternal progression toward godhood, he took away our memory of our former home. But to leave us without any way to stay anchored to the only source of guidance back home would have been disastrous. This is the purpose of prayer.

Prayer requires the full cooperation of the entire Godhead. And we have to work with the Godhead to receive the answers to our prayers. All of our petitions and comments, even the mean or belligerent ones get through to our Father in Heaven completely unfiltered in their pure felt and spoken forms. It is His responses back to us that requires the entire Godhead.

We have been cut off from God's presence (the Father) because we have sinned. We have no right to petition for his help because of anything righteous we have done because we have broken his commandments and neglected his laws. The only one who has a right to petition the Father for favors and guidance is Christ, because he is perfect and has atoned for the sins we have committed. Christ intercedes for us with the Father and petitions his blessings on our behalf. Because of Christ and his sacrifice made in our behalf, the Father grants our petitions for help and guidance back to him. The answers we seek and the guidance we pray for are given to us through the Holy Ghost. Those with the Gift of the Holy Ghost have greater access to answers and guidance than is available to those without this gift.

The Gift of the Holy Ghost is a covenant-based blessing. It is only available to those who have exercised their faith in Christ and accepted the ordinance of baptism by one holding the priesthood of God. The covenants we make at baptism give us the right to be schooled and instructed by the Holy Ghost on our journey back home to God. But, like so many other things in this life, our ability to hear the Holy Ghost and understand his words and promptings depend largely on whether we are honoring our covenants and keeping the commandments of God. So whether or not we can communicate easily with the Holy Ghost is based on our personal worthiness which is a result of how we live our life.

Prayer may seem like magic sometimes, but it is really a practical and logical thing. We make the covenants, keep the commandments then practice "listening" to the feelings we call the whisperings of the Holy Ghost. The more we practice listening and doing what we are told, the happier we become, and the more good we do each day of our lives. The happy happenstances of our lives multiply, and it is almost as if we are surrounded by magic, because we can't explain all the good in our lives that happens in miraculous ways.

What a marvelous blessing, to work directly with all three members of the Godhead to communicate with our Father in Heaven and have our prayers answered. The more closely we learn to work with them, the more we learn to think like them, behave like them, and to love what they love and abhor what they abhor (sin). I am saying that it is through the process of prayer and the living of a righteous life by what we learn through prayer that we become united with the Godhead and become one with them as they are one with each other. It is a process we practice our whole lives.

Preparing for prayer

Some prayers are spontaneous. We may be called upon in a meeting or at the beginning of a class to offer a prayer. Some prayers happen during times of crisis, which often surprises us, leaving little to no time to prepare for praying. I'm not referring to these prayers. I'm talking about the prayers we know we will be offering, like when we kneel by our bedside or have been asked ahead of time to be the voice of all in the room in a prayer. Do we prepare ourselves to pray?

As covenant-making and covenant keeping children of God we have a right to ask for help from the Holy Ghost in speaking to God. The purpose of including this member of the Godhead in our prayers is that it is His purpose to teach us what to pray for and how to feel in our prayers. He knows what we need the most. We often do not have any clue what is most important for us to ask in our prayers. So in order that we don't ask amiss, or for the wrong things, we need to seek out the companionship of the Holy Ghost and ask that our prayers will be guided by His divine influence.

When the Spirit tells us what to ask for we can be assured it is the right thing to be asking for at that moment in time. He is a God, and as such is omniscient, just like Christ and the Father. He knows what we need. He knows what we should ask for. And anything he tells us to ask for we will be given, for it is a righteous request, and he wouldn't be telling us to ask for it if the Father has no intention of granting it. Praying without the Holy Ghost present is not a wise way to pray, for we are praying, for the most part, blindly.

What does it take to invite the Spirit to be part of our prayers? First of all it takes a worthy life.

- Am I living up to my covenants?

- Am I keeping the commandments?
- Am I living a life of ministering and love for my fellowman?
- Am I completing all my callings in responsible and righteous ways?
- Am I listening to the prophet and obeying his counsel without having to be told what to do in every little thing?
- Am I seeking to do good all on my own so God doesn't have to command me in every instance?

When we are striving to do these things we have the right to expect the presence of the Holy Ghost in our prayers. When we contemplate saying our morning or nightly prayer we can think about what we have been doing that day or what we would like to accomplish. We can review in our mind what is going on in life, job situations, problems with children, a difficulty with a neighbor, our relationship with our spouse, our goals, etc. Sort through things like these and try to open your heart so when you begin to pray you are preparing yourself to be instructed by the Lord's designated teacher, the Holy Ghost.

If we are not living a worthy life it is going to be far more difficult to entice the Spirit into our prayer communications with God. For living an unworthy life is offensive to celestial beings. We can't expect to deliberately commit what we know to be sin (of any variety) and also expect the Spirit to take us by the hand and bring comfort to our souls.

Meaningful communication

My wife brought this idea up to me. Trying to figure out how to create meaningful communication with God may be a bit overwhelming, but if we bring it down to our current level we might have better success at learning how to communicate with our Father in Heaven.

If you want to have a heart-to-heart talk with your best friend, what do you do now to set up that conversation? What might you have done to create a rapport with your friend in the past so they will understand you and listen to you now? What if you need to learn to communicate with a complete stranger? Many of us feel like talking to God is like talking to a stranger. So ask yourself this question: How do I turn a stranger into a friend? How do I build rapport with someone I have just met?

That building of trust and rapport takes not only time, but a certain amount of vulnerability. That is why friends and loved ones are able to cause us more hurt than a stranger, it is because we are more vulnerable with friends and loved ones. These are just some thoughts to consider.

What can I ask?

Do we have subjects that are taboo in prayer? Absolutely not. The more appropriate question is, what should I be asking about today? For it is today's questions and today's behavior that shapes the life of your tomorrow. While any topic is open for discussion in a prayer with our Father, the most important things we should be asking about or talking about is that which matters most today.

Asking amiss

Taking no thought for what the Spirit would have me discuss in my next prayer opens the door for me to ask for things that are not what is in my best interest. Sometimes I want something so much that the propriety of asking for that thing is not really considered before I am blurting out my request. There is danger in asking amiss, or asking for things that are not in your best interests. For the Lord has a habit of giving us what we ask for, either to our eternal blessing or our eternal damnation. That is part of respecting our agency. As I said at the beginning of this article, one would think I would eventually learn my lesson and keep my mouth shut. But some of us take longer to learn our lessons than others. Sigh.

President Russell M. Nelson's talk

Now let's get to what President Nelson had to say in his April, 2018 talk on prayer. The topic of the talk was revelation, but all the following quotes are directly related to how we pray and what we are praying for. This first quote starts with a quote from President Lorenzo Snow.

> Said President Lorenzo Snow, “This is the grand privilege of every Latter-day Saint … that it is our right to have the manifestations of the Spirit every day of our lives.”
>
> One of the things the Spirit has repeatedly impressed upon my mind since my new calling as President of the Church is how willing the Lord is to reveal His mind and will. The

> privilege of receiving revelation is one of the greatest gifts of God to His children.
>
> Through the manifestations of the Holy Ghost, the Lord will assist us in all our righteous pursuits.

This is amazing that three such short paragraphs can have such grand ideas expressed within them.

1. "It is our right to have the manifestations of the Spirit every day of our lives."
2. Not only is personal revelation "one of the greatest gifts of God", but the prophet has had it impressed on his mind repeatedly how "willing the Lord is to reveal His mind and will" to his children.
3. It is through the Holy Ghost "the Lord will assist us in all our righteous pursuits."

What does that mean for our timidity in asking our questions to the Lord? How does this affect our confidence in approaching the Lord and hoping for an answer? These three points illustrate the very reason why the Lord answered the prayer of Joseph Smith in that sacred grove!

Speaking about the First Presidency and the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles President Nelson pointed out the following:

> In our meetings, the majority never rules! We listen prayerfully to one another and talk with each other until we are united. Then when we have reached complete accord, the unifying influence of the Holy Ghost is spine-tingling! We experience what the Prophet Joseph Smith knew when he taught, “By union of feeling we obtain power with God.”

Remember earlier when I said that it is through prayer that we learn to become unified with the Godhead? This is a living, breathing example of that concept. These men, all professionals in their own right, set aside their egos and seek to be one with the Spirit of God. Through the influence of the Holy Ghost they come to a unity of thought and feeling so that the Church leaders are always in agreement before anything is announced. They have learned the mind and will of the Lord and have used the Spirit of God to bring their own wills into alignment with what the Lord wants. We can do that too!

Exercise faith that the Lord WANTS you to talk to him. Exercise your faith in His love for you and in His desire to talk to you, His precious child. Expect answers, but don't

dictate how or when they come. Let Him control His own replies, just as He lets us ask what we want, when we want, and how we want. We need to respect Him and give Him the same courtesy. This is part of meaningful discourse, don't you think?

> The Prophet Joseph Smith set a pattern for us to follow in resolving our questions. Drawn to the promise of James that if we lack wisdom we may ask of God, the boy Joseph took his question directly to Heavenly Father. He sought personal revelation, and his seeking opened this last dispensation.

Here is the next practical bit of how to receive personal revelation, which is what happens when we have meaningful prayer.

> Pray in the name of Jesus Christ about your concerns, your fears, your weaknesses—yes, the very longings of your heart. And then listen! Write the thoughts that come to your mind. Record your feelings and follow through with actions that you are prompted to take. As you repeat this process day after day, month after month, year after year, you will "grow into the principle of revelation."

Most of us hate to write things down. For some of us it is a painful thing to have to translate our thoughts into something that others might read. But how many prophets have told us to do this very thing? When the Spirit prompts us with a thought or a feeling, we need to record it so we don't forget it. For not recording it before we can act on it will cause it to be taken from us. When that happens we won't be able to remember what has been given to us.

This has happened to me many times when it comes to writing articles. I'll wake up in the middle of the night already working through a concept I feel a need to write down. But for heaven's sake, it is 2:00 a.m.! Surely it can wait another 8 hours for a more decent time of day! But no, when it happens, if I don't get up right then and start writing then it disappears and I don't get it back. Some of the most enlightened hours of my life have happened between 2 and 6 a.m. I just have to worry about catching up on sleep at other times of the day. It is a good thing I'm retired and can take naps. This concept of writing down what is given to us at the moment it is given is probably why the Prophet has pen and paper next to his bed.

What does the Lord want to tell you?

> Oh, there is so much more that your Father in Heaven wants you to know. As Elder Neal A. Maxwell taught, "To those who have eyes to see and ears to hear, it is clear that the Father

> and the Son are giving away the secrets of the universe!”
>
> Nothing opens the heavens quite like the combination of increased purity, exact obedience, earnest seeking, daily feasting on the words of Christ in the Book of Mormon, and regular time committed to temple and family history work.

This last paragraph is the key to living worthily of meaningful communication with our Father in Heaven. Can we honestly check off each of those items and say we are really doing our best to honor all those commitments to the Lord?

> To be sure, there may be times when you feel as though the heavens are closed. But I promise that as you continue to be obedient, expressing gratitude for every blessing the Lord gives you, and as you patiently honor the Lord’s timetable, you will be given the knowledge and understanding you seek. Every blessing the Lord has for you—even miracles—will follow. That is what personal revelation will do for you.

Final Thoughts

If you have made it to this part of the article let me assure you there are more than 260 talks just from General Conference on this subject. Any one of them will have the ability to open our eyes and enlighten our minds with things we can do to improve our experience with God when we pray. In the meantime consider taking a personal inventory of your life and your expectations to see if you are doing what is in your own best interests when it comes to how your prayers are approached when you want to communicate with God.

President Russell M. Nelson
Revelation for the Church, Revelation for Our Lives

Click the link below to

print a PDF copy of the article.

How Can I Have More Meaningful Prayer?