

MAKING PRAYER EFFECTIVE

by Brooks A. Harris, O.D.

In the Bible it states, *“If my people, who are called by my name will humble themselves and pray, and seek my face and turn from their wicked ways, then will I hear from heaven, forgive their sin and heal their land.”* - 2 Chronicles 7:14 Therefore if we try to live righteous, holy lives and humbly go to God in prayer, He will hear and respond to our request. (Also see the article “America, Unite in Prayer”) Throughout the Bible it says that when people had a problem they would go to God with Fasting and Prayer. But what is Fasting and what is a good guide on how to pray?

Fasting is - the intentional, voluntary depriving yourself of things that distract you and take your attention off God. When we fast, we temporarily stop doing something that normally satisfies the desires of our fleshly body. Therefore we fast so we can concentrate better on God; this helps satisfy the needs of our spiritual body. To strengthen our relationship with God, we need to take more time to be with God. Fasting shows God that spending time with Him is more important to us than doing things which satisfy our fleshly desires.

So what are some things which distract us and take our attention off God? What can we stop doing so we can have more time to spend with God? Thinking of the word **FAST**, we can use it as an acronym to remind us of basic things that we should refrain from in order to spend more time with God. **F** stands for **Food**. When we deprive our body of food we become hungry. This physical hunger should remind us of our need to be hungry for God, His Word (the Bible), His guidance, His power and especially His love. We should never eat while praying. Besides, it is hard to concentrate and talk plainly with your mouth full. **A** stands for **Activities**. While it is good for us to stay active, mentally and physically, if our activities or active lifestyle keep us from taking quality time with God, they are distractions we need to do without. Talking to God should not be an after thought or something we do when we can get around to it. We need to limit or at least better organize our time spent with TV, reading, chores, sporting activities, etc. so we can make sure we take time to communicate with God every day. **S** stands for **Sleep**. If your evenings are too busy to spend quality time with God, you may need to get up earlier in the morning to communicate with God. You may just discover that giving the first part of your day to God is an excellent way to start your day. It will energize you more than does that little extra sleep. **T** stands for **Time**. We all have 24 hours every day. We find time to do the things that are important to us. Make prayer a priority, put God first in your life, give your life over to Him and see how much better your life becomes.

An effective prayer life is a **skill** developed through practice (repetition and dedication). There are different types, styles and lengths of prayers, and God hears them and will respond to each as He sees fit. But if you remember the acronym **SKILL** and practice the steps, you will find your prayer life greatly enhanced and your relationship with God will grow tremendously. So, how do relationships between two people grow? They talk to each other. Thus is the best way to develop a relationship with God. Talk to Him on a regular basis. Although we can live without God in our thoughts, our life is so much better when we acknowledge God’s existence and His involvement in our life. We must learn to trust and obey God. The more we turn our life over to God, the more we appreciate and understand God and His ways and the more we look forward to being with Him and to His guidance.

So what does **SKILL** stand for? When you want to spend quality prayer time with God, you need to be by your **Self**, alone, in a quiet, distraction-free area. Devote your entire attention to Him. Humbly go before God by **Kneeling** to pray. Your attitude and conduct before God affect effective prayer. Kneeling should show that you honor and respect God. It should also show that you acknowledge the need for God to be in control of your life - He is your Lord, right? Be careful though; God knows how sincere you are in your thoughts and beliefs. Just saying “I believe,” does not make you saved and a true Christian. You must have true faith in Jesus Christ to be saved.

Before you begin to pray, have an Itemized outline in mind to follow and help you keep your thoughts organized. I like to use the acronym ACTS for my outline when I take time for lengthy prayers versus quick prayers throughout the day. ACTS stands for Adoration, Confession, Thanksgiving and Supplication. Adoration means to praise and worship God (The Father, The Son, and The Holy Spirit) for who He is and what He has done as creation and salvation. Confession means we admit to and accept responsibility for our specific actions and thoughts. This should include our plea for forgiveness and our pledge of repentance (a sincere desire and attempt to turn away from sinful thoughts and activities). Next is Thanksgiving which is our showing gratitude to God for what He has done in our lives including the many blessings He has provided. We are to be thankful in all things (not for all things) which happen to us. Although God may not cause bad things to happen in our lives, He allows them to happen and often uses them to benefit us or others. Lastly remember the word Supplication to remind you to ask God to help you and help others. Supplication is a specific request to God to meet a particular need, while Intercession is praying for the needs of others, and Petition is praying for the needs of yourself and others. Our prayers should be Purpose Driven, giving glory to God, more than Need Driven, asking God to please our desires. Remember that God truly knows what is best for us and that we must pray for God's will to be done (versus our will). Ask the Holy Spirit of God to guide your prayers since we often do not know what to pray for.

To keep your thoughts organized and keep you from forgetting who and what you want to pray for, you may want to keep a List (the next letter in our SKILL acronym) of things and people to pray for. Keep two separate lists: 1) a *Continual or Permanent List* - listing people and situations you will likely always pray for such as protection and guidance for your friends and family members. 2) a *Situational or Temporary List* - listing people, things and situations which will change from time to time. This list should be updated every week or so. You may also decide to pray for different things on each day of the week, for example on *Sunday* you may add the Saints (other Christians - specific and in general) to your prayer list, praying for their health, wisdom, protection, guidance, etc. On *Monday* pray for Missions (local and abroad), praying that God will use us to spread His word to the lost and unconcerned and to those who hunger to hear His word. On *Tuesday* pray for our Troops - our military leaders and enlisted, and pray even for our enemies to be saved. On *Wednesday* pray for God's Will to be done and for us to understand and accept His Will and/or pray for Widows, for their comfort, protection, guidance, etc. On *Thursday* pray for Teachers, our children and our educational system. On *Friday* pray for our Federal Government, our political leaders, our economy, etc. And on *Saturday* pray for Sunday worship and church activities, our preachers, Sunday school teachers, and "the church" in general.

Finally the last L stands for Loud or more appropriately out loud. Pray out loud. Talk to God as you would a close friend or family member. After all, He is your Father in heaven, you know! When you pray out loud, you will find that you feel a closer connection with God. By talking out loud it is less likely that your mind will wander. Often when I pray silently, my thinking drifts to other ideas, often taking me away from my prayer. This is aggravating to me and disrespectful to God. I have found that it is easier for me to keep my thoughts organized and focused when I pray aloud.

So to make your prayer life more meaningful and your prayers more effective, remember FAST and SKILL and ACTS. To further enhance your prayer life see articles which I have collected on prayer. Review my "Evidence for Biblical Reliability" CD or go to my blogsite - <http://biblicalreliability.blogspot.com>. See the articles under the sections entitled "Communicate with God" and "More Prayers." Especially read the articles "Teach Us To Pray," "A Lesson In Prayer," "The Parts of Prayer," "A Sample Prayer" and the "Thank You God" prayer.