

How and when can we pray?

By Beverly Goldsmith Published in *The Christian Science Journal* October 1998

Recently a new friend told me that she hardly prays at all. This isn't because she doesn't want to. For years she has longed to know how and when to commune with God. She has wondered if you only pray to God when you're in trouble. Do you tell God what is wrong and ask Him to fix it? Do you inform Him that you need a car or some other material thing and ask Him to supply it? Does one say: "I'm ill. Please, God, take away this pain and make me well again"? She feels that if this is what you are supposed to do, it doesn't work. She has tried praying this way, and it hasn't achieved anything.

I know how she feels. There was a time when I, too, felt that prayer was frustrating and confusing. This situation changed when my grandmother was given a copy of *Science and Health with Key to the Scriptures* by Mary Baker Eddy. Through reading this book, she learned how to turn to God for healing. She threw out all her medicines, prayed for herself, and was subsequently healed of a bowel disorder.

When my mother read it, she began to understand the laws of God as they apply to the healing of physical difficulties. This led her to discontinue medical treatment for a painful neck condition and to rely on divine Mind alone for healing. As she applied the spiritual laws of health and harmony through prayer, she was permanently cured of that ailment.

When the book made its way to me, I read the chapter "Prayer" over and over to learn what does and does not constitute healing prayer. I found that if we are ill or facing tough times, we don't have to ask God for good, or to make us well. Why? Because our Father, divine Principle, Love, has already given us all good. *Science and Health* says, **"God is not moved by the breath of praise to do more than He has already done, nor can the infinite do less than bestow all good, since He is unchanging wisdom and Love."** and, **"Prayer cannot change the Science of being, but it tends to bring us into harmony with it."** ¹

The Scriptures state that when God created man and the universe, He "saw every thing that he had made, and, behold, it was very good." The Bible also says that His work was finished. ² This assures us that God's creation is complete in every way. There is nothing lacking. It is permanently whole and entire in every aspect. Affirming and realizing this truth is prayer that brings healing.

God has given us all good, and He doesn't take it away or permit it to be changed. Ill health and neediness are not of His creating. These discords are false beliefs, not the truth of being. They are destroyed as we deny their so-called reality, and affirm in silent gratitude the ever-present, superabundance of divine Love's goodness.

When God, Spirit, fashioned us, He made us spiritual, not material. With great love and care He formed us in His image. He made us perfect in every way. He gave us all we will ever need. As His precious children, then, we are always happy, whole, intelligent, and good. That is why in prayer we don't have to beg God to help us. Instead, we need to reject every mortal, material concept of life, and with heavenly conviction affirm the spiritual facts of existence.

God made man perfect, and this God-sustained perfection never changes. In Christian Science, metaphysical reasoning about man begins from this standpoint. It does not commence with the notion that we have lost our God-given health and abundance, and we now must regain them through prayer.

Christlike prayer declares that man is not, and never has been, a sick or unhappy mortal. It asserts that we have never ceased being the pure and flawless child of God. We can't lose the vitality and goodness that divine Love has given us. God is always caring for you and me. He is constantly maintaining our well-being, keeping us safe from harm, preserving our life.

Praying from the basis that right now we are the immortal image of God, uplifts and regenerates thought. It changes the way we think about ourselves and others. It destroys fear, bringing peace and release from pain and illness. What a joy it is to maintain in thought that man is, and always will be, God's offspring, free from sickness and disease.

Learning to practice the "how" of Christianly scientific prayer certainly changed my life. In the years since my first reading of *Science and Health*, I have prayed for myself countless times and have been healed of each troubling ailment. At no time have medical means been employed. In every case, prayer alone has brought practical, healing results.

Such proofs of God's power have not only taught me more about how to pray; they have shown me the importance of constantly turning to God, of moment-by-moment listening for His right ideas, of continuous thinking and acting from the basis of perfect God and perfect man. This steady, orderly approach to prayer frees us from fear of disease, from lack, from family inharmony—from troubles of every kind.

To heal consistently, we need to do more than pray in a now-and-then or a stop-start fashion. I learned this at a time when I was unwell periodically over several months. Whenever I felt ill I would put a lot of work into praying for myself and studying the Bible and Mrs. Eddy's writings. When I was free from the pain and illness, I would ease off until I was no longer praying at all. The cycle continued until it dawned on me that I wasn't getting very far.

In considering this, I noted that when I prayed faithfully each day, specifically identifying myself as God's spiritual, perfect child, I felt uplifted, confident, assured, spiritually strong. It was as if I were standing on top of a mountain. But as I gradually stopped thinking about God and how He keeps us well, it was like slowly walking downhill. When I reached the bottom, it seemed to require a mighty effort to climb back up again. I felt mentally weak, uncertain, fearful, and discouraged. Making the upward journey while being buffeted by pain and fear made the task seem more difficult.

I realized that I had to remain on the mountaintop of inspiration and acknowledge my God-maintained perfection all the time. I had to "pray without ceasing,"³ not just pray when I felt ill or when things went wrong in my life. I decided to take time at the start of each day specifically to claim my God-given dominion and freedom, and to refute feelings of unwellness. I also studied each week's Bible Lesson outlined in the *Christian Science Quarterly*, looking for spiritual ideas and applying their healing message to my life. I kept these truths in thought during the day as I went about my activities. As I was persistent and steadfast in prayer, it wasn't long before I found that I was completely and permanently healed of that difficulty.

Since then, as I explained to my new friend, I make a point each evening of praying until I'm resting peacefully. Often such prayer takes the form of thanking God for His tender care, or acknowledging divine Love's gentle presence. If I wake up during the night, I declare that I am God's child, safe and secure in His keeping. Each morning I continue to rejoice. I start immediately to thank God for making me in His image and likeness.

During the day, instead of letting my thoughts wander aimlessly along mental paths of sadness, injustice, disease, or bad experiences, I keep to the spiritual facts of creation. If I'm doing the washing, I take the opportunity to affirm that God is the only Mind and that He steadfastly governs man and the universe. If I'm preparing a meal, I use these moments to know that He loves and preserves me. Whatever I'm doing, I keep on declaring that I am Spirit's radiant reflection, whole and well.

Such constant, spiritually mental activity has blessed my life immeasurably. It has made me a happier, healthier person. Best of all, it keeps me close to our Father-Mother, God.

I told my friend that if she so desired, she could learn how to pray and to heal sickness and sin as Jesus did, without recourse to medicine or other material means. None of us have to wonder anymore about how or when to pray for ourselves or for the world. Ongoing study of the Bible and the writings of Mary Baker Eddy expands our understanding of prayer, enabling us to practice Christian healing for ourselves and for the benefit of others.

¹ *Science and Health*, p. 2. ² King James Bible: Gen. 1:31; 2:1. ³ I Thess. 5:17.