

# Bite Size Bible Study

## Defining Prayer and Worship #173

By Pastor Lee

Prayer and worship are so closely related that one word is often substituted for the other. This causes many to think that they are the same thing. So in order not to confuse each other we need to set down a definition of each and explain what each is and is not.

**Prayer** is our communication link to God. In it we can communicate our feelings, desires, and gratitude for being His unconditionally loved child. There is no right or wrong way to pray, no special position or way of speaking. Some people don't speak at all in their private prayers – they just think about what they want to say. These things do not limit God so we can be certain that he hears and understands our communications, whatever mode we use.

Some people say that prayer brings us closer to God, but the truth is that He is always close. It is just in prayer that we often recognize His closeness more fully. The purpose of prayer is building a relationship with God and like any relationship it occurs over time. The more time we put into the relationship the stronger it gets. A great way to keep this relationship growing is to continually thank Him with short prayers for things that happen during the day. You get to work on time even though traffic was horrific – thank Him. You see a person being kind to someone – thank Him. You wake up in the morning refreshed and ready to go – thank Him. You get the idea.

This brings up a point that is misunderstood by many. Sometimes we pray for something, maybe it is a better job or the healing of a friend or spouse, and when our prayer isn't answered right away we can feel that God hasn't heard us or is ignoring us for some reason. He wants us to ask for these things but He is not a vending machine.

His answer could be: "Not now" or "That would not be good for this person" or sometimes it is just plain "NO". That doesn't mean He hasn't heard or doesn't care, but He is able to see the big picture – past, present and future of our request. He will always do what is best in the long term, even when we don't see why at this time.

**Worship** is expressing our joy and gratitude to God for His decision to give us this wonderful relationship with Him now. Worship can be expressed in: music, dance, meditation, poetry, helping others or even fasting. Worship is not limited to a particular method, but it is our personal way of showing Him our sincere joy and gratitude for His relationship with us. Worship can occur within a group of people, in private, or even on the job.

In modern times we often think of worship in terms of the music used during services. That can be true worship. But it is not the complete meaning of worship. In fact, the true meaning of worship is completely lost when church members argue over which style of music is the appropriate for their services. Worship is not about the music, the dance or the poetry or whatever. It is about the attitude of the mind of the individual.

Jesus told the Samaritan woman at the well that God desired true worship – “. . . *true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and in truth, for they are the kind of worshipers that the Father seeks. God is spirit and his worshipers must worship in spirit and truth.*” John 4:23b-24(NIV). The Jewish New Testament uses the term “spiritually and truly” which seems to make it easier to understand.

This is not just a New Testament idea either. The Old Testament opposes the mere performance of acts, rituals, and routines without true, spiritual involvement. It is easy to perform an act like communion (or anything else) without being spiritually involved. From the outside it looks like one is doing all the right things but inside they may be only thinking of something else, or even thinking of how good they look to others. Jesus saw this attitude in some of the Pharisees when He said that they were like whitewashed tombs. They looked good on the outside but inside they were full of rotting bones.

*“Woe to you, teachers of the law and Pharisees, you hypocrites! You are like whitewashed tombs, which look beautiful on the outside but on the inside are full of the bones of the dead and everything unclean. In the same way, on the outside you appear to people as righteous but on the inside you are full of hypocrisy and wickedness.”* Matthew 23:27-28 NIV

Another time He said that some honored Him with their lips but their hearts were far from Him.

*He replied, “Isaiah was right when he prophesied about you hypocrites; as it is written: “These people honor me with their lips, but their hearts are far from me. They worship me in vain; their teachings are merely human rules.”* Mark 7:6-7 NIV

Is our heart in what we do, or do we do it for the wrong reasons? Is our Prayer and Worship towards God or is it for show? That is a question we need to continually ask ourselves if we want to walk in Jesus' steps. If our steps do not conform to His, then we need to stop, refocus and redirect ourselves.

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