

At the conclusion of the singing, Sister Kathleen H. Hughes, first counselor in the Relief Society general presidency, will address us. She will be followed by Elder

Robert D. Hales of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles. The choir will then sing “Come unto Him.”

Elder Russell M. Nelson

In this day of computers, phones, and pagers, people communicate with one another better than ever before. Even so, good communication is often lacking. Recently while visiting a nursing care facility, I spoke with a woman about her family. She told me that she had three sons, two of whom visit her regularly.

“What about your third son?” I asked.

“I don’t know where he is,” she replied tearfully. “I haven’t heard from him for years. I don’t even know how many grandchildren I have.”

Why we pray

If such a mother yearns to hear from her sons, it is easy to see why a loving Father in Heaven wants to hear from His children.¹ Through prayer, we can show our love for God. And He has made it so easy. We may pray to Him any time. No special equipment is needed. We don’t even need to charge batteries or pay a monthly service fee.

Some people pray only when confronted with personal problems. Others don’t pray at all. A scripture makes this observation: “Ye do not remember the Lord your God in the things with which he hath blessed you, but ye do always remember your riches, not to thank the Lord . . . for their.”²

Prophets have long told us to pray humbly and frequently.³

How to pray

Jesus taught us how.⁴ We pray to our Heavenly Father,⁵ in the name of Jesus Christ,⁶ by the power of the Holy Ghost.⁷

This is the “true order of prayer,”⁸ in contrast to “vain repetitions”⁹ or recitations given to “be seen of men.”¹⁰

Jesus revealed that we pray to a wise Father who knows what things we have need of, before we ask Him.¹¹

Mormon taught his son Moroni that we should pray “with all the energy of heart.”¹² Nephi exclaimed, “I pray continually for [my people] by day, and mine eyes water my pillow by night, . . . and I cry unto my God in faith, and I know that he will hear my cry.”¹³

The sweet power of prayer can be intensified by fasting, on occasion, when appropriate to a particular need.¹⁴

Prayers can be offered even in silence. One can *think* a prayer, especially when words would interfere.¹⁵ We often kneel to pray; we may stand or be seated.¹⁶ Physical position is less important than is spiritual submission to God.

We close our prayers “in the name of Jesus Christ, amen.”¹⁷ When we hear another’s prayer, we audibly add our “amen,” meaning, “That is my prayer too.”¹⁸

When to pray

When should we pray? The Lord said, “Search diligently, pray *always*, and be believing, and all things shall work together for your good.”¹⁹

Alma said, “Counsel with the Lord in *all* thy doings, and he will direct thee for good; yea, when thou liest down at night lie down unto the Lord, that he may watch over you in your sleep; and when thou risest in the morning let thy heart be full of thanks unto God.”²⁰

We pray privately, with our families regularly, at mealtime, and in daily activities. Simply summarized, we are a praying people.

Personal experience with prayer

Many of us have had experiences with the sweet power of prayer. One of mine was shared with a stake patriarch from southern Utah. I first met him in my medical office more than 40 years ago, during the early pioneering days of surgery of the heart. This saintly soul suffered much because of a failing heart. He pleaded for help, thinking that his condition resulted from a damaged but repairable valve in his heart.

Extensive evaluation revealed that he had *two* faulty valves. While one could be helped surgically, the other could not. Thus, an operation was *not* advised. He received this news with deep disappointment.

Subsequent visits ended with the same advice. Finally, in desperation, he spoke to me with considerable emotion: “Dr. Nelson, I have prayed for help and have been directed to you. The Lord will not reveal to me *how* to repair that second valve, but He can reveal it to you. Your mind is so prepared. If you will operate upon me, the Lord will make it known to you what to do. Please perform the operation that *I* need, and pray for the help that *you* need.”²¹

His great faith had a profound effect upon me. How could I turn him away again? Following a fervent prayer together, I agreed to try. In preparing for that fateful day, I prayed over and over again, but still did not know what to do for his leaking tricuspid valve. Even as the operation commenced,²² my assistant asked, “What are you going to do for that?”

I said, “I do not know.”

We began the operation. After relieving the obstruction of the first valve,²³ we exposed the second valve. We found it to be intact but so badly dilated that it could

no longer function as it should. While examining this valve, a message was distinctly impressed upon my mind: *Reduce the circumference of the ring.* I announced that message to my assistant. “The valve tissue will be sufficient *if* we can effectively reduce the ring toward its normal size.”

But how? We could not apply a belt as one would use to tighten the waist of oversized trousers. We could not squeeze with a strap as one would cinch a saddle on a horse. Then a picture came vividly to my mind, showing how stitches could be placed—to make a pleat here and a tuck there—to accomplish the desired objective. I still remember that mental image—complete with dotted lines where sutures should be placed. The repair was completed as diagrammed in my mind. We tested the valve and found the leak to be reduced remarkably. My assistant said, “It’s a miracle.”

I responded, “It’s an answer to prayer.”

The patient’s recovery was rapid and his relief gratifying. Not only was he helped in a marvelous way, but surgical help for other people with similar problems had become a possibility. I take no credit. Praise goes to this faithful patriarch and to God, who answered our prayers. This faithful man lived for many more years and has since gone to his eternal glory.

Inquire of the Lord

When we pray, we should not presume to give counsel but should inquire of the Lord²⁴ and hearken to His counsel.²⁵ Joseph Smith’s first prayer ushered in the Restoration of the gospel.²⁶ In 1833 he received the Word of Wisdom after asking the Lord for counsel.²⁷ The revelation on the priesthood received in 1978 by President Spencer W. Kimball came after intense inquiry.²⁸ Inspiration regarding the construction of smaller temples came after the pondering of President Gordon B. Hinckley.²⁹

Answers to prayers

Not all of our prayers will be answered as we might wish. Occasionally the answer will be no. We should not be surprised. Loving mortal parents do not say yes to every request of their children.³⁰

At a recent extended family home evening, our grandchildren were having a wonderful time. A six-year-old grandson became *very* upset when his father said it was time to go home. So what did this dear boy do? He came to me and said, “Grandfather, may I have your permission to disobey my father?”

I said, “No, sweetheart. One of life’s great lessons is to learn that happiness comes through obedience.³¹ Go home with your family, and you will be happy.” Though disappointed, he dutifully obeyed.

We should pray in accord with the will of our Heavenly Father.³² He wants to test us, to strengthen us, and to help us achieve our full potential. When the Prophet Joseph Smith was held in Liberty Jail, he pled for relief. His prayers were answered with an explanation: “All these things shall give thee experience, and shall be for thy good.”³³

Song of prayer

I have felt impressed to conclude this message on prayer with a prayer—presented as a hymn. The Lord has said that “the song of the righteous is a prayer unto me.”³⁴ The music comes from our book of *Hymns*,³⁵ for which I have written new words. With thanks to Craig Jessop, Mack Wilberg, and other dear friends in the Tabernacle Choir, we may hear that song of prayer. Brother Jessop, please:

Our Prayer to Thee

We pray to Thee, our Heavenly
Father,
With grateful hearts and fond
emotion.

We thank Thee for our great
Exemplar—
Thy beloved and atoning Son—
Who gave Himself as sacred ransom,
That we could live again with Thee!
Our joy is full, our song so gladsome;
Renew our faith and hope in Thee.

We pray to Thee, our Heavenly
Father,
With thankful hearts and adoration.
We thank Thee for our loving Savior,
Who redeemed us from death and sin;
He gave to us His truth to brighten
Our path, to help us walk His way,
To love and serve, to lift and lighten
The lives of all who will obey.

We pray to Thee, our Heavenly
Father,
With gratitude and deep devotion
For loving faith and endless
splendor—
Eternal glory—bound as one!
We pray for mercy and forgiveness
And hope to know Thy holy will.
We yearn for Thee, we plead in
meekness,
Thy trust in us may we fulfill.

In the name of Jesus Christ, amen.

NOTES

1. Many scriptures refer to those who were “slow to remember the Lord” (see Mosiah 9:3; 13:29; Helaman 12:5).
2. Helaman 13:22.
3. For examples, see Jeremiah 29:11–13; Joel 2:32; Philippians 4:6; 1 Nephi 15:8–11; Alma 37:37.
4. As Jesus wrought the Atonement, He maintained prayerful communication with His Father both in Gethsemane (see Luke 22:39–44) and on Calvary’s cross (see Luke 23:33–34, 46).
5. See Matthew 6:9; Luke 11:2; 3 Nephi 13:9.
6. See Jacob 4:4–5; 3 Nephi 20:31; 27:9; Moses 5:8.
7. See Moroni 6:9; 10:4–5.

8. Bruce R. McConkie, *A New Witness for the Articles of Faith* (1985), 380.
9. Matthew 6:7.
10. Matthew 6:5.
11. See Matthew 6:8.
12. Moroni 7:48.
13. 2 Nephi 33:3; see also Jacob 3:1; Alma 31:38; Doctrine and Covenants 37:2.
14. See Matthew 17:21; Mark 9:29; 1 Corinthians 7:5; Mosiah 27:22–23; Alma 5:46; 3 Nephi 27:1; Doctrine and Covenants 88:76.
15. One of our hymns recounts that “Prayer is the soul’s sincere desire, / Uttered or unexpressed, / . . . The upward glancing of an eye / When none but God is near” (“Prayer Is the Soul’s Sincere Desire,” *Hymns*, no. 145).
16. As may be appropriate for the occasion.
17. For other helpful instruction, see Dallen H. Oaks, in Conference Report, Apr. 1993, 16–20; or *Ensign*, May 1993, 15–18.
18. See *The American Heritage Dictionary of the English Language*, 4th ed. (2000), 57: “amen. . . . Used at the end of a prayer or a statement to express assent or approval. [Middle English, from Old English, from Late Latin *āmēn*, from Greek, from Hebrew *’āmēn*, certainly, verily, from *’āman*, to be firm.]”
19. Doctrine and Covenants 90:24; italics added.
20. Alma 37:37; italics added. See also Mosiah 26:39; Alma 26:22. For comparable teaching from Paul, see 1 Thessalonians 5:17.
21. While his words may not have been quoted *verbatim*, this is an accurate representation of his declaration.
22. This operation was performed on 24 May 1960.
23. He had stenosis (narrowing) of his mitral valve, caused by an earlier attack of rheumatic fever.
24. The Lord said, “If thou shalt ask, thou shalt receive revelation upon revelation, knowledge upon knowledge” (D&C 42:61). For an example, refer to section 9 of the Doctrine and Covenants. The Lord explained that “you must study it out in your mind; then you must ask me if it be right, and if it is right I will cause that your bosom shall burn within you; therefore, you shall feel that it is right. But if it be not right you shall have no such feelings, but you shall have a stupor of thought” (verses 8–9). See also Jacob 4:10.
25. See Exodus 15:26; Deuteronomy 13:17–18; 1 Samuel 15:22; Jeremiah 26:4–6; Omni 1:13; Doctrine and Covenants 41:1; 133:16.
26. See Joseph Smith—History 1:15–20.
27. See Doctrine and Covenants 89.
28. See Official Declaration 2.
29. See *Church News*, 1 Aug. 1998, 3, 12; 13 Mar. 1999, 9; 4 Mar. 2000, 7; 24 June 2000, 9.
30. Even the Son of God endured such an experience, “saying, Father, if thou be willing, remove this cup from me: nevertheless not my will, but thine, be done” (Luke 22:42). The Father and the Son both knew what had to be done.
31. Regarding obedience to divine law, see Abraham 3:25. Regarding obedience to wise counsel from loving parents, see Ephesians 6:1; Colossians 3:20.
32. See Helaman 10:4–5.
33. Doctrine and Covenants 122:7.
34. Doctrine and Covenants 25:12.
35. *Hymns*, no. 337; music composed by Joseph Parry; tune: Swansea.

Elder David E. Sorensen

Isn’t it amazing, the gifts of the Spirit that the Lord has given to Elder Nelson. His talents bless not only the Church, but the whole world.

A conflict over irrigation water

I’d like to speak today of forgiveness. I grew up in a small farming town where