



PRAYER

Supplemental reading: Summary of John Calvin's teaching on prayer from the Institutes of the Christian Religion

The chapter on prayer, entitled "Prayer, Which Is the Chief Exercise of Faith, and By Which We Daily Receive God's Benefits," in the Institutes of the Christian Religion, is one of the longest chapters in the Institutes. We might expect that the chapter on predestination would be the longest. It is only twelve pages long while the chapter on prayer is seventy pages. Calvin obviously regarded prayer to be very important.

1. **Holy Spirit and Prayer:** The Spirit of adoption, who confirms the truth of the gospel in our hearts (Romans 8:16), raises up our spirits to boldly call on God with our deepest heart desires, and stirs up our unspoken groanings, enabling us to confidently cry, "Abba! Father!"
2. **The Necessity of Prayer:** It is, therefore, through the means of prayer that we lay hold of the blessings of our inheritance, which are laid up for us with our Heavenly Father. (Ephesians 3:20 ,21)
3. **Earnest Desire:** In all our requests we must always sense our own inadequacy, and honestly consider how desperately we need all that we ask for, so that our prayer is combined with an intense sense of wanting from God the answer to our prayer.
4. **Prayer and Repentance:** Biblical prayer requires repentance. The beginning, and even the preparation, for proper prayer is the plea for pardon coming from a humble and sincere confession of guilt. He confesses his guilt as an individual, and as a petitioner takes refuge in God's pardon, recognizing that the prayers poured out by the godly do not depend on their worthiness. God cannot be called upon by any except those who have learned of his mercy from the gospel. (I John 1:9)
5. **Hope and Faith Overcome Fear:** We should nonetheless be encouraged to pray by the confidence that our prayer will be answered. We will only take refuge in God by not doubting that he is ready to extend his helping hand.
6. **Faith and Prayer:** It is by faith that we obtain whatever is granted in prayer. We challenge believers to be convinced with firm assurance of mind that God is favorably disposed and benevolent toward them (James 1:5-8).
7. **The Command and Promise of Prayer:** The Lord has commanded and invited us to pray and he promises to be easily approached and readily accessible. The title, "Father," assures us that nothing is more consistent with his nature than that he responds to the prayers of his children (Matthew 7:7-11).
8. **People Should Pray Confidently with Reverential Fear:** It is strange that even with the promises of such compassion we are affected either toward coldness or indifference, so that many of us prefer to wander through confusing paths and, rejecting the fountain of living waters, we dig for ourselves dry cisterns, rather than embrace God's freely given generosity toward us. He will hear us, because our prayers do not depend on our merit, but are wholly grounded for their worth and hope of fulfillment on God's promises, and depend on them, so that they need no other foundation. We must, therefore, make up our minds that, even though we do not excel



in holiness like that which is praised in the holy patriarchs, prophets, and apostles, yet because we and they have a common command to pray and a common faith, if we rely upon God's Word, in this we are rightly in their fellowship. Our gracious Father will not reject those whom he not only urges, but prompts and motivates by every possible means to come to him.

9. **Prayer in the Name of Jesus:** Since no one is worthy to present himself to God and come before him, the Heavenly Father himself, to immediately free us from shame and fear, which might have thrown our hearts into despair, he has given us his Son, Jesus Christ our Lord, to be our advocate (1 John 2:1) and mediator with him (1 Tim. 2:5), by whose guidance we can confidently come to him, and with such an intercessor, trusting nothing we ask in his name will be denied us, as nothing can be denied to him by the Father (John 14:12-14).
10. **Christ, our Eternal and Abiding Mediator:** We cannot imagine that he, kneeling before God, pleads as a suppliant for us; rather, with the apostle we understand he appears before God's presence with the power of his death making an everlasting intercession in our behalf (cf. Romans 8:34), yet in such a way that, having entered the heavenly throne room, even to the fulfillment of the ages (cf. Hebrews 9:24ff), he alone brings before God the petitions of the people.
11. **Petitions and Praise:** In asking, we pour out our hearts before God, asking both for those things which provide for the extension of his glory and the proclamation of his name, and for those benefits which are conducive to our own needs. In giving thanks for these, we celebrate with due praise his benevolence toward us, and credit to his generosity every good that comes to us. We are completely overwhelmed by such a great and plentiful outpouring of benefits, by so many and powerful miracles perceived wherever one looks, that we never lack a reason nor an occasion for praise and thanksgiving.
12. **Lifting Up Our Hearts:** We should be always seeking God and praying without ceasing, given that our weaknesses are such that they need to be supported by many helps and our lethargy such that it needs to be prodded, it is appropriate that each one of us should set aside certain times for prayer. But this should not be a superstitious observance of certain hours, as if paying of a debt to God. Rather it must be a discipline for our weakness, which needs to be exercised and repeatedly prompted. Before we begin any prayer for ourselves, we should pray that his will be done (Matthew 6: 10). By these words we subject our will to his in order that, restrained as by a horses' bridle, it may not presume to control God but may make him the arbiter and director of all our requests.
13. **Patient Perseverance in Prayer:** Persist in prayer and with your desires held with an open hand, patiently wait for the Lord. He is always present to us, and will in his own time declare how he has never been deaf to the prayers that humanly appear to have been ignored. Some agree with God only under certain conditions, and, as if he were the servant of their own desires, confine him to laws of their own design. If he does not immediately live up to them, they become indignant, complain, protest, murmur, and rage against him.



14. **Unheard Prayers?** Christ alone will be for us our satisfaction in place of all things, since all good things are contained in him and he will reveal them to us on the Day of Judgment, when his kingdom will be clearly revealed. He does not always respond to the exact form of our request, yet, in giving a different answer, in a marvelous manner, he shows us our prayers have not been in vain.