
THE CONSERVATIVE FRIEND

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PRAYER

Why prayer? How do we pray and why do we pray? These are questions which are important in the spiritual life of a Christian. Prayer plays a prominent role in our corporate worship and ministry, and also in our individual devotions. So prayer takes place at two levels in our faith, firstly in a Christian's personal relationship with God, and secondly in the corporate worship of God.

At the individual level, prayer is part of Christians' communication with their Lord and Creator. This is usually in the form of a personal petition to God. Spiritual things are besought which will nourish the individual soul: Strength, Grace, Peace, Wisdom, all the fruits of the Holy Spirit, which are recognized as needful in a person's daily walk with God. All these things may be asked for on behalf of another person, or indeed on behalf of a whole group of people. Also material things may be petitioned for, but only as they serve the glory of God, never simply to personal advantage. Certain passages of scripture inform us how to approach the subject of prayer in our relationship with our heavenly Father: The Lord's Prayer [Matthew 6:9-13], praying in secret [Matthew 6:6], and also Paul's words in Romans 8:26,27, which emphasize that every person needs the help of the Holy Spirit to discern for what to pray.

The prayer life of individuals is grounded in the intimacy between themselves and God, and will inevitably consist of both asking *and* listening to Him. We Friends believe in the immediate help of Christ's Spirit to show us how and what is to be prayed for in personal devotion; for which reason we have never relied upon predetermined words in our prayers, nor felt it necessary to set aside specific times of the day for prayer. If Christ's Spirit alone is to be relied upon, each person must be inwardly prepared to pray at all times, and in all ways. Each person can trust in the mercy and goodness of God, that He will help each one of us to ask Him aright, and what has been asked for will be given.

The second important aspect of prayer is public prayer. This is part of the vocal ministry that is spo-

ken aloud during meetings for worship. It is for all present to hear, which is why it is referred to as "public" prayer. We believe that all true ministry is given spontaneously with the help of the Holy Spirit. So again, the person who prays is entirely dependant upon the guidance of Christ to discern when to pray and what words to use. In the true sense of prayer, any public prayer will consist of asking God to bestow blessings upon those gathered together, or perhaps upon specific people who are in need, or upon humankind in general. Whatever is asked for, it is God himself that guides the one who prays, so that they will be enabled to ask in His will, as He commands [1 John 5:14]. It can be seen then, that formulated prayers according to set words or times have no place in worship. True prayer arises from the direct leading of Christ.

Thus we consider formal praying as not being from God, and ultimately as disobedient and unacceptable to Him. It is in this sense of what true prayer is that we unite with the witness of the following scriptures: *Take no thought how or what ye shall speak: for it shall be given to you in that same hour what ye shall speak. For it is not ye that speak, but the Spirit of your Father which speaketh in you* (Matthew 10:19,20). *I will pray with the Spirit, and I will pray with the understanding also* (1 Cor. 14:15).

The private prayer life of individuals and the public prayer spoken aloud in meetings are not mutually exclusive; often one leads to the other. They are both part of the rich spiritual blessings that God will bestow on those who are willing to draw near to Him with a humble and penitent heart. If you wish to draw near to God, humbly ask Him how to pray. Ask in faith, for there is a promise to you: *Ask and it shall be given you, seek and ye shall find, knock and it shall be opened unto you....* (Matthew 7:7).

Allistair Lomax

Allistair and his wife Gillian live with their four children in Fritchley, Derbyshire, UK. Allistair is an affiliate member of Rockingham MM (Ohio YM) and attends Ripley Christian Quakers worship group.

Scheduled Meetings for Worship

(For worship at OYM monthly meetings see www.ohioyearlymeeting.org)

Meeting	Location	Contact Person	Contact Information	Meeting Schedule
Athens Christian Friends	Athens, Greece	Themistoklis Papaioannou	papathem@gmail.com; P.O. Box 21121, Athens 11410, Greece	Weekly / First Days, 5 PM
Chatahoochee Friends Worship Group	Atlanta, Georgia	Scott King	770-315-9478; a_lang@bellsouth.net	Call or email for info
Crossroads	Michigan: Flint	Phil Helms	248-360-2074; admin@ michiganquakers.org	Weekly / First Days
Friends Gathering in Jesus Christ	Evanston, IL (near Chicago)	Robert Hopper	847-733-7226 ; friendrobert61@sbcglobal.net	Twice a month / 2nd and 4th Seventh Days
Goshen	Scone, Scotland	Paul Thompson	UK # 01738 620688; Book- seeker@blueyonder.co.uk	Twice a month / 1st & 3rd First Days
Greenwich	London, England	Simon Watson	simonw@quaker.org.uk	Weekly / First Days
Richland/Ashland Friends	Loudonville, Ohio	Scott Savage	419-368-9419 (leave message)	Monthly / 2nd First Day
Ripley Christian Quakers	Ripley, Derbyshire, UK	Mike Wake- field	UK # 01773-541424 Rcquakers@lomaxes.me.uk	Weekly First Days, 10:30 AM
Salisbury	Salisbury, Maryland	Kye Parsons	410-749-8221 kyeparsons@hotmail.com	Weekly First Days, 1:30 PM
	Little Falls, New York	Geoff Gilmore	315-823-0616 geoff@gsgilmore.com	Monthly / 3rd Fifth Day

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Editor - Susan Smith, 3876 Hopkins Gap Rd, Harrisonburg, VA 22802

email preferred: tufiyaat@aol.com

Treasurer - Elvina Krekler, 1187 State Hwy 250, Adena, OH 43901

WFCC Committee Convener - Nancy Hawkins, 5190 Kirk Rd, Columbiana, OH 44408

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THE LORD'S PRAYER

Being prepared to be one of the Lord's witnesses, how ever openly and lovingly, inevitably brings one into conflict with people in whom one's witness causes the inimical spirit to rise in opposition to Christ. This is especially so if the call is to somewhere remote, where one is alone; especially when one has appealed for help from fellow laborers, and the answer is, "There is only thee!"

At one place, which I felt commanded to visit again and again, and which I was not clear to abandon for a considerable length of time, so intense was this spirit of conflict that my wife asked me how I could stand could stand such open, persistent, ardent hostility. "Because," I said, "at the end of the day I can say that the LORD is MY Shepherd, I shall not want. I can praise Him, and say 'Thou preparest a table before me in the presence of mine enemies.'" However, I must say that there is no one in that place for whom I feel any enmity, and I would have them all at that table, which the Lord prepares, gladly, if only they would come to it.

I recall another, earlier period which was also stony, hard, and difficult, though in a different way - the stones were wrapped in cotton wool or candy-floss! Although my fearful prayer had often been like that of Ann Branson - "Lord, make of me anything in the Church, but a minister I can never be!" - the Lord had other ideas for me! Each time I came to meeting, I was determined, in my own strength, not to speak; each time, the command was clear, the shaking and the anointing were unmistakable, the answer to the prayer beforehand (asking for confirmation, and that the glory should be the Lord's) was positive, and so, despite my own rebellious wishes, I was brought to my feet. Sometimes the words I was given brought discomfort and conviction to some; at other times, I found I had spoken someone's mind, or that the Lord had reached someone through me. Hallelujah.

But still I was rebellious. These occasions were lessons to ME as much as to anyone. The Lord was teaching me obedience. Once, in my own strength, I was desperate for a rest from this labor, and silently

begged God to release me and raise up someone else. Quickly, these words clearly came into my mind: "Wouldst thou refuse my gift?" I had a vision of the Lord's favor being withdrawn. Forever! Never to be granted again! I had a vision of the abyss, of the eternal punishment of one who spurns the day of his visitation! In my despair and confusion, I cried, "Yes! No! I don't know! Help me!"

In the end? Yes, I obeyed the call to speak. The yoke was easy and the burden light The inward reward was peace.

I shall never forget my last ever visit to that place. The meeting house was full, except for two seats, one of which I took. Then in came a person who had become my enemy in that place, and sat in the adjacent seat. I accepted that this had to be.

I am going to write of this person, as far as possible, in such a way that identification will be impossible, even of the person's sex. I do not wish to reopen old wounds but rather to use this story as an illustration of God's power and grace. Please forgive me if the language becomes a little awkward.

This person had once been very sound, and a good friend, but at some point had let go of the hand of our holy Guide, and instead let in the dreadful, murdering demon of Personal Power. On finding that I, clinging to the Lord, could not be controlled by someone in that spirit, this person turned from friendship to enmity; more so because it was given to me to see and discern that state. Thus began a campaign of whispering and plotting, taking in many others, to displace and discomfort me. But - the power of the Lord was over all, and the more this went on, the more the Lord bore me up, despite my own weakness, to use me as his witness in that place and as a messenger.

On this last visit, I felt for once that I would not be used, and my creaturely feeling was one of relief, but then the hand of the Lord came upon me, and I felt a strong command to kneel and pray. This was unlike any command I had received before. Until then I

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had always been given an inkling, however slight, of what to say. Now there was nothing but the command "Pray!" I am ashamed to confess that I doubted this, and resisted. I resisted a long time, and the rebuke I felt grew stronger and more terrible, until I was in great distress. "Kneel and pray!" persisted the command, until, in utter brokenness, I obeyed.

It was at that moment that I saw the ram caught in the thicket by his horns. At the moment of my abject obedience, the words were given to me, and I was surprised to find that they were the words of Matthew 6: 9-16.

This prayer was one I had not uttered publicly since my schooldays, when I was required to recite it by rote. Now, as I knelt in God's presence, I spoke it, not by rote but as each word and phrase was given to me afresh by the Lord. I have never ceased to be thankful to him who holds the key of David, for opening the

scripture to me in such a way and more, for teaching not simply what words to use (because the Lord hears our unspoken thoughts), but HOW to pray, and in what spirit to ask for these things.

Had I never prayed before, for daily bread from heaven? Had I never prayed for forgiveness? Had I never prayed for the strength to aid me in forgiving? I don't know. But when I sat down again, the blissful reward I felt was so clear and strong. If that was not enough, my enemy reached over and took my hand!

All you who read this, praise the Lord. Praise the Physician, the Binder-up of broken hearts, the Freer of captives, the Prince of peace, who truly saves from death and sin. Let him have pre-eminence in all things. This is my testimony and my message to you, in his name. Hallelujah. Amen.

Paul Thompson

Paul, his wife Stephanie, and their daughter Ruth live in Perth, Scotland. He is an affiliate member of Rockingham MM (OYM) and is part of Goshen Meeting.

Inward and Outward Prayer

Prayer is two-fold, inward and outward. Inward prayer is that secret turning of the mind towards God, whereby, being secretly touched and awakened by the light of Christ in the conscience, and so bowed down under the sense of its iniquities, unworthiness, and misery, it (the mind) looks up to God, it breathes towards Him, and is constantly breathing forth some secret desires and aspirations towards Him. It is in this sense that we are so frequently in Scripture commanded to pray continually (Luke 18:1, 1 Thessalonians 5:17; Ephesians 6:18, Luke 21:36), which cannot be understood of outward prayer; because it were impossible that

men should be always upon their knees, expressing words of prayer.... Outward prayer is when the spirit, being thus in exercise of inward retirement, and feeling the breathing of the Spirit of God to arise powerfully in the soul, receives strength and liberty by a superadded influence of the Spirit to bring forth either audible sighs, groans, or words...either in public assemblies or in private or at meat, etc....The outward exercise of prayer... cannot be continually practiced...until [the] mind be some time acquainted with the inward

Robert Barclay

In Apology for the True Christian Divinity, Proposition XI.

Living in the Light of Christ Requires Prayer

First generation Friends gathered to wait on the Lord to receive the Light of our Saviour that overcomes the darkness of Satan. Those Friends engaged in much intense prayer to receive and eventually to live in the Light of Christ. Faithful to that Light, those sons and daughters of God baked bread for the needy and followed fair business practices. Because first generation Friends lived in the Light of Christ, they could not indulge in violence, for

Christ overcame their destructive tendencies. In darkness we tend to follow our own inclinations regardless of the baneful consequences. To continue living in the Light of Christ that eliminates darkness we not only need to wait on the Lord but also to engage in intense prayer much as George Fox did.

Arthur Berk

Arthur lives in New York City and is an affiliate member of Rockingham MM (Ohio YM).

Lead Us Not into Tempting God

It concerns me greatly that within the one Biblical text, of which the English words are most familiar to the greatest number of people the world over, is one item of which the true meaning is universally misunderstood. Throughout Christendom there is a widespread and pernicious misapprehension of the last two petitions of The Lord's Prayer (Matthew 6:13; Luke 11:4): *And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil.* (A.V.; Moffat) or *And bring us not into temptation, but rescue us from the Evil one.* (Weymouth, The New Testament in Modern Speech)

There is a book of short stories by Mark Twain called, after the title of the first story, *The Man That Corrupted Hadleyburg*. The "Hadleyburg" of the story is a town very jealous of its reputation, built up over three generations, as "the most honest and upright town in all the region round about....It was so proud of it, and so anxious to insure its perpetuation, that it began to teach the principles of honest dealing to its babies in the cradle.;;; Throughout the formative years temptations were kept out of the way of the young people, so that their honesty could have every chance to harden and solidify, and become a part of their very bone."

The story relates how a man who had been wronged there devised a plan to encompass the corruption of the whole town. His plan was successful, and Twain relates that subsequently the town changed its motto from "Lead Us Not Into Temptation" to "Lead Us Into Temptation." Although in this he seems to be subscribing to the common misunderstanding of the Biblical phrase, his story shows that he perceived the truth at the heart of it. From the outset, and before the stranger's plan begins to work, he portrays the Hadleyburgers as a bunch of mean hypocrites, demonstrating that all their efforts to remove temptation, to avoid being tested, were futile. In his final sentence he concludes: "It is an honest town once more, and the man will have to rise early that catches it napping again."

The misapprehension which Twain addressed and to which I refer arises from the confusion between the

two-way application latent in the word itself. The verb "to tempt" means "to put to the test." Thus, one can put God to the test, or one can be put to the test oneself. Was Jesus' example of prayer a petition that our heavenly Father not lead us into a place where we are tempted, or does it ask that we not be led into the temptation of God?

Almost exclusively in the Old Testament (Exodus 17:2; Deuteronomy 6:16; Isaiah 7:12; and Malachi 3:15) the word "temptation" refers to the sin of tempting God - of putting God to the test. This same meaning is also employed in the New Testament, most notably in Matthew 4:5-7; and Luke 4:12; also in Acts 5:9. (The reference to tempting God in Acts 15:10 refers perhaps to testing His patience and mercy, and is omitted by Moffat.) Rarely in the Old Testament (Genesis 22; Daniel 12:10; Psalms 95:8) but more often in the New, (Luke 8:13 & 12:31 & 40; Hebrews 3:8; & 11:17; 1 Peter 1:7 & 4:12; Matthew 22:18; Mark 12:15; Luke 20:23; 1 Corinthians 10:13; Galatians 6:1; 1 Thessalonians 3:5; Hebrews 2:18 & 4:15; James 1:12 & 13; and Revelations 3:10) "tempting" refers to ourselves being put to the test. Some references may be taken either way or both ways: (Matthew 26:41; Mark 14:38; Luke 22:46; 1 Timothy 6:9.)

Two texts have furnished the occasion of erroneous teaching on this subject: 1 Corinthians 10:13 (*God is faithful, who will not suffer you to be tempted above that ye are able; but with the temptation will also make a way to escape, that ye may be able to bear it*) and 2 Peter 2:9: (*The Lord knoweth how to deliver the godly out of temptations;*) though the latter may again be construed either way. These texts have been misapplied to reinforce the misinterpretation of the petitions in question, that we might pray to be spared from being tempted. A moment's thought is sufficient to convince us that such a prayer would be both futile and dangerous to the health of the soul.

We are on test every moment of our lives. From the moment of our waking until the close of each day

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we are obliged to choose whether we shall lie or speak the truth, whether we shall be pure or impure, just or unjust, slothful or industrious, selfish or generous, kind or unkind, loving or unloving, peaceable or violent, patient or irate, honest or dishonest. It is by daily exercising our wills in these matters that we develop our spiritual muscle. Just as one who takes no physical exercise becomes enfeebled, so one whom others seek to shield from testing, if that were indeed possible to accomplish, would become spiritually enfeebled, like the Hadleyburgers. It is contrary to God's purposes for us that any should become so enfeebled, and therefore inconceivable that He would tell us to ask to be spared from all testing, let alone grant such a prayer. Moreover, no virtue could be attributed to those who remained untainted by sin merely because they had never been tested. It would be like praising young Johnny for his honesty in not stealing your purse when all the time you are holding him back by the seat of his pants. In the words of the corrupter of Hadleyburg: *As soon as I found out that you carefully and vigilantly kept yourselves and your children out of temptation, I knew how to proceed. Why, you simple creatures, the weakest of all things is a virtue which has not been tested in the fire.*

Consider the four personal petitions of the prayer. First, we are to be given our daily bread, which will preserve our bodies. Second, we are to be forgiven all our debts (trespasses, shortcomings, sins) and that will preserve our souls. With those gains assured, and especially the latter, the greatest temptation of all appears - the temptation to spiritual laziness, the temptation to say to God, "Very well, you are going to feed me and forgive me, so I can safely leave you to get on with it. I can proceed to lie, cheat, steal, murder, and wallow in filth whenever I find it congenial to do so, safe in the knowledge that you will perform your function. I will tempt you, that is, I will put you to the test, just to prove that your mercy and forgiveness are to be relied upon. I will even make it a point of virtue in myself that I trust in these attributes of yours implicitly."

Thus the danger from which we need to be saved, which is addressed by the petition "Lead us not into

temptation," is of being led by our very conviction of His loving-kindness and mercy, in short, by God himself, into tempting Him, into putting Him to the test in this way. The most notable scriptural example of this is found in Matthew 4: 5-7 (c/f Luke 4: 9-12): *Then the devil taketh him up into the holy city, and setteth him on a pinnacle of the temple. And saith unto him, if thou be the son of God, cast thyself down: for it is written, He shall give his angels charge concerning thee: and in their hands they shall bear thee up, lest at any time thou dash thy foot against a stone* (Psalm 91, especially 11-12). *Jesus said unto him, It is written again, Thou shalt not tempt the Lord thy God* (Deuteronomy 6:16).

Some Christians today are employing and propagating a re-phrasing of the petition in The Lord's Prayer in the form "Save us from the time of trial," which consolidates the misconception and makes it more difficult to perceive the truth in that verse. Surely it was to alert us to the danger of putting God to the test that Jesus' includes the third petition - "Lead us not into temptation." We need to be kept from putting God to the test in that way, because in that way lies damnation. We pray that our sense of the wonderful bounty of God, with his promises of mercy and forgiveness, will not lead us into testing His mercy with spiritual laziness.

The fourth petition - "but deliver us from evil" - can be subject to the same misunderstanding. "Deliver" means "set free." As we have seen, being tested is not evil but, on the contrary, is spiritually useful. "Deliver us from evil" is not a petition to set us free from being tested, for that is dangerous nonsense. Rather, Jesus teaches us to pray to be set free from every evil, and especially the greatest of all evils (because it begets all the others), the evil of putting God's mercy to the test. We are told in the Bible that there is one unforgivable sin - the sin against the Holy Ghost. We commit this sin when, although the Holy Spirit tells us in our hearts that a certain action is wrong, we go ahead and perform it. It is the effect of this our propensity to sin from which we are praying to be set free.

Ralph Hill

Ralph, a retired teacher, and his wife Daphne live in Bexhill, East Sussex, England. Ralph is an affiliate member of Rockingham MM (Ohio YM).

Speaking of Christ in Liberal Meetings - An OYM Friends Center Weekend, 3/124-16/2008

As registrars for the Friends Center retreat with Brian Drayton, *Speaking of Christ in Liberal Meetings*, my wife Katharine and I communicated with an extraordinary range of f/Friends from around the country who expressed an interest and sought to gather with others around this theme. By the time of the retreat we had registered a full house of 22 people and several more were on the waiting list—an unusually large response for a Friends Center event. Why did this topic arouse such a keen and widespread interest? The weekend itself began to shed light.

Brian Drayton led us into the weekend Friday evening with a meditation on where he finds Christ, who Christ is for him as an embodied soul engaging the growing complexities and moral/ecological challenges of this unfolding 21st century. Humanity, for all its efforts, during thousands of years of cultural “maturation”, has been unable, of its own accord, to understand/heal “our abiding blindnesses, short-thought, and willingness to harm others to our own glorification or justification.” Yet the soul is “tuned amazingly to the whispers and intimations of a living power which sheds light, and (we have discovered, haven’t we?) can guide us unto the discovery, and the following, of a new path across the wilderness of this world.” To speak about Christ, Brian concluded, is to name and engage this living power that, we know experimentally, can heal and transform our lives and our world.

The following day, each of us was invited to name for each other our particular experience and understanding of Jesus Christ, in whatever language was authentic for us. We heard many moving reports, and in them Christ was always both a person and a power for healing—the person and power of God’s Love at work among us. We heard, again and

again, the interflowing of these two dimensions of Christ, the historic and the present. In the words of a participant, “One [dimension] is Christ as embodied in Jesus, his life teaching, death and resurrection. The other is the Living Christ, the companion I’ve known since I was a little child.” Known, she added, but not named by her until years later in adulthood. As our stories joined together in the prayerful space, a sense of Presence seemed grow and deepen. We knew Christ to be near at hand, not in name only, but in power and sweetness and grace.

In our concluding prayer time on First Day, before meeting for worship at Stillwater, Brian asked us what we were taking home with us. Many of us have struggled to find language for naming Christ in Christ-resistant meetings. We heard, in final words with one another, a double-message: 1) The Living Christ is astonishingly present to us, healing and guiding our lives, and we are humbly, deeply thankful; 2) We are to be tender with our meetings, trusting, that if we remain prayerfully alert, we will be given the words for sharing Christ as hearts and way open—always seeking, with words or without, to meet one another in the Love that is of Christ.

Why did so many respond to this call to gather, share, and pray about *Speaking of Christ in Liberal Meetings*? Perhaps we are sensing among Friends a growing hunger for and awakening to the astonishing heart-healing, truth-opening power of the Living Christ, God’s very Love-for-us from which our Religious Society was born, and upon which our future depends.

Ken Jacobsen

Ken and his wife Katharine are now living in Delavan, Wisconsin. Members of Stillwater MM (Ohio YM), they are active in Friends Gathering in Jesus Christ, near Chicago. Ken is studying for a PhD at Chicago Theological Seminary.

*The Lord is nigh unto all them that call upon Him,
to all that call upon Him in truth.*

Psalms 145: 18

The Conservative Friend #32
c/o Susan Smith
3876 Hopkins Gap Road
Harrisonburg, VA 22802

Lilies in Triumph - A Song of Resurrection

All Friends, to that which is pure, take heed, that with that
all your Minds may be kept up to God, who is pure; that as
the Lilly ye all may grow, and receive Wisdom from God...

George Fox

**Spring bursts winter's dam
as Christ shatters death's false vessel.
Life-water rains, sunlight's thrusts
are parried by blades of grass,
but accepted by the brown, warming earth,
save in stubborn, northerly shadow.
Yellow trumpets of Lent lilies triumph
against green riverbanks,
telling followers of seasons
that fasts do not break open truths,
unless the bonds of iniquity too
break and drop like rotten withy.**

**The soul has no safe north
in which to keep a dark treasure;
true Spring's piercing light will seek,
find, dazzle; tears will wash clean.**

**Plant, then, thy feet upon
that safe, sure hill;
face the Spring that calls by name
- my name, thine, all -
its faithful followers to rebirth.
All is new, come home, secure,
bathed in love. Breathe in the new savor,
be taken by the hand;
we stand, spring brides,
children all,
lilies in triumph,
crying - "I can see!"**

Paul Thompson

Author's note: In the north of England, the daffodil is often
called the "Lent lily".