

A Simple Guide to **Public Prayer**

Ask, and it will be given to you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you. For everyone who asks receives, and the one who seeks finds, and to the one who knocks it will be opened.

Matthew 7:7-8

Introduction

The way we pray in secret (Matt 6:6) is different from the way we pray in public. Private prayer is heightened by the reality of our personal relationship with God. Though we pray as part of the Church, remembering others in our prayers, we are praying in such a way that our own relationship with God is cultivated and deepened.

Public prayer is different. When one prays in public he or she prays not as an individual, but as one representing the entire church. Public prayer is offered remembering those who are listening to us, praying with us. Thus, our prayers to God are also meant *to edify and build up those that hear us* (1 Cor 14:13-19). So while you shouldn't think it's necessary to write down your prayer, you should be intentional in putting thought into the content and manner of the prayer.

The following are some simple directions meant to be a help for those praying in public. These directions are both practical and theological in nature. Remember that these directions are *meant to be a help and not some rigid pattern to follow*. They are not part of a check-list to tick-off or a series of requirements to follow. Instead, they are designed to help make our public prayers to be the most glorifying to God and edifying to his people.

Pray in the Plural

Remember again that when you pray in the worship service, you are praying on behalf of the entire church. You are leading everyone to the throne of God. Thus, you should not say things like, 'I pray' or 'I'm asking.' Pray in the plural with phrases like, 'We come before you this morning' or 'We pray now,' etc. This also follows the pattern of prayer the Lord gave us (Matt 6:9).

Pray the Scriptures

The language of the Bible is always right, safe, and edifying to God's people (2 Tim 3:16-17). It is always powerful and effective at gripping the believer's heart (Heb 4:12-13). It will always lead us to pray with kingdom priorities (Matt 6:33). Therefore, whenever possible, you should try to use the very words of the Bible in your public prayers.

Pray the Gospel

There is nothing more encouraging to God's people than a prayer that is full of Christ and the grace we have received through him. Whenever possible, offer praise and thanksgiving for Christ's saving work on the cross. Tie the cross to your words, making the reality of the gospel the basis and motivation of your prayers (Eph 3:7-14).

Pray an Appropriate Length

Various occasions call for varying lengths of prayer. Basically, we are saying that one should offer a prayer that is neither too long nor too short (Ecc 5:2; Matt 6:7). Often, wisdom in this area comes over time as you listen to the prayers of others and gain personal experience in praying publicly. For the most part, a basic rule of thumb is one to two minutes.

Pray with an Appropriate Tone and Attitude

Because God desires the prayers of his people, we should come boldly to his throne with confidence that he will hear us (1 John 3:21-24; Heb 4:16). This does not mean that we should go carelessly before God in prayer. It is still the humble person that attracts God's gaze (Isa 66:1-2). But it does mean that our prayers should be full of hope and joy in the goodness and power of the Lord to whom we are praying.

Furthermore, those praying in public should not use pretentious, overly familiar, or irreverent language. Language that is flippant and jokey is never befitting prayer (Ex 20:7; Heb 12:28). Neither is language that is exaggerated in its importance appropriate. Public prayer should not seek to impress anyone (Matt 6:5).

Pray with Spiritual Preparation

Make sure that before you pray, your heart is right before God (Ps 66:18). The night before, or the morning that you are to pray, examine your life and make any necessary confession and repentance so that you will be fit to bring God's people to his throne of grace in prayer (Heb 7:27).