In these days, prayer in the Christian realm is increasingly putting on the characteristics of unbiblical mysticism of the oriental religions. Prayers of Christians ought to be guided and moulded by biblical injunctions and patterns of prayer. The following characteristics of biblical prayer can be of help to maintain proper prayer habits.

**Prayer should always be Godward**

Prayer is unidirectional – believers speaking to God and Him alone. Philippians 4:6 says, “Let your requests be made known unto God” (cf. Nehemiah 4:9; Acts 12:5). Jesus said, “Thou shalt worship the Lord thy God, and him only shalt thou serve” (Matthew 4:10). Never does the Bible speak of prayer as a request made to dead saints, angels or demons. In truth, the Bible prohibits any form of prayer to idols, spirits of the dead persons and devils (Deuteronomy 18:9-13; Leviticus 9:31; 20:6; 2 Kings 17:17; Psalm 115:4-8; Zechariah 10:2). No man, whether dead or alive, is worthy of our dependence. “It is better to trust in the LORD than to put confidence in man” (Psalm 118:8). “Trust in him at all times; ye people, pour out your heart before him: God is a refuge for us. Selah” (Psalm 62:8).

Unfortunately, there are many who claim to be Christians but practise necromancy (praying to the dead) and other forms of prayer and worship that are abominable to God. It is not uncommon nowadays to hear some charismatic preachers talking to the devil in the midst of their prayers. These practices, biblically-speaking, are distortions of prayer. Prayer should only be rendered unto God.
Prayer provides immediate access to God

To all true Christians, prayer means instant access to God. Paul affirmed this truth in Ephesians 2:18 – “For through him we both have access by one Spirit unto the Father” (cf. Romans 5:2). Likewise, Hebrews 4:16 declares, “Let us therefore come boldly unto the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy, and find grace to help in time of need.” Christians can have boldness in the fact that they can have access to God’s gracious throne any time they need His help.

All those who have been reconciled to God through Christ can have the assurance that God is ever ready to hear their prayers. In fact, because God is omnipresent (God is everywhere regardless of time or circumstances) and omniscient (God is all-knowing), He not only hears prayer immediately but even knows the content of prayer before it is formulated by the one praying. Isaiah 65:24 says, “And it shall come to pass, that before they call, I will answer; and while they are yet speaking, I will hear.” Psalm 145:18 promises, “The LORD is nigh unto all them that call upon him, to all that call upon him in truth” (cf. Psalms 50:15; 91:15).

Prayer is independent of ritualistic posture and activities

The Bible records God’s people praying in various physical positions. Praying in various circumstances necessitates different postures. In the Bible, people prayed standing (Genesis 24:12-14), lifting up their hands (1 Timothy 2:8), sitting (Judges 20:26, 2 Samuel 7:18), kneeling (Daniel 6:10; Mark 1:40), looking upward (John 17:1), bowing down (Exodus 34:8), placing their heads between their knees (1 Kings 18:42), lying down on their bed (Psalms 4:4; 63:6), bowing on their bed (1 Kings 1:47), pounding on their breasts (Luke 18:13), facing the temple (Daniel 6:10), and prostrating (Mark 14:35; Revelation 7:11).

The above brief review indicates that in the Bible, there is not a particular posture of prayer. Postures are important only to the extent that they are the external expression of reverence, inner feelings and commitment to the Lord. No single posture is able to express all feelings of the praying man. Hence, we find in Scripture a diversity of options and possibilities. One should adopt his posture of prayer in a reverential manner. Our posture in prayer should be the reflection of our hearts, whether it be hearts overwhelmed with the cares of life, hearts overawed by the majesty of God or hearts hushed in humble obedience to God.

Above all, the Bible emphasizes the posture of the heart more than the external posture. Isaiah 29:13 admonishes us: “Wherefore the Lord said, Forasmuch as this people draw near me with their mouth, and with their lips do honour me, but have removed their heart far from me, and their fear toward me is taught by the precept of men.” Jesus also warned against the hypocritical prayer postures – “And when thou prayest, thou shalt not be as the hypocrites are: for they love to pray standing in the synagogues and in the corners of the streets, that they may be seen of men. Verily I say unto you, They have their reward” (Matthew 6:5).
Prayer can be offered anywhere


In 1 Timothy 2:8, Paul said, “I will therefore that men pray everywhere.” For the Spirit-filled Christian, every place becomes a place of prayer.

Prayer can be offered any time

A believer is always aware of his insufficiency and therefore the need to live in total dependence on God at all times. The Bible records the testimony of those who cried unto God day and night (Psalm 88:1; Luke 2:37; 1 Thessalonians 3:10; 1 Timothy 5:5; 2 Timothy 1:3). Everyone who humbly accepts his insufficiency and dependence on God will be eager to pray always. So Jesus exhorted: “Men ought always to pray, and not to faint” (Luke 18:1).

Scripture records people praying three times a day (Daniel 6:10), in the morning (Psalm 5:3), in the evening (1 Kings 18:36), before meals (Matthew 14:19), after meals (Deuteronomy 8:10), at the ninth hour (Acts 3:1), at bedtime (Psalm 4:4), at midnight (Acts 16:25), day and night (Luke 2:37; 18:7), often (Luke 5:33), when they are young (Jeremiah 3:4), when they are old (Daniel 9:2-19), when they are in trouble (2 Kings 19:3-4), every day (Psalm 86:3), and always (Luke 18:1; 1 Thessalonians 5:17).
Prayer has no language barrier

Prayer has no language barrier. Even though man thinks and speaks in different languages, God understands all of them. He is the God of all nations and Scripture says, “All nations whom thou hast made shall come and worship before thee, O Lord; and shall glorify thy name” (Psalm 86:9). This certainly gives evidence to the fact that language is no barrier when it comes to praying to God (Acts 2:4, 11; Acts 10:46). God even searches the hearts of His children and thereby knows their motives, needs and desires, no matter what language they think or speak in (Romans 8:27).

Prayer can be presented to God in various forms

Since God knows both the hearts and thoughts of everyone, prayer may be expressed mentally, audibly or in song (psalms). In times of great trials, we may prayerfully sit before His throne though without the power to express our thoughts. In times like these, the Holy Spirit searches our hearts and makes our feelings and thoughts known unto God (Romans 8:26; Hebrews 4:15).

There is a time for offering up our prayers in a proper, clear and formal manner. This should be the case, especially when we pray before a congregation or fellowship group. However, we can come before God with broken hearts and weeping, crying audibly (1 Samuel 1:10; Psalm 34:18). At times, it may be expressed in the form of making a vow (1 Samuel 1:11; Acts 18:18), making sacrifices (Psalm 20:1-3) and singing songs (Psalm 59:16, 17; Acts 16:25).

People in the Bible prayed sitting in ashes (Job 1:20-21; 2:8), wearing sackcloth (Psalm 35:13), crying with tears (Psalm 6:6), smiting their breasts (Luke 18:13), throwing dust on their heads (Joshua 7:6), tearing garments (1 Kings 21:27), fasting (Deuteronomy 9:18), sighing (Ezra 9:4-15), groaning (Psalm 6:4-6), crying out loud (Hebrews 5:7) and sweating as if bleeding (Luke 22:44).

Sometimes, Christians may engage in prayer for several days (Esther 4:16), several hours – all through the night (Luke 6:12), or short ejaculatory prayers (Matthew 14:30). Some would even take time to pray several times a day (Daniel 6:10).

Conclusion

Prayer is to be a total way of life—an open and continual communion with God. It is not limited or restrained by factors such as time, posture and place. Under any circumstance, a child of God can call on His God.