

SPIRITUAL DISCIPLINE OF PRAYER

James Jonah Watopa

Universitas Klabat

jwatopa@unklab.ac.id

Abstract

Prayer is an essential communication that relates to transcendence. Every religion in the world must practice prayer in their religious life. For this reason, this study seeks to explore how important prayer is for every religious believer. In this study, the method used is document research or library research. The discussion is based on some legitimate literature to support this issue. For Christianity, prayer is the breath or opening of contrite hearts to God. This discussion discusses explicitly Jesus' prayer in John 17, which consists of prayer for Himself, His disciples, and all believers.

Furthermore, prayer brings all the burdens and purposes of life to God, who is trusted to provide solutions in the form of answers. Although the answer is not by personal request, it is with faith, believing it is God's answer. Those who pray diligently and unceasingly are proof of the faithfulness of their faith. For this reason, prayer is a must element for every religious believer, especially in Christianity.

Keywords: *Prayer, Jesus' prayer, unceasing, faithfulness, transformation and forgiveness*

Introduction

The word “prayer” is famous and essential in the religious community. This is true not only of the Christian religion but also of all prominent religions worldwide. For instance, Moslem, Buddhism, and Hinduism, even in the tribal religion world too, are concerned about prayer. As Keller (2014, p.35) states: “In the great monotheism of Islam, Judaism, and Christianity, prayer is at the very heart of what it means to believe.” Reid points out that prayer (is) intimacy with God that leads to the fulfillment of His purpose (Alvin Reid) in Henderson (2011.p.23).

Prayer is an opening of the mind and heart to God. (Green, 2006.p.36). Prayer, in the highest sense, is the communion of a believer with God in which the believer speaks to God, and God speaks to him. Prayer is a gift from God. Prayer is communion with God. Prayer is asking from God. Prayer is the commitment to God (William, 2000). Prayer is a basic need for every religious person. Therefore, this study is going to answer the question, what is the biblical foundation talking about prayer? What are Ellen G. White's Writings related to prayer? What are the strategies to exercise this discipline of prayer?

Particularly among the Seventh-day Adventist Church, there was polling conducted by the Pew Research Centre (PRC) in the United States in 2014 about prayer; it is an interesting statistic. For instance, in category age distribution among adults who pray daily: Age 18-29 years old is 26%, 30-49 years old is 35%, 56-64 years old is 17%, while 65+ is 22% in daily prayer. The next category is about gender. Women are higher than men in terms of daily prayer. Women comprise about 56% of the total, while men comprise 46%. Then, regarding educational distribution among adults, high school or less is 34%, some colleges 40%, some

colleges 16%, and post-graduate degrees 10%. The last is marital status: married 53%, never married 20%, divorced 14%, widow 8%, and living with a partner only 5%. That is why God commands that marrying is better than just quiet alone. These are only the descriptions regarding the prayer scale among adults in their capacity in the United States, 2014.

Methodology

The methodology is document research or library research. The discussion is based on some legitimate literature to support this issue. According to Wallman (2011), library research analyzes evidence such as historical records and documents. Similarly, it means gathering data from library materials, including textbooks, both published and unpublished academic documents, such as journals, conference proceedings, theses, dissertations, and internet access.

Biblical Foundation of Prayer: Jesus Prayer

Many people see prayer as communicating with God. Consequently, they pray often regardless of their religious tag. Christians are particularly interested in prayer. In the Bible, the word of prayer is around 375 times. According to the NIV Exhaustive Concordance, the word prayer is used 121 times, not including the various conjugations of the verb. After praying, you have prayed at 68 times, prayed at 106 times, prayed at 32 times, prayed at 36 times, and prayed at 12 times, for 375 times. But, the word prays, in most occurrences of the word in the New Testament, comes from the Greek προσευχομαι (prosenchyma), which, according to the Goodrick & Kohlenberger index of Bible vocabulary, is number 4667. It is 4336 in the old Strong's system.

Moreover, the important thing for the believer is not about the number of words "pray" mentioned in the Bible but how to make prayer a need and priority. Throughout the scripture, the prevalence of the concept makes it clear that early believers depended on that power and that we should follow their example. They believed in the power of prayer, which is depicted in the Bible.

When the disciples of Jesus came to Him in one moment, asking Jesus in Luke 11:1, "One day Jesus was praying in a certain place. When he finished, one of his disciples said, 'Lord, teach us to pray, just as John taught his disciples.'" The disciples asked Jesus to teach them how to pray. For them, prayer is the most important thing when facing this life. Jesus teaches them about prayer in the following verses (2-4), identical to Matthew 6:9-13, known as a Lord's Prayer.

Talking about prayer is so broad in the Bible. In this paper for the biblical foundation, I narrow it down to John 17, which is about Jesus's prayer. This is a Jesus' prayer. This prayer consists of three parts. First, He prays for Himself; second, He prays for His disciples; and last, He prays for the believers.

The Prayer of Jesus for Himself (John 17:1-5).

The first part of this chapter depicts Jesus' proposal to His Father to glorify Him as His only begotten Son. It means crucifying. His prayer is that He can be given strength to experience suffering. He begged the Father to glorify Him, even though he also begged not to take it. In verse one, He says, "Glorify your son." It means not boasting for Himself, but He will crucify on Calvary. As He says, "Jesus spoke these things; and lifting His eyes to heaven, He said, 'Father, the hour has come; glorify Your Son, that the Son may glorify You, two even

as You gave Him authority over all flesh, that to [a]ll whom You have given Him, He may give eternal life.

Furthermore, Paul points out in his letter to Philippians that the meaning of glorifying is to die. As Philippians 2:6-11 says, “6 who, although He existed in the form of God, did not regard equality with God a thing to be grasped, seven but emptied Himself, taking the form of a bondservant, and being made in the likeness of men, 8 Being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross. 9 For this reason also, God highly exalted Him and bestowed on Him the name which is above every name, 10 so that at the name of Jesus every knee will bow, of those who are in heaven and on earth and under the earth, 11 and that every tongue will confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father. Philippians 2:6-11. Jesus asked His Father to give Him the power and strength to defeat the heavy temptation that is unwilling to die for humankind.

But when Jesus died on Calvary, he defeated Satan. As apostle John says, “Now judgment is upon this world; now the ruler of this world will be cast out. 32 And if I am lifted from the earth, I will draw all men to myself.” 33 But He was saying this to indicate the kind of death by which He was to die. John 12:31-33. Precisely through His death, Satan was defeated.

The Prayer of Jesus for His Disciples (John 17:6-19)

The second part of Jesus’ prayer is about His disciples from verses 6-19. To sanctify them when they carry His good tidings to the world. As He prays verse, “I have manifested Your name to the men whom You gave Me out of the world; they were Yours, and You gave them to Me, and they have kept Your word. v. 17 sanctify them in the truth; Your word is truth. v. 19 For their sakes I sanctify Myself, that they also may be sanctified in truth.

The Prayer of Jesus for the Believers (John 17:20-26)

The third part of Jesus’ prayer is about the believers from verses 20 to 26. His prayer is about their unity, Jesus and His Father. He also prays for their protection. “I do not ask on behalf of these alone, but for those also who believe in Me through their word; 22 The glory which You have given Me I have given them, that they may be one, just as We are one; John 17:20,22.

In addition, Jesus prays for believers worldwide to be strong when facing the battering. As He prayer verse 22 says: “The glory which You have given Me I have given to them.” Jesus also prays for the believers, so they have love as His Father loves Him. Verse 26 says, “And I have declared unto them thy name and will declare it: that the love wherewith thou hast loved me may be in them, and I in them. v. 26. It means as His believers, we have to practice the love of God to others as well as the Father loves His Son, Jesus Christ.

To conclude, Jesus’ prayer in John 17 is comprehensive and covers all aspects. The first session of His prayer is about Himself being able to pass severe trials through the death of Jesus on the cross, which he mentioned in worship that glorifies me. The second is about His disciples to sanctify them in truth. The third is about all believers having protection and practicing love as His Father loves Him.

Ellen. G. White Comments About Prayer Contrite Heart

When someone comes to pray, he should do it contritely. As Ellen White says, Our Savior is always ready to hear and answer the prayer of the repentant heart, and grace and peace are

multiplied to His faithful ones. (White, 1955). Those need to have contrite hearts when we pray to God.

Humble Prayer

True prayer needs humbleness. Every believer, when they come to God through worship, is unlike the Pharisees and the priest in the public area to show they are more spiritual or holy than others. Ellen White states: "Church members, let the light shine forth. Let your voices be heard in humble prayer, in witness against intemperance, the folly, and the amusements of this world. (White, 1947, p. 19.3). As a follower of Jesus, we must be humble when we come to pray.

Prayer is Faith

Another element of prevailing prayer is faith. Jesus told His disciples, "What things soever ye desire when ye pray, believe that ye receive them, and ye shall have them." Mark 11:24. Mrs. White points out that prayer is faith (White, 2002, p. 27.3). If people pray and then they do not have faith, it is useless.

Earnest and Solemn Prayer

The actual prayer should be done in earnest and solemn. As White states: "While their cheeks were wet with tears; and bowing before God in earnest, humble prayer, to be guided into all truth." White (1983, p. 396.2). Furthermore, White states:

"King Solomon stood upon a brazen scaffold before the altar and blessed the people. With his hands raised upward, he then knelt and poured forth an earnest and solemn prayer to God, while the congregation bowed with their faces to the ground." (White, 1870, p.141.1). White also emphasizes the critical thing about earnest prayer: "Nothing that can prevent us from lifting our hearts in the spirit of earnest prayer. In the crowds of the street, amid a business engagement". (White, 1892, p. 99.1).

Unceasing Prayer

To make a closer relationship with God, believers should pray unceasingly. As Mrs. White states: "Unceasing prayer is the unbroken union of the soul with God so that life from God flows into our life; and from our life, purity, and holiness flow back to God." (White2, 2002, p. 27.6). Gradually prayer makes the life of every believer holy.

Secret Prayer

God Sees Us in Our Secret Prayer Place, such as Nathanael; we need to study God's word for ourselves and pray for the enlightenment of the Holy Spirit. Prayer, p. 187.5 (Ellen Gould White). In secret prayer, the soul is free from surrounding influences. (White 21892, p. 98.2). God is omniscient; God knows everything in the unseen place. God knows everything in the dark, the room, and the secret place. The critical thing is unceasing prayer.

Respect

Every parent should teach their children to respect when praying is going on. White says, "You should feel grateful to God for his care over you. Morning and evening you should have an interest in and respect for the hour of prayer, and from your hearts offer God true gratitude." (White, Ellen. G. Adventist Youth 66.1).

In summary, Mrs. White writes about prayer in many ways. She realizes prayer is one of the crucial things in the spiritual discipline of every believer. Prayers should be exercised adequately based on what the Bible says. It has not happened just by feeling or emotions. But it is the commitment and principles of a Christian's life.

Strategies Discipline of Prayer in The New Testament

Moving Inward: Seeking the Transformation, We Need

Transformation is needed before we request our prayer to God. Firstly, transformation is coming from inward to change our hearts and minds. A challenging, heart-like stone must be softened through forgiveness. This is a must. As Thrasher points out, true prayer starts with God and the prayer burden He places on our hearts. The most significant discipline in prayer is communicating with the Holy Spirit as He aids us in sharing our fundamental concerns, burdens, and desires. (Thrasher, 2003, p.52). Then, make someone worthy or valid before the Lord. The blood of Jesus Christ covered his sin. Jesus died on Calvary, so everyone or whosoever believes in Him can be forgiven.

Asking Forgiveness. Asking for forgiveness is one crucial thing in prayer. As Mark 11:25 says, "And when ye stand praying, forgive, if ye have fought against any: that your Father also which is in heaven may forgive you your trespasses." Packer (2001, p.26) states that prayer can change us and the church. To change someone, you need forgiveness. Forgiveness is a must for those who are praying to God.

Pray earnestly. Jesus prayed earnestly to sweat the blood when he was in the Garden of Gethsemane. Luke 22:44 noted, "And being in agony he prayed more earnestly: and his sweat was as great drops of blood falling to the ground. Jesus' earnestness was revealed not only on the last night in Gethsemane but also in the whole life of Jesus' ministry. For example, to display the earnestness of prayer, Luke 6:12 says, "And it came to pass in those days, that he went out into a mountain to pray, and continued all night in prayer to God." Jesus went to the mountains to pray, and all night, he prayed. It means He so heartily in prayer.

In addition, James's book says, "Elias was a man subject to passions like we are, and he prayed earnestly that it might not rain: and it rained not on the earth by the space of three years and six months. James 5:17. Praying without being earnest indicates that we are not serious about being devout to God.

Pray with Joy. When someone prays, it can bring joy to himself. According to Paul, an apostle, in the letter to Philippians, "Always in every prayer of mine for you all requesting with joy." Philippians 1:4. If prayer is without joy, it is ineffective. It does not bring benefits for those who over the prayer.

Incorrect Prayer. In the book of Matthew, Jesus contemplated prayer that is not in a proper way. He says, "And when thou pray, thou shalt not be as the hypocrites are for, they love to pray to stand in the synagogues and the corners of the streets, that they may be seen of men. I say unto you, they have their reward." Matthew 6:5. Prayer should be transparent. What is in the ward should be the same with outward appearance.

Another reason prayer is not an answer is that we can use it to satisfy our desires or lust. In the book, James states, "Ye ask, and receive not, because ye ask amiss, that ye may consume it upon your lusts. James 4:3 (KJV). God does not answer the prayer if we ask about that issue for self-desires.

In addition, God does not answer our prayers because of anger, not to forgive fellow others, even our enemy. James 4:2 states: "Ye lust, and have not: ye kill, and desire to have, and cannot obtain: ye fight and war, yet ye have not, because ye ask not." Those who are praying must be well-noticed.

Spiritually arrogant. Feeling yourself is more trustworthy than other people. As in the book of the Gospel, Luke says, "The Pharisee stood and prayed thus with himself, God, I thank thee, that I am not as other men are, extortioners, unjust, adulterers, or even as this publican." As this verse firmly says, God is not pleased with their prayers.

Attitude in Prayer. When we pray, it is better to kneel. It shows respect for God as a Creator of heaven and earth. Several verses in the New Testament mention the attitude in prayer. It can describe how vital kneeling is while praying. As Luke says, “he was withdrawn from them about a stone's cast, kneeled, and prayed. Also, Luke 22:41 mentions the same practice. The verse says, “And he was withdrawn from them about a stone's cast, and kneeled, and prayed,”

Also, in the book of Acts 20:36, Paul says, “And when he had thus spoken, he kneeled and prayed with them all. And when we had accomplished those days, we departed and went our way; they all brought us on our way, with wives and children, till we were out of the city: and we kneeled on the shore and prayed. Acts 21:5 (KJIV). “But Peter put them all forth and kneeled, and prayed; turning him to the body said, Tabitha, arise. She opened her eyes, and when she saw Peter, she sat up. Acts 9:40 (KJV). Mark noted in Jesus' example when He was in Gethsemane, “And he went forward a little, fell on the ground, and prayed that, if possible, the hour might pass from him. Mark 14:35 (KJV). These verses state the attitude in prayer to honor God as a Creator and Redeemer.

Moving Upward: Seeking the Intimacy, We Need

As His believers, we have to pray to God. Jesus gives the example of prayer. He instructs the audience: “After this manner therefore pray ye: Our Father which art in heaven, hallowed be thy name. Matthew 6:9 Also in the book of Luke, Jesus says, “And it came to pass in those days, that he went out into a mountain to pray, and continued all night in prayer to God. Luke 6:12. Peter also says, “Then answered Simon, and said, Pray ye to the LORD for me, that none of these things which ye have spoken come upon me.” Acts 8:24

Unceasing Prayer. Apostle Paul, in his letter to the Thessalonians, prays without ceasing. 1 Thessalonians 5:17; always keep in prayer. Jesus also gives the parable about always being in prayer. “And He spoke a parable unto them to this end, that men ought always to pray, and not to faint;” Luke 18:1. The book of Acts gives the same emphasis that “A devout man, and one that feared God with all his house, which gave many alms to the people, and prayed to God always.” Acts 10:2. We pray for you, that our God would count you worthy of this calling, and fulfill all the good pleasure of his goodness, and the work of faith with power: 2 Thessalonians 1:11 (KJV). Prayers must continually walk openly, honestly, and transparently before the Lord. (Stanley, 2011, p. 32). For example, Daniel prays three times a day. Also, Jesus always prays in Mark 1:35. Prayer needs consistency and always.

Place of prayer. In the bible verses, mention the places to say prayers. Here are several verses that mention locations for worship. At home, in the mountains, in the wilderness, in the temple, in a solitary place devoted to prayer. Spend time alone with Him in quietness and solitude; you will not hear it. Jesus Himself spent much time alone with God. Determine to keep that appointment with God. (Omartian, 2004. P. 11).

Jesus says in Sermon on the Mount, “But thou, when thou prayest, enter into thy closet, and when thou hast shut thy door, pray to thy Father which is in secret; and thy Father which seeth in secret shall reward thee openly. Matthew 6:6 (KJV). Paul defense before the Jews, “And it came to pass, that, when I was come again to Jerusalem, even while I prayed in the temple, I was in a trance; Acts 22:17. “On the morrow, as they went on their journey, and drew nigh unto the city, Peter went up upon the housetop to pray about the sixth hour: Acts 10:9.

Jesus Himself prays in the wilderness and mountains. Luke says, “And he withdrew himself into the wilderness and prayed. Luke 5:16 says, “And it came to pass in those days that he went out into a mountain to pray and continued all night in prayer to God.” Luke 6:12. Mark also points out that Jesus prays continually in a solitary place. “And in the morning, rising a great while before day, he went out, departed into a solitary place, and prayed there.” Mark 1:35.

This is the reason for solitude prayer (Watts, 1995, p. 46). The issue is about the place of worship everywhere. We can pray to God and make it a particular place for prayer.

Moving Outward: Seeking the Ministry, We Need

Pray for Others

When prayer is sent, not only inward or upward to God but also outward, we pray for our leader, the church's mission, and everything. Paul, in his prayer, "May be able to comprehend with all saints what is the breadth, and length, and depth, and height;" Ephesians 3:18. He prays for all believers: their faith and their salvation. Furthermore, Paul's apostle's prayer in a letter to Romans says, "And he that searcheth the hearts knoweth what is the mind of the Spirit, because he maketh intercession for the saints according to the will of God. Romans 8:27. Prince points out, "Praying for our government Prince (2002, p.47) because they represent God on earth.

Paul also prays for the believers so they can receive the Holy Spirit. "Who prayed for them when they had come down, that they might receive the Holy Ghost"? In Act 8:15, Jesus rebukes Simon Peter and prays for him. He says, "But I have prayed for thee, that thy faith fails not: and when thou art converted, strengthen thy brethren." Luke 22:32. Paul also prayed for the healing of his brothers, particularly Publius; he mentioned his name. Bible says, "And it came to pass, that the father of Publius lay sick of a fever and a bloody flux: to whom Paul entered in, and prayed, and laid his hands on him, and healed him." Acts 28:8. God is always ready to heal us spiritually (Watts, 1994, p. 84). The task for every believer is demanding the promise of God.

Prayer by itself has value as an objective act. In this sense, prayer fulfills the function of the Church. (Danielou, 1996, p.11). Prayer is increasing the evangelical spirit of humility (76). Danielou (1996, p.76). Prayer is moving outward to reach the world, to carry God's mission.

To conclude, as believers, we have to make plans or strategies for the disciplines of prayer. It is crucial for all Christians. When people pray with good planning, it could increase their spiritual discipline. We cannot do it with our strength but God's power in us. We have to come in prayer, asking Him daily and ceasing prayer, wherever, and we have to pray to God as our Creator.

Conclusion

Prayer is an opening of the mind and heart to God. Prayer, in the highest sense, is the communion of a believer with God in which the believer speaks to God, and God speaks to him. Prayer is a gift from God. Prayer can change the sinner. Prayer is communion with God. Prayer is a commitment to God. Prayer is a basic need for every religious person. Without prayer, Satan can defeat every believer. Prayer must be an unceasing prayer. It means gradual and consistency.

Everywhere, somebody could say a prayer to God when it is already set apart. The believer can gain strength and victory in Jesus through prayer. Jesus is an example of worship. His disciples and apostles can do God's work only in His prayer. Mrs. Ellen White gives so many citations about the importance of prayer. Finally, the breath of every Christian is prayer.

Bibliography

- Constable, Thomas L. (2003). *Talking to God: What the Bible Teaches about Prayer A Biblical Theology of Prayer*. Sonic Light Pub. www.soniclight.com.
- Danielou, Jean (1996). *Prayer: The Mission of the Church*. Michigan: Eerdmans Publishing.
- Goodrick & Kohlenberger (Biblical Studies (Divinity): Instructions for Word Study retrieved from <https://guides.library.duke.edu/c.php?g=289359&p=1929639>.
- Omartian, Stormie (2004). *The Power of Praying: Help for a Woman's Journey Through Life*. Oregon: Harvest House Publishers.
- Packer, David Lee. (2001). *The Priority of Prayer. Philippines: Church Strengthening Ministry*.
- Pew Research Center (2014). *Adults who pray daily, who are Seventh Day? Religious Landscape Study*. Washington, DC: PRC. Retrieved from <https://www.pewforum.org/>
- Prince, Derek. (2002). *Shaping History through Prayer and Fasting*. California: Whitaker House.
- Richert, Scott P. (2017). *What is prayer? Learn Religion*. Retrieved from <http://www.stdeclanspenshurst.org/>
- Stanley, Charles (2011). *Handle With Prayer*. Colorado Springs: David Cook.
- Thrasher, Bill (2003). *A Journey to Victorious Praying: Finding Discipline and Delight in Your Prayer Life*. Chicago: Moody Publishers
- Wallman, Nicholas (2011). *Research Methods the Basic*. New York: Routledge Taylor & Francis Group.
- White, Ellen (1947). *Christian Service*. Washington, DC: General Conference of Seventh Day Adventists.
- White, Ellen (1955). *The Acts of the Apostles*. Shanghai: David Lin.
- Watts, Dorothy Eaton, 1995. *Prayer Treasures: Discover the Riches of Prayer*. Idaho, Canada: Pacific Press Publishing Association.
- White, Ellen G¹. (2002). *A call to stand apart: challenging young adults to make an eternal difference--selections from the writings of Ellen G. White*. Hagerstown, MD: Review and Herald Publishing Association
- White, Ellen G². (2002). *A call to stand apart: challenging young adults to make an eternal difference--selections from the writings of Ellen G. White*. Hagerstown, MD: Review and Herald Publishing Association
- White, Ellen G. (1983). *The Publishing Ministry*. Washington, DC: Review and Herald Publishing Association
- White, Ellen G. (1870). *The Spirit of Prophecy*, vol.1. Washington DC: Ellen White Estate, Inc.
- White, Ellen.¹ (1892). *Steps to Christ*. New York: Fleming H. Revell Company.
- White, Ellen.² (1892). *Steps to Christ*. New York: Fleming H. Revell Company.