 The Difference between Personal and Corporate Prayers: **Praying Alone and Praying with Others**

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Have you ever considered the difference in how you pray when you are alone or in a group? There really is an entirely different flow and some different aspects. Both are important parts of a healthy prayer life but there are some cautions and pitfalls, too. Here is a summary of some of the points we identified in our SAM community on the matter of corporate prayer.

*Messiah, please continue to teach us and draw us into You, trusting Your Ruach/Spirit to teach us to pray as well as to number our days. Please cover these words and allow each one to understand whatever it is that You have for them; not from me.  I stand in Yeshua's Name against any kind of distortion or condemnation through these concerns. Show us how to let the Ruach pray through us and intercede for us even as our sighs are too deep for words. Please let us grow more conscious of You as we call to you and less focused on ourselves and our own ideas; or on self-consciousness. Prompt us with Your Words that are spirit and life to breathe into each concern and praise.  Abba, we direct our prayer to You alone; the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob; through the finished work of our King and Redeemer, Yeshua Messiah. Omayne!*

1. **Our attention and our prayers are directed to YHWH in Messiah's Name.**  If you find yourself "praying" details and information about a situation that you think people in the group should know, then you are "praying to the people" and not to Him. Our Abba already knows all the details! This is an easy trap to fall into and akin to gossip.  It is not honoring to Him to address Him and then really be talking to people in the group. This information can certainly be shared as we talk together and is not always necessary for us to have in order to agree in prayer for His will to be done in a situation. At the very least, perhaps we can be aware that we are dropping in and out of "prayer focus" as we give information.

 Far better to be seeking His Word and perhaps even finding Scripture that reflects the situation that we can pray back to Him about whatever the particular concern. As we hide His Word in our hearts, we are able to draw on that insight and language in knowing how to approach a holy, set apart Mighty One in ways that He has preserved for us to know.

We know, too, that simply praying “in Messiah’s Name” is not some kind of stamp of approval that means prayer will be answered in the way we direct! It is acknowledgement of our position in and through Him.

2.  **In a group setting, we are approaching Him in a unified way about our concerns.** This is also an especially difficult area to address! I do not intend to discourage people from making a personal request or statement of need. Yet, though there *are* personal needs, this is not always the best time to go into deep and extensive details about them. Those details are best kept for your personal prayer life or with an accountability prayer partner. Again, we need His leading and discernment as we pray and we ask for that!  If you find yourself giving details about your personal needs that you think people in the whole group need to know, then again, you may be falling into the "trap" of praying to the people, not to Him. Better then to take some time before or after prayer to bring all those involved up to date with the information you’d like them to know, rather than the indirect method of providing info to them while addressing our Father. This will help to maintain the “vertical” focus on group prayer rather than diluting it with subtle “horizontal” focus between people.

**3. A related concern here is that we can fall into too much emphasis on what the problem is rather than our confidence in Messiah over it.**  How do we pray? As a defeated person or as an overcomer in the authority of Messiah seated at the right Hand of the Father ABOVE powers, principalities, thrones and dominions? It was shocking to me the first time I found myself intervening when someone was moving into this kind of “defeated” prayer stance. It seemed unkind in a social way to dare intrude when someone was praying! Yet, when we pray together, we are speaking both with and for one another. To tolerate such prayer from one implies that it is the position of all. A healthy focus in prayer is as stated above, prayer in confidence in what our covenant keeping God will do in whatever the circumstances we find ourselves. When we pray as the writers of the psalms did, we may indeed express our view of the circumstances as clearly and deeply as we need to do! Yet, we do this because we are identifying the difference between what His Word promises for those who honor Him and what we perceive is happening. We do this not in a “whining” way but in a way that a child confident of the care and concern of a parent presents their troubles.

Another way to say it comes from "Prayers that Avail Much" by Word Ministries, Inc.

***Talk the answer, not the problem***. It is always a wise addition to incorporate Scripture as it applies to the topics of prayer.

4**.  We are bringing our concerns to our Father and it is not that there is only one "right" way to pray!**  Many still experience a personal barrier of fear of speaking out loud in prayer. In my Lutheran background, I had never learned how to address Him in spontaneous prayer.  The encouragement of others, learning to listen in my spirit to His Spirit, and incorporating His Word helped me overcome that barrier. I am sure it is similar for others.

 Yet, even here, there are boundaries and appropriate or inappropriate behaviors. It is not so much about "how" to pray as it is "to whom" we address our prayer. Perhaps one element of that apprehension about praying in a group is that self-consciousness that comes from too much awareness and concern about what others who hear us might think, rather than what we are speaking to our Elohim? Another pattern I frequently hear is that repetitive use of “Lord” throughout the prayer, beginning and ending many sentences with His title. This pattern has become evident throughout evangelical Christian practice and I hear it in Messianic circles as well. To my ears, it has a mechanical aspect that does not indicate genuine communication with our Abba but more an adherence to a form. This is still true, despite the insistence that this kind of prayer is spontaneous and flowing from the heart. I do not see how this adherence to a verbal form is really much different from adherence to only written forms which is often derided as “unspiritual” or compared to “the speaking of many words.” I hear the same phrases from very different people as well….”bless this food to our bodies”…”In Your Name, amen.” The difficulty with these two common phrases? We see in the Word that we are instructed to Praise Him Who provides the food, not the food itself so there is a faulty focus. Those who say, “in Your Name” often fail to include His Name anywhere within the prayer. May I challenge this practice here, too? If you are genuinely speaking to our Father in confidence and intimacy, would you be addressing Him only by His title repetitively? Do we talk that way to one another? I don’t think we do. This is perhaps a way that “religiosity” creeps into our prayer lives; we pray using language that is far different from our normal speech, as though we have to somehow “dress it up” or make it sound more important.

Another situation that has arisen on many occasions is the fine line between telling him what our experience is and what we understand as His covenant promise to do in our lives from telling him how to handle a situation in a way that we think it merits. The implication is that we somehow know better what will most benefit the person or situation involved. Truly, we know that our omnipotent, omniscient, omnipresent God knows the situation and the person far better than we do so it is not ours to direct Him how to manage it! As much as our hearts may wish for example, that a situation not be so difficult for someone near and dear to us, we cannot really know as He does what it might take to help bring the person into a right relationship with Him.

If we ask Him to handle something in our way, we may find ourselves praying against His will and sovereign plan. This is not something we’d want to do individually and certainly not something to do when praying corporately.

**5. There is value in BOTH written/liturgical prayer and spontaneous personal prayer.** We need to be prayerfully discerning about falling into a habitual prayer form rather than from the heart. We do not want to be among those who think we are heard just for our many words.

It is easy to fall into routine of praying for those who are ill; we find ourselves praying the same things; for the wisdom of the doctors, for strength...and so forth.  Still; are we praying from our positional authority?  I have called them "safe, lady prayers" meaning that I have seen that corporate prayer all too often falls into such patterns with no depth, strength or joy. No risk or personal exposure or any subject too deep that might be difficult for the group.

Do you feel the difference between a focus on "me," "us," and a wider focus? I think perhaps this is what was meant several years ago when the comment was made that prayer is different when our leaders are involved; a more uplifting focus, or something to that effect?  As I write this, it occurs to me that this may be a "maturity in prayer life" issue, too; as a child's prayers are usually very close and personal while growing to an adult, parent and later elder gives a wider focus to the needs observed. As adult, parent and elder we also have a wider understanding of how to pray in His will about worldwide situations that concern us all.

6.  **There is a "flow" to group prayer that is different than individual prayer**. Have you noticed and felt it?  It is not the same thing for a group of people to each be doing "their own thing" and speaking in turns, as it is for the group to be *praying together*, listening to one another's intercessions and flowing back and forth in them; building in intensity while all being "on the same page".  Sometimes there are jarring notes where it is evident that someone has been more thinking of what they are going to say or just bringing up something that has nothing to do with what has just been spoken. I see this as indication of whether we are in "*echad/unity*" with one another and with Him.  It becomes evident if people are accustomed to praying together; in the "flow" and direction moving back and forth between them, which can and does include silences.

It is awareness of "flow" that helps one know when to bring an open prayer time to an end. It is true for both individual and corporate prayer that there is a sense when a matter has been “prayed through.”

**7.  Express praise and adoration for Who He is, not just what He does for us.** A common problem for fallible human beings, who can tend to be very self-absorbed, we do need to remember Who He is. When we concentrate only on what He has done for us we are not being respectful and humble, and can easily fall into a pattern of “whining” or “demanding.” It will reveal whether we are more interested in the benefits we receive or in our love for Him and being “taken up” into His plans.

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