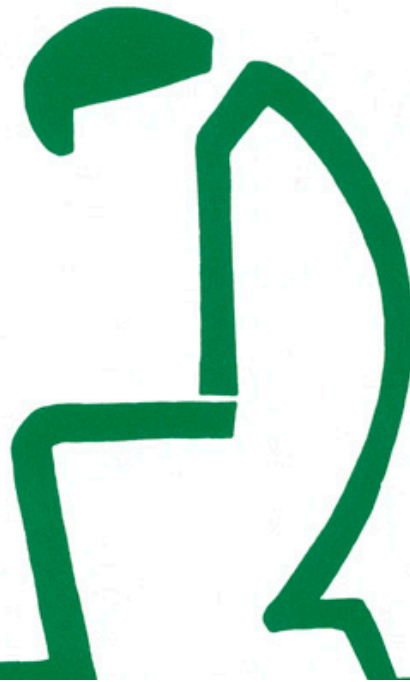


HOW DO WE PRAY?

**ISKANDER
JADEED**



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By Iskander Jadeed

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1. WHAT IS PRAYER?

QUESTION: What is Prayer?

How many obligatory prayer times must be observed daily and where?

A.A., Morocco

One of the great thinkers once said, "Prayer is the highest and deepest natural manifestation of the soul, and it will remain so as long as God wills". The natural disposition of man to pray is evidenced by widespread use among all kinds of people, no matter what their class, language or religion. In its diverse forms and patterns as well as subject matter, Prayer is practised at all times and in all places, even among the most primitive nations.

Some people might become frustrated because they see no answer or results to their prayers, and yet they do not forsake prayer, because deep in themselves lies an instinctive tendency to pray.

Perhaps inspired by this fact, Samuel Johnson, when asked about the evidence which supports prayer, said, "Prayer does not need proof outside itself because its proofs are within. It is in the nature and function of man, like breathing, eating and drinking, and he practises it as part of his very being".

Ancient history tells us that the Greek world, which was the cradle of civilisation and philosophy, was full of the spirit of prayer. Zerophar, the philosopher, used to begin every day of his journeys with a word of prayer. Pericles used to start every one of his speeches with prayer, and Homer, the poet, began his famous poem with a word of prayer. Plato said Before he begins any work in life, every intelligent person will seek help from God.

One of the proofs which illustrate that prayer is instinctive in man and not acquired is that no matter how much man grows and advances in civilisation and science, he never considers himself above the need to pray. On the contrary, he still finds that prayer is necessary and beneficial.

2. HOW TO PRAY?

Luke, the writer of the Gospel, tells us that Christ was praying alone and "When he finished (praying) one of his disciples said to him, 'Lord, teach us to pray'". Maybe the disciples realised there was a connection between the wonderful life of their Master and prayer, so they came to him asking him to teach them to pray. They could not have done better than go to the Master. Jesus was an experienced and successful teacher, and the successful teacher is the one who teaches from his experiences. He did not exhort them in what to do to reach their goal, but showed them by example how to do so.

So by this method, which was full of experience, he gave them a living pattern of prayer which contained concise sentences suitable for expression before the throne of Grace.

This pattern, simple in wording but deep in meaning is called "The Lord's Prayer" in reference to the Lord who taught it. It consists of the following:

1. Introduction

"Our Father in Heaven".

This exclamation places us in the position of the wonderful relationship which the Lord Jesus came to establish between us and the Father. It contains the secret of redemption which is that Christ saves us from the curse so that we become children of God. It contains also the secret of regeneration, which is that the Holy Spirit by the new birth gives us new life. There is in it also the secret of faith.

We understand from this introduction that prayer is the fellowship of personal love between the one who prays and the Lord God. The basis of its power and growth is the knowledge of the Fatherhood of God revealed by the Holy Spirit. So we must meditate long and profoundly upon these words "Our Father in Heaven", until the Holy Spirit fills our hearts with their spirit and truth. Then we speak to God in this way as from inside the curtain, in the sanctuary of secret power, where prayer can avail much.

2. Three requests concerning God

"Hallowed be your name, your kingdom come, your will be done".

The aim of the first request is that mankind should sanctify the name of the Father in their hearts, their thoughts, and with their tongues. The second request is a natural result of the first. When the name of God is sanctified in hearts, thoughts and by words, his authority is spread abroad. The third request means the complete surrender of man to God. The will of God carried out in heaven and Christ teaches us to pray that God's will be carried out on earth, as it is in heaven, in the spirit of worship and complete obedience. The will of God is the glory of heaven and its performance heaven's delight. When this will is carried out the Kingdom of God comes to the heart.

3. Three requests concerning man

The first deals with the needs of the body: "Give us today our daily bread". Its purpose is to give to the body that which is necessary for life, in order to make it possible for man to carry out his spiritual duties.

The second request concerns forgiveness: "Forgive us our debts". For even as bread is the first necessity of the body, so the first necessity of the soul is forgiveness. For truly, though we are God's children we are also sinners, and our right to come to the Father is based on the blood of Christ which obtained forgiveness for us.

The third request, "Lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from the evil one", deals with sin and its deceptions which draw us into temptation. This

request carries its own special obligation, because the one who utters these words must flee from temptation.

4. Conclusion

This contains the reason for the whole prayer. We offer it to God because He is King, that is, he has the power and complete authority over the world and he has power to answer these petitions. Glory is his and we ask these things for his glory.

After explaining the pattern for prayer, Christ exhorted people to bring their requests to God. He said "Ask and it will be given to you; seek and you will find; knock and the door will be opened to you" (Matthew 7:7). He followed the exhortation with the definite assurance that whoever asks will receive and he who seeks will find. It is as if the Lord wanted to impress upon our minds the fact that prayer has an unchangeable law; namely that whoever asks receives.

If one asks and does not receive it means something is hindering his prayers. This may be lack of assurance that God is near those who call upon him. It might be a state of doubt in the mind of the one who prays, since he who doubts cannot possibly receive anything from God. There may be the hindrance of sin which the one who prays has not confessed to God, for sin veils the face of God from man.

Prayer may fail when the one who prays asks for wrong things, as James said "When you ask, you do not receive, because you ask with wrong motives" (James 4:3). It also may fail because it is offered as religious duty and not out of love and longing for God.

3. HOW IS PRAYER PERFORMED?

In his conversation with the Samaritan woman the Lord Jesus said that the Heavenly Father seeks worshippers and it pleases him when we worship him, under the condition that our worship is in spirit and in truth. He said, "Yet a time is coming and has now come when the true worshipers will worship the Father in the Spirit and in truth, for they are the kind of worshipers the Father seeks. God is spirit, and his worshipers must worship in the Spirit and in truth" (John 4:23-24). Christ means here that there must be agreement between God and those who worship him. As the eye is fitted to receive light, and as the ear is made to receive sound, so the worshipper who wants to enjoy spiritual worship must be adjusted inwardly to receive the Holy Spirit. Then the Spirit

intercedes in him and his worship is in spirit and truth.

Perhaps Christ wanted to teach us that the requirements of the New Testament worshippers are quite different from those of the Jews in the Old Testament. Worship for the Jew was based on "the letter of the law". The worship of the Samaritan was subject to many delusions. Christian worship, however, is in the spirit, that is, in contrast to Jewish worship and Samaritan thinking. Actually the manner of worship which Christ laid down is logical and free from traditional rites which accompanied the Old Testament worship. In other words, true Christians worship God, not according to the rites of Mosaic Law, but according to spiritual precepts which place

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less importance on bodily practises. It is full of divine power and activity.

Surely, nothing encourages worship more than this verse, "For they are the kind of worshippers the

Father seeks". For if the spirit seeks to meet the God from whom it came, the God who sent the spirit seeks to meet it in worship.

4. HOW SHOULD PRAYER BE OFFERED?

Jesus, after he had given his disciples a living pattern for prayer, gave them another lesson to teach them that prayer should be offered out of a real thirst and desire for God. He illustrated this by means of a parable known as the parable of the "importune friend". He said, "Suppose you have a friend, and you go to him at midnight and say, 'Friend, lend me three loaves of bread; a friend of mine on a journey has come to me, and I have no food to offer him.' And suppose the one inside answers, 'Don't bother me. The door is already locked, and my children and I are in bed. I can't get up and give you anything.' I tell you, even though he will not get up and give you the bread because of friendship, yet because of your shameless audacity he will surely get up and give you as much as you need" (Luke 11:5-8).

In another parable he taught that men ought always to pray and not to faint. He said, "In a certain town there was a judge who neither feared God nor cared what people thought. And there was a widow in that town who kept coming to him with the plea, 'Grant me justice against my adversary.' "For some time he refused. But finally he said to himself, 'Even though I don't fear God or care what people think, yet because this widow keeps bothering me, I will see that she gets justice, so that she won't eventually come and attack me!'" And the Lord said, "Listen to what the unjust judge says. And will not God bring about justice for his chosen ones, who cry out to him day and night? Will he keep putting them off? I tell you, he will see that they get justice, and quickly" (Luke 18:1-8).

We learn from these two parables that there is a great difference between mere repetition of words in prayer and persistence. The prophet Isaiah said, "You who call on the Lord, give yourselves no rest, and give him no rest till he establishes Jerusalem and makes her the praise of the earth" (Isaiah 62:6-7). Jesus, in both parables, praises importunity and firmness of purpose, as if he wants to impress his word on our minds; "Everyone who asks receives; the one who seeks finds; and to the one who knocks, the door will be opened" (Matthew 7:8).

The parable of the "persistent friend" teaches us important lessons of the faith which works by love. The man went at midnight to ask bread for another. Pleading for another is a very admirable act because it stimulates in us the power of faith and urges to effective prayer. The prayer of intercession for others is the best mode of prayer for it invokes the name of the living Christ to do his work at the throne of God.

In the parable of the persistent widow, Christ teaches us that perseverance in prayer is among the things which God demands of us, and God cannot ignore the petitions of his own. If the persistence of the widow overcame the unwillingness of the judge, how much more effective will be the prayers of God's elect to their heavenly Father, whose mercy is great.

We learn also that the purpose of God might move slowly, but God has an appointed time in which to answer, according to his wisdom. He might delay his answers to prayer because he wishes to rouse in us expectancy and strengthen hope.

5. WHERE SHALL WE PRAY?

The Gospel teaches us that Christ's coming freed worship from traditions which restricted it to special places where people were obliged to go at appointed times. Christ said to the Samaritan woman, "Woman," Jesus replied, "believe me, a time is coming when you will worship the Father neither on this mountain nor in Jerusalem" (John 4:21). He told this woman, who had asked him where they should worship, that it was neither on Mount Nablus nor on the Mount Jerusalem. He desired to make her understand that

God fills all of space so that we can worship him wherever we are.

Christ stressed the importance of individual prayer in private. He said, "But when you pray, go into your room, close the door and pray to your Father, who is unseen. Then your Father, who sees what is done in secret, will reward you" (Matthew 6:6).

The purpose of this privacy is to provide the suppliant with a quiet place where he can be alone with his Heavenly Father. Surely when we meditate on the subject of prayer, in the light of the Sermon on the Mount, we see that the Lord Jesus pictured the private place of prayer as filled with the Light of God the Father. We note that he repeated the name "Father" three times, for he said "Pray to your Father", "Your Father will reward you" and "Your Father knows what you need".

A private place is the place of quiet and calm where the believer enjoys meeting his Heavenly Father. The light which shines there is a life-giving light and the inspiring atmosphere which fills it is the breath of the Holy Spirit, who pours God's love into our hearts. The Lord Jesus taught, "Go into your room, shut the door and pray", as if by this precaution he desired the suppliant to pray in secret and not be like the hypocrites who loved to stand and pray in the synagogues and at the street corners to be seen by men (Matthew 6:5). They desired to have the praise of men rather than of God, but the divine Teacher said, "Shut the door". Shut it to keep out the world and find seclusion with the Father who awaits your coming with longing. A philosopher has said, "When

you shut your door and are alone in your room, do not say to yourself, 'I am alone,' but remember that God is there".

The Lord's teaching "Enter into your room and shut the door" does not mean that being alone with God is only possible behind a shut door. It means, rather, that the one who prays should look for some secluded and quiet place in which to worship, possibly a field as Jacob did, or beneath a fig tree as Nathaniel, or on the roof top as Peter, or on the mountain as Jesus so often did.

"Pray to your Father, who is unseen", said Jesus, the Teacher of prayer. He wants us to understand that God is not seen by the physical eye, but by the eye of faith. His light shines in the heart of every worshipper who, detached from the world, surrenders to the leadership of the Spirit of Christ who brings him into the very presence of God.

The secret, the shut door, and detachment from things around us, are only a means to prepare a quiet and holy sanctuary where we can meditate deeply on the perfection of God and his love which takes the role of Fatherhood.

6. ARE THERE CONDITIONS FOR PRAYER TO BE ANSWERED?

The Lord Jesus said, "If you remain in me and my words remain in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be done for you" (John 15:7). The Apostle John said, "Dear friends, if our hearts do not condemn us, we have confidence before God and receive from him anything we ask, because we keep his commands and do what pleases him. And this is his command: to believe in the name of his Son, Jesus Christ, and to love one another as he commanded us" (I John 3:21-23).

In the world the power and influence of any mediator depend on his personality and his relationship with the person with whom he is mediating. So it is with God where the answer to prayer depends on the Person of Jesus Christ, who is the only Mediator and whose condition for mediating on our behalf is that we "remain in him and his word remains in us".

The Lord Jesus explained this "remain" in the parable of the vine, where he says, "I am the true vine, and my Father is the gardener. He cuts off every branch in me that bears no fruit, while every branch that does bear fruit he prunes so that it will be even more fruitful. You are already clean because of the word I have spoken to you. Remain in me, as I also remain in you. No branch can bear fruit by itself; it must remain in the vine. Neither can you bear fruit unless you remain in me. "I am the vine; you are the

branches. If you remain in me and I in you, you will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing" (John 15:1-5).

True believers are branches in Christ, who is the true vine, and for them it is possible to have prayer answered. Indeed, it is expected of the believer that he should remain in Christ, keep his commandments, and walk in perfect obedience in heart and life. Then he can pray in righteousness and the Lord will grant his supplications.

Some wonder why they fail to have this blessed life, the life of the branch remaining in the vine. They should consider the important words in the parable of the vine where the Lord Jesus says, "I AM the true vine and my Father is the gardener... you are the branches". This means that we have the Glorious Son in the fullness of his divinity, and the Father who watches over us as branches, observing the growth of each branch. If we neglect to remain connected to the vine, our divine growth will be hindered, thus limiting our fruitfulness. The Gardener will surely take his pruning knife to cleanse us.

The Bible gives us examples of the power of prayer in the lives of Abraham, Moses and Elijah and mentions the fruitfulness of their lives. When we consider their lives we find that before they obtained these

privileges and blessings they accepted the Lord's discipline with joy and obeyed his commands by separating from the world, which is Satan's realm.

So, my friend, if you desire to receive the privilege of being a man of prayer, submit to the divine Gardener

when he applies the pruning knife to your life. Do not be afraid of anything, for the "knife" is the Word of God, as Christ says, "You are already made clean by the word which I have spoken to you", and prays, "Sanctify them by the truth; Your word is truth".

7. WHAT IS THE SECRET OF PREVAILING PRAYER?

"Have faith in God", Jesus answered, "Truly I tell you, if anyone says to this mountain, 'Go, throw yourself into the sea,' and does not doubt in their heart but believes that what they say will happen, it will be done for them. Therefore I tell you, whatever you ask for in prayer, believe that you have received it, and it will be yours" (Mark 11:23-24). These wonderful words assure us that faith is the secret of prevailing prayer, which moves the heart of God. The Lord gives us two basic elements that are essential for prayer:

1. The desire of the heart

The prophet Jeremiah said, "You will seek me and find me when you seek me with all your heart" (Jeremiah 29:13). The heart's desire is the spirit of prayer and if the desire is weak the prayer is bound to be weak as well. A believer may have true desires for spiritual blessings, but still have worldly desires which take the first place. Such a person cannot expect power in his prayer, because he is not abiding by the command of the Lord which say, "But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well" (Matthew 6:33).

2. Faith

"Whatever you ask for in prayer, believe that you have received it". By faith we know God, by faith we receive the Lord Jesus, by faith we live the victorious life. Likewise by faith we have the life of prayer and the power of prayer. We need to learn afresh what faith is and begin to live by faith, and pray in faith.

"Have faith in God", said the Lord when he spoke about the faith which moves mountains, and which he gives to his disciples of every age. By this faith the early Christians did miraculous works, healed the sick, and cast out demons. These works are in fact a moving of mountains.

If we long for the life of prayer and intercession where there is joy and power and blessing, we must learn anew what faith is, for faith deals with God and takes him at his word.

Faith accepts an answer from God before actually seeing it. Faith sees the invisible. This seems strange, but it is at the heart of prayer. The blessing of heaven, God's answer to prayer, is spiritually understood before it is seen by the eye. Faith does this and the soul which seeks God and his answer will be given the assurance that the things it has asked for will be given, according to Christ's words, "Ask and it will be given, seek and you will find, knock and the door will be opened to you" (Matthew 7:7).

Christ said, "Whatever you ask for in prayer, believe that you have received it, and it will be yours" (Mark 11:24). This is a word of assurance to the one who prays, that the Heavenly Father hears the prayers of faith and gives the answer. Begin in faith, my friend, even if it is weak. Begin the new life of prayer and you will be assured that you have obtained grace in Christ. This grace will lead you, step by step, to be faithful in prayer. Expect the Holy Spirit to work within your heart. It is God who said, "Before they call I will answer; while they are still speaking I will hear" (Isaiah 65:24). He will do as he has said.

8. WHO GUIDES OUR PRAYER?

We read in Romans 8:26, "In the same way, the Spirit helps us in our weakness. We do not know what we ought to pray for, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us through wordless groans". And in Ephesians 6:18 we read, "And pray in the Spirit on all occasions with all kinds of prayers and requests. With this in mind, be alert and always keep on praying for all the Lord's people".

The Holy Spirit is the Spirit of prayer, the Spirit of grace and supplication which is poured into the believer's heart. The Bible says, "He intercedes for the saints according to the will of God in Spirit and in Truth". Prayer in its essence is the expression of the Holy Spirit in us. Wait on him, trust him and believe in him. Disappointment and failure in prayer come from lack of submission to the guidance of the Spirit.

Right and prevailing prayer depends on the extent to which we are filled with the Holy Spirit.

9. IN WHOSE NAME MUST PRAYER BE OFFERED?

Jesus said, "And I will do whatever you ask in my name, so that the Father may be glorified in the Son. You may ask me for anything in my name, and I will do it" (John 14:13-14). Jesus desires us to trust absolutely in the power of his name, to which all must bend the knee, and in Him all prayer is answered.

There is a truth we must understand, that prayer in the name of Christ does not mean uttering his name at the beginning and at the end of prayer. It means the believer should pray in the Spirit of Christ and through his merit and Person.

The words, "If you ask anything in my name I will do it", mean that if we pray to the Father, Christ will answer in his name and authority. Believers pray in Christ's name and he works in the Father's name.

In fact when a person believes, he thinks first of the worthiness of Christ and his intercession, which is the basis of our faith. However, when he grows in grace and knowledge of Christ, he enters into a deep union with him. The result is that he learns prayer in the name of Christ, which is prayer in the Spirit of Christ. In other words, union with Christ gives us fellowship in his nature and then there is in us the power of his prayer.

He said, "If you remain in me and my words remain in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be done for you" (John 15:7). This means the believer, in whose heart Christ lives, can enjoy all power inherent in Christ's name. This is not surprising for Jesus taught us that prayer, and especially prayer in his name, is praying in union with him.

10. WHO IS OUR ADVOCATE?

Christ taught us how to pray and through his divine words we know the meaning of prayer in his name. There only remains for us to know Christ in his power as an advocate and intercessor.

He ended his farewell message to his disciples with a prayer of intercession, with which he sealed all his past works (John 17). Then he interceded for his own, saying, "I pray for them... keep them in Thy Name... Sanctify them in the Truth".

No doubt this prayer is a sample of his intercession in heaven. Inspired by this truth the apostle said, "Therefore he is able to save completely[a] those who come to God through him, because he always lives to intercede for them" (Hebrews 7:25).

We understand from this verse that he still continues his work of salvation in heaven, as he did on earth, in continual fellowship with the Father, and in direct intercession before him. Every work of grace in Christ is always preceded by his intercession and every blessing descending on us from above carries the divine imprint which comes through the intercession and advocacy of Christ.

Without doubt the advocacy of Christ is the fruit of the atonement and its glory. When he gave himself to ransom humanity, he had one goal: the glory of God in their salvation. This goal is realised by his intercession, for God is glorified in the salvation of the most evil sinner whose life becomes a living praise to God's glory.

11. WHAT ARE THE CONDITIONS OF ACCEPTED PRAYER?

There are certain conditions for prayer to be accepted, or there would be no value in it. Most important of these conditions are the following:

1. Prayer must come from the heart. The Lord, who searches the hearts, is in no need for words or outward appearances. Prayer which is not from

heart does not please God, and he does not accept it.

2. It must be reverent and in keeping with his unbounded greatness and holiness, his knowledge and power. Since his divine will is the basic element in every true religion - even as it is among all those who know God and glorify

his holy name and worship him with the reverence of the angels in heaven - we must not come to him with words lacking in reverence.

3. It must be in humility, seeing we are unworthy because of our depravity and uncleanness in God's sight. We must therefore follow the example of Isaiah the prophet who said, "Woe to me! I am ruined! For I am a man of unclean lips" (Isaiah 6:5).
4. It must be in a spirit of complete surrender to God. Whoever surrenders himself to God, and whatever his request may be, let him say, "Lord, not my will but Thine". If a child knows he must commit his affairs to his earthly father, how much more must we submit our wills to our Heavenly Father, who alone knows what is good for us? It must be in faith, because only the prayer of faith is effective before God. A doubter cannot

receive anything from God. The suppliant has to believe that:

- God exists.
 - God is able to hear and answer prayer.
 - God loves to answer.
 - God will surely answer if our prayer is according to his will and for our own good.
5. The suppliant must seek the glory of God, and not his own. Nor must he seek personal ambitions resulting from greed.
 6. Prayer must be in the name of Christ, who is proclaimed by the Holy Scripture to be the one and only mediator and advocate of man.
 7. Prayer must be in accord with God's purpose.

12. HOW MANY OBLIGATORY PRAYER TIMES MUST BE OBSERVED DAILY AND WHERE?

In the Jewish Talmud it is forbidden for a person to pray more than three times a day, as God is weary of prayer every hour. But Christ, who came from God, taught, "That they should always pray and not give up" (Luke 18:1). Of course he did not mean that we are to pray for twenty-four hours a day on our knees, but that we should never tire of prayer.

As for the number of times for prayer, the Bible does not specify and limit it but we have many examples of men of prayer. Daniel, the prophet, used to pray in the morning, at noon and in the evening. David said, "Seven times a day I praise you for your righteous laws" (Psalm 119:164).

The Gospel tells us that the Lord Jesus used to rise very early in the morning and go to some lonely place to pray (Mark 1:35). When we consider the lives of men of prayer outside the Bible, we note that most found the early hours of the morning, that is before the day's work, the best time for prayer. No doubt the early morning is the best time for spiritual meditation. At that time our spirits are active and alert. It is best always to give the Lord the first fruits of our time.

A saint once said, "Morning is the door of the day. It is good to guard it by prayer". Another said, "Morning is one of the cords which binds our daily activities, so it is good to bind it well with prayer".

The religion of the Gospel does not limit prayer to special times, but leaves it to the desire of the heart. He whose heart is joined to the Lord, prays, and is not weary of doing so. His prayer may not be one of words to praise the Lord, but it can still be an activity which glorifies God. Prayer, as understood from God's word is a state rather than a form. It is the Spirit more than words, and a fellowship with God in love more than a religious duty.

It is true Christ gave his disciples a living pattern of prayer but it is not a mould into which prayer can be poured and become rigid. He intended it so be a starting point for prayer to germinate and spread. When he gave them this pattern he said, "Pray then, like this, which is to say, in the Spirit".

QUIZ

Dear Friend,

after reading this booklet, answer the following questions carefully. If 9 of your answers are right we will enroll you in our Bible school by correspondence.

1. Is prayer a natural tendency in a person or is it usually done for the purpose of gain?
2. What is prayer and what does it mean?
3. How should our inward attitude be before God when we pray?
4. How often must we pray?
5. Where should we pray?
6. What are the conditions for accepted prayer?
7. What is the secret of effective prayer?
8. What can the reason be for unanswered prayer?
9. What does it mean to pray in the name of Christ?
10. What is the service of Christ in heaven?
11. What must a worshipper believe when he prays?
12. How can we overcome laziness in our prayers?

Please don't forget to write your full name and address at the end of your test. DO NOT write other remarks on your test paper, but on a separate sheet. We are waiting for your answer.

Write your answers clearly and send them to our address:

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