

Reprinted from the Christian Science Monitor, September 19, 1998.  
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## Prayer and Presidency

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I've been praying about how to pray. The personal and political quagmire of the President of the United States seems to affect us all - even those living in other countries.

I tried ignoring it. Since I'm not politically inclined, that seemed charitable. But ignorance is impractical. Then I tried listening to informed, wise friends. (It's interesting how scriptural passages can be found to support various points of view.) Yet instead of finding the quandary resolving, I found it deepened.

That's when I began praying about how to pray. An unrelated incident came to mind that really helped. I had been in a meeting where I felt another person's opinions and actions were wrong and disruptive. I mentally vented frustration and annoyance, chastising them silently. Suddenly I had realized that I was mentally "malpracticing."

Malpractice is the opposite of prayer. One way to describe it is venting one's own human will. And the effect of malpractice is the opposite of the effect of prayer. Prayer blesses; malpractice curses. Prayer uplifts and heals; malpractice degrades and condemns. Even Jesus warned against mistaking malpractice for prayer, in a parable about a Pharisee and a publican (see Luke 18:9-14).

"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.... And the publican, standing afar off, would not lift up so much as his eyes unto heaven, but smote upon his breast, saying, God be merciful to me a sinner. I tell you, this man went down to his house justified rather than the other ...."

The Pharisee was malpracticing folks in general and the publican in particular! Jesus said this was not prayer and was not approved by our heavenly Father. The humble petition of the publican, for all its lack of eloquence, Jesus commended as effective prayer.

In humility, I asked God to forgive my malpractice of the person in the meeting. As I continued turning to God for guidance, the thought came: "What if they were to come to you after the meeting and asked you to pray for them? Could you do it?" Well at that moment the answer was no. I'd have to be thinking completely differently. I'd have to stop condemning them and begin acknowledging their spiritual nature. It seemed God was telling me not to wait to change my thought. I needed to repent right away, and start praying to recognize God's government of all His children.

When Jesus prayed for others, he almost always started by acknowledging God's presence and power. Even when he told them to have faith or not be afraid, he was assuring them of God's supreme government right then, on earth. As he said in his model for prayer called the Lord's Prayer: "Thy kingdom come. Thy will be done in earth, as it is in heaven" (Matt. 6:10). Affirming that God's will does govern on earth - rather than dictating what God's will is - is praying in the manner Jesus prayed.

This formed the starting point for my prayer about the office of the President. Instead of dictating what should be done and how to do it, my prayer began with a humble acknowledgment of God's government. I've been finding it helpful to pray with Romans 8, the entire chapter. This helps me stick to prayer and avoid malpracticing or simply voicing human opinions in the guise of prayer.

The Bible commands: "I exhort therefore, that, first of all, supplications, prayers, intercessions, and giving of thanks, be made for all men; for kings, and for all that are in authority; that we may lead a quiet and peaceable life in all godliness and honesty. For this is good and acceptable in the sight of God our Saviour; who will have all men to be saved, and to come unto the knowledge of the truth" (I Tim. 2:1-4).

Those in positions of authority need our prayer. God will inspire the content of your prayer as you commune directly with Him. And it will be a blessing.

Mortals seem very material; man

in the likeness of Spirit is spiritual. Holding the right idea of man in my mind, I can improve my own,

and other people's individuality, health, and morals ....

MARY BAKER EDDY