

27. Lyon, "Recollection of 'Old Nauvoovers': Memories from Oral History," 147–48.
28. Lyon, "Recollection," 145.
29. Lyon, "Recollection," 144–45.
30. Frank Y. Taylor, in Conference Report, October 1905, 30; see also Mosiah Lyman Hancock, *The Life Story of Mosiah Lyman Hancock* (n.p., n.d.), 3.; Leon R. Hartshorn, comp., *Classic Stories from the Lives of Our Prophets* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1981), 13.
31. Delila Gardner Hughes, *The Life of Archibald Gardner*, 2d ed. (Draper, Utah: Review and Preview Publishers, 1970), 154.
32. Burgess, "Recollections," 66.
33. History of Barbara Belinda Mills Haws, papers in possession of my father, Greg W. Haws.
34. David Smith, "Recollections," *Juvenile Instructor*, 15 August 1892, 471.
35. Jesse Smith, "Recollections," *Juvenile Instructor*, 1 January 1892, 24.
36. Louisa Y. Littlefield, "Recollections," *Juvenile Instructor*, 1 January 1892, 24.
37. Burgess, "Recollections," 66.
38. Thompson, "Recollections," 399.
39. "Joseph Smith, the Prophet," *Young Woman's Journal*, December 1905, 558.
40. Samuel Miles, "Recollections," *Juvenile Instructor*, 15 March 1892, 174.
41. Daniel McArthur, "Recollections," *Juvenile Instructor*, 15 February 1892, 128–29.
42. Frank Y. Taylor, in Conference Report, October 1905, 30.
43. Jane Snyder Richards, "Joseph Smith, the Prophet," *Young Woman's Journal*, December 1905, 550.
44. Clark, "The Charted Course," 8.

"Pray Always" (D&C 19:38)

S. Brent Farley

S. Brent Farley is manager of CES College Curriculum in Salt Lake City, Utah.

The admonition to "pray always" is found fourteen times in the standard works; ten are in the Doctrine and Covenants.^{lxiii}1 The scriptures indicate that praying always will result in the avoidance of entrapment in the temptations of Satan (see 3 Nephi 18:15, 18; D&C 20:33; 31:12). Other blessings accompany the admonition to pray always, such as receiving an abundance of the Lord's Spirit (see D&C 19:38), gaining a greater understanding of the Lord's revelations (see D&C 32:4), working out all things for the good of an individual (see D&C 90:24), and achieving the ability to conquer Satan and escape his servants (see D&C 10:5).

To determine what it means to pray always, let us consider what it does *not* mean. I recall a lesson in an elders quorum class during my early university days. The instructor related an experiment wherein he committed to "pray always" for one day. When he first awoke that morning, he began a prayer, and he continued that prayer steadily throughout the rest of the day until bedtime. His assessment of the experiment was interesting. He determined that at the end of the day, he had done neither a good job at his praying nor at his work. His conclusion: "Pray always" *does not* mean to pray continually.

What *does* it mean to pray always? I believe there are various meanings, the most obvious relating to time, place, and circumstance.

We all know that morning and evening prayers are recommended as a minimum, but is it appropriate to pray in the middle of the night when everyone else is sleeping? The answer is *yes*. We can pray *anytime*.

We all know that we can kneel at your bedside for prayer, but can we pray in a park? In our car? At an office? At school? While walking along a busy sidewalk? The answer is *yes*; we can pray *anywhere*.

What about moods? Is it appropriate to pray when we're happy? Sad? Troubled? Destitute? Rushed for time? Yes; we can and should pray *in any circumstance*. So, as a basic lesson, to "pray always" means that we can pray anytime, anywhere, and in any circumstance.

A humorous poem illustrates the concept:

The Prayer of Cyrus Brown^{lxiv}2

"The proper way for a man to pray,"
Said Deacon Lemuel Keyes,
"And the only proper attitude
Is down upon his knees."
"Nay, I should say the way to pray,"
Said Reverend Doctor Wise,
"Is standing straight with outstretched arms
And rapt and upturned eyes."
"Oh, no, no, no," said Elder Snow,
"Such posture is too proud.
A man should pray with eyes fast closed
And head contritely bowed."
"It seems to me his hands should be
Austerely clasped in front,
With both thumbs pointed toward the ground,"
Said Reverend Doctor Blunt.
"Las' year I fell in Hodgkin's well,
Head first," said Cyrus Brown,
"With both my heels a-stickin' up,
My head a-p'inting down;
"An' I made a prayer right then an' there—
Best prayer I ever said,
The prayingest prayer I ever prayed,
A-standing on my head."

What should we pray for as we strive to pray always? Alma's and Amulek's teachings on the hill Onidah give some representative samples of what we should pray for (see Alma 34:17–27; see also 33:3–11). Relating their teachings to our times, we might come up with something like the following regarding prayer:

1. "In your houses . . . over all your household" (Alma 34:21). We should pray in our homes for our family members. We can also pray about anything to do with our household including its safety, security, stability, the furnishings, the yard, and so forth as appropriate.
2. "In your closets" ("pour out your souls"; Alma 34:26). Our closets represent private places out of the view and knowledge of others. It might literally be a closet. It could also be a room at home or at work or even a private outdoor setting. The inference is that it will be a place where

we can pray unnoticed by others and in an *unrushed setting*—that is, where we will have time to pour out our souls without fear of interruption.

3. “In your fields, yea, over all your flocks” (Alma 34:20). Our fields are the places where we work or give service. Our flocks involve those who are in our charge. For a dentist, it is the patients. It is not that the dentist prays for more patients and more money. It is appropriate that the dentist prays for help that the work will be of high quality and beneficial to the patients and that they will feel better or do better because of the work. Businesspeople might pray that they will be honest in their dealings and that their customers will be treated fairly. Businesspeople might pray that their lives will be made better because of their services and products. Doctors will pray for help in diagnosing and treating the health problems of patients so the patients will feel better and be more productive. Teachers will pray for members of the class and request that teaching abilities will be enhanced for the benefit of the students.

The bishop will pray for the members of his ward that they may be faithful, endure their trials, and serve faithfully in their various responsibilities. The father and mother will pray for family members that they will love and serve one another and be successful in their various endeavors. These are samples of the flocks and the increase for which we should pray.

4. “Over the crops of your fields, that ye may prosper in them” (Alma 34:24). Farmers will literally pray for crops that they will be abundant. They will pray that they might cover expenses and gain a profit in their business to continue production for the benefit of others. The car mechanic will pray for the ability to properly diagnose problems and skillfully make the needed repairs in a fair amount of time. The resultant wage will help provide for the mechanic’s family members and do fun things with them. Though none should pray that they will become financially better off than others, it may be appropriate to pray for prosperity both temporally and spiritually not only for personal benefit but also for others being served.

5. “In the midst of thy congregations” (Alma 33:9). Those with positions of service in the Church should see that appropriate prayers are offered in classes, meetings, and services. They will pray secretly for the benefit of those they serve (their “congregations”). The Primary music leader will pray for the children that their singing will bring joy and faith. Sunday School teachers will pray that their classes will be receptive to the Spirit and the messages of the lesson given.

6. “In your wilderness” (Alma 34:26). Our wilderness areas are the places where we are less comfortable or lost or the times and places that we deal with uncertainty or trial. These are the times when those not inclined toward prayer will drop to their knees seeking help. For those who pray always, this is not a dramatic change.

Amulek concluded his discourse on prayer with a thought that helps us to understand a deeper meaning of “pray always.” It is the *attitude of prayer* that should be continuous. He counsels, “Yea, and when you do not cry unto the Lord, let your hearts be full, drawn out in prayer unto him continually for your welfare, and also for the welfare of those who are around you” (Alma 34:27). It is more than the acts of verbalizing to the Lord that qualify a person as praying always. It is a continuous *state of the heart*, or an attitude and feeling of prayer, that garnishes the lives of those who pray always. They are consistently and constantly humble, worthy, thankful, and able to communicate with their Father in Heaven under any circumstance.

To reach such a state, we are helped through an understanding of the basics of prayer. My first formal lesson about prayer came in seminary. The teacher humbly and sincerely taught us this lesson. He explained to us that we did not have to be concerned about the formalities of prayer to get started. We should just talk to our Heavenly Father. If we miss a step or do not know how to properly begin or end our prayer, we need not worry. We should just talk to God, and He will

hear. It is as if He were saying, “If you put the stamp of sincerity on your prayer, it will be properly delivered.” My teacher’s intent was to make us feel comfortable in approaching our Heavenly Father. He also explained that when we felt comfortable in praying, there were some refinements we could add to our prayers. But the most important element was just to talk to our Heavenly Father.

Elder Dallin H. Oaks explained, “Our earliest efforts will be heard with joy by our Heavenly Father, however they are phrased. They will be heard in the same way by loving members of our church.”^{lxv3}

As my seminary teacher explained, there are four basic components of a prayer that we could include as we seek to improve: (1) we address Heavenly Father by name, (2) we give thanks for our blessings, (3) we ask for what we need, and (4) we close in the name of Jesus Christ with an “amen” as the final seal.

There are a few set prayers in the Church. These include the baptismal prayer, the sacrament prayer, and, as I believed during my growing-up years, the blessing on the food. It was always the same, and with time it became so well known that an individual could quickly slur through the words and then get to the food. Everyone at the dinner table knew what had been said in the blessing, whether or not the words had been spoken with clarity.

My seminary teacher explained that it would be appropriate to expand the blessing on the food by praying for other things. I decided I would try it one evening. It was my turn to offer the blessing, so I started with the traditional wording. In the middle of the blessing I added some additional thoughts. When I concluded and looked up, everyone was quietly staring at me. Then Mom asked, “Why did you change the blessing?” I answered that my seminary teacher told us we could, and she said, “Oh.” All began to eat quietly. From then on, I went back to the traditional prayer on the food to avoid disrupting the family routine at mealtime.

Contrasted with the rote prayer on the food is one of the most memorable prayers I have witnessed. On one occasion, our family of four was traveling to Grandma’s house for a vacation. We were between towns in southern Utah when I noticed the gas needle pointing to empty. I had misfigured the distance compared with the gas reserve. It was early in the evening, and in those days the gas stations closed for the night. Closing time was near. I made a worried confession to my wife and expressed concern about being stranded overnight. One of our two little daughters in the back seat heard my comments, held out her hands with her palms up, and stated, “Why don’t we just pray?” (Her tone of voice indicated she thought that would solve the problem.) I asked if she would like to say the prayer, and she said yes. All in the car bowed their heads and closed their eyes (except me—I didn’t want to stop the momentum of the car, so I kept driving). She offered a simple prayer of faith that we would make it to a gas station and then sat back as if the problem were solved.

We did make it to the anticipated exit, but it was late. We drove into the small town only to find that the gas station in the business district was closed. We made a U-turn and drove in the opposite direction. Though we spotted a gas station at the top of a hill, its lights went out. Desperate, I determined I would drive up to the station and beg the owner to open again. Suddenly the lights of the station flicked back on. I gratefully pulled in, and the owner filled our car with gas.

I asked him why he was still open. He indicated that he had decided to stay a few minutes late to do some paperwork instead of leaving it for the next day. When he finished, he turned out the lights to go home. He looked down the street and saw our car making a U-turn. The thought came to him, “Maybe they need gas. I’ll turn the lights back on for them.” To this day I credit the

prayer of a two-year-old child for getting us to a gas station so we could complete our trip to Grandma's house. If only I could have the faith as an adult that she had as a child!

As we become acquainted with the reasoning of the world, we might ask, "Why should we pray?" President Marion G. Romney explained, "We should pray because prayer is indispensable to the accomplishment of the real purposes of our lives. We are children of God. As such, we have the potentiality to rise to his perfection. . . . No one shall ever reach such perfection unless he is guided to it by Him who is perfect. And guidance from Him is to be had only through prayer."^{lxvi}4

I believe that prayer and self-worth are connected. There seems to be a natural tendency to want to communicate with God. President Romney stated, "The purpose of prayer . . . is to attune oneself with the spirit or light which 'proceedeth forth from the presence of God to fill the immensity of space'" (D&C 88:12). In that light is to be found sure answers to all our needs because "prayer is the key which unlocks the door and lets Christ into our lives."^{lxvii}5

President Harold B. Lee drew a comparison between the value of physical exercise and prayer: "We must have daily exercise by our spirits by prayer."^{lxviii}6

Elder Bruce R. McConkie added: "*Prayer is essential to salvation*. No accountable person ever has or ever will gain celestial rest unless he learns to communicate with the Master of that realm."^{lxix}7

Someone might wonder why we pray when God already knows all there is to know (see 2 Nephi 9:20). Why ask when He already knows what we need? Truman G. Madsen explained: "First, the Lord's knowledge of our needs includes the knowledge of our need to express them. There are many sound and inspiring reasons for praying that are independent of the response from on high. Moroni counseled the Prophet, 'Forget not to pray that thy mind may become strong.' Prayer *is* mind-strengthening as well as soul-strengthening. It helps us reorder our priorities and bring out into the open what otherwise only stirs and stagnates within."^{lxx}8

Finally, we might ask: "What if a person does not feel worthy to pray? Is it not a sign of hypocrisy to pray in such circumstances?"

Truman G. Madsen counseled: "There may be things in our lives that make us more or less unworthy of certain privileges. But of one thing we are never unworthy: prayer. . . . Regardless of the condition of our soul, we can, we must, go to the Lord. He never closes the door against us; he pleads with us to call upon him when we need him the most. And often that is when we feel least worthy."^{lxxi}9

President Brigham Young explained: "If you are in darkness, and have not the spirit of prayer, still do not neglect your prayers . . . [but] get down on your knees, and when the cares of this world intrude themselves upon your devotions, let them wait while you remain on your knees and finish your prayers."^{lxxii}10

How do we appropriately approach our Father in Heaven in prayer? Experience fosters respect. When we begin our prayers, our voice should not be loud (God is not *hard of hearing*) nor authoritative, as if *we* are directing *Him*. We are not lecturing God in prayer.

We should replace "you" with "thee." Elder Oaks drew the parallel:

When we address our Heavenly Father, we should put aside our working words and clothe our prayers in special language of reverence and respect. In offering prayers in the English language, members of our church do not address our Heavenly Father with the same words we use in speaking to a fellow worker, to an employee or employer, or to a merchant in the marketplace. We use special words that have been sanctified by use in inspired communications, words that

have been recommended to us and modeled for us by those we sustain as prophets and inspired teachers. . . .

Literary excellence is not our desire. We do not advocate flowery and wordy prayers. . . . Our prayers should be simple, direct, and sincere.^{lxxiii} 11

President Kimball confirmed, “In all our prayers, it is well to use the pronouns *thee, thou, thy,* and *thine* instead of *you, your,* and *yours* inasmuch as they have come to indicate respect.”^{lxxiv} 12

There is a reverent posture appropriate for prayer. Elder McConkie explained: “Almost by instinct, therefore, we do such things as bow our heads and close our eyes; fold our arms, or kneel, or fall on our faces. We use the sacred language of prayer (that of the King James Version of the Bible—thee, thou, thine, not you and your). And we say Amen when others pray, thus making their utterances ours, their prayers our prayers.”^{lxxv} 13

What is the value of closing our eyes when we pray? It removes from our visual senses all the distractions around us. It helps to focus attention. As explained in a priesthood manual, “the vital element in personal prayer is that a man *strictly control his mind to think about only those things that he is sincerely praying about.*”^{lxxvi} 14 In addition, it enhances our closeness to God. Closed eyes and bowed heads during prayer can strengthen our faith and increase our humility. Leaving our eyes open in prayer is either a show of personal pride or a sign of a lack of understanding (unless, of course, we are praying while driving a car or walking somewhere).

When we pray, we should speak respectfully to God as if He were right there before us. In reality, we are never out of His presence. President Ezra Taft Benson asked: “When you pray—when you talk to your Heavenly Father—do you really talk out your problems with Him? Do you let Him know your feelings, your doubts, your insecurities, your joys, your deepest desires . . . ? Do you ponder what you really mean to say?”^{lxxvii} 15

The question might be asked, “Is there a guideline regarding the number of times per day that we should pray?” President Heber J. Grant gave what might be considered a minimum number when he stated: “I have little or no fear for the boy or the girl, the young man or the young woman, who honestly and conscientiously supplicate God twice a day for the guidance of His Spirit. I am sure that when temptation comes they will have the strength to overcome it by the inspiration that shall be given to them. Supplicating the Lord for the guidance of His Spirit places around us a safeguard, and if we earnestly and honestly seek the guidance of the Spirit of the Lord, I can assure you that we will receive it.”^{lxxviii} 16 Thus, morning and evening personal prayers are recommended as a minimum. Family prayers are also of great value.

I recall as a deacon a statement by a counselor in the bishopric about prayer. He said to us, “If you pray every day, you will not go too far astray.” I thought that sounded too easy. I have since learned and observed that when our prayers become less regular or stop altogether, it is a good indication that we have strayed from the Lord. When we pray regularly, we are inclined to strive harder to keep the commandments.

What should we do if we are too tired to offer a meaningful prayer before retiring to bed? It was a revelation to me to realize that I could say my evening prayers earlier than bedtime, when I was not tired. Praying earlier took the self-imposed guilt out of tired, short prayers just before bedtime.

How long should a prayer be? Enos prayed all day and into the night (see Enos 1:4). On the other hand, the model of the Lord’s prayer lasts less than thirty seconds (see Matthew 6:9–13). The need, the mood, and the circumstances will help determine the length of the prayer. Prayers in church meetings are not meant to be long. In personal prayers, time is not a factor as much as desire and intent.

I once gave an unusual assignment to an adult class after a lesson on prayer. It was an optional assignment, to be done only if desired and considered to be appropriate. Those interested were encouraged to time their usual evening prayers. Interested students were to set a timer or notice the clock and then pray their normal evening prayer. When finished, they were to notice the amount of time they prayed. If the prayer was considered shorter than expected, they were encouraged to try to double the amount of time the next evening.

The intent of the assignment was to encourage a more thoughtful prayer with more issues addressed than normal. The next class I challenged them to pray for the same amount of time, but only give thanks—no asking for anything. The intent here was to stretch the mind in realizing more of the blessings that normally are overlooked in our prayers.

I have given that assignment only once, but I think the intent had some meaningful possibilities for the improvement of personal prayers.

Elder Marvin J. Ashton suggests that “to be effective, prayers must not consist of words alone. Earnest prayers must have an appropriate blend of earnest feeling and spirit.”^{lxxxix} 17 This is perhaps the most important element of prayer. Short prayers with great feeling can be more effective than longer prayers that are lacking such depth. If we could learn to pray when things are going well with the same fervency fostered by trials, we would be a lot closer to the concept of “pray always.”

Another important element in prayer is understanding that prayer is not a one-way street. Our petitions ascend to God, and His response descends to us. Elder Oaks offered the opinion, “I am sure that our Heavenly Father, who loves all of his children, hears and answers all prayers, however phrased. If he is offended in connection with prayers, it is likely to be by their absence, not their phraseology.”^{lxxx} 18

This brings us to the question of how prayers are answered. President Kimball asked: “Is prayer only one-way communication? No! . . . At the end of our prayers, we need to do some intense listening—even for several minutes. We have prayed for counsel and help. Now we must ‘be still, and know that [he is] God’ (Psalm 46:10). . . . Sometimes ideas flood our mind as we listen after our prayers. Sometimes feelings press upon us. A spirit of calmness assures us that all will be well. But always, if we have been honest and earnest, we will experience a good feeling—a feeling of warmth for our Father in Heaven and a sense of his love for us.”^{lxxxii} 19

“When you listen for God’s answers to your prayers, you don’t listen for audible sounds, necessarily, but for feelings, impressions, or sudden bursts of thought. These are the manifestations of the Spirit of God, by which Spirit, men communicate with God and God communicates with men.”^{lxxxiii} 20

Elder H. Burke Peterson encouraged: “Listening is an essential part of praying. Answers from the Lord come quietly—ever so quietly. In fact, few hear his answers audibly with their ears. We must be listening so carefully or we will never recognize them. Most answers from the Lord are felt in our heart as a warm comfortable expression, or they may come as thoughts to our mind. They come to those who are prepared and who are patient.”^{lxxxiiii} 21

My favorite scripture on answer to prayer is found in Doctrine and Covenants 8:2–3: “Yea, behold, I will tell you in your mind and in your heart, by the Holy Ghost, which shall come upon you and which shall dwell in your heart.”

With so many thoughts and distractions flying around us, it takes concentration to gain a focus for listening for answers to our prayers. President Boyd K. Packer commented:

Answers to prayers come in a quiet way. The scriptures describe that voice of inspiration as a still, small voice.

If you really try, you can learn to respond to that voice.

In the early days of our marriage, our children came at close intervals. As parents of little children will know, in those years it is quite a novelty for them to get an uninterrupted night of sleep.

If you have a new baby, and another youngster cutting teeth, or one with a fever, you can be up and down a hundred times a night. (That, of course, is an exaggeration. It's probably only twenty or thirty times.)

We finally divided our children into "his" and "hers" for night tending. She would get up for the new baby, and I would tend the one cutting teeth.

One day we came to realize that each would hear only the one to which we were assigned, and would sleep very soundly through the cries of the other.

We have commented on this over the years, convinced that you can train yourself to hear what you want to hear, to see and feel what you desire, but it takes some conditioning.

There are so many of us who go through life and seldom, if ever, hear that voice of inspiration, because [of] "the natural man."^{lxxxiv}22

The concept of praying always suggests that if we are in a constant attitude favorable to prayer, we are in a state such that communications from Deity may come at any time.

In addition to thoughts and feelings, prayers may be answered by an event, series of events, or the presentation of an opportunity that leads to the desired blessing. For example, a sister in our ward prayed for an increased spiritual understanding. She was called to be the Relief Society president, and her service resulted in the spiritual growth she had prayed for. She joked about being more careful in the future what to request in prayer.

Some answers come through others. President Thomas S. Monson commented, "Of all the blessings I have had in my life, one of the sweetest is that feeling the Lord provides when I know that He has answered the prayer of another person through me. As we love the Lord, as we love our neighbor, we discover that our Heavenly Father will answer the prayers of others through our ministry."^{lxxxv}23

On some occasions, dreams are another way prayers are answered. If others' lives are like mine, it is a rare occurrence, but it can happen. Church Educational System teachers pray often that they will teach what the students need and that they will be receptive to the Spirit and able to change the course of the lesson if prompted to do so. As a seminary teacher, I once had the experience of dreaming I was teaching my seminary class a lesson about relating with their parents. In the dream, I gave my students an in-class assignment to write a letter to their parents and mention only *good things*, avoiding anything negative. I encouraged them to express appreciation and love to their parents. Students responded and took time in class (in the dream) to write the letters. At the end of class, I encouraged them to hand or mail the letters to their parents. If any were embarrassed to do so, they could place the letter where their parents would find it without the student being present.

In the dream, everything went well. I awakened, and the good feeling I had enjoyed in the dream lingered in reality. On the chance that it was inspired, I set my well-planned lesson aside and duplicated the *dreamed* lesson in my first period. It went exactly as it had in my dream, and I felt the same good feeling I had felt in the dream. I repeated the lesson in each class throughout the day, with the same positive results. I marveled as I went home and concluded that the dream really was inspired.

A week or so later, a girl came up after class and said, “Brother Farley, do you remember that great lesson you gave on relating with our parents?” I answered that I did, knowing I was not the source. She continued to tell me a story that went somewhat like this: “When I got home, my parents were gone. Since they didn’t return by bedtime, I placed my letter on their bedroom dresser where they would be sure to see it and then retired for the evening. I found out later that they were having difficulties with their marriage, and that evening they had gone out to discuss their troubles. They returned home having made the decision to separate for a while to think things over individually. When they went in their bedroom, they found the letter and read it. They told me that when they finished reading the letter, they said, ‘If she feels that good about us, maybe we should try harder to stay together.’” Concluding her story, she beamed, “Brother Farley, that lesson saved my parents’ marriage!” Before I could respond, she turned and hurried off to her next class. I was humbled by the realization that the Lord had a purpose for that lesson beyond my imagination.

There are times that an answer to prayer may not be distinguished at all. Perhaps the Lord knows we will make the right decision and determines to let us gain the experience and resultant growth on our own. In those cases where time demands a decision and we cannot determine an answer from the Lord, we should make the best possible choice according to our own capabilities with a prayer in our heart that we will not go astray.

In seeking answers to our prayers, we have a responsibility that devolves upon us. Elder Franklin D. Richards counseled, “Never forget that whatever our prayers are, we can supplement our heavenly request with some positive action on our part.”^{lxxxvi}24 “‘Please, Lord, help me to help myself.’ I am convinced that this prayer for increased personal powers—spiritual strength, greater inspiration, and greater confidence—is one that God always answers. We can learn to solve our problems with God’s help, making Him our partner.”^{lxxxvii}25

What is the time element in receiving answers to prayers? Some are answered quickly. Isaiah speaks of a time when answers will come even before the prayer can be uttered (see Isaiah 65:24). Such occurred with me once when traveling to a location to give a talk. I was driving through a canyon when suddenly the car engine sputtered and quit. I coasted off the road, raised the hood, and failed to determine the problem. I looked at my watch, thought about my coming appointment, and determined that I must pray for help. Before I could begin my prayer, a car pulled off the road, and the driver offered assistance. I explained my plight, and he said he was going to the very city where I was scheduled to speak. “Hop in.” I arrived on time, gave my talk, and accepted a ride from a member of the audience who was traveling back that evening to my hometown to visit relatives. The next day I sent a tow truck for the car and marveled that I started to work out before I had time to offer a prayer for help.

Many answers build over time. President Packer counseled: “Put difficult questions in the back of your minds and go about your lives. Ponder and pray quietly and persistently about them. The answer may not come as a lightning bolt. It may come as a little inspiration here and a little there, ‘line upon line, precept upon precept’ (D&C 98:12). Some answers will come from reading the scriptures, some from hearing speakers. And, occasionally, when it is important, some will come by very direct and powerful inspiration. The promptings will be clear and unmistakable.”^{lxxxviii}26

What effect do our sins have on receiving answers to prayers? Elder Peterson explained:

As we go through life, we oftentimes build a rock wall between ourselves and heaven. This wall is built by our unrepented sins. For example, in our wall there may be stones of many different sizes and shapes. There could be stones because

we have been unkind to someone. Criticism of leaders or teachers may add another stone. A lack of forgiveness may add another. Vulgar thoughts and actions may add some rather large stones in this wall. Dishonesty will add another; selfishness another; and so on.

In spite of the wall we build in front of us, when we cry out to the Lord, he still sends his messages from heaven; but instead of being able to penetrate our hearts, they hit the wall that we have built up and bounce off. His messages don't penetrate, so we say, "He doesn't hear," or "He doesn't answer." Sometimes this wall is very formidable, and the great challenge of life is to destroy it, or, if you please, to cleanse ourselves, purifying this inner vessel so that we can be in tune with the Spirit.^{lxxxix}27

Even so, God hears and respects the sincere prayer of a sinner.

Just who answers our prayers? Elder McConkie taught: "When we pray to the Father, the answer comes from the Son, because 'there is . . . one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus.' (1 Timothy 2:5.) Joseph Smith, for instance, asked the Father, in the name of the Son, for answers to questions, and the answering voice was not that of the Father but of the Son, because Christ is our advocate, our intercessor, the God (under the Father) who rules and regulates this earth."^{xc}28

An examination and review of the basic elements of prayer lead to the following basic conclusions:

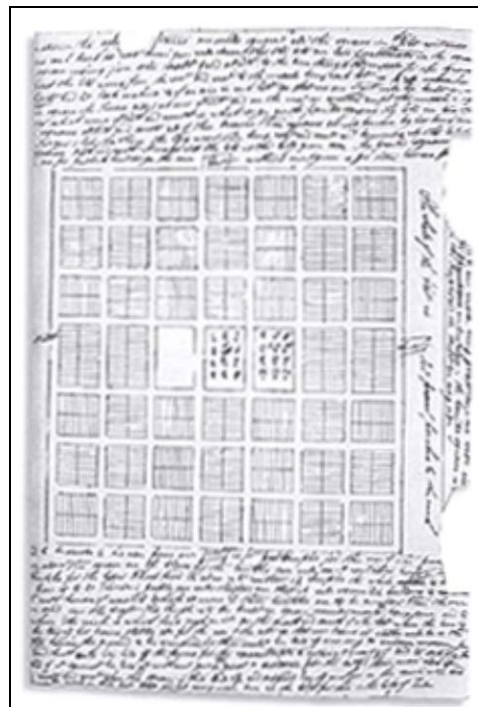
1. Prayer is always appropriate.
2. Prayer is a means of gaining strength.
3. Prayer is a conduit for communication between Heavenly Father and His children.
4. Prayer helps us become more Christlike.

I believe that this fourth point, the development of a Christlike character, is the ultimate goal for the commission to pray always. Elder Ruderger Clawson said, "The spirit of prayer must be in our hearts unceasingly."^{xc}29 When we reach that point, we will be well on the road to fulfilling the Lord's desire, "I would that ye should be perfect even as I, or your Father who is in heaven is perfect" (3 Nephi 12:48).

Notes

1. See Luke 21:36; 2 Nephi 32:9; 3 Nephi 18:15, 18; D&C 10:5; 19:38; 20:33; 31:12; 32:4; 61:39; 88:126; 90:24; 93:49–50.
2. Sam Walter Foss, "The Prayer of Cyrus Brown," in *Stars to Steer By*, ed. Louis Untermeyer (New York: Harcourt, Brace and Company, 1941), 301–2.
3. Dallin H. Oaks, in Conference Report, April 1993, 20; or *Ensign*, May 1993, 17.
4. Marion G. Romney, "Prayer Is the Key," *Ensign*, January 1976, 2.
5. Marion G. Romney, in Conference Report, April 1978, 75; or *Ensign*, May 1978, 50.
6. Harold B. Lee, *Teachings of Presidents of the Church: Harold B. Lee* (Salt Lake City: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 2000), 176.
7. Bruce R. McConkie, "Why the Lord Ordained Prayer," *Ensign*, January 1976, 9.
8. Truman G. Madsen, "Prayer and the Prophet Joseph," *Ensign*, January 1976, 25.
9. Madsen, "Prayer and the Prophet Joseph," 23.
10. Brigham Young, in *Journal of Discourses* (London: Latter-day Saints' Book Depot, 1854–86), 12:102.
11. Oaks, *Ensign*, May 1993, 15–17.

12. Spencer W. Kimball, *Faith Precedes the Miracle* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1973), 201.
13. McConkie, *Ensign*, January 1976, 12.
14. “How to Communicate with God,” *When Thou Art Converted, Strengthen Thy Brethren*, 1974–75 Priesthood Study Guide, 118.
15. Ezra Taft Benson, in Conference Report, October 1977, 56; or *Ensign*, November 1977, 32.
16. Heber J. Grant, *Gospel Standards*, comp. G. Homer Durham (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1941), 26.
17. Marvin J. Ashton, “Personal Prayers,” in *Prayer* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1977), 77.
18. Oaks, *Ensign*, May 1993, 17.
19. Spencer W. Kimball, “Pray Always,” *Ensign*, October 1981, 5.
20. “How to Communicate with God,” 115.
21. H. Burke Peterson, “Adversity and Prayer,” *Ensign*, January 1974, 19.
22. Boyd K. Packer, in Conference Report, October 1979, 28; or “Prayers and Answers,” *Ensign*, November 1979, 19–20.
23. Thomas S. Monson, “How Do We Show Our Love?” *Ensign*, January 1998, 6.
24. Franklin D. Richards, “The Importance of Prayer,” *Ensign*, July 1972, 66.
25. Richards, “The Importance of Prayer,” 66.
26. Packer, *Ensign*, November 1979, 21.
27. H. Burke Peterson, “Prayer—Try Again,” *Ensign*, June 1981, 73.
28. McConkie, *Ensign*, January 1976, 10.
29. Rudger Clawson, in Conference Report, April 1904, 42.



Plat Map of Zion, 1833