

Public Prayer Guidelines

When you are asked to pray in public you are not just praying to God, but you are praying in front of and on behalf of all those who are gathered with you. In that situation it is important that you remember to speak and act in such a manner as to show respect not only to God, but to all those who are listening. Here are some suggestions to help you.

- 1. Remember that you are speaking to the great and mighty God, the Creator of all the universe.** While He most definitely is our Savior, and Friend, yet He is also the Judge of all the earth. Hebrews 4:16 encourages us to come "boldly" in the King James Version, but the Hebrew really means to come with assurance, or confidence. There is no place for boldness as we currently define this word today. We should be humble, and respectful, but confident in the loving and receptive character of God.
- 2. Unless you have spent a lot of time praying in public in the past, and even if you have, it may be best for you to come prepared with your prayer written out beforehand.** Some people think this is not appropriate because for some reason they think prayer should always be spontaneous to be genuine. However, this is not the case, and persisting in this idea can be very discouraging to people who find verbal expression difficult. The book of Psalms is a book of 150 prayers, all written down of course. The rest of the prayers are preserved for us in written form. There is no less sincerity in reading a prayer you have written compared with speaking one impromptu. Both can be sincere, and both can be insincere depending on the dedication and mindset of the person praying. Until you become more comfortable praying out loud and in public writing down your prayers will be a big help to you by alleviating stress over what you will say and how you will say it. You can always add a few notes to your prayer if something comes up at the last minute.
- 3. Do not make this a time for personal prayer.** It is not appropriate, in most cases, to mention your personal problems, challenges, sins, or frustrations when you are praying in public. That type of prayer is to be kept private between you and God. Public prayer is for bringing to the Lord those things that are shared by all who are gathered together, and for specific things that have been requested for the whole group to pray about. But even there discretion is essential. For example, let's suppose you are asked to pray for the main prayer during the church service. Just before you go onto the platform someone hands you a note and asks you to pray for two men who are members of the congregation and who are having difficulty getting along with each other. The best response is to say, "I can't pray for these men by name, and I can't give specifics about the situation because that would reveal who these gentlemen are, and I have not been asked by them to pray about this. However, I can ask God to help all of us live in peace with our fellowman." The request was invasive and therefore disrespectful. The reply suggested a way to cover the need to live in unity and harmony without compromising the dignity and privacy of the individuals. Jesus gave us this example in John 8 with the way He handled the situation of the woman caught in adultery and the Pharisees.
- 4. Be brief.** I think the best counsel about this comes from Ellen White. She put it this way: "Long, prosy talks and prayers are out of place anywhere, and especially in the social meeting. They weary the angels as well as the people who listen to them. Our prayers should be short, and right to the point. Let the Spirit of God pervade the hearts of the worshipers, and it will sweep away all formality and dullness. One or two minutes is long enough for any ordinary prayer. . . . Our prayers in public should be short, and express only the real wants of the soul, asking in simplicity and simple trusting faith for the very things we need. Prayer from the humble, contrite heart is the vital breath of the soul hungering for righteousness." Ellen White, Prayer, pg. 201-202.
- 5. Remember that biblical prayer is always comprised of three elements:** asking (Matt. 7:7),

believing (Mark 11:24), and claiming, or praising (John 11:41), or the ABC's of prayer. Always begin and end your prayers with praise (Psalm 100:4 & Matt. 6:9-13). Praise God for who He is, and thank Him for what He has done. After you have praised the Lord it is time to present your petitions. Mention the need, and then claim a biblical promise that applies to that need. After that, thank God that you have received. This is true biblical prayer. "True faith lays hold of and claims the promised blessing before it is realized and felt. We must send up our petitions in faith within the second veil and let our faith take hold of the promised blessing and claim it as ours. We are then to believe that we receive the blessing, because our faith has hold of it, and according to the Word it is ours. "What things soever ye desire, when ye pray, believe that ye receive them, and ye shall have them." [Mark 11:24](#). Here is faith, naked faith, to believe that we receive the blessing, even before we realize it. When the promised blessing is realized and enjoyed, faith is swallowed up." Ellen White, Early Writings, pg. 72.

6. **Ask the congregation to kneel for prayer during the church service.** When it is Sabbath morning and you are at church then we must kneel before the Lord. This is the command of God, and it is also a sign of submission and respect. However it is not always possible, or even appropriate to kneel for prayer every time. In the book *Amazing Grace*, p. 91, we are told: "Both in public and in private worship, it is our duty to bow upon our knees before God when we offer our petitions to Him." However, the footnote at the bottom of the page clarifies: "There are instances where Ellen White stood at the desk while offering prayers of consecration during church services." The Bible says, "Come, let us worship and bow down. Let us kneel before the Lord our maker, for he is our God. We are the people he watches over, the flock under his care." (Psalms 95:6-7 NLTse) But, at other occasions, and for other purposes than for the main prayer during the weekly worship service, standing for prayer may be appropriate. The Bible also says, "And whenever you stand praying, if you have anything against anyone, forgive him, that your Father in heaven may also forgive you your trespasses." (Mark 11:25 NKJV). So, there are times for kneeling and times when other postures are also appropriate.
7. **Be sincere.** It has often been said that prayer is the opening of the heart to God as to a friend. When you pray it is more important that you be sincere than grammatically correct. Of course, speak as well as you can, but above all speak with the heart. Take your time and speak clearly. Pause if you need to. Silence is not a bad thing. When you have gathered your thoughts speak again. When you conclude your prayer it is considered biblical and culturally acceptable to say, "In Jesus' name, Amen." To pray in Jesus' name is much more than mentioning His name at the end of a prayer. It means to pray in harmony with His word, and in harmony with His character which is described in such places as Galatians 5:22-23, which are the fruit of the Spirit. Love, of course, is the defining characteristic of God (1 John 4:7-8).

As you pray more frequently in public, you will become more accustomed to having an audience listening in. Soon, you will become at comfortable praying in public and you will find that it is a large blessing to people to have someone such as yourself lead out in prayer.

May God bless you as you continue to serve the Lord and intercede with Him on behalf of His earthly children.

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