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FORMULA OF PRAYER

James B. Cox*

The purpose of this paper is to provide a model whereby a counselor can help a client receive revelation, improve his perception of what to expect, and a basic process that will work in this spiritual quest. The model can be used as a check list to see if the client has made adequate preparations, if the client understands what to do and what to expect. The counselor can take the client through the formula of prayer until the problem is found. That is, the formula always works, so if a client is not receiving revelation, the formula will help us locate the client's problem and at that point the counselor can assist him in his quest. As the model is understood by the client, he can use it to provide self direction and thereby draw closer to his Father in Heaven.

Laman and Lemuel were having problems understanding Lehi's dream. They were confused about the natural branches of the olive tree and also concerning the Gentiles (1 Nephi 15:7).

... [Nephi] said unto them, Have ye inquired of the Lord? And they said unto me: We have not; for the Lord maketh no such thing known unto us. (1 Nephi 15:8-9)

Many people have the same problem as Laman and Lemuel did. That is, they pray but do not receive answers.

Some time ago a report came to the attention of a stake president about a father who was upset because the stake president wouldn't advance his son to the Melchizedek Priesthood. The home teacher and the stake president made an appointment to visit his home. Upon arriving they felt a lack of the Spirit of God in the home, and they could tell that the wife was bitter about the problem.

The home teacher asked if all could kneel and have prayer. Upon receiving permission from the father, everyone knelt and the father called on the home teacher to offer the prayer. After the prayer was offered, they reviewed the problem with the father and asked him what could be done to help him and his son.

It seems that the boy became upset because all his friends were advanced in the priesthood and he wasn't. It was found in the interview with the son that he had a special problem that must be overcome before he could be recommended for advancement. The stake

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president outlined what the son was to do and suggested that whenever he felt he was ready, to contact the bishop. It was recommended that he become active in young adults, do some missionary work, read the scriptures and study the Institute study guide on the "Life and Teachings of Jesus."

However, rather than do what was suggested, he rebelled because of his embarrassment with his friends. He didn't tell his father what the conversation had been with the stake president, he only said that he didn't care anymore, and he felt the stake president didn't care either.

The home teacher asked the father if he had inquired of the Lord about this problem. He said he had inquired for over six weeks. "What did Heavenly Father tell you to do?" he asked. "That is the problem," said the father. "He wouldn't tell me a thing." "Did you follow the formula of prayer?" The father answered, "I don't believe I know the formula of prayer."

The home teacher told him that if he would follow the formula that Jesus taught, he would always receive direction from above. Also, he would receive a burning within his bosom or a stupor of thought. By this he might know whether or not the path he was on was right in the sight of Heavenly Father. They then inquired if he was willing to try the formula right now. He said he was willing.

"First, Brother Jones, we know that we talk to Heavenly Father by prayer. How does He reveal answers to our prayers? Let us turn to D&C 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.

Now behold, this is the spirit of revelation. . .

"You see, as we turn our minds and hearts to God, we will have thoughts placed in our minds. How will we know if these thoughts are from God? We will feel in our hearts that these thoughts are good.

"How do I know if these thoughts are mine or from Heaven?" inquired Brother Jones. "Good question, let us review a few principles in answer to your question.

"Principle number one: God will reveal His answers to you in your mind and heart. That is why He says, 'For as he thinketh in his heart, so is he' (Proverbs 23:7). He didn't say as he thinketh in his mind so is he. We tend to do those things we feel good about.

"Remember, Satan places thoughts in the mind and confirms in the stomach. Whenever you have had

negative thoughts about yourself, you will feel those pains in the stomach. You feel rotten about yourself, worthless.

"If we learn to do it God's way, we can see our faults clearly and still feel good about ourselves.

"Principle number two: We are told by the prophets that one can know good from evil with a perfect knowledge (Moroni 7:15-18). That is, we do not need to doubt these thoughts and feelings, for if they are good they come from Him. Moroni says that we can know good and evil as well as we can tell daylight from darkness.

"Principle number three: We cannot receive answers to our prayers if we allow doubt to remain in our minds. In order to receive revelation we must condition our minds. We must believe that we shall receive revelation from Heaven when requested.

Or what man is there of you, whom if his son asks bread, will he give him a stone? Or if he asks a fish, will he give him a serpent? If ye then, being evil, know how to give good gifts unto your children, how much more shall your Father which is in heaven give good things to them that ask Him? (Matthew 7:9-11)

If any of you lack wisdom, let him ask of God, that giveth to all men liberally, and upbraideth not, and it shall be given him. But let him ask in faith, nothing wavering. . . (James 1:5-6)

. . . if ye do not cast it out by your unbelief, that ye will resist the Spirit of the Lord. . . (Alma 32:28)

Remember that without faith you can do nothing; therefore ask in faith . . . (D&C 8:10)

"Joseph Smith taught us in his lectures on faith that 'doubt and faith do not exist in the same person at the same time. . .' (Page 59).

"We must exercise our faith that God is directing us and by our faith He can and will lead us.

"Principle number four: As you use the formula of prayer you will come to know that the revelations are from Him and that which you receive is right. It always works.

If any man will do his will, he shall know of the doctrine, whether it be of God, or whether I speak of myself. (John 7:17) (Italics added.)

"Now Brother Jones, let us read the formula in Matthew 7:7 and understand it before we apply it.

Ask and it shall be given you; seek and ye shall find; knock and it shall be opened unto you.

"The formula is:

A
S not ASK.
K

"Many people get down on their knees and ask Heavenly Father to bless their son or forgive them of their sins or help them to become a better husband or wife. He is not pleased with that type of prayer.

Behold, you have not understood; you have supposed that I would give it unto you, when you took no thought save it was to ask me. (D&C 9:7)

"The formula of prayer, as taught by the Savior, gives us the way to receive revelation.

"Ask, 'For everyone that asketh receiveth.'

As you petition Heavenly Father, make it clear what you desire. Remember, He will not do for you those things you can do for yourself. You are on this earth to gain experience. You need Heavenly Father's help and support as you overcome earthly weaknesses. For example, you may desire to become a better person. Ask God to give you ideas on what you can do to become a better person and He will help you and give you strength.

"Seek, for 'he that seeketh findeth.'

Find what? As you seek you will find the way to accomplish your prayer. You may have asked God to help you become a better husband. Now allow Him to place the ways in your mind to accomplish this worthwhile prayer. He may place in your mind the following suggestions:

1. Take wife out once a week
2. Say thank-you for each meal
3. Help her when she is tired
4. Relieve her of the children from time to time
5. Pay attention when she has canned all day
6. Express your real feelings (negative or positive)

"Knock, 'And to him that knocketh it shall be opened.'

What will be opened? The way to accomplish your prayer if you will knock.

What does it mean to knock? It means to do. That is, you must carry out and do the ideas that Heavenly Father suggested in the seeking phase. You will say thank you after each meal. As you do, you will come to know that what you are doing is not only good, but it is fulfilling your prayer. The burning inside is good and confirms you actions.

"Now Brother Jones, do you understand the formula of prayer?"

Brother Jones told the home teacher he did and was ready to use it on behalf of his son.

"Let us kneel and you ask God for what you desire," requested the home teacher. Everyone then knelt on the floor and the father prayed.

Our Father which is in Heaven, we kneel before thee this hour with complete dependence upon thy spirit. We are grateful for thee and feel thy love and concern for us. May we be prepared to receive revelation from thee now concerning my son. Thou knowest his desires and difficulty in preparing for the Melchizedek Priesthood. We desire to help him. Please reveal to us what we can do to assist him in this preparation. These things we pray for in the name of Jesus Christ Amen.

Everyone got off of their knees and sat back down. The home teacher requested the father to take a blank sheet of paper and at the top write the problem down as he understood it. Next he asked the father to open his mind and heart to Heavenly Father and in that framework write down whatever came into his mind. The following was written down:

I want to help my son get the desire to prepare himself for the Melchizedek Priesthood.

1. Ask the stake president what I can do to help.
2. Ask the bishop what I can do to help.
3. Do more things with my son and get closer to his feelings.
4. Pray more and feel after the Holy Ghost.

The stake president and home teacher were thrilled with the answers the father had received. These were essentially the same steps that they would have suggested to the father had he asked.

The father asked the stake president what he could do, and the stake president reviewed what had taken place in the interview except any confidential matters. The father knew for the first time the suggested areas the son was asked to work on by the stake president.

The father met with the bishop and asked the question on his sheet. The bishop reviewed the problem as he saw it, and the suggestions he had given the young man previously. Among these recommendations was for the young man to request a blessing from his father.

The father and mother got their lives back in order and met with their son. They talked openly about all that had transpired. The blessing was given. The father and son spent much time together reading the scriptures and doing some special things together. The son would still become moody and close up at various times, but the father followed the formula of prayer again to help his son. I do believe the father grew as much as the son over that three-month period.

By the way, the father did receive a burning within his bosom as he carried out the prayer. There were times when the father didn't feel anything particularly, spiritually that is. But he refused to allow doubt to hinder his progress. He pressed forward, for he knew what he was doing was right regardless of the consequences of the moment. Sometimes his son didn't want help, but the father continued to show love and concern. The father knew that what he was doing was right. Three months later the young man received the Melchizedek Priesthood and later went on a mission.

FORMULA OF PRAYER-QUESTIONS & ANSWERS

I hate to bother Heavenly Father about all my problems. Should I?

Many people feel unworthy of spiritual help and therefore, do not want to bother Heavenly Father, especially with their "little" problems. These thoughts are contrary to what the Savior taught.

Look unto me in every thought; doubt not, fear not. (D&C 6:36)

For if ye would hearken unto the Spirit which teacheth a man to pray ye would know that ye must pray; for the evil spirit teacheth not a man to pray, but teacheth him that he must not pray. But behold, I say unto you that ye must pray always, and not faint; that ye must not perform any thing unto the Lord save in the first place ye shall pray unto the Father in the name of Christ. . . (2 Nephi 32:8-9)

Yea, and cry unto God for all thy support; yea, let all thy doings be unto the Lord, and whithersoever thou goest let it be in the Lord; yea, let thy thoughts be directed unto the Lord; yea, let the affections of thy heart be placed upon the Lord forever.

Counsel with the Lord in all thy doings, and he will direct thee for good. . . (Alma 37:36-37)

But aren't we supposed to do things on our own?

The intent of this question is that if one is going to become dependent upon heaven before one makes a move, then one will never become like God. For we know that man is equipped to make decisions on his own and thus to act. (Helaman 14:30). So why run back to Heavenly Father every time one needs to make a decision?

Let it be understood that each of us has been placed upon this earth to walk alone through many experiences. Some of these experiences include financial, marriage, health, children, wars, loss of loved ones, accidents, business success and failures, and many, many other experiences. Heavenly Father will not go through these experiences for us. But Heavenly Father is available to guide us and strengthen us as we walk through these growth experiences. Why wouldn't we stay close to Him for guidance and advice? It is free and always correct. He is the best partner we can have to be successful. In fact, the saying goes, "You can live without God, but you cannot succeed without Him." The book of Helaman records:

Behold, they do not desire that the Lord their God who hath created them, should rule and reign over them; notwithstanding his great goodness and his mercy towards them, they do set at naught his counsels, and they will not that he should be their guide. (Helaman 12:6)

As we shall discuss later, many times you will ask for help and receive none for the path you are on is right and Heavenly Father chooses to let you walk alone. You must sweat, endure, plan, challenge, and exercise the faith to overcome, but the heavens can give you assistance and directions. Why wouldn't you ask for help, so if Heavenly Father felt his help was needed, he would intervene in your behalf? There is no sense in our enduring experiences that are not needed for us to become like God. By checking with Heaven in all things, we become prepared to receive revelation when it is for our good. Bruce R. McConkie (1975) has said:

And so we're faced with two propositions. One is that we ought to be guided by the spirit of inspiration, the spirit of revelation. The other is that we're under a direction to use our agency, to determine what we ought to do on our own; and we need to strike a fine balance between these two, if we're going to pursue a course that will give us joy, satisfaction, and peace in this life and lead to eternal reward in our Father's Kingdom.

The solution is to always keep the channels open to heaven for guidance. For one will not receive revelation until he exercises his free agency and chooses what he will do to solve a problem (D&C 9:7-9). Then one knows that Heavenly Father is always there to help when help is necessary. As one uses the formula of prayer, one knows that the solution, or the enduring, or the overcoming, will be achieved.

Elder Cannon testifies (*Journal of Discourses*):

We of all people should be happy and joyful. When the clouds seem the darkest and most threatening, and as though the storm is ready to burst upon us with all its fury, we should be calm, serene, and undisturbed, for if we have the faith we profess to have, we know that God is in the storm, in the cloud, or in the threatened danger, and that He will not let it come upon us only as far as it is necessary for our good and for our salvation. . .

In conclusion, remember that you are on your own. But there is help available so you never have to fear that you will not succeed in this life and return to your Heavenly Father.

Does Heavenly Father always hear my prayers?

Yes. (Alma 18:32, Matt. 6:8)

What preparations do I need to make in order to receive revelation?

Have a state of mind known as faith.

- a. nothing wavering - James 1:5-7
- b. remove doubts, fears - D&C 6:36, Alma 32:8
2. One must love God and all men, including oneself (2 Nephi 31:20, Matthew 5:22-24).
3. Qualify for the companionship of the Holy Ghost (D&C 8:2-3).
4. President Marion G. Romney (1966) suggests:
If you would obtain and keep the guidance of the spirit, you can do it by following this simple three-part program.

First: Pray diligently. Learn to talk to the Lord. Call upon his name in great faith and confidence.

Second: Live righteously. Repent of your sins by confessing them and forsaking them. Then conform to the teachings of the gospel and give service in the church.

Third: Study. Study the gospel as you might sciences and other scholastic courses.

If you will do these things, you will get the guidance of the Holy Spirit, and you will go through this world successfully regardless of what the people of this world do.

I would use the above items as a check list to see if the client is prepared to receive revelation. If he is not prepared, help him to get prepared and experience the joy of revelation.

Why do I feel confused many times when I pray?

There could be several reasons, like not living worthy of the companionship of the Holy Ghost. Or, you haven't decided what to do for yourself. Or, you really do not want to hear the answer that you know is right. Or, you have not made preparations spiritually to receive an answer. Or, you are trying to receive answers when you do not like yourself or someone else.

I have felt good about my prayers, but it still didn't come out as I expected.

Some members make the mistake of assuming that if they get a good feeling in the asking phase that Heavenly Father has approved the whole package. My wife and I prayed about going into a business venture and we felt good feelings about it. To me, this is the signal to continue in the formula of prayer in order to evaluate the price. Once we got all the facts, we could have decided that the venture was good and honorable, but we might not have wanted to pay the price. However, we did decide to pay the price and asked for a confirmation on our decision, and received that confirmation. Five years later we were broke and in heavy debt. Does this mean that Heavenly Father failed us and that our experience was of little value? Not so. I have found that in order to achieve a level of financial independence, business failures can be the very training one needs to succeed.

Is there a difference between confirmation, stupor of thought and no answer?

First of all, each of us has the light of Christ and can tell the difference between good and evil with a perfect knowledge. (Moroni 7:15)

Secondly, assuming we are using the light that we have been given, then we will receive the answer to our prayer in the mind and in the heart. (D&C 8:2,3). We will feel a warm sensation within our heart. (D&C 9:8). Or if we are looking for more light and knowledge or ideas to answer our prayers in the seeking phase, we will experience a flow of intelligence within our minds which will be just what we need to answer our prayer, according to the teachings of the Prophet Joseph Smith. We will experience three signs from this type of revelation. It will enlighten our understanding, enlarge our soul, and be very delicious to us. That is, we will want more of this type of help. (Alma 32:28)

Next, what happens if you receive no response?

First, check to see if your request is appropriate. (James 4:3)

Second, is my faith sufficient to expect an answer and abide by the answer when received? Do I feel good about myself, Heavenly Father and others?

Thirdly, have I followed the formula of prayer. Made a decision, sought for help, then done all I could do?

Finally, if time is short and I have done my best to receive revelation, then Heavenly Father is allowing me to act on my own.

Elder Scott (1978) of the First Quorum of Seventy, has suggested three possible results to prayer, when one is in tune.

... permit me to share something with you that I feel is sacred. I have found by personal experience and have had confirmed so repeatedly that I know it is true that when we follow the laws of prayer given us of God one of three things happens. First, we will feel that peace, that comfort, that assurance, that certainty, that our decision is right; or second, we will feel that uncomfortableness, that stupor of thought, and we know that what we have chosen is wrong; or third, - and this is the different one - we feel nothing. What do you do when you do not feel an answer? I have come to thank the Lord with all my heart when that occurs, for it is an evidence of his trust . . .

President Joseph F. Smith (1952) said:

Therefore, the presentation or 'gift' of the Holy Ghost simply confers upon a man the right to receive at any time, when he is worthy of it and desires it, the power and light of truth of the Holy Ghost, although he may often be left to his own spirit and judgment.

Remember, sometimes Heavenly Father doesn't care which activity we engage in for they both are good and will bring us growth and experience. Therefore, it is by design that he allows us to decide and act. (D&C 58:26-28). We can choose several places to live and several different occupations to make a living - all of which are acceptable to Him, but I still check with Him to see if He does care about my decision, or if I need to add more ways to determine the total price that I will have to pay in order to accomplish my prayer. If I have more time to get an answer, then I suggest we follow President Romney's (1966) plan.

I know from my own experience that prayer is the pathway by which we may come into contact with God and receive direction from Him. There have been times in my life when it was very difficult for me to get through to the Lord and when I've had to fast and pray for periods each week over long months of time. But it can be done, and you can pray to the Father and receive help in your problems. One need not make serious mistakes in life. If you can learn to walk by the Spirit, you can make every decision in your life correctly.

How do I know if the Holy Ghost is speaking to me or not?

Do what you feel impressed to do and you will know. (John 8:32) (D&C 84:46). To walk by faith is not to have a perfect knowledge that what you feel impressed to do is for sure. (Alma 32:21). One must walk to the edge of the light (that which you can see clearly) and then into the darkness (that which you have little or no experience) and act with faith.

If you will write down in your journal what you felt impressed to do and do it, and then several months later go back and review your journal, you will find out that, with some modifications, your prayer was answered.

Those who ask "How do I know," usually are not doing that which already has been given to them. They choose to doubt the revelation because they cannot see for sure that it will work. They are not willing to walk by faith and trust Heavenly Father.

Personally, I find the confirmation of the Spirit more in the knocking phase than the asking or requesting phase. The sad part is that many people never get out of the asking phase, therefore, seldom experience the burning within their bosom.

It has been my experience that one must keep his mind and heart open unto Heavenly Father during all three phases of prayer. As one carries out the 'to do' list in the knocking phase, and as one has the attitude of prayer, more revelation comes and the list is expanded. This means turning off the radio and asking Heavenly Father for additional help or insight in carrying out each item given in the seeking phase.

Do we always feel the influence of the Holy Ghost if we are worthy?

No. Read Brother Hugh B. Brown's statement as reported by Truman Madsen(1964), then a mission president in New England.

"It was at the Mission home. We sat down in the midst of a tight schedule with President Hugh B. Brown. Several missionaries luxuriating in his spirit, grasped at the moment to ask questions.

"Can you have the spirit of God all the time?" asked one. "And how do you cope with the dark hours?" He looked away for a moment reflecting.

"My life experience proves to me one thing. The Lord knows. And the Lord cares. When you are blessed with the communion or the 'sunshine' of the spirit, you bask in it, drink it in, to prepare for the hours when you are left to yourself; to pull you through the darkness. I have never been able to synchronize my watch with the Lord's timetable. We are his instruments and His will does not always correspond with ours. But we must go on. Or we are lost and have no promise. Even the Savior cried out on the cross, 'Why has Thou forsaken me?'"

It has been my experience that the Holy Ghost withdraws itself from time to time in order for me to become like God. That is, I need to have the experience of walking according to my own light and knowledge. I can pray, read the scriptures, love myself and others, and then choose what I will do to succeed. I am responsible. Heavenly Father wants me to succeed, but I must go through the experience.

Even the Savior had to go through the suffering for the sins of the world without the Spirit in the final

hour. He had to walk alone. But, He knew that the course he was on was correct. He still requested, if the cup could pass, let it, but "thy will be done:"

Conclusion

The above outline provides a model for one to receive answers to prayers. In cases of difficulties with prayer one can review the formula to find out which part is not being carried out properly, and then instructions can be given to a client on how to move forward. A counselor can outline the formula of prayer to a client and then help the client right there in the office to kneel and experience revelation.

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