ITEMS ON PRAYER

1. Keep in mind the purpose of the meeting and of the prayer. There is a specific purpose for an opening prayer, a different purpose for a closing prayer.
2. Do not begin until there is attention and a reverent attitude.
3. Speak clearly and distinctly.
4. Be brief, avoiding any vain repetitions. It is unnecessary to offer long and tedious prayers.
5. Use the name of Deity carefully. Address the Father by name but once—at the beginning; and then close in the name of Jesus Christ.

• Prayers should be offered under the direction and inspiration of the Almighty.
• Avoid using trite statements.
• Use intimate pronouns “thee” and “thou” in praying.
• Use “may” not “might.” May is indicative and positive. Might is subjunctive and expresses the doubtful, the improbable.

Addressing the Father

First, the way we address our Father in Heaven in prayer. I listen to so many people offering prayers, and I wonder who they are addressing. The salutation is so complicated [lots of adjectives?] I find it difficult to comprehend the being to which the prayer is being directed. I am reminded of the occasion when the first Congress was trying to determine how to address the president of our country. The suggestion was given that he could be called “His Highness, President of the United States and Protector of the Liberties of the Same.” Washington’s request was just to call him Mr. President. (Willis M. and Ruth West, The American People, Boston: Allyn & Bacon, 1948.)

Truman Madsen, Ensign, January 1976, p. 20.
Did the Prophet address the Lord as “Father,” or did he have a special manner or title of address? Most frequently he prayed “Our Father,” or simply “Father” or “O Lord,” and was not inclined to embellish that title with adjectives and flowery phrases.

King James Version, Mt 6:9  “Our Father which art in heaven...”
JosephSmith Translation, Mt 6:10  “Our Father who art in heaven...”
Book of Mormon, 3 Ne 13:9  “Our Father who art in heaven...”

Conclusion: Use “who,” not “which.”

Length of Public Prayers

Francis M. Lyman, President of the Council of the Twelve, Improvement Era, 50:214, 245; quoted in Mormon Doctrine, 2nd ed., p. 583.
It is not necessary to offer very long and tedious prayers, either at opening or closing. It is not only not pleasing to the Lord for us to use excess of words, but also it is not pleasing to the Latter-day Saints.

Two minutes will open any kind of meeting, and a half minute will close it.

We ought to take into account the occasion, and let the prayers be suited exactly to it. Sometimes our habits may control us more strongly than the Spirit of the Lord, so we should consider these things.

Offer short prayers, and avoid vain repetitions, particularly the repetition of the name of Deity, and the name of the Savior. It is quite common to open a prayer in the name of Jesus Christ, to close it in his name, and possibly use his name a few times through the prayer. If we approach the Father, and offer our petitions to him, and then close in the name of Jesus Christ, it is sufficient. There is no prayer so great and important that it is necessary to use more than once the name of the Son of God and of the Father.

Bruce R. McConkie, Mormon Doctrine, 2nd ed, p. 582.
Certain proprieties attend the offering of all prayers. Public prayers, in particular, should be short and ordinarily should contain no expressions except those which pertain to the needs and circumstances surrounding the particular meeting then involved. They are not sermons or occasions to disclose the oratorical or linguistic abilities of the one acting as mouth.

Unfortunately the all too common practice in the Church in conference sessions, sacrament meetings, and the like, is for those saying the prayers to take entirely too much time and pray about too many matters not directly involved in the particular meeting.
Pray in Restaurants?


The practice of the Church in our day is to have family prayer twice daily, plus our daily personal prayers, plus a blessing on our food at mealtimes (except in those public or other circumstances where it would be ostentatious or inappropriate to do so), plus proper prayers in our meetings.


Other times, as at a dinner with members of a cattlemen’s association, no prayer was offered -- but I knew Dad had blessed his food, though his eyes remained open and there was no bowing of his head, lest he bring offense and be regarded as the Pharisees....

I know of people who, for a few seconds, simply survey their food, admiring its beauty and aroma, and sense gratefully the fact that they have it, and in an instant express silently within their own minds a prayer of “Thank Thee, Heavenly Father, for this food.” It seems to me that this is also a sensitive solution to the problem.

We should recognize that prayer is a sacred expression, normally reserved for private places (our churches, homes, etc.) where we can control the spirit of the occasion. Prayer is also a very personal expression, and it would seem that private prayers should be just that -- private. But I also know that, on occasion, a more obvious indication of a personal prayer, perhaps by a bowed head for an instant, has opened up a gospel conversation with a companion.

Other Items on Prayer

When praying for a congregation or class, use the pronoun “we,” not “I.” For example, “We say this prayer in the name of...” Not “I say this prayer in the name of...”


CORRECT RELIGIOUS TERMINOLOGY. The Presiding Bishopric expresses concern about some incorrect uses of the language that seem to be gaining widespread momentum among the youth of the Church.

Many young people are using the term *patriarchical* when they refer to their patriarchal blessing.

Also, when people give a talk to a congregation, many have fallen into the habit of concluding their talks with the phrase, “I say these things in the name of thy son, Jesus Christ. Amen.” Although this is proper for closing a prayer addressed to our Father in heaven, it is not a proper way to close our remarks to the congregation. We should, however, close our talks in the name of Jesus Christ. Amen.

It has also been noted that as they pray, many people are incorrectly using the terms *you* and *your* instead of *thee*, *thou*, and *thy*.


Another modern prophet, President Spencer W. Kimball, has written: “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.”

In the general priesthood meeting, October 6, 1951, President Stephen L Richards remarked: “We have discovered...a lack of proper teaching with reference to prayer. I know that I myself have been shocked as I have heard missionaries called on for prayer who seem to have had no experience or training whatever in the use of the language of prayer.

“...I think, my brethren, that in the quorums and in the classes, you would do well, as in the homes, also, to teach the language of prayer -- ‘thee’ and ‘thou’ rather than ‘you.’ It always seems disappointing to me to have our Father in heaven, our Lord, addressed as ‘you.’”


In all of our prayers it is well to use the sacred pronouns of the scriptures -- thee, thou, thy, and thine when addressing Deity in prayer, instead of the more common pronouns you, your, and yours. In this arrangement we show greater respect to Deity.

Do We Need To Tell God Trivial Things That He Already Knows?

*Salt Lake Tribune*, 4 January 1880 [a non-member news reporter’s account].

The exercises of the afternoon [session of the Salt Lake Center Stake Conference] opened with a hymn and a prayer by Bishop Wooley, in which he corrected any false impressions the Lord might have as to the building in which his Saints were worshipping, or as to the character of the meeting.
Avoid Vain Repetition

- "We come before thee..." (Where have we been otherwise? Especially odd at the end of a meeting.)
- "Nourish and strengthen our bodies and do us the good we need." (Over punch and do-nuts?)
- "Take us home in peace and safety." (Perhaps this could be an "unvane" repetition.)
- "Bless all those who aren’t here that they’ll be here next time." (When everyone is there, or else there isn’t really a next time for the particular meeting.)
- Perhaps you can make up your own list.

Warning

What is in our heart is more important than the mechanics of prayer. However, if our hearts are right, we will want to improve the way we say not only our public prayers, but also our private prayers. To use the excuse of "Well, God knows what I mean" is not acceptable to a being who directs "Therefore, I would that ye should be perfect even as I, or your Father who is in heaven is perfect." (3 Nephi 12:48.)

And our purpose is not to self-righteously judge others' prayers. But we should know what is proper and what is not proper and improve as best we can.