

# Prayer

## The Challenges We Face Today

One of the greatest challenges facing disciples of Jesus is developing a disciplined prayer life.

- We don't seem to be able to find the time to develop an effective prayer life.
- We don't really know how to pray effectively and often we feel our prayers may go unanswered.
- We don't really know what to pray for and so our prayers become routine and we feel we are just going through the motions.
- We have not learned how to pray in faith or to pray according to God's will.

## Lesson Truth

Prayer is the key to an effective disciple lifestyle. Everything we do should be done in an attitude of prayer. Unless we develop an attitude and intent to "pray always", our disciple journey will begin to stall. We must learn when to pray and how to pray.

## Lesson Goal

The goal for this lesson is for you to develop an effective prayer life through a strong abiding relationship with Jesus and consistent focus on keeping Him in view regarding every area of your life.

## Lesson Discussion



Luke 18:1 ESV "and he told them a parable to the effect that they ought always to pray and not lose heart."

## What is Prayer?

Prayer is simply a practice and habit we develop to bring our minds and hearts before God so that we do not lose His viewpoint on the matters pertaining to life. Prayer is bringing our petitions to God, sharing the burdens of our heart with Him, and praising and giving thanks to Him for His sovereign control over everything in creation.

Prayer is acknowledging God and seeking His viewpoint and help so we do not faint along the journey of life. It is a conscious tearing ourselves away from the cares, concerns, and activities of this life to focus on the one thing that is most important to God – our relationship with Him.

Jesus maintained a constant focus on the Father and was always about the Father's business. The source of His strength was in His relationship and His oneness with the Father. The purpose of His life was to always please the Father and to keep in perfect step with the Father. Jesus took plenty of time to commune with the Father and to pray to Him, even though He was the Son of God.

Prayer is the means by which we can discern God's will for our lives and for staying free from the cares and concerns of this life. There is no better way to deal with burdens, problems, worry, fear, and doubt. It is through prayer that we learn to cast all our anxiety on Him.



1 Peter 5:7 ESV "casting all your anxieties on him, because he cares for you."

Through prayer we bring our petitions, our burdens, our needs, our expectations, and our very lives to Him as an act of faith in Him. Through prayer we can reverence God, praise Him, and give Him thanks for all that He is and all He does for us. Through prayer we connect with His love, mercy, compassion and grace.

Through prayer we can receive cleansing and forgiveness of our sins and we are reminded to forgive others and get our hearts right before God as we come before Him with a humble and contrite heart.

The Bible talks about prayer throughout and teaches that it is one of the most important activities that we must do to keep our minds and hearts tuned to God's way and His will for our lives. Prayer keeps our thinking in check and helps us discern our path to ensure we stay on the right path.

When you look at the "Lord's prayer" that Jesus prayed when He was teaching His disciples how to pray, you will see a very simple, God-honoring prayer. The goal is to develop a continuous attitude of prayer so that you are "praying always" as you are going about your day to day activities.

Prayer happens as your mind is directed to the Father in short conversations with Him throughout your day and sometimes in long periods of prayer and fasting for intercession and burden lifting.

## How Do We Pray



---

Matthew 6:5-14 ESV "And when you pray, you must not be like the hypocrites. For they love to stand and pray in the synagogues and at the street corners, that they may be seen by others. Truly, I say to you, they have received their reward. But when you pray, go into your room and shut the door and pray to your Father who is in secret. And your Father who sees in secret will reward you. And when you pray, do not heap up empty phrases as the Gentiles do, for they think that they will be heard for their many words. Do not be like them, for your Father knows what you need before you ask him. Pray then like this: "Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name. Your kingdom come, your will be done on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread, and forgive us

our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors. And leads us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil. For if you forgive others their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you, but if you do not forgive others their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses."

---

Prayer should be simple and direct. When the disciples asked Jesus how to pray, He gave them a very simple prayer, but a prayer that covered what is important to God. I am sure Jesus prayed this prayer regularly. It provides us an example so we can pray effectively.

It not about how many words you are praying or how eloquent your prayer is, it is about the state of your heart as you pray. The attitude should be one of humble reverence as you speak to the Father. The audience for your prayer is the Father, always pray to Him and no other or anything else. This is the only Jesus ever prayed to.

We pray from our heart with heart-felt petitions to the Father. We pray from an attitude of praise, worship, and thanksgiving. We pray asking for forgiveness and forgiving others. We acknowledge God's dominion by asking that His will be done, not ours. We pray for daily provision and we pray against evil. From there we can lift up our petitions and burdens to the Father and then we leave those with Him. We cast all our cares on Him.

## Praying Always



---

1 Thessalonians 5:17 ESV "pray without ceasing".

---

The Bible teaches us that we should "pray without ceasing". This is a difficult discipline to develop because we are so busy and distracted by everything in this life that don't believe we could ever do that. So we leave that up to a few who have learned that powerful spiritual discipline and we stay with our meager prayer life. You can do this and you must learn to do

this, but it can take time, sometimes a lot of time.

When you realize that you can speak to the Father any time of day or night, you can begin to take prayer moments throughout your day. You must spend sufficient prayer at the beginning and end of your day as well as grabbing small prayer moments throughout your day. You may need to schedule prayer moments in your phone throughout the day as a reminder.

The average routine of most believers is to have a quick prayer in the morning followed by nothing until the next morning. We blast through an entire day without acknowledging the Father and it is no wonder that we are so worldly and feel far away from the Father. Lack of prayer is not the only reason for that but it is a primary factor.

The secret of a wonderful abiding relationship with the Father is prayer. The Father desires such a relationship with us, because we all know that strong relationships are built on communication. Maybe you start with two or three times a day for five minutes to say the Lord's Prayer sincerely. Then you can start doing a short prayer to acknowledge Him before a meeting or when a difficult issue arises.



---

Proverbs 3:6 ESV “In all your ways acknowledge Him and he will make straight your paths.”

---

---

Psalms 46:1 ESV “God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble.”

---

Jesus often went to a lonely place to pray. This allowed Jesus uninterrupted time with the Father which was crucial to prepare Him to carry out His Father's will. We will also need time like this with God to prepare us to carry out His will for our own lives when we have a big decision to make.

We must believe that our prayers do matter. They matter to God and they matter to others we are praying for. The Bible says that the

“effectual prayer of a righteous man's avails much”. Prayer can bring God's mercy, compassion, and love to operate on behalf of others.

### **Prayer Requires Right Relationships**

Having a right relationship with God through Jesus Christ is critical to an effective prayer life. If your life is out of order with the Father and the Son, your prayer life will be ineffective. It is sinful disobedience that puts us out of relationship with God.

We must not only get in right relationship with the Father through His Son, but we must also stay in a right relationship with Him. Jesus said that if we abide in Him, we can ask whatever we wish and it will be given to us.

The Holy Spirit will show us through our conscience when our life is out of order with God. If we have done something and our conscience is guilty, we must clear our conscience through repentance and confession of our sins because sin prevents God from hearing our prayers. Always deal with known wrongs immediately.

It is also important to be in right relationship with others. The Holy Spirit will check your conscience when your life is out of order with someone else. You need to reconcile the wrong so your prayers are not hindered.

If we have not forgiven another for a wrong done to us and we harbor that in our hearts, God says he cannot forgive us our sins and therefore cannot hear our prayers. This puts us out of relationship with God and we should not expect that God will honor our prayer. You must forgive.

### **Three Attitudes for Effective Prayer**



---

James 1:5-7 ESV 5:7-1 “If any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask God, who gives generously to all without reproach, and it will be given him.”

But let him ask in faith, with no doubting, for the one who doubts is like a wave of the sea that is driven and tossed by the wind. For that person must not suppose that he will receive anything from the Lord;”

---

As we pray to the Father, whether in private or in public, our attitude must be right. The first attitude in prayer is an attitude of faith. When Jesus prayed, he always prayed as if things that He prayed for would be a reality. He did not doubt that God would answer His prayer. When he was arrested, he told his captors that he could ask His Father and His Father would send twelve legions of angels to fight for Him if He wanted to. Jesus knew that He could have from the Father whatever He asked because He had faith in the Father.

Praying in faith means we pray as if it is a done deal. We don't keep dwelling on it or coming back to it. Faith says it is done because God says it will be done. We simply leave it with Him and let Him do whatever He chooses to do. We say “your will be done Lord” and go on.

The second important attitude in prayer is humility. We must come to God as paupers, knowing that we do not deserve anything from God. We realize that apart from God's grace and mercy, we have no right to ask Him for anything. We are aware of our true state before God and our own sinfulness and we humble ourselves before Him.



---

Luke 8:9-14 ESV “He also told this parable to some who trusted in themselves that they were righteous and treaded others with contempt: “Two men went up into the temple to pray, one a Pharisee and the other a tax collector. The Pharisee, standing by himself, prayed<sup>[a]</sup> thus: ‘God, I thank you that I am not like other men, extortioners, unjust, adulterers, or even like this tax collector. I fast twice a week; I give tithes of all that I get.’ But the tax collector, standing far off, would not even lift up his eyes to heaven, but beat 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. For everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, but the one who humbles himself will be exalted.”

---

The third important attitude we must have in our prayer life is an attitude of thankfulness. Whether we get what we asked for or not, we must be thankful regardless and give thanks in all things. We are thankful because we know that He knows what is best for us for every situation we lift up to Him.

We must avoid grumbling and complaining as if they were a plague. These attitudes dishonor God and keep us from receiving God's favor. A thankful and grateful attitude keeps us from falling into the trap of grumbling, complaining and fault finding.

### How Long Should I Pray

There is no set time that the Bible tells us to pray. We pray until we are done. It may be five minutes or five hours. Jesus told the disciples in the garden before His arrest “could you not pray with me for one hour?” When you are facing a significant event in your life and you need God's viewpoint, direction and help, you pray until you know you have prayed enough. You will know because you will have a peace and confidence afterwards.

You may choose to fast and pray for days until you have reached this point of peace and confidence with God. At other times ten minutes may be enough for the situation. When you sense the need to pray, stop and pray. Get to some place alone or ask someone to pray with you.

You can turn your mind to God at any moment because He is always near. Learn to do that more and more frequently, not because you want something from Him, but because you want to be with Him and sense His presence. You want the comfort and sense of God's love and you desire to express thankfulness and praise to Him.



## One Step for Living This Truth

Prayer is more important than most think. When you look at the prayer life of most believers it would seem that prayer isn't important at all. It is so important that God tells us to pray without ceasing. Doesn't that signify some importance? We need to change our thinking toward prayer and believe what God is saying.

### ACTION STEP

Think about your own prayer life? Do you think God would be satisfied with it? Do you feel close to God throughout your day or do you rarely acknowledge Him? Start with some simple changes to your prayer life so you can develop a close, loving, trusting, abiding relationship with the Father.

It takes discipline and commitment to make prayer a priority and develop the habit of continuous prayer. It will never happen unless it becomes more important to you than all the other things in life that you think are so important. Prayer is what allows the one thing to be the one thing in our life.

Start each and every day with at least fifteen minutes of prayer. If you do this you will find that each day will go very differently. You must develop a habit of daily time with God. At the end of your day before bed spend another fifteen minutes with God in prayer.

Start turning your mind to God two or three times a day. If you plan this time into your schedule you will more likely take the time. See God's sovereignty in everything. Know that He is engineering your day and take time before events or when things have gone haywire to stop, acknowledge Him, give

thanks and hear what He might want you to know about the situation.

You will have completed this lesson when you have developed a habit and discipline of prayer as outlined above. You will see a positive change in your daily life and you will feel close to Him throughout your day. The way to get closer to God is to simply get closer to God through prayer and He is always within reach.

As you continue in this discipline and begin to pray more and more, you will notice a definite reduction in the amount of fear, worry, doubt and stress in your life. Prayer will help you stay in an attitude of trust and obedience which will help ensure a consistent state of peace and contentment.

---

As you continue to practice living this truth, you may need to come back to this lesson often. Don't be in a rush to start the next lesson. Even if it takes several weeks to get this truth integrated into your life, keep it as your primary focus until you feel you are living it.

Remember, the most common problem with believers today is that they know many truths about the Christian life, but are not able to live them. Make sure you are solidly living this truth before attempting to tackle the next truth.

### Bumper Sticker Summary

A consistent and unceasing prayer life is essential for having the life that is truly life. It brings our focus back to the one thing continually, the thing that matter most in life. You won't find time to pray, you make time to pray. If prayer is not a priority for you then He will not be a priority to you.

### Illustration for Living this Truth

Beth had been a believer for many years. She attended church and other church activities on a regular basis. She would pray a few moments before starting her day. She believed prayer was

important, but for her it seemed just another thing to do. She wondered if there was more to prayer than she was experiencing.

Sandra was a friend of Beth and sometimes they would have coffee together and talk about things going on in their lives. Sandra seemed to have an easy going approach to life and things didn't seem to upset her or cause her to worry. One day Beth asked Sandra why she never seemed upset or worried about things in her life.

Sandra shared with Beth that a few years back she began being disciple by a woman in her church. This woman helped her learn to understand and live in the reality of what she professed to believe. One of the areas that helped her tremendously was prayer. Sandra didn't have much of a prayer life up to that point and it was turning point in her life.

This woman taught Sandra about the importance of prayer and how to pray effectively. It took several months before Sandra began to make prayer a priority in her life and as she learned how to pray and when to pray, it changed how she saw life. Her trust, faith, and obedience to God grew and she found herself rarely worrying or getting upset about things.

Beth thought about what Sandra had said for the next few days and felt a strong conviction to pursue a better prayer life. She asked Sandra if she would disciple her in learning how to pray and in other areas of the Christian life. Sandra was happy to do that and it was not long before Beth was finding freedom from worry and being upset about things in her own life.

### Other Scriptures

1Samuel 12:23 ESV “Moreover, as for me, far be it from me that I should sin against the LORD by ceasing to pray for you, and I will instruct you in the good and the right way.”

Psalm 4:1 ESV “Answer me when I call, O God of my righteousness! You have given me relief

when I was in distress. Be gracious to me and hear my prayer!”

Psalm 5:2 ESV “Give attention to the sound of my cry, my King and my God, for to you do I pray.”

Psalm 42:8 ESV “By day the LORD commands his steadfast love, and at night his song is with me, a prayer to the God of my life.”

Proverbs 15:8 ESV “The sacrifice of the wicked is an abomination to the LORD, but the prayer of the upright is acceptable to him.”

Proverbs 15:29 ESV “The LORD is far from the wicked, but he hears the prayer of the righteous.”

Proverbs 28:9 ESV “If one turns away his ear from hearing the law, even his prayer is an abomination.”

Matthew 5:44 ESV “But I say to you, Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you,”

Matthew 14:23 ESV “And after he had dismissed the crowds, he went up on the mountain by himself to pray. When evening came, he was there alone,”

Matthew 21:22 ESV “And whatever you ask in prayer, you will receive, if you have faith.”

Matthew 26:41 ESV “Watch and pray that you may not enter into temptation. The spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak.”

Mark 1:35 ESV “And rising very early in the morning, while it was still dark, he departed and went out to a desolate place, and there he prayed.”

Mark 11:25 ESV “And whenever you stand praying, forgive, if you have anything against anyone, so that your Father also who is in heaven may forgive you your trespasses.”

Luke 18:1 ESV “And he told them a parable to the effect that they ought always to pray and not lose heart.”

Acts 1:14 ESV “All these with one accord were devoting themselves to prayer, together with the women and Mary the mother of Jesus, and his brothers.”

Acts 2:42 ESV “And they devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers.”

Acts 8:22 ESV “Repent, therefore, of this wickedness of yours, and pray to the Lord that, if possible, the intent of your heart may be forgiven you.”

Acts 10:1-2 ESV “At Caesarea there was a man named Cornelius, a centurion of what was known as the Italian Cohort,<sup>2</sup> a devout man who feared God with all his household, gave alms generously to the people, and prayed continually to God.”

Romans 8:26 ESV “Likewise the Spirit helps us in our weakness. For we do not know what to pray for as we ought, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us with groanings too deep for words.”

2 Corinthians 1:11 ESV “You also must help us by prayer, so that many will give thanks on our behalf for the blessing granted us through the prayers of many.”

Ephesians 6:18 ESV “praying at all times in the Spirit, with all prayer and supplication. To that end, keep alert with all perseverance, making supplication for all the saints,”

Philippians 4:17 ESV “do not be anxious about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God.”

Colossians 4:2 ESV “Continue steadfastly in prayer, being watchful in it with thanksgiving.”

2 Thessalonians 1:11 ESV “To this end we always pray for you, that our God may make you worthy of his calling and may fulfill every resolve for good and every work of faith by his power,”

1 Timothy 2:11-13 ESV “First of all, then, I urge that supplications, prayers, intercessions, and thanksgivings be made for all people,<sup>2</sup> for kings and all who are in high positions, that we may lead a peaceful and quiet life, godly and dignified in every way.<sup>3</sup> This is good, and it is pleasing in the sight of God our Savior,”

Hebrews 5:11 ESV “In the days of his flesh, Jesus offered up prayers and supplications, with loud cries and tears, to him who was able to save him from death, and he was heard because of his reverence.”

James 5:13-16 ESV “Is anyone among you suffering? Let him pray. Is anyone cheerful? Let him sing praise. Is anyone among you sick? Let him call for the elders of the church, and let them pray over him, anointing him with oil in the name of the Lord. And the prayer of faith will save the one who is sick, and the Lord will raise him up. And if he has committed sins, he will be forgiven. Therefore, confess your sins to one another and pray for one another, that you may be healed. The prayer of a righteous person has great power as it is working.

1 Peter 2:12 ESV “For the eyes of the Lord are on the righteous, and his ears are open to their prayer. But the face of the Lord is against those who do evil.”