

5 PRAYER



How Important is Prayer in My Life?

Someone has said that a Christian is only as strong as his prayer life. There is a great deal of truth in this because prayer is simply your direct communication with God. When you read the Bible, God speaks to you, when you pray, you speak to God. Your personal relationship with the Lord Jesus Christ cannot grow without proper communication.

This lesson will acquaint the individual with the basics of a proper prayer life so that these lines of communication can be open and effective in his life. If you have not done so already, at the onset of this lesson begin to keep a list of your prayer requests and answers to those prayers in your own "prayer book."

I. The Mysteries of Prayer - *Romans 11:33-36*

A. All true prayer originates with God.

Prayer is begun through Divine Initiative - *Romans 3:11, John 15:16, Revelation 1:8, Colossians 1:16, 17, 1 Corinthians 8:6.*

Prayer is a cycle that begins with God and ends with God. The normal concept of prayer is as follows...we have a need, we go to God, God says, "Yes," "No," or "Wait."

Prayer is not man dreaming up good ideas and then asking God to bless them.

B. God creates a need in our lives so that we might have a point of contact with Him.

God is omniscient; He knows every thing that comes into our lives, in fact, He allows these things. The Lord creates a need so that we will go to Him for direction and comfort.

Whatever in your life that is in reality a need, is placed there so that you will learn to trust and depend upon God.

The real point of this need is not what you think you need, the point and purpose is to prove to you that you need God.

God does not sit in Heaven dreaming up new ways He can afflict His saints so that they might be more spiritual.

How do you respond when you are confronted with need? Do you resort to human ingenuity first and prayer last?

C. God meets man at his point of need - *Matthew 6:8, Psalm 50:15.*

Our real need is not to have our problems solved, our health, our relationships, finances, or children restored; our need is to get closer to God.

D. Man must be spiritually sensitive to the moving of the Spirit of God in his life.

Romans 8:26 - The Spirit of God moves us to pray, often times for things we do not understand.

Philippians 2:13 - God attempts to place His desires in our hearts through His Holy Spirit. See *Psalm 37:3-5*.

If this is true, we must be consciously resisting and negating the leading of the Spirit of God in our lives to pray, that is, we become so spiritually desensitized that we cannot detect His moving within!

Man must now react to the need, by human initiative. Obey God and ask for that which the Lord has placed in your heart.

This brings us to the crisis of faith - *Mark 14:36*, *2Corinthians 12:9, 10*. At this point God shows us what we really need; Him!

See *1John 5:14, 15*, *Hebrews 11:1*

E. God is looking for an intercessor that will bring God's will from heaven down to earth.

Ezekiel 22:30, 31 - In this passage God finds Himself in a position where He cannot do what He wants to do; no one could get a hold of heaven in Israel.

God is offering man through prayer control of His almighty power. If the church does not pray, God does not move.

God proposes and man disposes. God has made us partners in prayer so that we would implement the decisions He has already made.

God has voluntarily limited His power in some way to our willingness to intercede. We have the opportunity to put God's will into action.

Real prayer comes through Divine initiative. God creates a need. We, being spiritually sensitized to the Spirit of God, react to the need by communication with God in prayer; we ask. God meets us at the point of need to prove to us that we need Him and His grace. As a result of this meeting we praise Him for who He is, not for what He gives us. With these principles in mind reread *Mark 11:22-24*.

II. What can be accomplished through prayer? *Philippians 4:6-7, James 5:16*.

Leonard Ravenhill writes, "Poverty stricken as the Church is today in many things, she is most stricken here in the place of prayer. We have many organizers, but few agonizers; many players and payers, but few prayers; many singers, few clingers; lots of pastors, but few wrestlers; many fears, few tears; much fashion, little passion; many interferers, few intercessors; many writers, but few fighters. Failing here, we fail everywhere."

A. Prayer changes us - *Proverbs 3:5-6*, *Philippians 4:7*, *Romans. 8:26-28*.

B. Through Prayer we fight the spiritual warfare - *Ephesians 6:11-18*, *Luke 22:31*, *1Thessalonians 1:2; 3:5*.

C. Through Prayer we acknowledge our submission to the will and way of God. Prayer places the believer in an attitude of expectancy. The individual who does not pray tends to depend upon human invention, circumstances and expediency to make decisions. The praying Christian is "spiritually sensitized." "Coincidence" and "accident" are words foreign to his vocabulary. See *Ephesians 3:20-21*.

D. Through Prayer God demonstrates His presence and power in our daily lives see *Hebrews 4:12-16*.

E. Prayer serves as a spiritual watchdog against temptation - *Mark 14:38*, *2Corinthians 13:7*, *1Corinthians 10:13* - YOU are cognizant of the fact that there is a "way of escape" or grace to bear Up under the trial.

F. Prayer is simply pleasing to God - *Revelation 5:8; 8:3-4*, *Proverbs 15:8*.

III. What are the necessary ingredients of prayer? - *Matthew 6:9-13*

A. Worship, Adoration or Praise - More often than not our prayers are characterized by selfishness. The real objective of our prayers becomes our personal fulfillment and well-being. If we worship God, we "must

worship in spirit and truth." We must recognize God for who He is. Primarily, we must worship Him in His holiness. See *Daniel 9:3-4, Isaiah 6:1-3*.

B. Confession - In our own righteousness none of us are worthy to approach the throne of God. Yet, because of our position in Christ, we have been instructed to boldly approach God in *Hebrews 4:16*. Although in Christ our sins have been purged, confession reminds us of God's mercy and helps us to assume a humble posture before Him. See David's prayer in *Psalms 51* and Daniel's prayer in *Daniel 9:3-19*.

Thomas Fuller wrote, "Man's owning his weakness is the only stock for God thereon to graft the grace of his acceptance."

C. Restitution - Our willingness to make restitution where it is possible is the proof of genuine, sincere, repentant confession. Restitution also reaffirms our faith in God and His provision for our life. Zacchaeus, when faced with his sins of dishonesty, was so overwhelmed by the righteousness and holiness of Jesus that he covenanted to make restitution for his errors. - *Luke 19:8*

D. Thanksgiving - *Philippians 4:6, Hebrews 13:15*.

"Evil and Unthankful are twins that live and die together; as anyone ceases to be evil, he begins to be thankful" - Gurnall.

E. Forgiveness - *Matthew 6:12-15*.

F. Unity – *Acts 2:41-47, 1Corinthians 1:10-13*, One of the marks of the early church was unity - *Ecclesiastes 4:12*.

G. Faith - *James 1:5-8*.

These verses suggest, as does the whole book of James, that we show our faith by our works. "Asking in faith" does not mean that one must conjure up within himself a positive assurance that what he has asked for will take place if he believes hard enough. The text suggests we should have a single eye and that our walk should be consistent with our talk - *James 2:18*.

H. Petition - *Matthew 7:7-8*. "Ask, seek, and knock" suggest that we not only make our request known to God, but that we ought to be persistent in our prayer requests. Jesus illustrates this principle in *Luke 11:8* where He says, "...Because of his importunity he will rise and give him as many as he needeth."

I. Submission - "... Thy will be done..." - *Matthew 26:42*.

"I would a thousand times rather that God's will should be done than my own. I cannot see into the future as God can; therefore, it is a good deal better to let Him choose for me than to choose for myself...when it comes to temporal matters...what I ask for may not be God's purpose concerning me" - D.L. Moody.

"Faith has no design to have its own will, when that will is not in accordance with the mind of God; for such a desire would at bottom be the impulse of an unbelief which did not rely upon God's judgment as our best guide. Faith knows that God's will is the highest good..." - C.H. Spurgeon.

IV. Some questions about prayer - *Isaiah 65:24*.

"The two first and essential means of grace are the word of God and prayer. By these come conversion; for we are born again by the Word of God, which liveth and abideth for ever; and whosoever shall call upon the name of the Lord shall be saved."

"By these also we grow; for we are exhorted to desire the sincere milk of the word that we may grow thereby, and we cannot grow in grace and in the knowledge of the Lord Jesus Christ except we also speak to Him in Prayer . It is by the Word that the Father sanctifies us; but we are also bidden to watch and pray lest we enter into temptation."

"These two means of grace must be used in their right proportion. If we read the Word and do not pray, we may become puffed up with knowledge, without the love that buildeth up. If we pray without reading the

Word, we shall be ignorant of the mind and will of God, and become mystical and fanatical, and liable to be blown about by every wind of doctrine" -D.L. Moody.

"Prayer is the contact of a living soul with God. In prayer , God stoops to kiss man, to bless man, and to aid in everything that God can devise or man can need" - E. M. Bounds.

A. Where are we to pray?

1. Everywhere - *1 Timothy 2:8*
2. In the closet - *Matthew 6:6*
3. In the temple - Luke 18:10. See also Acts 3, Psalms 26:12, 1 Kings 8:22-53.

B. When are we to pray?

1. Always - Luke 18:1, 1 Thessalonians 5:17
2. In the morning - *Psalms 5:3*.
3. At noon and in the evening - *Psalms 88:1*.
4. Daily - *Psalms 86:3*
5. Day and Night - *Psalms 88:1*
6. *Daniel 6:10* tells us that Daniel prayed three times a day.

C. What are some things for which we ought to pray?

1. *Matthew 6:9-13* pray for the return of Christ and the will of God to be done. For daily provisions, forgiveness, guidance, victory over temptation and sin.
2. *James 5:13-16* pray for the sick and infirmed.
3. *1 Timothy 2:1-4* pray for all men, for all in authority and for the salvation of the lost.
4. *Isaiah 38:1-5* pray for a long life.
5. *Daniel 6:18-23* pray for personal safety and the safety of others.
6. *1 Kings 3:5-9* pray for food, clothing and shelter.
7. *Romans 1:10* pray for a prosperous journey.
8. *Colossians 1:28* pray for the spiritual maturity of "Christian brethren".
9. *1 Timothy 5:17* pray for those over you in your local church.

"To seek aid in time of distress from a supernatural Being is an instinct of human nature. I believe in the truthfulness of this instinct, and that man prays because there is something in prayer. As when the Creator gives His creature the power of thirst, it is because water exists to meet its thirst; and as when He creates hunger there is food to correspond to the appetite; so when He inclines men to pray, it is because prayer has a corresponding blessing connected with it" - Charles Spurgeon.

V. Why doesn't God always answer our prayers? - *1 Samuel 14:37*

The paint can label reads, "Clean surface thoroughly. Remove dirt, grease, wax, and oil. Scrape off any loose paint. Patch and prime large cracks. Do not apply if temperature is below 50 degrees Fahrenheit." What would happen if you violated the instructions so clearly stated on the can of paint? Any painter, amateur or professional, who has at one time or another violated these instructions, knows perfectly well what will probably happen. You'll have one big mess on your hands! So it is with prayer.

Why is it that God doesn't always answer our prayers the way we would like Him to?

- A. God does not answer our prayers when we willingly violate His directives, will and commandments. Our sin keeps God from answering our prayers - 1John 3:22, Psalms 66:18, John 9:31, Isaiah 59:2, Proverbs 28:9, 1Peter 3:12.
- B. God does not answer our prayers when our requests contradict His intended means of chastisement in our lives.

See *2 Samuel 12:16*! In the case of David, God could have spared the life of the child but, He determined that it would be more beneficial for David if the chastisement was complete. By the way, God can change His mind as He did in the case of Nineveh found in the book of Jonah.

- C. God does not answer prayer when one prays to the wrong god - See *1 Kings 18:26* and the "unknown God" of *Acts 17:22-31*
- D. God does not always answer prayer immediately. *Nehemiah 1:4-11; 2:1* - four months pass between request and answer. Our timing is not always God's timing and He teaches us faith and patience in just such circumstances where we must wait upon Him. Time is not nearly as important to God as it is to us. God's "delays" are well thought out.
- E. God does not answer our prayers when we have improper interpersonal relationships.
 - 1. Husband and Wife - *1Peter 3:7*
 - 2. Holding personal grudges - *Ephesians 4:26, Mark 11:25-26 James 5:9, Zechariah 7:9-13*
- F. God does not answer prayer when prayer is pretense. - *Matthew 23:14*. Insincere prayer is fruitless and worthless. It can even become sin - *Psalms 109:7*
 - 1. Fruit bearing is a prerequisite - *John 15:16*.
 - 2. *Ecclesiastes 5:3* - All talk, no action is pretense.
 - 3. *Matthew 6:7* - Repetitious prayers are a pretense.
- G. God does not answer prayer when it is used strictly for selfish reasons. *James 1:6-7; 4:3, Mark 11:24*.
- H. God does not answer prayer when He chooses not to answer. God does not act without purpose. 2 *Corinthians 12:7-10, Matthew 26:39, 42-44, 1John 5:14-15, Romans 8:27*.
- I. God does not answer prayer when we will not in humility assume our proper place before Him. *Luke 18:10-14*

VI. Prayer and Meditation - Joshua 1:8, Psalms 1:1-2.

The biblical practice of meditation goes back to the book of Genesis where the word is first used. *Genesis 24:63* tells us that Isaac, at eventide, went out into the field to meditate. It was on this occasion that he met his wife Rebekah. Webster defines the verb "to meditate" accordingly:

- A. To contemplate; to keep the mind fixed upon; to study.
- B. To purpose; to intend; to design; to plan by revolving the mind. Synonyms are consider, ponder, weigh, or study.
- C. Biblically, meditation is associated with prayer *Psalms 5:1*, singing praises to the Lord *Psalms 104:33, 34* witnessing and testifying for the Lord *Psalms 77:12*, the word of God *Psalms 119:15, 23, 48, 78, 97, 99, 148*. Meditation is to be done with understanding *Psalms 49:3*, and is to be acceptable unto the Lord, *Psalms 19:14*.
- D. What are some of the hindrances we face in prayer and meditation?
 - 1. Spiritual opposition.
 - 2. Over scheduled.
 - 3. Failure to designate a quiet time & place.

4. Imagination burn out.
 5. Failure to recognize its importance to our peace of mind and spiritual well-being.
 6. Laziness.
- E. One of the synonyms for "to meditate" under Webster's definition was "to consider ." Our Authorized Version King James 1611 lists numerous things we are to meditate upon or consider.
1. Consider the wondrous works of God - Isaiah 5:12, Job 37:14, Psalms 8:3, 143:5, Ecclesiastes 7:13.
 2. Consider how great things God hath done for YOU - 1 Samuel 12:24, Psalms 64:9, Matthew 6:28, Luke 12:24, 27, Deuteronomy 4:39.
 3. Consider your ways - *Haggai 1:5-7, Deuteronomy 8:5.*
 4. Consider the fruit of slothfulness and laziness - *Proverbs 24:30-32; 6:6.*
 5. Consider the end of the wicked - *Isaiah 41:20-22, Proverbs 21:12.*
 6. Consider Him - Hebrews 3:1; 12:3.

VII. Why is prayer the true mark of spirituality? - Acts 4:31

There are many spiritual exercises in which every true born-again, blood bought, child of God ought to be involved. Bible reading, soul-winning, Christian service and ministry all designate or mark the zealous, responsible, Christian individual. Yet, important as each of these are, none can be properly motivated or empowered without prayer. D.L. Moody declared, "Every great movement of God can be traced to a kneeling figure." One writer stated; "The only footprints in the sands of time that will be kept are the ones made after the knee-prints." Prayer is the true mark of spirituality for:

- A. Through prayer we lay hold of spiritual power.
1. Power against sin-acknowledgment, humiliation, confession and repentance, cleansing, resultant spiritual sensitivity.
 2. Power against "backsliding"-reaffirmation of commitment and purpose, godly communication, laying hold of God's resources. "Prayer is not overcoming God's reluctance, but laying hold of God's willingness."
 3. Power against slackening of service-prayer lightens the duties and responsibilities of Christian service. Prayer is the spiritual lubricant that makes the run smooth and efficient.
- B. Through Prayer spiritual life is increased and enhanced.
1. Prayer is the means by which one maintains and expresses a right attitude toward God-gratitude, thanksgiving, submission, trust, dependence, worship.
 2. Prayer leads to constant God-consciousness - Christ in you, temple of the Holy Ghost.
 3. Prayer makes clear the will of God-through word, circumstance, assurance, and balance, perceptions of the soul are clarified, determinations of the will are strengthened.
- C. Through Prayer we are motivated to do the work of Christ - "...They spake the word of God with boldness."
1. George Mueller said, "The most important part of prayer is the fifteen minutes that follow it."
 2. Martin Luther said, "I am so busy now that I find if I did not spend two or three hours each day in prayer, I could not get through the day."
 3. Prayer brings power and authority and credibility to our work.
 4. Prayer makes the word of God real to us; it unlocks the promises and blessings of God.
 5. Prayer sensitizes us to the heartbeat of God - souls, evangelism, missions, and the needs of others. It proves our sincerity of purpose.
 6. Prayer teaches us that man's extremities are God' opportunities. Prayer is the slender nerve that activates the muscle of the omnipotence of God.