

# Approaching The Throne Of God



GodSaidSo Press

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**Discovering God's Word Bible Study Series**

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# Lesson 1: The Privilege Of Prayer

Christians generally know that they should pray, but do not always fully appreciate what is so special about prayer or understand how to pray. In fact, many have grown frustrated and discouraged with their prayer lives, believing they are not making the best use of prayer. For, it is easy for prayers to become rote/routine without experiencing the great privilege and blessing God has designed it to be. Consider the following questions to evaluate your prayer life: Do you ever find yourself viewing prayer as a burden/chore you must check off for the day? Do you ever feel as if God is not listening to your prayers? Do you ever pray with the expectation that what you are praying about will never happen? Do you find yourself repeating the same prayers over and over because you do not know what you should pray about? It does not have to be this way! God's word can help us develop the proper prayer life that is fitting with the great privilege God designed prayer to be!

The purpose of this lesson is to learn why prayer is so special and why we should view it as a true privilege so that it can have the proper place in our lives.

## **Prayer Approaches The Throne Of God**

**Jesus Christ makes it possible to approach the throne of God.** Read Hebrews 4:14-16. The picture of this passage harkens back to the tabernacle and temple in the Old Testament, wherein there were two sections: The holy place and the most holy place. Only the high priest could enter the most holy place (where the ark of the covenant was kept). God would meet with His people from the mercy seat (the lid of the ark of the covenant, between the two cherubim with their outstretched wings, Exodus 25:22). In the Old Testament, the high priest would enter the most holy place through the veil in the tabernacle/temple one time each year with the blood of atonement to find mercy for both himself and the others in Israel.

Today, Jesus is pictured as being our great High Priest (Hebrews 5:1-10). Rather than just passing through the veil, He has passed through the Heavens. Rather than being a normal high priest from the descendants of Aaron, He is the

Son of God. Rather than taking the blood of animals to remember sin once every year, He has offered His own blood as the perfect sacrifice once for all. Through the sacrifice of Jesus, we can now approach the throne of grace with boldness. For, Jesus is our great and sympathetic High Priest who is now at the right hand of God's throne and represents us before God when we pray! So, we have Jesus (who lived on earth and was tempted just as we are, knowing our weaknesses) as our Advocate before God when we approach Him in prayer!

**A picture of God on His throne.** There are various glimpses of God in the Bible that should cause us to stand in awe of Him! Consider one found in Revelation 4:1-11. Notice the praise that is offered to God by those who were before the throne of God in Heaven. Can you imagine approaching the throne of God after reading this scene? The closest we can picture to this is probably the opportunity and honor to go before an earthly king/ruler and make a request of that person. When we pray to God, we approach the throne of this awesome God who created the universe! And, we can do so with boldness because Jesus has presented us who are Christians as acceptable to God!

**Our prayers are like incense offered to God.** As the scene regarding the throne room of Heaven continues in Revelation 5, the focus turns to the scroll in the hand of God and one is sought who is worthy to take the scroll. The one who is worthy emerges – it is the Lamb who has been slaughtered (Jesus Christ). When He takes the scroll, praise is given to Him. The praise that is offered includes the prayers of the saints, pictured as golden bowls full of incense (Revelation 5:8). Another part of the tabernacle/temple was the altar of incense, positioned right before the veil that separated the holy place from the most holy place. Incense was offered twice each day and God gave a recipe to follow for this incense to please God (Exodus 30; Luke 1:8-10). Other passages also picture prayer as being like incense offered to God (Revelation 8:3-4; Psalm 141:2). Therefore, God views our prayers like sweet-smelling fragrance to Him, that come up to Him on His throne! So, prayer is not some annoyance God tolerates; but something that is pleasing to Him that He considers to be holy!

### **God Wants His People To Pray**

**Old Testament examples of prayer.** God's people in the Old Testament were committed to prayer. For example, Hannah prayed to God when she was deeply distressed because she had no children (1 Samuel 1:11). David prayed to God frequently and wrote many of the psalms (Psalm 141:1-2). Daniel prayed to God even when doing so would result in him being thrown into the lion's den (Daniel 6:10).

**Examples of Jesus's prayers.** Appreciate that even Jesus (who was God living on this earth) saw the need to pray to God. For example, Jesus sought quiet time with His Heavenly Father in prayer (Luke 5:16). In fact, Jesus even spent all night in prayer (Luke 6:12). Then, Jesus prayed when His betrayal, arrest, and death were quickly approaching (Luke 22:41-44)!

**New Testament examples of prayer.** Jesus is not the only example of prayer being offered in the New Testament, as we see God's people continuing to be prayerful. For example, the apostles prayed after Jesus ascended to Heaven and they were waiting according to what Jesus had instructed them (Acts 1:14). Paul and Silas prayed to God after they had been put into prison (Acts 16:25). Paul prayed with the Ephesian elders before they parted ways (Acts 20:36).

**Instructions to pray.** Prayer is always presented as being something God's people can and should do. In fact, prayer is a privilege God expects His people to take advantage of in their lives. Consider just a few of the many New Testament passages about prayer: Matthew 6:5, 9; Romans 12:12; Ephesians 6:18; Philippians 4:6-7; Colossians 4:2; 1 Thessalonians 5:17.

### **Prayer Is How We Communicate With God**

**God hears the prayers of the righteous.** While God communicates to us through the Bible's message, prayer is how we come before the throne of God and communicate with Him! Take a moment to appreciate this – that we can come before the throne of God and communicate to the God of the universe! Although anyone can go through the actions involved in offering a prayer to God, the Scriptures teach that God does not welcome just anyone who approaches His throne (Isaiah 1:15). In fact, the principle in Scripture appears to be that God does not hear the prayers of those who are not seeking to do His will in a receptive way. The promises regarding God hearing prayers are made to those who are righteous (1 Peter 3:12).

**What we can communicate in prayer.** Being able to approach the throne of God and communicate something that is in your mind is an awesome opportunity that should cause you to consider what you can or should say (much more than if you approached an earthly ruler). What God teaches us to communicate to Him in prayer can be summarized as the "ACTS" of prayer. Through prayer, we can communicate our adoration of God (Acts 4:24), the confession of our sins (1 John 1:9), our thanksgiving to God (Colossians 4:2), and supplications (petitions, requests, Philippians 4:6).

**This communication is powerful.** Although God already knows what is going on in our lives and knows our innermost thoughts, prayer is not some

meaningless exercise. Rather, He promises that prayer is powerful in what it can accomplish! But, recognize that prayer is not powerful because we are anything. Rather, prayer is powerful because God is powerful, because Jesus is at the right hand of God petitioning Him on our behalf, and because we are His children (Matthew 7:9-11)! In fact, prayer is taught as being powerful in both physical and spiritual ways (James 5:13-18). Although God does not always answer our prayers according to what we ask, He does assure us that our prayers are powerful! Yet, also appreciate that prayer is not to be used as one would think about making a wish to a genie. Rather, God teaches that prayers of the righteous are powerful when they are offered in faith and according to His will (1 John 5:14-15). Therefore, appreciate the great privilege in prayer in being able to communicate to God and know that God hears your prayers and assures you that your prayers are powerful! While there are many things that happen beyond your control and that are much larger than you, you can communicate to the God who is over all!

### **Conclusion**

Prayer is a tremendous privilege – and one that God’s people should greatly appreciate! For, through prayer, we can approach the throne of God (the Creator of this universe), accomplish something He wants us to do, and communicate with Him! Because this great privilege has been given to Christians today, we should learn to pray effectively and devote ourselves to prayer!

## **Study Questions**

How is your prayer life?

### **1. Prayer Approaches The Throne Of God**

How does Jesus make it possible to approach the throne of God?

Describe how the Bible pictures God on His throne?

How are prayers like incense offered to God?

### **2. God Wants His People To Pray**

List some examples of prayer in the Old Testament.

List some examples of when Jesus prayed.

List some examples of prayer in the New Testament.

List some passages that give instructions for God's people to pray.

### **3. Prayer Is How We Communicate With God**

Whose prayer does God promise to hear?

What can you communicate to God in prayer?

How is prayer powerful?



# Lesson 2: How To Pray

Most Christians know that prayer is something that should be an integral part of their lives. Yet, not every Christian knows how to pray as he/she should. Is there even a right and a wrong way to pray? The Scriptures show that prayer is something that is learned through the proper teaching (Luke 11:1). Furthermore, Jesus (generally) taught that true worship involves the two elements of spirit and truth (John 4:23-24). So, it is important that you take some time to evaluate what the Scriptures teach about how to pray.

The purpose of this lesson is to learn how to pray by considering some elements of prayer, mechanics of prayer, and attitudes of prayer.

## Elements Of Prayer

**Addressed to God.** The normal pattern of prayer seems to be to address our prayers to the Father. For example, this is how Jesus taught His disciples to pray (Matthew 6:6, 9; Luke 11:2; Matthew 7:11; John 15:16; John 16:23). This is also commonly expressed in the letters. (Ephesians 1:15-17; Ephesians 5:20; Philippians 1:3; Colossians 1:3; Colossians 3:17; 1 Thessalonians 1:3; 2 Thessalonians 1:3; James 1:5). But, while this common pattern is seen repeatedly in the Scriptures, we must not diminish prayer into some kind of meaningless formula. For example, the Bible teaches the concept of people praying to Jesus (who is also God) in various places (John 14:14; Acts 1:24-25; Acts 4:24, 29; Acts 7:59-60; 1 Corinthians 16:22; 2 Corinthians 12:8-10; 1 Timothy 1:12; Revelation 22:20). So, we cannot restrict the Bible's pattern so as to cause it to be in conflict with these passages.

**Message communicated to God.** Prayer is not an empty meditative and zen-like state of mind. Instead, prayer involves communication from the person (or people) praying to God (Luke 11:1-4). However, we should note that this communication can happen in two ways. First, this communication can happen verbally (through spoken words, Luke 11:1-4; Acts 4:24). Second, this communication can happen nonverbally (through thoughts directed in prayer to God, 1 Samuel 1:12-15; Genesis 24:45; Matthew 6:6).

**In the name of Jesus.** There are many Scriptures that teach the importance of praying in the name of Jesus (John 14:13-14; John 15:16; John 16:23-24;

Ephesians 5:20; Colossians 3:17). But, again, this truth must not be diminished into an empty formula. Instead, praying in Jesus's name refers to praying with His authority. For, it would be impossible for our prayers to be offered up to God in a way that is pleasing to Him without Jesus Christ. Thankfully, the Scriptures demonstrate that Jesus is the Mediator between us and God (1 Timothy 2:5-6), the Advocate who pleads our case to the Father (1 John 2:1-2), and our great High Priest through whom we can approach the throne of God (Hebrews 4:14-16). So, when we pray, we must bring them in Jesus's name! This is commonly expressed at the end of a prayer. Then, "amen" (so be it) is a typically ending expression (Romans 11:36; Romans 15:33; 1 Corinthians 14:16).

**With the help of the Holy Spirit.** When we pray to God, all three members of Deity are involved (though I do not always understand how all of this works on God's part). Romans 8:26-27 teaches the Holy Spirit helps God's people in prayer. Although I cannot explain exactly what is involved in this, it is a wonderful blessing and comfort to know that the Holy Spirit works on our behalf in prayer so that our prayers are properly expressed to God!

### **Mechanics Of Prayer**

**Contexts.** Consider the three contexts in which it is appropriate to pray. First, it is appropriate to pray in private when no one else is involved in the prayer (Matthew 6:5-6; Luke 5:16). Second, it is appropriate to pray in an assembly of the church with all the people involved in offering the same prayer (Acts 12:5, 12; 1 Corinthians 14:16). Third, it is appropriate to pray with others outside of a church assembly (Luke 11:1-4; Acts 20:36).

**Postures.** As we read about a great many examples of prayer in the Bible, one thing that is noteworthy is how many different physical postures are involved. For example, we can see people bowing (Psalm 95:6), kneeling (Acts 20:36), falling facedown (Ezekiel 11:13), standing (1 Chronicles 23:30), sitting (2 Samuel 7:18), looking up at Heaven (John 17:1), looking down (Luke 18:13), and raising hands (1 Timothy 2:8). So, we may conclude that there is not a single posture that is acceptable to God when we pray; but many that we can choose from.

**Timing.** It is important for you to utilize the avenue of prayer by making the proper time for it. Thankfully, the Scriptures demonstrate some things about when people in the Bible prayed that can help you establish some good prayer practices. First, it can be appropriate to schedule certain times when you pray (like Daniel, Daniel 6:10), perhaps praying about specific things at each scheduled time. Second, it is appropriate to use specific circumstances to cause you to pray (Matthew 14:19; Acts 27:35; Acts 14:23). Third, it is appropriate to pray whenever

and wherever you have the opportunity to do so, as you should have a constant disposition that looks for any opportunity to pray (1 Thessalonians 5:16-18; Acts 16:25). Therefore, following these points, we should also recognize that any time of the day or night is appropriate for prayer to be offered (Psalm 55:16-17)!

**Length.** Some are intimidated when they think about offering prayer to God because they believe their prayers must be long and eloquent. However, the Bible demonstrates prayers being offered to God in all different lengths and styles. For example, Jesus taught a very short prayer when He taught His disciples to pray in Luke 11:1-4. Furthermore, He teaches a short and simple prayer in the parable He taught in Luke 18:13. However, we also see Jesus spending all night in prayer (Luke 6:12) and offering extended prayers (John 17:1-26; Matthew 26:36-46). Therefore, prayer is acceptable to God in all different lengths and is not dependent on one's eloquence or style (consider the variation in the book of Psalms).

**Contents.** What people ought to pray about has often been summarized using the acronym "ACTS." First, we should express adoration (praise, reverence) for God in prayer (Luke 11:2). Second, we should confess our sins to God in prayer (1 John 1:9). Third, we should express our thanksgiving to God in prayer (Ephesians 5:20). Fourth, we should present our supplications (requests, petitions) to God in prayer (Philippians 4:6-7).

### **Attitudes Of Prayer**

**Humility.** God plainly demonstrates that the attitude of your heart matters when you come before His throne in prayer. For one, God demonstrates that humility is an essential attitude for your prayer to be acceptable to God (Luke 18:9-14). It is the humble and broken spirit that is pleasing to God (Psalm 51:17). And, while God resists the proud, He gives grace to the humble (James 4:6; 1 Peter 5:5-7). To be humble in prayer is to have a modest estimation of yourself, acknowledge your own faults, and recognize the supremacy of God.

**Boldness.** Boldness is not at odds with humility. Rather, boldness is being unreserved, courageous, and confident. This is precisely how we are taught to approach the throne of God in prayer (Hebrews 4:14-16). We can have the confident assurance that God desires to hear our prayers and that they are not a burden to Him if we are truly striving to seek Him in our lives (1 Peter 5:7). But, the only way we can have this boldness in prayer is because Jesus Christ serves as our High Priest!

**Gratitude.** God has blessed every person on this earth in some way (James 1:17). So, rather than seeing prayer as just a way to ask this God for more favors, you should view prayer as a way to express your thanks for how God has already

blessed you. Certainly, no matter how much or little God has blessed you with physically, God has given you the greatest gift possible by offering salvation through the sacrifice of Jesus Christ on the cross! Therefore, you should have an attitude of gratitude to look for the various opportunities to tell God “thank you” (1 Thessalonians 5:16-18; Ephesians 5:20; Colossians 3:17).

**Selflessness.** While God certainly gives you the opportunity through prayer to ask for various things, we are still taught that we must *not* be selfish in our asking! So, we must not treat our opportunities to come before the throne of God in prayer as if we are asking a genie for whatever our hearts desire. And, we must not use prayer as an opportunity for people to see and praise us (Matthew 6:5-8). Rather, while we are invited to ask God for His favors and blessings, we should do so in a way that is focused on His will above our own and not in a way that is focused on our selfish pleasures (Matthew 6:10; Luke 22:42; James 4:2-3)!

### **Conclusion**

It is important that you learn how to offer prayer in a way that pleases God. For, unless you learn how to pray, you will not take advantage of the wonderful blessing that prayer affords! Now that we have considered many principles that are involved in learning how to pray, you should carefully meditate on them and develop good prayer habits and practices.

## **Study Questions**

Is prayer something people naturally know how to do? Explain your answer.

### **1. Elements Of Prayer**

What does it mean to pray to God?

What happens during the prayer?

Why is it important to pray in Jesus's name?

What role does the Holy Spirit play in prayer?

### **2. Mechanics Of Prayer**

In what contexts is prayer appropriate?

What physical postures are appropriate for prayer?

When is it appropriate to pray?

How long does prayer have to last for it to be acceptable to God?

What kind of things can you pray about?

### **3. Attitudes Of Prayer**

How is humility an important attitude of prayer?

How is boldness an important attitude of prayer?

How is gratitude an important attitude of prayer?

How is selflessness an important attitude of prayer?

# Lesson 3: What To Pray About

Although most Christians understand there is a need and responsibility to pray, there is sometimes a struggle concerning the contents of the prayers. Unless one is very mindful of the content of his/her prayers, they can easily become mundane, insincere, and repetitive (in an empty kind of way). Yet, the Bible teaches people what they can and should pray about. One easy way to remember what can and should be included in our prayers is summarized by the acronym ACTS (adoration, confession, thanksgiving, and supplication). Then, while we can learn much throughout the Scriptures, the book of Psalms can serve as a major help in this area.

The purpose of this lesson is to learn the ACTS of prayer so as to consider how to engage in more meaningful prayer.

## Adoration

**What it is.** This element of prayer expresses praise, reverence, and devotion to God. When Jesus taught how to pray in Matthew 6, He prayed that God's name would be honored as holy (v. 9). This expresses the desire that others would come to recognize who God is and recognize that His name is above all others. However, in this, is also a personal recognition of the holiness of God's name. Therefore, it is appropriate to spend time in prayer praising God for all that He is and all He has done!

**Example in the Psalms.** Read Psalm 145 and learn from how the psalmist expressed such adoration. Notice his exaltation of the name of the Lord (Jehovah, Yahweh). Notice his recognition of the exalted role of his God and King. Notice his awe of God and God's acts. Notice his celebration of God's goodness, majesty, righteousness, and works. Notice his expression of dependence on all that God does. Notice his identification of God's character.

**How to pray this kind of prayer.** Consider the following suggestions. First, learn to stand in awe of who God is and all that He has done so that expressing your adoration of God is not a forced or uncommon expression (Romans 11:33-36). Second, develop the desire to glorify the name of God so that doing so is not

just something you feel like you must do to go to Heaven, but something that you long to do and that you will continue to do when you get to Heaven (Revelation 4:8-11; 5:11-14). Third, take time to identify what makes God holy and awe-inspiring so that it is easy for you to list them as expressions of praise toward Him (Psalm 111:9). Fourth, meditate regularly on all the characteristics and acts of God so that you develop a growing and deep sense of awe concerning them and can express them with an increasing sense of reverence (Psalm 143:5).

### **Confession**

**What it is.** This element of prayer expresses your own faults and shortcomings to God, in a desire that He will extend mercy toward you. When Jesus taught how to pray in Matthew 6, He taught we should petition God for forgiveness (v. 12). Then, 1 John 1:9 directly teaches the concept of confession of sin toward God. Although God certainly knows our faults and shortcomings, He still desires us to admit them to Him (both generally and specifically).

**Example in the Psalms.** Read Psalm 51 and learn how the psalmist confessed his sin (concerning the incident between David and Bathsheba, 2 Samuel 11-12). Notice his acknowledgement of wrongdoing. Notice his need for God's grace, mercy, and compassion and his expression of such to God. Notice his request for God to cleanse him from his sin completely. Notice his expressions of guilt for the sin that had been committed. Notice his contrite desire to be restored to a right relationship with God. Notice his expression of commitment to live and work for God if He would restore him.

**How to pray this kind of prayer.** Consider the following suggestions. First, engage in sincere reflection and honest self-evaluation so that you can honestly see all the areas of wrongdoing in your life rather than allowing pride to cloud the way you perceive yourself (Luke 18:9-14). Second, have a broken and contrite spirit that does not view the fault, shortcoming, or wrongdoing as being a small and insignificant thing to God and your relationship with Him (Psalm 51:17; James 4:8-10). Third, ask God for mercy/forgiveness in recognition that there is nothing you can do to earn this forgiveness for yourself (Acts 8:22; Luke 18:13). Fourth, experience godly sorrow/grief concerning what the sin has done to your relationship with God and sincerely repent of the sin before you ask God for mercy (2 Corinthians 7:10; Acts 8:22).

### **Thanksgiving**

**What it is.** This element of prayer expresses your gratitude for who God is and what He has done. Although Jesus does not include thanksgiving when He



teaches how to pray in Matthew 6, He demonstrated the importance of it in His own life (Matthew 15:36) and in other Scripture. Christians are directly told to give thanks to God the Father for everything in the name of Jesus Christ (Ephesians 5:20; 1 Thessalonians 5:16-18). Certainly, failing to give thanks demonstrates an arrogant and ungrateful attitude for all that God has done and continues to do.

**Example in the Psalms.** Read Psalm 136 and learn how the psalmist expressed his thanksgiving to God in a wide variety of ways. Notice his gratitude for who the Lord is. Notice his gratitude expressed for all the various elements of God's creation. Notice his gratitude for God's past actions for His people. Notice his gratitude for the way God had presently blessed His people. Notice his gratitude for God's daily provisions and care.

**How to pray this kind of prayer.** Consider the following suggestions. First, be mindful of as many ways as you can concerning how God has given blessings in your life and in the lives of others (Psalm 143:5; James 1:17). Second, consider it essential for you to express thanksgiving to God for anything and everything He does (Luke 17:11-19; Ephesians 5:20). Third, thank God for the physical blessings He has given you (Acts 27:35). Fourth, thank God for His past answers to your prayers (Psalm 118:21; 2 Corinthians 1:11). Fifth, thank God for the spiritual blessings He has provided through Jesus (1 Corinthians 15:57). Sixth, thank God for things that others do (1 Thessalonians 1:2; 2:13; 1 Timothy 2:1). Seventh, be overflowing with gratitude toward God (Colossians 2:6-7).

### **Supplication**

**What it is.** This element of prayer makes a humble petition/request to God. When Jesus taught how to pray in Matthew 6, He includes the petitions that God's name would be honored as holy, for God's kingdom to come, for God's will to be done, for daily provisions of food, for forgiveness, and for deliverance from temptation (vv. 9-13). Although prayer is not just to be viewed as an opportunity to petition and make requests of God, it is part of the design of prayer. And, God wants us to cast our cares upon Him (1 Peter 5:7; Philippians 4:6-7).

**Example in the Psalms.** Read Psalm 141 and learn how the psalmist expressed his supplication to God in a variety of ways. Notice his petition for God to hear his voice and hurry to help. Notice his petition for God to help him pursue personal holiness and to stay away from evil. Notice his petition as working against the evil acts of the wicked. Notice his prayer for personal deliverance from the wicked.

**How to pray this kind of prayer.** Consider the following suggestions. First, cast your own anxieties and cares upon God in recognition that He cares for you

and is the one who can do something about them (Philippians 4:6-7; 1 Peter 5:7). Second, petition God on behalf of others concerning the same things you would think to petition Him about for yourself (Ephesians 6:18-20; 1 Timothy 2:1-2). Third, petition God concerning physical concerns you and others have, including the world leaders to make right decisions (1 Timothy 2:1-2), daily needs (Matthew 6:11), sickness (James 5:14-15), challenges of the flesh (2 Corinthians 12:7-8), etc. Fourth, petition God concerning spiritual concerns you and others have, including avoiding temptation (Luke 22:46), spiritual growth (Philippians 1:9-11), effectiveness in God's service (Philemon 1:6), wisdom (James 1:5), open doors for sharing the gospel (Colossians 4:2-4), boldness in speaking God's word (Acts 4:29), the salvation of others (Romans 10:1), the forgiveness of sins (James 5:15-16), etc. Fifth, make all your requests focused on the will of God being accomplished above your own (Matthew 6:10).

### **Conclusion**

As you consider the privilege to address God in prayer, there is certainly an endless amount that we can pray about. You can use the ACTS of prayer to help guide you through prayer and to grow in your prayers. Challenge yourself to pray each kind of prayer daily. And, even challenge yourself to devote an entire prayer to each of the ACTS of prayer (i.e. an entire prayer just to express adoration toward God).

## **Study Questions**

Do you ever have trouble knowing what you should pray about? What are the ACTS of prayer?

### **1. Adoration**

What does it mean to offer a prayer of adoration?

What do you learn about this kind of prayer from Psalm 145?

How can you pray this kind of prayer?

### **2. Confession**

What does it mean to offer a prayer of confession?

What do you learn about this kind of prayer from Psalm 51?

How can you pray this kind of prayer?

### **3. Thanksgiving**

What does it mean to offer a prayer of thanksgiving?

What do you learn about this kind of prayer from Psalm 136?

How can you pray this kind of prayer?

### **4. Supplication**

What does it mean to offer a prayer of supplication?

What do you learn about this kind of prayer from Psalm 141?

How can you pray this kind of prayer?

# Lesson 4: The Power Of Prayer

It is a great privilege to approach the throne of God in prayer! Certainly, it is a great privilege just to know that the God who created the universe is willing to hear what is on our minds that we want to say to Him. But, it is an even greater privilege to realize that this God says that our prayers are powerful and effective in what they accomplish (James 5:16-18)! So, prayer is not just some kind of empty expression that is offered toward God. Rather, it is something that is truly effective in many ways.

The purpose of this lesson is to learn the power involved in prayer so that we can better learn to appreciate and utilize its wonderful privilege and potential.

## The Power Of God

**Prayer is powerful because of God's power.** Prayer is not powerful and effective because of your own strength or because of mere positive thinking. Rather, it is powerful because of God's power! In fact, all three Beings of the Trinity (the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit) are involved in prayer. Consequently, the Scriptures often teach prayer as being powerful and effective (Matthew 7:7-11; 21:21-22; Mark 11:22-24; John 14:13-14; James 5:16).

**Biblical examples of God's power.** Consider a small sample of the power of God that is recorded by the Scriptures. Consider God's power in creating the universe and all things in them in six days (Genesis 1:1; Psalm 33:6-9). Consider God's power to send the great flood that covered the entire world, while saving Noah and his family (2 Peter 2:5; Genesis 7:17-24). Consider the ten plagues God brought on the land of Egypt and how God delivered His people from Egyptian slavery through the parting of the Red Sea (Isaiah 51:10; Exodus 15:1-21). Consider the way God gave Gideon's army of 300 the victory over a large army (Judges 7:7, 20-22). Consider the way God rescued Daniel from the mouths of the lions (Daniel 6:16-24, 25-27). Then, consider the miracles Jesus performed while He was on the earth – how He healed the sick and the blind, cast out demons, walked on the water, calmed the storm, raised the dead, etc. (Matthew 8:26-27; 9:33). These should cause us to stand in awe of God's great power!

**All things are possible with God.** It is not just important to believe that God is powerful whenever you pray; but that everything is possible with Him! For, one of the fundamental characteristics God possesses is that He is all-powerful (able to do whatever He desires). Consider the statements made in the following passages about God being able to do the “impossible.” In Genesis 18, God promised Abraham and Sarah (at 99 and 89 years old) that they would have a son (v. 14). In Luke 1, God gave a son to Zechariah and Elizabeth in their old age (when they had been unable to have children) and caused the virgin Mary to also have a Son (v. 37). And, in Matthew 19, Jesus taught concerning the difficulty of rich people entering the kingdom of God (vv. 23-26). So, it is not just that God is powerful and can do much. Rather, God is able to accomplish anything that is in harmony with God’s holy nature and will!

**Need to pray like God can do more than we ask or think.** All of these passages and reminders should lead us to pray differently than we may often find ourselves praying. Perhaps we are guilty of putting artificial limits on God when we pray that God does not put on Himself. Perhaps we are guilty of treating prayer like a burdensome obligation rather than an opportunity to tap into the limitless power of God. Perhaps we are guilty of praying in small-minded ways. However, the Scriptures teach us that God is able to do above and beyond all that we ask and think (Ephesians 3:20-21)! While it is appropriate to remember that God does not answer every prayer in the ways we ask them, none of this means that God is any less able to do whatever is according to His will to accomplish (1 John 5:14-15)!

Consider Mark 11:22-24 again. We must neither conclude prayer to be powerful to do everything that is according to our own will, nor explain these verses away so that they mean nothing (or very little) in practical application. However, I believe there is another option. The context shows that Jesus’s disciples point out the fig tree Jesus had cursed that had withered (vv. 12-14, 20-21). In response to this, Jesus taught them about faith and its power, in connection with prayer. Now, Jesus was not teaching that His disciples should go around casting mountains into the sea (and we never read of them doing such a thing, even with miraculous powers). In fact, I don’t believe such a thing would have been in harmony with God’s will. Yet, Jesus was teaching that prayer is powerful because of what God is able to do – just as the tree!

### **Examples Of The Power Of Prayer**

**Old Testament examples.** The entire Bible is full of true stories that demonstrate the power of prayer! Although it may be easy to conclude that these are old stories from bygone days that cannot and will not happen today when

people pray, we must recognize God's continued promises concerning the power of prayer – and remember that God is no less powerful today than He was in the past. Spend time reading the greater context of each example and consider what they teach about the power of prayer.

Consider how God answered Joshua's prayer that the sun would stand still over Gibeon as the Israelites were fighting against the Amorites (Joshua 10:12-14). Consider how God answered Manoah's prayer (the father of Samson) when he prayed that the man of God who had told his wife they would have a son would come again to tell them what they should do (Judges 13:8-10). Consider how God answered Hannah's prayer that He would give her a son (1 Samuel 1:9-11, 17, 19-20). Consider how God answered Jabez's prayer for God's hand to be with him (1 Chronicles 4:9-10). Consider how God answered Elijah's prayer to raise a widow's son back to life (1 Kings 17:19-23). Consider how God answered Elisha's prayer when the army of Aram surrounded the city he was in and Elisha prayed for his servant's eyes to be opened and see the Lord's army around them (2 Kings 6:15-17). Consider how God answered King Hezekiah's prayer when he was terminally ill by adding 15 years to his life, and gave the sign of the sun dial going backwards (Isaiah 38:1-8).

**New Testament examples.** Like the Old Testament, the New Testament also gives examples of God powerfully answering prayers. Spend some time reading the greater context of each example and consider what they teach about the power of prayer. Consider how God answered Zechariah and Elizabeth's prayers concerning having a son even though they were both well along in years (Luke 1:5-7, 13). Consider how God answered the prayers of the apostles after their release from prison for boldness in speaking the word of God (Acts 4:27-31). Consider how God answered the prayers of the church concerning Peter's release from prison when King Herod had imprisoned him and intended to execute him (Acts 12:4-17). Consider how God answered the prayers of the church in Antioch as they prepared to send Paul and Barnabas on a preaching journey (Acts 13:2-3; 14:27).

### **Prayer Is Powerful For The Righteous**

**This promise is not given to the unrighteous.** Notice carefully that this power of prayer is not promised to those who are unrighteous. In fact, the Scriptures demonstrate that God that God is not receptive to the prayers of the unrighteous who are not trying to seek Him (Isaiah 1:15). Perhaps passages like this contributed to the conclusion that was reached by the blind man Jesus had healed in John 9 (v. 31). Furthermore, the New Testament Scriptures plainly state that God is against those who do what is evil (in contrast with His ears being open

to the prayers of the righteous, 1 Peter 3:12). So, you must not believe that you can live in opposition to God and still expect that your prayers will be powerful!

**This is a promise given to the righteous.** Rather than prayer being promised as a powerful blessing that is given to all people, it is presented in Scripture as being a blessing that is given specifically to those who are righteous and are trying to seek Him. Although God can hear everyone at all times, we know that He looks upon the prayers of the righteous in a favorable way (1 Peter 3:12). In fact, James 5:16 specifically identifies the prayers of the righteous as being very powerful in their effect, giving another example of Elijah and his prayers (vv. 17-18). In fact, the examples we have considered demonstrate this principle of the power of prayer for those who are righteous! So, if you want God to hear your prayers favorably and you want your prayers to be powerful in their effect, you must live a righteous life that is striving to seek Him with your whole heart!

### **Conclusion**

There is tremendous power in prayer – because our prayers are offered to the God who has limitless power! While the power of prayer does not mean that we will absolutely be granted everything we ask according to how we ask it, we must not take any of this to mean that prayer is not powerful. Instead, we should find great encouragement in the power of prayer, while also learning the other things God teaches about how God answers our prayers. Therefore, let's be encouraged and learn to pray with the recognition that prayer is powerful!



## **Study Questions**

What does James 5:16-18 teach about what prayer can accomplish?

### **1. The Power Of God**

Why is prayer powerful?

What are some Biblical examples of God's power?

What is possible with God?

What does it mean to pray like God can do more than we ask or think?

## **2. Examples Of The Power Of Prayer**

What are some Old Testament examples of the power of prayer?

What are some New Testament examples of the power of prayer?

## **3. Prayer Is Powerful For The Righteous**

Is there any promise concerning the power of prayer for the unrighteous?

What is the promise concerning the power of prayer for the righteous?

# Lesson 5: How God Answers Prayer

Prayer is powerful (James 5:16)! This is a basic truth that many Christians know. However, knowing that prayer is powerful and understanding how God answers prayer are two different things altogether. Although we will never know all the depths of God's working (in prayer or anything else, Romans 11:33-36), there are some things we can understand about how God answers prayers. And, gaining a better understanding of these should help us trust more in the power of prayer and not be so discouraged and frustrated when we pray.

The purpose of this lesson is to learn how God answers prayers by considering how God intervenes in human life, the different answers God gives to prayer, and how to know God's answer.

## God Intervenes In Human Life

**God's intervention is essential for prayer to be effective.** The Bible clearly teaches the concept that God is sovereign over all (1 Chronicles 29:11-12). God's sovereignty refers to His supreme power over all. While God does *not* actively, intentionally, and purposefully cause everything to happen that happens on earth (like a puppet master, Ecclesiastes 9:11), God can and does get involved in the affairs of people (without taking away free will)! If He did not do so, then there would be no reason whatsoever to pray (because there would be nothing that God can or will do). Consider two ways God can intervene in your life.

**Direct intervention.** When you pray, you need to believe that God can and will *directly* intervene in your life at the times and in the ways God knows to be appropriate. Consider when Hannah prayed to God, asking that God would give her a son (1 Samuel 1:10-11). The Scriptures teach that God remembered her and she conceived and gave birth to a son (1 Samuel 1:19-20). Also consider when King Hezekiah prayed to the Lord for his life to be extended (Isaiah 38:1-3). The Scriptures teach that God added 15 years to the king's life (Isaiah 38:4-6).

**Indirect intervention.** When you pray, you also need to believe that God can and will *indirectly* intervene in your life at the times and in the ways God knows to be appropriate (i.e. through other people, circumstances, etc.). Consider when

King Ahasuerus had approved the proposal made by Haman to annihilate all the Jewish people (Esther 3:12-13), that resulted in all the Jewish people weeping and crying bitterly (surely including prayers, Esther 4:1-3). Yet, God's hand can be seen working through a series of events that had brought Esther to be queen and to save the Jewish people (Esther 4:13-14). So, while God did not rescue the Jewish people through some spectacular show of direct involvement against the king, God was working "behind the scenes" to bring about their salvation! The same thing can be seen in the life of Joseph. God allowed Joseph to endure many terrible experiences before bringing Joseph into a high position of authority to deliver the Israelites from starvation (Genesis 50:20).

### **Possible Answers To Prayer**

**Yes.** You must not conclude that God always answers prayer according to what, how, and when you ask. Rather, the Scriptures show a few different ways God answers prayer. This certainly includes that God can and sometimes does answer prayer according to what is being requested. This was seen in the examples of Hannah and King Hezekiah. And, God can certainly grant requests made to Him in prayer today (Matthew 7:7-11; James 5:15-16).

**No.** God does *not* always affirmatively answer every prayer – even when a righteous person is praying! Look no further than Jesus's prayer in the garden of Gethsemane shortly before His arrest and crucifixion to see this point (Luke 22:41-45). Though He was the Son of God, the suffering was not taken away from Him (as His sacrifice was necessary to save us all)! Then, consider Paul and his thorn in the flesh in 2 Corinthians 12. Paul pleaded with the Lord three times that this would leave him (vv. 7-8). But, this was not taken away from him (vv. 9-10). Therefore, God will sometimes answer your prayers with a "no." However, you must continue to trust that God knows better than you do, even when you don't like the answer (Isaiah 46:9-10; Romans 11:33-36; 1 Corinthians 1:25)!

**Wait.** While there are certainly times in which it may seem God is not answering our prayers, it may be that God is delaying the answer to a later time. For example, it may have seemed to Zechariah and Elizabeth (who were both righteous people, Luke 1:6) that God had answered their prayer for a son as "no" (Luke 1:7). Yet, at the proper time of God's choosing, they would have a son – who would prepare the way for Jesus (Luke 1:13, 19-20)! In fact, even the Psalmist speaks of waiting patiently on the Lord when he cried out to Him for help (Psalm 25:3; 27:14; 40:1; 130:5-6). The implication is that God will not always answer in the ways you are seeking immediately. Still, we must learn to trust God enough that we will wait for Him and that He works everything out according to His will

and in His time (Psalm 31:14-15) – and know that His timing is better than ours (Isaiah 55:8-9; Psalm 90:4)!

### **How To Know God's Answer**

**Expect God to answer.** If you pray without the expectation that God will hear and answer your prayer, you should not expect to receive anything from Him (James 1:5-8)! On the other hand, if you pray fervently to God and then expect Him to give you an answer, you will be looking for it and watching for how He may choose to intervene in your life. However, you still must not expect the answer to always be what, when, and how you want it to be and you must be open to receiving the other possible answers God gives to prayer.

**Look for God's answers to be according to His will.** It is easy to quote verses that seem to promise God will always answer our prayers according to what, when, and how we ask (i.e. Matthew 7:7-11). However, not only should these passages be studied carefully themselves to arrive at the proper conclusions, but we must also harmonize these with other Scriptures that show God not giving people what they ask for. The conclusion we must reach is that God will grant the request of our prayers when they are in harmony with His will (1 John 5:14-15)!

**Be willing to wait and accept God's answer.** God may choose to delay the answer to your prayer. This is where you must learn to wait on God's answer and not act presumptuously. While this can be extremely difficult, we have seen that this idea occurs frequently throughout the Psalms. At this time, though, you must not become discouraged. Rather, you must pray even more persistently, while you wait for God to give you an answer (Luke 11:5-13; Luke 18:1-8). Then, even if the answer is clearly "no" after some time passes, you must accept His answer and continue to worship and seek God (2 Samuel 12:14-23).

**Recognize God may answer your prayer differently than you expected.** When you pray, you must not put God in the box of what your mind can conceive concerning the possible answer(s) to prayer (Ephesians 3:20-21)! For example, the apostle Paul prayed that he would be able to visit the Christians in Rome (Romans 1:9-12; 15:31-32). Although he had been hindered up to that point (Romans 15:22), he was making plans concerning going to Spain after he traveled to Jerusalem (Romans 15:23-29). But, instead of this, Paul would be imprisoned in Jerusalem and spend two years in prison in Caesarea before he would appeal to Caesar and be transported to Rome as a prisoner, where he would spend at least two more years under house arrest (Acts 21-28; 28:30-31). Yet, God opened various doors through these prison years for the gospel. Therefore, you must have

your mind open to your prayers being answered in ways you do not expect or you may miss out on what God makes available!

**Test everything.** If you are not careful, you may reach a conclusion about how God has answered your prayer that really is not God's answer and may not even come from God! For example, although God can work to open and close doors in our lives, Satan is also pictured in Scripture as being able to hinder plans (1 Thessalonians 2:17-18). And, there are some people who interpret various things that happen in their lives to be a sign from God that He wants something from them that goes against what He has revealed in the Scriptures. Therefore, you must learn to put everything about your life to the test (1 Thessalonians 5:21-22), including what you think may be the answer to prayer. Since God's word is true, you can know He will not give you an answer that conflicts with His truth!

### **Conclusion**

You should find great comfort in knowing that God answers prayer and determine that you will make the best use of prayer you can! But, you must recognize that God answers prayers in various ways and you must not put God in a box (unless He has said He puts Himself in that box). While I cannot possibly explain everything about how God answers prayers, you can use these principles to help you search for His answers.

## **Study Questions**

How will understanding how God answers prayer help you in prayer?

### **1. God Intervenes In Human Life**

How is God's intervention essential for prayer to be effective?

Can God intervene in your life in direct ways?

Can God intervene in your life in indirect ways?

### **2. Possible Answers To Prayer**

Does God ever answer prayers as "yes"?

Does God ever answer prayers as "no"?

Does God ever answer prayers as “wait”?

### **3. How To Know God’s Answer**

Why is it important to expect God to answer?

Why is it important to look for God’s answers to be according to His will?

Why is it important to be willing to wait and accept God’s answer?

Why is it important to recognize God may answer your prayer different than you expected?

Why is it important to test everything?



# Lesson 6: Requirements For Effective Prayer

Prayer is a wonderful privilege God has made available to His people and is powerful in its effect (James 5:16). However, it is also possible for prayers to have no effect (James 1:7). Thankfully, the Bible teaches us how to pray effective prayers by detailing some elements that are required by God. Consider this: If you were invited to come before a king and speak to him, wouldn't you desire to learn as much as you could about the proper way He desires to be approached? In a much greater way, you should desire to learn what God teaches about how He wants people to approach His throne in prayer (Hebrews 4:14-16)!

The purpose of this lesson is to learn how God desires the elements of spirit and truth, faith, the will of God, and righteousness for our prayers to be effective.

## Spirit And Truth

**The right motives in prayer.** Jesus taught that the Father wants those who worship Him to worship in spirit and in truth (John 4:23-24). Worshiping Him in spirit involves having the right motives and sincerity. It does not involve just going through the motions in worship while our hearts are far from God (Matthew 15:7-9). So, as prayer is an avenue through which we worship God, we must conclude that it is essential to pray with the kind of spirit/motive that pleases God. For example, Jesus taught that people must not pray insincerely and for show that they would be seen and praised by people (Matthew 6:5-8). Part of praying for personal praise and recognition was praying many empty words (i.e. babbling, vain repetitions). We can do this by praying long and wordy prayers that are not offered sincerely and by repeating the same memorized prayers without really meaning what is said. Furthermore, God forbids prayer that is motivated by selfish pleasures (James 4:3). Rather, God desires people to approach Him with the motive of seeking Him and His will to be done so that He will be glorified!

**The right actions in prayer.** Jesus also teaches that true worship to God involves truth (John 4:23-24). So, our prayers must be offered according to the way of truth God teaches in the pages of Scripture. That is, we cannot just sincerely

offer our prayers in whatever way we desire without considering how God teaches us to pray. For example, offering prayers to Mary (the mother of Jesus) or to saints is a complete misuse of prayer that is unauthorized in the Bible. While the Bible gives us a great deal of general authority in prayer that leaves us with many options about how to pray and what to pray about, we must still be careful to offer every prayer according to the authority of Jesus Christ as He has taught in Scripture (Colossians 3:17)! This includes praying to God, praying in Jesus's name, expressing the ACTS of prayer (adoration, confession, thanksgiving, and supplication), etc. (see the lesson, "How To Pray" for more).

### Faith

**Prayer without faith is useless.** James demonstrates the power of prayer when he teaches about asking God for wisdom (James 1:5). However, the prayer must be offered in faith (James 1:6-8). One who prays to God and then doubts should not expect to receive anything from God. Instead, this one is like the sea that is driven and tossed by the wind, double-minded and unstable – praying for God to do something, but then doubting that God can make that happen! James later demonstrates the importance of faith in prayer regarding the sick (James 5:15). God is certainly capable of healing the physically sick and forgiving the spiritually sick. Our prayers should reflect this great power of God. In fact, James demonstrates how Elijah prayed concerning rain and that it came to be (James 5:16-18). Notice the confidence with which Elijah had prayed, expressed through the words he told the king (1 Kings 17:1).

**What faith looks like in prayer.** It is easy to pray in faith whenever God has revealed what will happen. But, it is still possible to pray in faith whenever God has *not* directly revealed His will! However, when we do not know what God's will is concerning a situation (i.e. whether He will heal someone physically), then you must *not* let your faith be conveyed as demanding. Rather, it must express confidence in God's ability to do the thing if it is according to His will! A good example is the man who had leprosy in Mark 1. He came to Jesus and fell on his knees, begging Jesus. He said that Jesus could make him clean if Jesus was willing (Mark 1:40). In this case, Jesus was willing and cleansed the man (vv. 41-42). However, we must also recognize the real possibility that whatever we ask for is not according to the will of God and, therefore, may not happen (2 Corinthians 12:7-10). Praying in this way is how we can pray with faith for God to move mountains – if it is His will (Mark 11:22-24)!

## **The Will Of God**

**Prayer should come from a heart and life that is seeking God's will.** The one who is truly following Jesus Christ is not one who is focused on his/her own desires and pleasures. For, just as Jesus sought the will of the Father, so will those who are striving to imitate Jesus (John 4:34). In fact, those who follow Jesus are to crucify the flesh with its passions and desires (Galatians 2:20; 5:24). With this being the case, then, the prayers that are offered by Christians will reflect the desire for God's will to be done rather than for selfish desires (James 4:3). However, none of this means that we cannot ask God concerning things that are matters of personal concern to us (i.e. health problems, family challenges, financial burdens, etc.). For, God wants us to cast our cares on Him (1 Peter 5:7). Yet, we do not do this just so that we can have what we want and have an easy and carefree life. Instead, we do this so that however God may bless us can be used to His glory and further advance the cause of His kingdom (Philippians 1:20-24)!

**Prayer should seek God's will.** When we have hearts and lives that are seeking the will of God above our own, it will be an easy transition for this to flow into our prayers. For example, this is how we see Jesus in the moments before His arrest (which would lead to His crucifixion, Luke 22:41-44). Although His grief was intense and His desire for another way to accomplish the Father's will was real, He was committed to doing whatever was necessary to accomplish the Father's will! Certainly, we should learn to express our desire for the Father's will to be done in our prayers, even above our own wills. In fact, Jesus taught people to pray in this way (Matthew 6:10). By praying in this way, we can be confident that God will hear us and we know that God's will will be accomplished (1 John 5:14-15)! Therefore, we must never be so presumptuous to seek our own will above God's will in prayer.

## **Righteousness**

**God looks favorably on the prayers of those seeking to do His will.** The Scriptures plainly demonstrate the power of prayer is promised to those who live in righteous ways according to the will of God (Luke 1:6, 13; John 9:31; James 5:16; 1 Peter 3:12; 1 John 3:21-22). So, those who have become Christians and are keeping their lives free from sin should have confidence in God hearing their prayers favorably. However, I believe the Scriptures also demonstrate a couple other points that should be considered along with this one. First, God looks favorably on the prayers of those who are seeking to know Him (Acts 10:1-4; Matthew 7:7-8). Second, God looks favorably on the prayers of Christians who are humbly confessing their sins to Him (Acts 8:22; 1 John 1:9). So, even though they

are not righteous, God hears the prayer that is appealing for His forgiveness and seeking to know Him!

**Unrighteousness will hinder prayer's effectiveness.** The Scriptures give many warnings about the negative impact remaining in sin will have on the effectiveness of prayer. In the Old Testament, anyone who does not want to hear and obey the law of God can only present detestable prayer before God (Proverbs 28:9; Isaiah 1:15). Then, in the New Testament, Jesus taught that one should not continually bring offerings to God while ignoring the uncorrected offenses (Matthew 5:23-24). Furthermore, Jesus taught that God will not forgive those who do not forgive others (Matthew 6:14-15). Then, it was believed that God would not listen to sinners (i.e. those who persist in sin, John 9:31). In fact, Peter plainly states that God's face is against those who do evil (1 Peter 3:12). And, Peter even teaches that such sin as a husband not treating his wife in the proper way can hinder a Christian's prayer (1 Peter 3:7). Therefore, we must carefully evaluate ourselves as we pray and make sure we are seeking God's will and not ignoring sin that is present in our lives. If we are, this may explain why our prayers are not being effective.

### **Conclusion**

Prayer is a wonderful blessing that is full of power! However, just saying words to God in prayer does not ensure that our prayers are being effective. Rather, we have seen some of the elements that should be involved in our prayers and in our lives for prayer to be as effective as it can be. Therefore, if we believe that our prayers seem to not be effective, it would be good to carefully evaluate both our lives and our prayers to see if all the elements for effective prayer are present. If not, we should correct whatever is lacking.

## **Study Questions**

How can prayer both be effective and have no effect?

### **1. Spirit And Truth**

Why is it important to have the right motives in prayer?

Why is it important to have the right actions in prayer?

### **2. Faith**

Why is prayer without faith useless?

What should faith look like in prayer?

### **3. The Will Of God**

How should your heart and life be focused on seeking God's will?

How should your prayer seek God's will?

### **4. Righteousness**

How does God view the prayers of those who seek to do His will?

How does unrighteousness impact prayer?

# Lesson 7: Persistence In Prayer

While prayer is powerful in its effect for those who are righteous, the answer to prayer is not always immediately known. There are many times when the only answer we seem to receive to our prayers is to wait. Then, after the wait, sometimes God grants what we have asked for in prayer. Other times, after the wait, God does not answer according to what we ask. Regardless, the waiting can be a challenge for us, as we often want and perhaps even expect an answer in quick order. Therefore, we need to learn how to be persistent in prayer.

The purpose of this lesson is to learn how to be persistent in prayer by observing that Jesus taught persistence in prayer, understanding why persistence is necessary, and considering how to wait on the Lord.

## Jesus Teaches Persistence In Prayer

**Luke 11:5-13.** After Jesus taught the model prayer (Luke 11:1-4), Jesus taught a parable that emphasizes persistence in petitioning God by way of a contrast between a friend and God. For example, Jesus teaches how one will eventually get up and give bread to his friend through the continual requesting (shameless boldness) – as much bread as he wants. However, the lesson in the parable is not that we should keep bothering God, but that if this would happen in the case of a friend, how much more will it happen whenever God's people call upon God (who desires to give good things to those who ask Him for such)! In fact, we should notice that if even evil earthly fathers will give their children what they ask for, God will certainly give good gifts to His children (i.e. the knowledge needed for salvation by the Holy Spirit's message). So, we should ask, seek, and knock – and continue to doing so as we wait for God's answer!

**Luke 18:1-8.** Jesus teaches a similar parable in this text to the one in Luke 11. The focus of this parable is explained as Jesus teaching the need to pray always and not give up (v. 1). So, the implication is that people may start to give up in their prayers. In the parable, Jesus presents a contrast between an unjust judge and God. He illustrates how an unjust judge would respond to a widow who persistently continued coming to him, seeking justice. Although he was initially

unwilling to grant her this justice, he did eventually give her the justice she sought because she kept pestering him. So, the point Jesus is making is *not* that God's people pester God when they persistently pray. Rather, if an unjust judge responds to a widow in this way, how much more will God grant justice to His elect people who cry out to Him day and night!

**Matthew 26:36-46.** Jesus also taught persistence in prayer with His actions – even in these moments immediately preceding His arrest and crucifixion (when He was deeply grieved to the point of death). He knew what was about to happen and the terrible things He was about to experience. So, He petitioned His Father on three occasions in this text that this cup (of suffering) might be taken from Him. Yet, He was focused on the Father's will above His own. And, He was persistent in this prayer until the time immediately before He was arrested.

**Romans 12:12.** Jesus also taught persistence in prayer through the messages of the inspired New Testament writers, like Paul in this passage (1 Corinthians 14:37). Through them, Jesus teaches that His people must be persistent (enduring) in prayer. So, even when you are experiencing difficult circumstances and you may be tempted to rely on yourself or when you think God is not listening, you must not give up in your prayers!

### **Why Persistence In Prayer Is Necessary**

**To demonstrate faith.** Some believe that asking God for something in prayer more than once demonstrates a lack of faith. For, as they may claim, if you really trusted in God, you would not need to ask again. However, rather than a lack of faith causing one to do this, it is actually faith in God that results in this persistence! For example, such a one demonstrates faith by simply obeying the teachings of Scripture to be persistent in prayers, as true faith comes through hearing God's word (Romans 10:17). Then, persistence in prayer demonstrates faith by trusting so much in God that he/she continues to ask! And, such a one also understands that God answers prayer in His timing and not according to the time we desire. So, these trust so much in God that they are willing to wait on Him and continue to seek His will through prayer (Isaiah 40:27-31)!

**To demonstrate boldness.** Prayer, in its nature, is an opportunity to boldly come before the throne of God through Jesus (Hebrews 4:14-16). And, we know that our prayers are not burdensome to Him (so long as our prayers and our character are as He desires them). In fact, we know that He wants us to cast our cares upon Him because He cares about us (1 Peter 5:7). So, even when we are persistent in our prayers while we wait for God to answer, we are demonstrating a shameless boldness that is unembarrassed to come before God and ask about



those things we believe are important again and again (Luke 11:8)! Clearly, God looks favorably on such boldness in prayer (Luke 11:9-13).

**To demonstrate faithful reliance on God.** Since prayer to God is an integral part of our relationship with Him, we should not be able to go long periods of time without addressing Him in prayer (1 Thessalonians 5:17; Ephesians 6:18). True faith in God, then, is manifested (in part) through our actions of persistently going to God in prayer. For, the alternative is giving up (i.e. one who becomes discouraged and overwhelmed by the struggles in his/her life). Faithfulness to God is not just moving on from each request you make of God after one mention of it. Rather, it is relying on God so deeply in your life that you will not give up and will continue to seek God's will (Luke 18:1; Romans 12:12)!

**To demonstrate patience.** When we demonstrate persistence in prayer, we are showing that we trust in God so much and will be faithful to Him even when it requires waiting on Him. The psalms express such willingness to wait on God (Psalm 27:14; Psalm 130:5-6). Sometimes, this patience toward God also means that we continue to reaffirm our trust in Him to hear our prayers and continue to ask God concerning the same things. For, we must recognize that God answers in the ways and at the times He knows will be best. However, when it is clear that God has answered our prayers (either with a "yes" or a "no"), we should then stop asking for the same. For example, Paul pleaded with the Lord three times concerning his thorn in the flesh (2 Corinthians 12:8). Yet, when he learned of God's answer to not take this away, he changed his prayer (2 Corinthians 12:9-10)! The same can be seen with King David (2 Samuel 12:15-23).

### **How To Wait On God**

**Don't stop praying.** When you wait for God to answer your prayer, it can be tempting to get discouraged and give up on prayer. For, perhaps you conclude that the prayer does not accomplish anything or that God is not listening to you. However, you must continue to pray no matter what situation you find yourself in (Psalm 130:1-2; Luke 18:1)! Cry out to God (no matter where you are in life) that He would hear your voice and be attentive to your cry for help!

**Reflect inwardly.** There are situations in which your prayers can be hindered (1 Peter 3:7, 12). Therefore, the opportunity to wait on God is also a good opportunity to reflect on your life and evaluate if there is anything that may be hindering your prayers, using the word of God as the standard for evaluation (2 Corinthians 13:5). If there is, make correction of it and seek God's forgiveness (Psalm 130:3-4).

**Study the word.** Prayer and Bible study are key elements in a life that pleases God. Through prayer, you communicate to God. Through Bible study, God communicates to you. So, as you wait, you should continue to hope in the word of God, knowing that what He says is always true and right (Psalm 130:5). And, you should use God's word to evaluate whether what you are asking of God is truly according to His will (1 John 5:14-15).

**Have open eyes and an open heart.** As you wait on God, there should be an eager desire to see how God answers. But, this will require that you are open to however God chooses to answer (Psalm 130:6). Don't let your own expectations of how you think God should answer your prayers get in the way of realizing how He actually does answer your prayers!

**Keep trusting.** No matter how long it takes or how God chooses to answer your prayers, keep your hope and trust firmly in Him. Understand that God remains the same and that He is still trustworthy (Psalm 130:7-8). Therefore, do not allow your hope and trust in God to waver. Instead, realize that God will work all things out for the good of those who love Him (Romans 8:28). And, don't rush ahead with your own plans if you are not confident what pleases God.

### **Conclusion**

Because the answers to our prayers do not always come as quickly as we might desire, we will have to be patient and persevere in prayer. Do not let yourself become discouraged so as to give up in your prayers. Instead, learn to wait on God and trust in Him regardless of your circumstances!

## Study Questions

Will the answer in prayer always be immediately known? Why or why not?

### 1. Jesus Teaches Persistence In Prayer

How does Jesus teach about persistence in prayer in Luke 11:5-13? What lessons do you learn?

How does Jesus teach about persistence in prayer in Luke 18:1-8? What lessons do you learn?

How does Jesus teach about persistence in prayer in Matthew 26:36-46? What lessons do you learn?

How does Jesus teach about persistence in prayer in Romans 12:12? What lessons do you learn?

## **2. Why Persistence In Prayer Is Necessary**

How does persistence in prayer demonstrate faith?

How does persistence in prayer demonstrate boldness?

How does persistence in prayer demonstrate faithful reliance on God?

How does persistence in prayer demonstrate patience?

## **3. How To Wait On God**

Why is it important to not stop praying while you wait on God?

Why is it important to reflect inwardly while you wait on God?

Why is it important to study the word while you wait on God?

Why is it important to have open eyes and an open heart while you wait on God?

Why is it important to keep trusting while you wait on God?

# Lesson 8: Devoted To Prayer

Prayer is a great privilege that has been given to God's people. In addition, prayer is powerful in its effect whenever righteous people pray according to the will of God (James 5:16; 1 John 5:14-15). These basic facts about prayer ought to have a dramatic impact on how often we pray – and the fervency of that prayer. For, it should not be that God's people pray to “check the box” of something God wants His people to do. Rather, God's people should have the burning desire to devote themselves to prayer! In fact, God wants His people to recognize prayer as an integral part of fighting and winning our spiritual war!

The purpose of this lesson is to learn how to be devoted to prayer by learning that God wants His people to be devoted to prayer, considering prayer warriors of the Bible, and evaluating some characteristics of being devoted to prayer.

## God Wants His People To Be Devoted To Prayer

**Devoted.** God's people should not just be moderately interested in prayer. Rather, they must give continual attention to it. For example, this is one of the first things we read about Christians doing (Acts 2:42)! Furthermore, it is also something that God expects Christians to do (Romans 12:12; Colossians 4:2). But, this steadfast devotion to prayer goes beyond just being patient with God (Luke 18:1). Rather, it is a deep sense of commitment to the value and practice of prayer!

**Pray always.** God's people should strive not to just be people who pray on certain occasions (i.e. before bed, before meals, with other members of the church, etc.). Rather, they should be so devoted to prayer that it is a constant element of their lives (1 Thessalonians 5:17; Luke 18:1). While prayer is not the only thing God desires from our lives, we should have a constant prayerful attitude that is quick to go to God in prayer and that utilizes many opportunities to pray.

**Prayer warriors.** “Prayer warriors” is a term that is used to describe people who are devoted to prayer, including prayers for others. This is a fitting description for what God wants of all His people – not just a select few. For example, as God teaches how to overcome Satan's challenges in Ephesians 6, He teaches us to pray always (vv. 18-20). Being successful in our spiritual war requires a commitment to prayer – on behalf of yourself and others (for both other Christians and non-

Christians, 1 Timothy 2:1-2). The Bible also presents the concept of striving, struggling, or wrestling for others in prayer (Colossians 4:12)!

### **Prayer Warriors Of The Bible**

**David.** Not only do we see David praying at different points through the Biblical record of his life, but we also have the book of Psalms that contains many of David's prayers to God. For example, when David was facing a physical enemy, he inquired of the Lord to know what he should do (1 Samuel 23:10-12). Or, when David faced trouble from his son Absalom, he prayed to the Lord for deliverance (Psalm 3:1-4).

**Daniel.** Daniel's devotion to prayer was tested in a major way whenever the king issued an edict that forbade the calling on any god (or God) other than the king, threatening any violators would be thrown into the lions' den (Daniel 6:6-9). Yet, whenever Daniel learned of this, he continued his normal practice of praying to God three times a day, on his knees, with his windows opened toward Jerusalem (Daniel 6:10)! Then, Daniel 9 records Daniel's prayer when he understood the captivity of the people would last for 70 years, petitioning God and confessing the sin of the people (vv. 3-6).

**Jesus.** Jesus is the ultimate example of one who was devoted to prayer, fighting in prayer for Himself as He strove to do the will of God and for others. For example, we see Jesus praying at many different times and even for long lengths of time (Mark 1:35). Then, we see Jesus praying to the Father throughout John 17 concerning Himself (vv. 1-5), His disciples at that time (vv. 6-19), and all who would believe in Him through His disciples (vv. 20-26). In fact, Jesus's devotion to prayer can be seen in that He was praying in the moments immediately preceding His arrest and crucifixion (Matthew 26:36-46).

**The apostles.** The apostles undoubtedly learned from Jesus's personal devotion to prayer, and asked Him to teach them how to pray (Luke 11:1-4). However, their devotion to prayer did not end when Jesus ascended to Heaven. Rather, upon their return to Jerusalem after Jesus ascended, the apostles were all continually devoted to prayer (Acts 1:14). Furthermore, the apostles considered devotion to prayer and the ministry of the word as primary works (Acts 6:4). Then, the apostle Paul can also often be seen praying and writing concerning a devotion to prayer (Colossians 4:2).

## Characteristics Of Being Devoted To Prayer

**Prayer is prioritized.** Prayer takes time. Although time is the most precious resource we have on this earth, God repeatedly demonstrates that prayer is worth the time spent on it. Those who are devoted to God have given prayer a prominent place in their schedules, even when it means sacrificing other things (Psalm 55:17; Mark 1:35). Interestingly, prayer is also often coupled with fasting in the Scriptures (Daniel 9:3; Acts 13:3). So, whether with fasting included or not, prayer must be given a significant place in your schedule and you must take advantage of whatever opportunity you can to pray (1 Thessalonians 5:17).

**Prayer is sincere.** True devotion to prayer is not making sure you recite a form/memorized prayer at designated times. Although there is nothing inherently wrong with repeating the same prayers, we must always make certain that we are meaning the words that we pray so that they are not empty/meaningless babble (Matthew 6:7). But, as you consider the examples of Scripture, you should be impressed that the prayers recorded in its pages sincerely express the thoughts of those praying (i.e. Acts 4:23-31). This is how we are to pray always in the spirit (Ephesians 6:18, whether in our own sincere spirits or according to the teachings of the Spirit as He helps us be in a right relationship with God).

**Prayer is desired.** Those who were devoted to prayer in the Bible always appear to desire to pray (not something they were forced to do). God wants people to pray to Him who desire to approach His throne and come into His presence (Hebrews 4:14-16; 1 Thessalonians 1:2-3). Although there are many things we can become distracted with in this life, the pursuit of all those things will end in devastating ways. But, those who truly delight in the Lord will seek refuge in Him (Psalm 73:26-28). One way we do this will be through prayer. In fact, there should be a yearning that we develop to draw near to God by approaching Him in prayer.

**Prayer is personal.** Those who are devoted to God pray about anything and everything that is significant to them. As you search throughout the pages of Scripture, you can see the people of God who were devoted to prayer praying about many different things related to their personal lives. For example, Paul taught Christians to cast the sources of their anxiety upon God so as to experience the peace of God (Philippians 4:6-7). So, there are many things we are taught to pray about that are deeply personal (i.e. Matthew 6:9-13).

**Prayer is intercessory.** Those who are devoted to prayer do not just use prayer selfishly. Rather, we see examples throughout the Bible of people who are devoted to prayer petitioning God on behalf of others. As we have already seen, devotion to prayer should include such intercession today (1 Timothy 2:1-2; Ephesians 6:18-20). This includes people of all sorts – including world leaders,

church leaders, brothers and sisters in Christ, and the lost! We should view prayer as our opportunity to help others in their spiritual war as well as ourselves.

**Prayer is opportunistic.** Prioritizing prayer will require you to devote yourself to prayer in whatever situations you find yourself in (1 Thessalonians 5:17). In fact, we see people who were devoted to prayer praying in various contexts throughout Scripture. First, you need to be opportunistic with your own personal and private prayers (Matthew 6:5-6), setting aside the appropriate times to pray and taking advantage of various opportunities throughout the day. Second, you need to be opportunistic with the prayers offered in a church assembly (Acts 12:5, 12), setting aside the time to assemble with the church and diligently involving yourself in the prayers. Third, you need to be opportunistic to pray with others outside of a church assembly (Acts 20:36), setting aside time to gather and pray with brothers and sisters.

### **Conclusion**

Prayer is much too great of a blessing God has provided to His people to not devote yourself to it! Yet, if you are not careful in making prayer a priority in your life and in your faith, it can easily be pushed to the background and simply be something that you are occasionally or habitually involved with. Rather than this, you should challenge yourself to take full advantage of the opportunity God has given you to approach His throne in prayer!



## **Study Questions**

How should understanding the blessing of prayer impact your life?

### **1. God Wants His People To Be Devoted To Prayer**

What does it mean to be devoted to prayer?

What does it mean to pray always?

What does the Bible teach about prayer's connection with fighting your spiritual war?

### **2. Prayer Warriors Of The Bible**

How was David a prayer warrior?

How was Daniel a prayer warrior?

How was Jesus a prayer Warrior?

How were the apostles prayer warriors?

### **3. Characteristics Of Being Devoted To Prayer**

How should prayer be prioritized?

How should prayer be sincere?

How should prayer be desired?

How should prayer be personal?

How should prayer be intercessory?

How should prayer be opportunistic?