# prayer.jpg“Lord, Teach Us to Pray”

A Study in Practical Prayer[[1]](#footnote-1)

One might assume that all Christians naturally understand the importance of prayer and spend time daily communing with God in this way. One would be wrong in this assumption. Many Christians spend little or no time in regular prayer. They pray at church, in crisis situations, and occasionally on religious holidays or when called upon in public, but rarely beyond that. Perhaps they don’t comprehend the importance of prayer, or perhaps they struggle with the mechanics or the form or it. For whatever reasons, believers often neglect prayer.

*Note the Quote:* Contemporary Christians appear to face two problems related to prayer. One is that many simply do not pray. The other is that, when they do pray, they pray badly. By no means are these problems confined to isolated instances. They are pervasive.[[2]](#footnote-2)

This series of lessons is designed to encourage believers to pray rightly by examining what the Bible says about this critical spiritual discipline.

**Lesson 1: The Importance of Prayer**

Eph 6:18 …*praying always with all prayer and supplication in the Spirit, being watchful to this end with all perseverance and supplication for all the saints*

Why is prayer so important?

1. God commands believers to pray.
   1. Pray without giving up (Luke 18:1)
   2. Watch and pray ( Luke 21:36)
   3. Pray with supplication, watchfulness, and perseverance (Eph 6:18)
   4. Pray earnestly, vigilantly, thankfully (Col 4:2)
   5. Pray continually (1 Thes 5:17)
   6. Pray seriously and watchfully (1 Pet 4:7)
2. God’s people pray.
   1. Jesus (Mark 1:35; [Luke 6:12](http://www.crossbooks.com/verse.asp?ref=Luke%206:12)): The words “pray” and “prayer” are used at least 25 times in connection with our Lord’s earthly ministry. Jesus continues to intercede for his people before God’s throne (Heb 7:25).
   2. Abraham (Gen 18:23f)
   3. Moses (Ex 33:11)
   4. David (Ps 17:1, 86:1)
   5. Daniel (Dan 6:10)
   6. The Apostles (Acts 6:4)
   7. Church fathers, martyrs, missionaries, pastors, theologians, teachers, etc. Virtually anyone who’s served God in any significant way has been a person of prayer.
3. Prayer is God’s appointed means for obtaining things God would give to us. James 4:2
   1. God is not obligated to work through human prayer. He does whatever he wants. It is pure grace that God listens to our requests. He often says “no.” There is no magic “key” to persuading God to give us what we want.
   2. God hears and answers prayer according to his will (1 John 5:14). Our desire should be that God would grant our requests according to his will and for his glory. Our intent should not be to change God’s mind or overcome his reluctance to provide something we want.
   3. God grants mercy and grace to help in time of need (Heb 4:16). Christians need grace and help all the time, especially in times of crisis. Unfortunately, many Christians come before the throne of grace only during such times.
   4. We can legitimately tell God our requests in prayer (Phil 4:6). God promises to give us what we need, but not everything we want. When we cast all our cares upon God in prayer (1 Pet 5:7), we enjoy the peace that “passeth all understanding” (Phil 4:8).
4. Prayer promotes sanctification and spiritual maturity. (Luke 21:34-36)
   1. Sanctification (Ps 139:23-24; Heb 13:18)
   2. Spiritual maturity (Ps 119:18; James 1:5)
5. Prayer empowers our work. E.g., Eph 6:18-20; 1 Thes 5:25—“pray for us”
   1. God works through prayer in the conversion of the lost.
   2. God works through prayer in the strengthening of the church.
   3. God works through prayer in virtually every aspect of Christian life and service—preaching, teaching, evangelism, discipleship, parenting, etc.

*Quote:* Prayer will root out heresy, allay misunderstanding, sweep away jealousies and animosities, obliterate immoralities, and bring in the full tide of God’s reviving grace. In the hour of darkest portent, when the case of the church, local or universal, has seemed beyond hope, believing men and believing women have met together and cried to God and the answer has come.[[3]](#footnote-3)

**“Lord, Teach Us to Pray”**

**Lesson 2:** **Overcoming the Difficulties of Prayer**

1. Prayer is difficult.
   1. People misunderstand prayer.
      1. They don’t understand what the Bible says about it.
      2. They fail to appreciate the necessity of prayer. “God is going to do whatever He wants anyway, so why pray?” “It doesn’t seem to matter if I pray or not.”
      3. They have false expectations about it, and when prayer doesn’t get them what they want, they quit.
      4. They underestimate what biblical prayer requires. Prayer is hard work. It demands concentrated effort. It places demands on mind and body. It requires extended time and a quiet place. Some are unwilling to invest the energy and time necessary to have an effective prayer life.
      5. Some are unsure about what to say and how to say it. They are intimidated by the flowery prayers they’ve heard in the past and don’t think they can pray correctly. They don’t know the mysterious formulas or incantations people use to address God.
   2. Biblical indications that prayer is difficult.
      1. Mt 26:41 *Watch and pray, that ye enter not into temptation: the spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak.*
      2. Rom 15:30 *… strive together with me in prayers to God for me,*
      3. Eph 6:18 *Praying always with all prayer and supplication in the Spirit, and watching thereunto with all perseverance and supplication for all saints;*
      4. 1Pe 4:7 *But the end of all things is at hand: be ye therefore sober, and watch unto prayer.*
   3. Prayer may become a burden, a duty more than a delight.
      1. We know that we should do it, but find it difficult, boring, and/or unfruitful.
      2. We find that our minds wander, our bodies are uncomfortable, and we don’t know what to say.
   4. Worldly influences insist that prayer is meaningless superstition.
      1. It’s a relic of the dark ages, little more than empty wishes. Prayer is a psychological means of coping with the difficulties of life. Answers to prayer are merely self-fulfilled expectations or happy coincidences that only gullible people attribute to God’s intervention.
      2. Educated people know better; they don’t waste their time “wishing upon a star.”
   5. The Bible lists several hindrances that make prayer ineffective.
      1. Unbelief (James 1:6-7)
      2. Disobedience (Isa 59:1-4)
      3. An unforgiving spirit (Mark 11:25)
      4. Unconfessed sin (Psalm 66:18)
      5. Failure to ask or asking with wrong motives (James 4:1-3)
2. We must overcome the difficulties of prayer.
   1. Understand the importance of prayer (review last week’s lesson).
   2. See that prayer is a privilege, a gift of grace. We approach God “to find grace to help in time of need” (Heb 4:14-16).
   3. Recognize that prayer is the means by which we maintain intimacy and communion with God. We connect with God through prayer. Prayer is an essential component of Christian spirituality; you cannot experience a full Christian life without it.
   4. Affirm that prayerlessness is essentially a failure to understand and appreciate the nature of God. People don’t pray because they don’t know God. “If we are lethargic in prayer it is because we are blind to the nature of the God to whom we pray.”[[4]](#footnote-4)
   5. Hints for effective prayer
      1. Pray to God, in Jesus’ name, through the power of the Holy Spirit. John 16:24; Acts 12:5; Eph 6:18
      2. Follow the ACTS pattern in your regular devotional prayer life.

Adoration Nehemiah 9:6-7

Confession Prov 28:13; 1 John 1:9

Thanksgiving 1 Thes 5:18

Supplication Phil 4:6; James 4:3

* + 1. Plan your schedule so you can pray regularly. Read Ps 55:17.
    2. Find a quiet place away from distractions so you can concentrate.
    3. Use a list. E.g., the bulletin, church directory, make your own
    4. Make prayer an absolute priority in your daily life. Discipline yourself to participate in this essential Christian exercise.

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**Lesson 3: What Is Prayer?**

We might wish that the Bible clearly defined what prayer is. We find many examples of prayer in the pages of Scripture, but no complete definition of the concept. Over the years, many people have tried to define what prayer is or what it should include. Most definitions seem to fall short in one way or another. Today’s lesson will attempt to define prayer by looking at the elements of prayer.

1. Prayer expresses worship.
   1. God is worthy of unending adoration and praise for who He is and what He has done (Ps 150:2). Expressions of worship are not merely the prelude for prayer; prayer is worship. The primary goal of prayer is to bring glory to God.
   2. God is pleased when His people express their appreciation, praise, and adoration for His person and work. We should tell God what He means to us and rehearse before Him His great ways and works.
   3. OT examples
      1. 1 Sam 2:1-10
      2. 1 Chron 29:10-16
      3. Neh 9:5-6
      4. Jer 32:17-22
   4. NT examples
      1. Matt 6:13
      2. Luke 1:46-55
      3. Rom 11:33-36

Quote: Praise purges our souls of selfish indulgence and turns our attention to him to whom all things are due.[[5]](#footnote-5)

Note: We must avoid irreverent familiarity when approaching God in prayer. Many today pray to God as if they were talking to a neighbor or a buddy. We must approach God in a manner fitting with His majesty and power and with our own sinfulness and weakness. We may come boldly, but never arrogantly, flippantly or presumptuously. Our prayer language should be respectful and honorable.

1. Prayer expresses dependence.
   1. Petition or supplication is asking for God something.
      1. God invites believers to come boldly before the throne of grace (Heb 4:16) to make our requests (Phil 4:6). We should find it remarkable that God is sensitive to the desires of His sinful people. God is concerned about the seemingly trivial matters in the lives of believers (Mt 10:29-31). We can ask God for anything in keeping with His will and character.
      2. Unfortunately, the greed and selfishness of human nature often corrupt our prayers to the extent that we ask for things merely to “consume it upon [our] lusts” (James 4:3). We must be very careful not to reduce prayer to a self-centered repetition of “give me.” Our goal in prayer is to request what we think God would want for us, not merely what we want. God is not some kind of vending machine who can be manipulated into giving us what we want when we say the right words. God is not constrained by the creation. God does not depend on us; we depend on Him.
   2. Thanksgiving recognizes God as the source of the good things we enjoy (James 1:17). It is always proper to give thanks to God (Phil 4:6; 1 Thes 5:18). Lack of thanksgiving characterizes unsaved people (cf. Luke 17:17; Rom 1:21; 2 Tim 3:2).
2. Prayer expresses confession.
   1. Confession is the acknowledgment of our sins and of our unworthiness, apart from Christ, to receive anything good from God. In confession, we agree with God that our sin is reprehensible and that we are guilty of it. We plead for God’s grace and cast ourselves on His mercy (Ps 25:11).
   2. Biblical authors like Daniel, Ezra, and Nehemiah often included themselves when confessing national sins (e.g., Ezra 9:6-7; Neh 1:5-6; Dan 9:4). David is famous for the confession of his sin (Ps 51). Solomon urges sinners to confess and forsake their sins (Prov 28:13). In the Lord’s Prayer, Jesus stated that believers need to acknowledge their sins and seek reconciliation (Luke 11:4). John assures us that if we confess our sins, God will forgive our sins (1 John 1:9). God delights to forgive those who come to him in humble confession (Micah 7:18-19).
3. Prayer expresses love.
   1. Intercession is likely one of the most common forms of prayer. We intercede for others when we lift up their needs to God in prayer. Prayer for others is an expression of love for them.
   2. Prayer for the salvation of the lost follows Jesus’ example (John 17:20). God uses intercessory prayer for the lost to bring them to salvation. Paul’s great burden for the salvation of his people led him to pray for their salvation (Rom 9:1-4, 10:1).

If we define prayer by its various elements, we could say that prayer is praise and worship, petition and thanksgiving, confession of sin, and intercession for others. We are not suggesting that every prayer must contain all of these elements. Any one of them constitutes legitimate prayer. All of them express our dependence upon God as our Father and Creator, and all of them should be included in our devotional prayer life.

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**Lesson 4: Our Perspective on Prayer**

Our prayer lives largely depend on our understanding of the character and nature of God. That is, what we think of God and of his interaction in the world will greatly influence our practice of prayer. A low view of God will naturally result in a weak and ineffective prayer life. A biblical view of God will (or should) result in a vibrant and meaningful prayer life. Nothing affects our perspective on prayer more than our perspective on God.[[6]](#footnote-6)

How do people perceive of God’s character and nature? Note several options.

1. God does not exist; prayer has no effect.
   1. Some atheists see the existence of God as a harmless philosophical question to which they answer “no.” Beyond that, they have little or no interest.
   2. Some atheists not only do not believe themselves, but also demand that others do not believe in God. The concept of God’s existence is morally repulsive to them; God must not exist. People should not and must not pray. Only fools pray.
2. God does exists but is not personally responsive to prayer.
   1. Some suggest that God created all things, wound up the universe, and set it to run on its own without any divine intervention (Deism). God observes the universe, but does not interact with it. God does not tinker with the system.
   2. Prayer in this case is again futile. Nature is going to run its course and no amount of prayer is going to change things. Man should praise God and thank him, but God is not moved by human requests. God may sympathize with us, but does nothing to help us.
3. God exists and occasionally steps in to rescue his people.
   1. Many so-called religious people hold this viewpoint. They believe that God created the universe, watches over it, occasionally interacts with it when necessary, but leaves most mundane matters to nature or to human choice. When the Red Sea needs to be parted or the Egyptians need some persuasion (the plagues), then God does something remarkable. Otherwise, events happen naturally, spontaneously, and/or randomly. God certainly may intervene, but usually is not directly involved in earthly events.
   2. Prayer from this perspective may be effective, depending on the nature of the crises and who is doing the praying. If the crisis is genuine and people pray sincerely and fervently, then perhaps God will pay attention and send some relief. Small, everyday matters are of little consequence to God; no need to pray for them on this view.
4. God exists and responds to those who know the “secrets” of answered prayer.
   1. God has many good things in store for those who know the secret combination to opening the storehouse of heaven. One must say the right words, assume the right posture, and/or ask with enough fervency to convince God to open his hand.
   2. God is dependent upon man in this scenario. God wants to do certain things in the world, but man thwarts God’s plans. God is limited by man’s sinfulness, lack of prayer, weakness, and failures. God will not violate human freedom by acting without being asked. Prayer influences God and may even get him to change his mind.
5. God exists and actively upholds, directs, governs, and disposes of all things according to his own purpose and will.
   1. Few today, it seems, uphold the biblical idea that “God the good Creator of all things, in his infinite power and wisdom doth uphold, direct, dispose, and govern all creatures and things, from the greatest even to the least, by his most wise and holy providence, to the end for the which they were created.”[[7]](#footnote-7) On this perspective, God is not some passive observer of the passing scene, but an active participant in all events.
   2. God is absolutely sovereign over nature. Briefly skim through Psalm 104 and note the various aspects of nature that the psalmist attributes to God’s control. Also see Matt 10:29-30.
   3. God is absolutely sovereign over human affairs. Consider the following texts:
      1. Gen 20:6 – God controls human hearts (affections, intentions, purposes).
      2. Dan 2:21 – God controls human leadership (cf. Rom 13:1f).
      3. Isa 10:5-6 – God controls political and military movements.
      4. Acts 4:27-28 – God controls the wicked activity of evil men.
6. Our understanding of God influences our prayer life.
   1. If God does not exist, then don’t pray.
   2. If God is merely a spectator, then petition/supplication is futile.
   3. If God only occasionally interacts in human affairs, then we should pray only when necessary (crises, danger, opportunities, etc.).
   4. If God responds only to those who know the secrets of prayer, then we must find those secrets and employ them to get what we want.
   5. If God is sovereign, we pray according to his will, expecting him to accomplish his purposes. Prayer is much more focused on God and his glory than on our wants and ourselves.

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**Lesson 5: Praying in Jesus’ Name**

We commonly end our prayers with the short expression, “in Jesus’ name, amen.” Why should we do this? What is the significance of praying in Jesus’ name?

Note several things we should keep in mind regarding prayer in Jesus’ name.

1. The Bible instructs believers to pray in Jesus’ name.

John 14:13-14 *And whatsoever ye shall ask in my name, that will I do, that the Father may be glorified in the Son. If ye shall ask any thing in my name, I will do it.*

John 15:16 *Ye have not chosen me, but I have chosen you, and ordained you, that ye should go and bring forth fruit, and that your fruit should remain: that whatsoever ye shall ask of the Father in my name, he may give it you.*

John 16:23-24 *And in that day ye shall ask me nothing. Verily, verily, I say unto you, Whatsoever ye shall ask the Father in my name, he will give it you.* *Hitherto have ye asked nothing in my name: ask, and ye shall receive, that your joy may be full.*

Col 3:17 *And whatsoever ye do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God and the Father by him.*

1. Prayer in Jesus’ name has specific implications.
   1. The significance of a name
      1. In our culture, one’s personal name has little significance beyond designation or description. E.g., most first names have no particular meaning.
      2. But “name” may have a broader connotation, referring to one’s reputation, as in “he has a good name in the community,” or “don’t drag my name through the mud.”
      3. In Bible times, one’s name stood for his person or character. One’s name stood for oneself. See Psalm 5:11, 20:1; John 17:11-12. The Jews had such reverence for God’s name that they would not pronounce it.
   2. Prayer in Jesus’ name implies approaching God based on Jesus’ person and work.
      1. We are unworthy sinners who have no right to expect anything from God. Our access to God is based solely on Christ’s merit. If we are in union with Christ (i.e., saved), then we have the right to approach God in prayer by virtue of Jesus’ work on our behalf. God hears those who are “in Christ.” Access to God always and only comes through Christ (John 14:6; Eph 2:18; Heb 10:19).

What does this imply about the prayers of those who come some other way? What about those who have not applied the merits of Christ to themselves (i.e., they are not saved)?

* + 1. Prayer in Jesus’ name means that our prayers are consistent with the person and work of Christ. We pray in a way that is in harmony with what we know him to be.

What does this imply about requests that are at odds with the person and work of Christ?

* + 1. Prayer in Jesus’ name means that we pray for what he would want for us. To pray in his name means praying like he would pray. We ask for what we think Jesus would want for us. Essentially, this means praying according to God’s will (1 John 5:14).

What does this imply about prayer outside of God’s will?

* + 1. Prayer in Jesus’ name means praying by his authority (Heb 4:16). Believers have the right to approach God in prayer because Jesus has given us that right. We do not assume this right unlawfully or inappropriately, but by his permission.
    2. Prayer in Jesus’ name means that Jesus fully sympathizes with us in our infirmities and temptations as a faithful high priest (Heb 4:14-15). He understands our problems.
  1. Prayer in Jesus’ name is not some kind of mysterious formula that unlocks God’s storehouse of blessings. Merely reciting the words “in Jesus’ name” during prayer has no magical power. Prayer in Jesus’ name is an expression of one’s understanding of who Christ is and what he has done to make prayer possible. In fact, tacking on the words “in Jesus’ name” is not necessary for one to pray in Jesus’ name. If you are approaching God on the basis of Jesus’ work for you, consistent with God’s will, and by his authority, you are praying in Jesus’ name.

1. Pray to God the Father, through the Son (i.e., in his name), by the power of the Holy Spirit.
   1. Our primary audience in prayer is God the Father (cf. Mt 6:6; Luke 11:2; John 15:16). Our access to God comes via our relationship with Jesus (cf. 1 John 2:1; Heb 7:25).
   2. We may pray directly to Jesus as well. See John 14:14.
   3. The Holy Spirit helps our infirmities and makes intercession for us “with groanings which cannot be uttered” (Rom 8:26).

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**Lesson 6: How Not to Pray**[[8]](#footnote-8)

No one in the Bible was more interested in prayer than Jesus. Prayer was a natural and regular part of His life. He could speak to His Father spontaneously and almost conversationally. He could also devote long periods to planned prayer. Not surprisingly, prayer was one of the important matters in which He instructed His disciples.

A substantial portion of Jesus’ Sermon on the Mount (Matt. 6:5-15) focuses on prayer*.* The positive side of Jesus’ instruction takes the form of the Lord’s Prayer, which is designed to provide a template for His followers to employ in their prayer lives. Immediately before the Lord’s Prayer, however, Jesus offers words of negative instruction. Before He teaches His disciples how they should pray, He describes ways in which they should not.

1. Don’t pray like the hypocrites (Matt 6:5-6).
   1. Hypocrisy is an inherent danger in any spiritual exercise. How does one pray, give, or fast like a hypocrite? According to Jesus, spiritual exercises become hypocritical when they are performed in order to impress people—to “be seen of men” (Matt 6:1, 5, 16). One must choose between divine and human praise. Even the most holy exercises can be performed to impress people rather than God.
   2. No tendency is more natural than the desire to divert glory from God to self. This is exactly the inclination against which Jesus was warning. Those who engage in spiritual pursuits in order to be seen by people do get a reward—they receive worship, however briefly. But Jesus cautions that such people have received all that they are going to get—the praise of men. They should expect no praise from God.
   3. Consequently, Jesus commands that spiritual exercises are best performed in secret. The person who gives should not let his right hand know what his left is doing. The person who fasts should wash and dress as normal without telling others about his fast. The person who prays should address God privately. These acts, performed in secret for the pleasure of God alone, win God’s approval.
   4. Of course, pubic prayer is not wrong; the Bible contains many examples of public prayers. But we must be careful not to use prayer as a means of exalting ourselves. The focus must always be on God, not on self. Our attitude should be “Look at Him!” rather than “Look at me!”
2. Don’t pray like idolaters (Matt 6:7-8).
   1. According to Jesus, idolaters pray in empty repetitions, believing that their many words will gain a hearing from their deities. The true and living God, however, is never impressed by pointless reiteration.
      1. We do not have to gain God’s attention in prayer. The prophets of Baal worried that they might find that their god was asleep, absent in travel, or otherwise indisposed. They wailed and cut themselves in order to get him to notice them. The true and living God is not like that. He is aware even of a sparrow when it falls. He knows His children in such detail that He notes the number of hairs on their heads.
      2. We do not inform God about our needs in prayer. He already knows them. He has anticipated our petitions before we utter them. Not only so, but God is already disposed to respond. He is not only aware of our needs, but also deeply concerned with them.
      3. Since God knows all about us, we are now free to devote our primary attention to the work of God instead of our immediate needs. Our lives need not be dominated by anxiety over daily necessities. God is willing and able to supply these things while His children devote themselves to the things that matter most. This confidence changes the way that we pray. While we certainly will wish to share our daily needs with our loving Father, our gaze should lift beyond our present little circumstances and our hearts should be quickened by His larger work in the world.
   2. Repetition need not be mindless or idolatrous.
      1. Jesus does not forbid some repetition. The Bible contains several examples of repetition in prayer. For example, in Psalm 136, every verse ends with the refrain, “for His mercy endureth forever.” This repeats twenty-six times.
      2. Jesus does not forbid the use of written prayers. Many of the psalms were written as prayers that are meant to be used and repeated by God’s people, whether individually or corporately. When we pray a psalm of David or Asaph, we are repeating someone else’s words, but the repetition is not empty. The opposite of vain repetition is not spontaneity (which may also be vain), but thoughtfulness.
      3. Jesus does not forbid the recitation of memorized prayers. We memorize portions of Scripture so that we can use them in our own prayer lives. We praise God using the words of the biblical authors (e.g., psalms of David, prophecy of Isaiah or Jeremiah, prayers of Paul). We may confess our sins using phrases drawn directly from the Bible (e.g., Ps 51:1-3, 139:23-24).
   3. Whether our prayer is one that we compose or one that we have learned, what matters is that it is spoken with understanding and offered from our heart. Sincere prayer is not mechanical, merely repeating words with no meaning. Sincere prayer is an expression of genuine devotion, submission, and expectation.

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**Lesson 7: The Model Prayer (Matt 6:9-15)**

This section of the Sermon on the Mount is often called “the Lord’s Prayer,” but it is more properly “The Model Prayer.” Jesus prefaces his remarks with the words “after this manner therefore pray.” This is the correct manner; this is how to pray. We need not repeat these exact words in every prayer, but prayer should follow this model and reflect these ideas.

1. Pray to the right Person—“Our Father” .9
   1. The words “our Father” imply a warm, personal relationship. This is how a child addresses his parent. The Jews rarely addressed God with such warm familiarity (cf. Isa. 63:16; 64:8). We must approach God in a humble and reverent way (cf. Ex 3:5; Isa 6:1-5; Heb 12:29). God is our Father, but He’s also our sovereign King. We approach Him reverently, not casually.
   2. Many people do not have the right to call God “our father.” Such is the exclusive right of those who are “in Christ” (John 1:12; 1 Jn 3:1-2). In a sense, God is the Father of all people by virtue of creation; yet God is the spiritual Father only of those who are saved. Jesus claimed that for some people, the devil is their father (Jn 8:44; 1 Jn 3:10). Thus, this model prayer is for believers only.
2. Pray reverently .9-10
   1. “Hallowed” – may your name be recognized as holy.
      1. One’s “name” stands for his character or essential nature; the name is identified with the person.
      2. The basic meaning of holy is “set apart.” Thus, to “hallow” God’s name is to recognize Him as unique and sacred; to hold God in reverence.
      3. Genuine believers desire that all people would recognize God as holy.
   2. “Thy kingdom come. Thy will be done in earth, as it is in heaven.”
      1. The “kingdom” Jesus is talking about here is the earthly reign of the Messiah. Only during this time will God’s will be accomplished “on earth as it is in heaven.” This kingdom has not yet come.
      2. God’s “will,” in this case, is clearly his moral will as expressed in the Law. Every believer wishes that God’s moral will were obeyed by every person.
3. Pray for daily needs. .11

The word “daily” signifies

* 1. Something necessary for the day (emphasizing time)
  2. Something necessary for existence (emphasizing amount)
  3. Thus, “Give us today the portion needed for today” seems to be the intended sense.
     1. “Daily bread” represents all manner of needs (not luxuries).
     2. We recognize our dependence on God to provide all our needs.

1. Pray for forgiveness .12
   1. Sin is like a debt. As only a creditor can forgive a debt, only God can forgive sin.
   2. God’s forgiveness of our sins is related to how we forgive others.
      1. If we forgive others, God will forgive us. If we refuse to forgive others, God will not forgive us. .14-15
      2. Although believers enjoy full cleansing from sin, they still should pray for forgiveness from the ongoing sin in our lives (1 Jn 1:9). We still need the application of the cleansing blood of Christ on a daily basis.
      3. Remember that this prayer was given while the OT dispensation was still in operation. OT believers did not enjoy full and final forgiveness of sins. They had to repeatedly make their sacrifices to cover their sins. Christ made the final sacrifice for sins, and NT believers enjoy full and perfect forgiveness.
      4. God’s forgiveness of us is ultimately not based on how well we forgive others. Forgiveness is always based on God’s grace, not our efforts. There is no merit implied here. However, a forgiving attitude is very important. The disposition to forgive others is a proof of our own forgiveness. Read Mt 18:21-35.
2. Pray for strength. .13a
   1. “lead us not into temptation”
      1. God never entices people to sin (James 1:13). In that sense, God never leads people into temptation.
      2. The word “temptation” often refers to a trial, test, or difficult circumstance.
      3. It’s appropriate to pray for protection from affliction, adversity and trouble.
   2. “deliver us from evil”
      1. Evil in general—trials and problems, the consequences of immoral behavior
      2. The “evil one,” i.e., Satan. The Greek has “the evil.” Satan is frequently called “the evil one” (Lu 22:40; Mt 13:19; 1 John 2:13-14, 3:12).
3. Pray with praise. .13b[[9]](#footnote-9)
   1. “kingdom, power and glory”: This doxology (ascription of praise to God) gives us our motivation for prayer—that that glory of God might be demonstrated in the granting of our petitions.
   2. “amen” – truly, so let it be

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**Lesson 8: Pray-ers that Pleases God**

God is gracious in answering prayer. He does not demand perfection from the person offering the prayer. God is well aware of our failures, weaknesses, and sin. Because Jesus is our “great high priest,” we can approach God “boldly” to “obtain mercy and find grace to help in time of need” (Heb 4:14-16). Nevertheless, several passages in the Bible relate certain personal characteristics that should be evident in the life of one who approaches God in prayer.

1. Righteousness James 5:16

Qualities of a righteous person:

* 1. Saved Rom 1:17, 5:1
  2. Sincere (“not as the hypocrites” Mt 6:5; “effectual fervent” [lit “energetic, earnest”])
  3. Humble James 4:6
  4. Obedient John 15:7
  5. Overt, unrepentant sin in the life of a believer may hinder one’s prayers or even render them without effect. Ps 66:18; Prov 15:29: Isa 1:15

1. Faith Mark 11:23-24; James 1:5-7
   1. This does not suggest that prayer has no effect unless all doubt is removed from our hearts. We often have doubts concerning God’s will for us.
   2. This does not suggest that merely believing something means that God is obligated to grant our requests. Our personal desires and expectations are not the measure by which God acts. The fact that we may have convinced ourselves that we believe something does not compel God. We do not know the mind of God where he has not revealed it. We cannot manipulate God.

What would happen if God granted every request from everyone who truly believed that his request was God’s will?

* 1. Faith does not eliminate other considerations; faith is not the only condition for answered prayer. Faith operates in conjunction with other requirements for effective prayer.
  2. Faith must have the right object—God. We have faith that God loves us, has wisdom to grant what is best for us, and is able to provide what we need.

1. Submission 1 John 5:14-15
   1. Praying according to God’s will is not simply asking for biblical things.
      1. In one sense, we can count on God’s promises to do what he said he’d do. E.g., Rom 10:9; 1 John 1:9. We can and should trust God to do what he said.
      2. However, we should realize that what God wants people to do is not necessarily what people will do. People often violate his will. In other words, we recognize a difference between God’s prescriptive will (what he has commanded—his moral will) and his decretive will (what he has decreed to happen—his sovereign will). John is not guaranteeing that God will grant every request for people to obey his word. If that were the case, we could pray once and everyone would be saved and stop sinning!
   2. Praying according to God’s will means that we ask God to grant the requests that please him and conform to his eternal purposes. We don’t know God’s secret counsels, so we pray, “If it be your will.”

Quote: We pray, expressing our heartfelt desire, all the while subordinating our will … to the wise and providential Lord of life and history who is working all things according to the counsel of his will (Eph 1:11).[[10]](#footnote-10)

* 1. Good example: Daniel 3:17-18. The young men did not know if God would save them; they did not presume on God’s will. They were submissive to God’s purpose for them, whether it meant life or death. Whatever God allowed, they remained loyal to God. Their loyalty God’s prescriptive will (“no other gods before me”) meant that they were willing to accept whatever might be in God’s decretive will for them.
  2. Essentially, prayer for God’s will means that we pray for what God has already determined to do. This does not imply that prayer does nothing. God accomplishes his ends by means of the prayers of his people. God works through means (although he’s never limited/constrained by human activity or non-activity). God decrees both the ends and the means. Prayer is only one means God uses to attain his ends, not the only one (contra the idea that God does nothing except through prayer).

1. Reverence Ps 145:17-19
   1. The “fear of God” describes a broad array of virtues. Fear of God is reverence, awe, honor, and worship in response to the transcendent holiness of God (cf. Isa 6:5). We may approach God boldly, yet with proper respect and decorum.
   2. The fear of God prevents us from approaching God with a frivolous, casual, overly-familiar attitude. Likewise, prayer is not merely getting from God what we want for ourselves. The focus of prayer is God and his will, not ourselves.
   3. The fear of God reflects a desire not to offend God. Those who fear God do not want to grieve him or provoke his anger.

The exercise of these virtues does not guarantee that God will grant our every request. But if they are present, but we can be confident that God is not declining our requests because of our own sin. Further, no one possesses these virtues perfectly. We should see consistent evidence of them but not expect faultless perfection. God is gracious and understands our weaknesses.

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**Lesson 9: Persistence in Prayer**

One of the reasons that prayer is such a difficult part of the Christian life is that prayer often requires persistence. God may be pleased to answer a prayer very soon after the believer sends his request heavenward. But God may be just as pleased to withhold an answer for an extended time and require that the believer continue praying. Giving up on prayer is easy; persisting in prayer is hard.

1. Texts calling for persistent prayer
   1. 1 Sam 12:23 *Far be it from me that I should sin against the LORD in ceasing to pray for you; but I will teach you the good and the right way.*
   2. Ps 55:17 *Evening, and morning, and at noon, will I pray, and cry aloud: and he shall hear my voice.*
   3. Matthew 26:41 *Watch and pray, lest you enter into temptation. The spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak.*
   4. Luke 18:1 *Then He spoke a parable to them, that men always ought to pray and not lose heart.*
   5. Acts 12:5 *Peter was therefore kept in prison, but constant prayer was offered to God for him by the church.*
   6. Rom 1:9 *For God is my witness, whom I serve with my spirit in the gospel of His Son, that without ceasing I make mention of you always in my prayers,*
   7. Eph 6:18 *[Pray] always with all prayer and supplication in the Spirit, being watchful to this end with all perseverance and supplication for all the saints*
   8. Col 1:9 *On account of this we also, since the day we heard, do not cease praying for you, and asking that you may be filled with the full knowledge of His will in all wisdom and spiritual understanding;*
   9. Col 4:2 *Continue earnestly in prayer, being vigilant in it with thanksgiving;*
   10. 1 Thes 3:10 *night and day praying exceedingly that we may see your face and to perfect what is lacking in your faith?*
   11. 1 Thes 5:17 *Pray without ceasing.*
2. Principles of persistent prayer
   1. Both direct biblical commands and examples require believers to persist in prayer. We see biblical characters praying persistently and direct commands tell us to do the same. Virtually every aspect of our lives ought to be “covered” by prayer. Prayer should be our constant, recurring experience, part of our daily lives. Lack of persistent prayer ought to be the exception among believers.
   2. The spiritual battle we are in (Eph 6:10f) requires constant prayer. Our adversary the devil does not let up in his attempts to devour us, so neither should our spiritual warfare against him let up. One of Satan’s most potent devices is to lure us into believing that prayer is ineffective or unneeded.
   3. We must not heed the temptation to quit praying during times of prosperity. Lack of adversity does not call for the cessation of prayer. If our own lives are temporarily lacking tragedy, plenty of other people and situations call for our attention in prayer.
   4. It is natural to grow weary and tired in prayer (e.g., Mt 26:37-41). Persistent prayer for the same request may become tiresome and even discouraging. We may wonder if God is hearing us. But we must remind ourselves to “not faint” (Lk 18:1) when we are tired and ready to quit.
   5. Prayer need not be lengthy. Persistent prayer may be swift and silent. The length of the prayer is not significant; the intensity and devotion of the prayer are what matter. “Short, pungent prayers thrust heavenward … are just as effective as extended periods of vocal prayer.”[[11]](#footnote-11) Quality, not quantity, matters most in prayer. The attitude of the heart is far more important than the number of words. Cf. Rom 8:26.
   6. Why can’t we simply pray once about something and not mention it again? Direct biblical commands and examples seem to require that we repeat our prayers (e.g., Luke 18:1-8; 2 Cor 12:8-9). There is no harm or sin in repeating a request.
   7. Why does God wait in answering prayers? Why does he require us to persist? Several possible reasons:
      1. Persistent prayer reminds us that we are totally dependent on God (2 Cor 1:9). “It is only when we come to the painful realization that our own resources are insufficient that the all-sufficiency of God strikes home.”[[12]](#footnote-12)
      2. Persistent prayer helps us differentiate between temporary, surface desires and deep-seated, sincere needs. Perseverance helps us weed out those petitions that may be improper or untimely. Continuing in prayer purifies the contents of our requests.
      3. Persistence develops patience. Through persistence in prayer, we learn how to wait on God. What we desire now may not be within God’s providential will at this time. We must learn to desire God’s will, not our own, and wait for his timing (cf. Mt 26:42).
      4. Persistence is our duty whether we perceive the reasons God requires it or not. God calls on us to “watch and pray,” even when we are tempted to lose heart. We should ask God to give us the faith and commitment to “pray without ceasing” no matter what obstacles or situations hinder us.

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**Lesson 10: Learning from Paul’s Prayers**

We often learn best by following the example of an expert. Other than Jesus, the NT example of expert prayer would have to be Paul. He urges us to follow his example as he follows Christ (1 Cor 11:1; cf. Phil 3:17, 4:9). Paul’s prayers function as models for Christians in every age and culture.[[13]](#footnote-13) So what can we learn about prayer for how Paul prayed?

Perhaps the most obvious thing about Paul’s prayers is their volume and frequency; Paul prayed a lot! We find evidence of prayer in almost all of the NT books bearing his name. Paul was surely a man given to prayer (cf. Acts 6:4).

What kind of prayers do we find in Paul’s prayer life?

1. Prayers for God’s blessing
   1. Prayers for grace and peace (Rom 1:7, 16:20; 1 Cor 16:24). Most of these prayerful expressions come from salutations or benedictions of the epistles.
   2. Prayers for spiritual virtues like patience, unity, joy, peace, hope, love, stability, holiness, knowledge, discernment, sincerity, and fruitfulness (Rom 15:5-6, 13; Eph 3:14-19; Phil 1:9-11; Col 1:9-12; 1 Thes 3:11-13; 2 Thes 1:11-12)
   3. Prayers for success in various tasks or journeys (Rom 1:10; 1 Thes 3:11)
   4. Prayers for the Lord to return (1 Cor 16:22)
2. Intercession on behalf of others
   1. Continuous prayers for others (Rom 1:9, 12:12; 1 Cor 1:4; Phil 1:3; Col 1:3; 1 Thes 3:10; Phm 4)
   2. Asking that others would pray for him (Eph 6:18-19; 2 Thes 3:1-2)
3. Petition for Personal Needs

2 Cor 12:7-10 appears to be the only place where Paul gives direct insight into the way he prayed concerning his personal needs. Even this special prayer experience was intimately connected with his mission. Whatever the nature of the “thorn in the flesh,” it appeared to be such a handicap to his life and ministry that he pleaded with God three times for its removal. The answer to his prayer was not what he sought: the affliction remained but the promise was given: “My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness.” Paul’s contentment with that answer indicates a clear conviction that it was the Lord’s gracious and wise provision for him in that. Paul’s experience of bringing his need confidently before the Lord thus became a means of discerning God’s will for his life and growing in Christ-likeness (cf. 13:4).

This incident suggests that there is a time to cease asking God for something and to rest in the same grace and power of Christ promised especially to the apostle in his distress but available to all who seek such divine enabling (cf. Eph. 3:14–21).

1. Praise and Thanksgiving

Paul spontaneously breaks into praise or thanksgiving at various points in his letters (cf. Rom 1:25, 6:17, 11:33; 1 Tim 1:17).

* 1. Prayers thanking God for various blessings—salvation, the Gospel, faith, hope, love, etc. (Rom 1:8-10; 1 Cor 1:4-8). Thanksgiving is recognizing God as the source of all the good things we enjoy and being grateful for all the benefits he bestows. A thankful attitude and the explicit giving of thanks to God is a basic duty of mankind.
  2. Prayers glorifying God or expressing worship (doxology) (Rom 11:33-36, 16:27; 2 Cor 1:3; Eph 3:20-21). A doxology (the Greek word for “glory” is *doxa*) is a formal expression of praise, glorifying God for who he is or what he has done.
  3. It is interesting to note that almost all of Paul’s expressions of thanks are directed to God, not to other humans. God is the ultimate source of blessings, even though people may play a necessary role (e.g., Phil 4:14-18). Paul never stoops to cheap flattery when expressing his thanks for how others have ministered to him.

1. Conclusions
   1. Each of these categories ought to find a place in our personal prayer lives. We ought to be praying continually for God’s blessings upon others, and especially for the growth and development of spiritual virtues among fellow Christians.
   2. Praise and thanksgiving should make up a larger part of our prayers. We should spend more time expressing worship and praise to God for his person and work (cf. Ps 150:2).
   3. Prayer for our own personal needs should perhaps receive less time and attention than it usually does. Spiritual well-being is more important than physical condition and should be a main focus of our prayers.
   4. The life of prayer and thanksgiving should not be confined to set times and places; the acknowledgement of God’s character and providence should be a natural part of everyday conversation for the Christians.
   5. We should continue steadfast in prayer as we remember various people and their needs.

Paul’s praise introductions, and the benedictions, doxologies and outbursts of praise throughout his letters are an invitation to others to join in with him in glorifying God for who he is and what he has done for them.

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**Lesson 11: Learning from OT Prayers**

Most of the primary figures of the OT were people of prayer. A detailed examination of the prayers of all the OT saints is far beyond the scope of this lesson, but we can highlight some valuable lessons to learn as we observe how prayer functioned in the OT.

1. God’s people pray.
   1. The main OT characters pray (e.g., Job, Abraham, Jacob, Moses, Gideon, David, Solomon, Elijah, Ezra, Daniel, etc.).
   2. Even the minor characters in the OT pray (e.g., Abraham’s servant, Jabez, Samson’s parents, etc.). People of God, both extraordinary and ordinary, pray.
2. Prayer must be combined with action. Prayer is no excuse for passivity.
   1. Exod 14:15
   2. Josh 7:6-11
3. Unbelief and disobedience hinder prayer.
   1. Prov 28:9
   2. Isa 59:1-2
   3. Zech 7:13
   4. Submitting questions to God is not necessarily an act of unbelief (e.g., Jer 14:19; Ezek 9:8, 11:13).
4. Pray at all times and in all places.
   1. Daniel prayed three times a day (Dan 6:11; cf. Ps 55:17).
   2. Believers can worship God anywhere (cf. John 4:21-24). God fills heaven and earth (Jer 23:24); he’s not a local deity and is not confined to any particular location.
5. Pray using any reverent position.
   1. The OT mentions a variety of physical positions one might assume while praying: standing, kneeling, flat on one’s belly, etc. Sometimes one’s hands are lifted up or spread out in prayer (cf. Ps 28:2).
   2. No particular posture is required. By the way, nothing in the Bible says that one must close his eyes or bow his head during prayer.
6. Pray with fasting.
   1. Fasting is associated with prayer from earliest times. The Israelites fasted on the Day of Atonement (Lev 16). Later, four other annual fasts were observed (Zech 8:19) and perhaps a fifth (Esther 9:31).
   2. Fasting was especially associated with grief and penitence and with seeking God’s guidance. But abstinence from sin was more important than abstinence from food, just as a broken heart was more important than torn clothes (cf. Isa 58; .Joel 1:14; 2:12, 15).[[14]](#footnote-14)
7. Pray for miracles.
   1. The OT contains numerous remarkable miracles that God performed in answer to prayer.
   2. Examples:
      1. Joshua’s long day (Josh 10:12-14)
      2. Hezekiah’s deliverance from Sennacherib (2 Kings 19) and his prayer for an extension of his life (2 Kings 20).
      3. Elijah on Mt Carmel with the prophets of Baal (1 Kings 18)
      4. Elisha with the Syrians (2 Kings 6:17)
8. Prayer may include vows, oaths, invocations, benedictions, and curses/imprecations.
   1. Vows (Deut 23:21-23; 1 Sam 1:11; Ecc 5:2-7): A vow is a voluntary promise to God in return for certain benefits one hopes to receive from God. No one need make a vow, but once made, keeping the vow was one’s sacred and binding duty. Thus, one should not make a vow lightly or flippantly.
   2. Oaths (2 Chron 15:14-15): An oath is a solemn appeal to God, often prefaced with an expression like “As the Lord lives,…” or “The Lord do so to me and more also, if…” An oath calls down a curse upon oneself if he fails to keep a promise.
   3. Invocations (Num 10:35-36; Judg 5:31; Ruth 2:12; 1 Sam 24:12): An invocation calls upon the Lord to do something or invokes God’s name in expressing a desire.
   4. Benedictions (Gen 9:26-29; Num 6:24-26): A benediction is an expression of a desired blessing from God.
   5. Curses/imprecations (Deut 27:15f; Josh 6:26; Mal 1:14): An imprecatory prayer asks God to uphold the terms of his covenant by punishing the disobedience of a transgressor. The aim is not personal vengeance but the vindication of God’s name based on a zeal for God’s righteousness and justice. Cf. Proverbs 8:13 and 2 Chron 19:2. It seems doubtful that imprecatory prayers are appropriate for the church age.

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**Lesson 12: Prayer as an Expression of Spirituality**

Spirituality is a broad concept. People from nearly all religious traditions, and even secularists and atheists, may think of themselves as “spiritual” in some sense of the word. Christian spirituality, of course, is distinct from other forms of spirituality. How does prayer fit into Christian spirituality?

1. Definitions
   1. The Gk. word for “spiritual” is *pneumatikos*. It’s the word for *spirit* (*pneuma*) and a suffix -*ikos* which denotes “pertaining to.” Thus, *pneumatikos* / *spiritual* means *pertaining to the Spirit.*
   2. The word conveys the sense of belonging to the realm of Holy Spirit or being under the control of the Holy Spirit. One who is led by the Spirit, filled with the Spirit, and displaying the fruit of the Spirit could be called spiritual.
   3. Ephesians 5:18 contrasts drunkenness and Spirit-filling. Just as a drunken person is controlled by the liquor which he consumes, so a Spirit-filled Christian is controlled by the Spirit. This will cause him to act in ways which are unnatural to him, not erratic or abnormal, but not the ways of the old life. Control by the Spirit is a necessary part of spirituality.[[15]](#footnote-15)
   4. The Holy Spirit ministers to the believer in various ways: teaching (John 16:12–15), guiding (Rom 8:14), assuring (Rom 8:16), interceding (Rom 8:26), imparting spiritual gifts (1 Cor 12:7), battling the flesh (Gal 5:17), and all of these depend on the filling of the Spirit (Eph 5:18).
   5. The spiritual man is the Christian’s ideal or goal. Essentially, spirituality is Christian maturity, Christian adulthood. The goal or pattern to strive for is maturity in the faith.
2. </span></div><div style="text-indent: 18pt; margin-left: 18pt; margin-right: 18pt; margin-bottom: 3pt; position: static; "><span style="text-indent: 18pt; position: static; ">TheSince malkjsSinceSinceSpirituality and prayer
   1. Prayer is obviously a spiritual, as opposed to secular, activity. If one does not believe in a supernatural realm, he will never pray. If spirituality is control by the Holy Spirit, then those under His control will pray. People who are led by the Holy Spirit pray. Since Christian maturity would include regular times of prayer, one cannot be mature in the faith if he does not pray.

Eph 6:18 *through every prayer and petition, praying in every season in the Spirit, being watchful to this same thing with all perseverance and petition concerning all the saints.*

Php 1:19 *For I know that this will turn out for my deliverance through your prayer and the supply of the Spirit of Jesus Christ.*

* 1. Prayer is a mark of Christian maturity.
     1. Christian maturity develops through prayer. One must pray in order to grow and mature as a believer. The strongest Christians are those who pray much.
     2. Mature Christian people handle life situations with prayer. Prayer is an essential response to the ups and downs of life. Prayer is appropriate in times of joy and thanksgiving as well as in times of grief and pain. Prayer accompanies all events in the life of a mature Christian.
     3. One of the weaknesses of immature Christianity is a lack of prayer, or at least a lack of consistent prayer. Those who don’t make prayer an essential part of their lives cannot mature in the Christian life.
  2. Prayer requires trust in God. “He that cometh to God must believe that he is” (Heb 11:1). We come to God in prayer believing that he is “able to do exceeding abundantly above all that we ask or think” (Eph 3:20). We come boldly before the throne of grace (Heb 4:16) to make our requests (Phil 4:6) because we believe that God hears us and has the power to change things. Mature Christians cast their cares upon the Lord (Ps 55:22; 1 Pet 5:7) and experience the “peace that passeth all understanding” (Phil 4:7) as a result.
  3. Prayer is seeking the Lord. God repeatedly invites believers to seek him (Isa 55:6; Heb 11:1). One of the ways we do this is through prayer. In prayer we present our requests to God, but our attitude should always be “thy will be done” (Mt 6:10; cf. James 4:15). The glory of God should be our primary goal. We should desire that God would get the honor and praise through the granting of our requests.

2 Chron 7:14 *If my people, which are called by my name, shall humble themselves, and pray, and seek my face, and turn from their wicked ways; then will I hear from heaven, and will forgive their sin, and will heal their land.*

* 1. Prayer is worship. Our expressions of adoration, praise, thanksgiving, and supplication to God are key elements of Christian spirituality. We worship God through prayer.
  2. Prayer is congregational. A significant expression of Christian spirituality is congregational prayer. We should follow the pattern of the early church by continuing steadfast in prayer (Acts 2:42). The church should pray “without ceasing” for the needs of its members (Acts 12:5; cf. James 5:14). The church should pray that “the word of the Lord may have free course [lit. “run”], and be glorified” (2 Th 3:1) as more laborers go out into the harvest fields (Mt 9:38).

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**Lesson 13: The Five Different Kinds of Prayer in the Psalms**[[16]](#footnote-16)

The Psalms include a multitude of expressions of Israel’s communion with God. Believers of all ages have been encouraged and challenged by the prayers of the Psalms, which include a variety to prayer types. Christians may use any or all of these forms in their personal and congregational prayers.

1. Lament/petition
   1. “Lament” commonly refers to an expression of grief, sorrow, or deep regret. Some psalms appeal to God for divine intervention in the face of a national disaster (communal lament). Other psalms are addressed to God in the context of an individual disaster, and appeal for God’s help (individual lament). Typically, the psalmist makes petition to God for his compassion and concludes with an expression of confidence in God’s help or with words of praise. The psalmist petitions God for God’s presence, good health, spiritual help, moral strength, material good, long life, rich progeny, victory in war, and the like. An example of petitionary prayer is Psalm 13 (read).
   2. Christians are easily tempted by the feeling that we are forgotten by God when we are in trouble and deep sorrow. But God does not forget us. We should cling fast to the truth that God is merciful to the believer who cries out for help and deliverance.
   3. Prayer strengthens our faith. In Psalm 13, the psalmist’s faith was not strong enough to proclaim his confidence in God’s help at the beginning of his prayer. But later, at the end of his prayer, his heart is flooded with confidence and praise. Such is the power of prayer and the effect it can have.
2. Penitential prayer
   1. Penitence is an expression of repentance. The psalmist confesses that the chastisement of God comes to him because of his own sin. Psalms 32, 38 and 51 are recognized as penitential psalms. Read Ps 32:1-5.
   2. Although the penitent clearly expresses his own responsibility for the present wretchedness or calamity he is suffering, it is remarkable that he confesses not only his own sins, but also the hereditary sin, the fathers’ sins (Ps 51:5; 79:8; 106:6ff.).
   3. The penitent heart touched by God’s mercies cannot be silent: it must praise him and tell of his deliverance to others. Such an testimony will be a more powerful message to unbelievers than the message of those who do not deeply experience God’s forgiveness of their sins. Here, the psalmist seems to teach that the praise and witness of the forgiven penitent are also the privilege and duty of all other forgiven penitents.
3. Intercessory prayer

Intercessory prayer asks God for something on behalf of someone or something else. Such prayer is often found in royal psalms in which the king plays a role. Psalms 20 and 72 are examples of an intercessory prayer found in “royal” psalms. The ideas and hopes expressed in this psalm lead the people to look not only to the present, but also to the future messianic king who will bring them all to fruition. Read Ps 72:1-4.

1. Thanksgiving or confident prayer

When God answered some prayer or delivered an individual (or the nation) from trouble, the man (or the nation) offered thanks to God. So the thanksgiving prayer is a prayer of praise for the specific deed which God has just done for the one giving thanks. Psalms 9 and 40 are good examples. Read Ps 40:1-4

1. Hymnic prayer
   1. Hymnic prayers expresses adoration directed exclusively to God. In such a prayer, the psalmist praises God for his greatness and might or for the beauty and wisdom of his creation. Psalms 8, 29, 33, 65, and 113 are examples of hymnic prayer. Read Ps 8.
   2. Hymnic prayers are usually full of hymnic expressions without making any petition to God. These psalms are not prayers of petition, but prayers of praise. Many of these psalms were likely liturgical songs sung at Israel’s worship.
   3. Recognizing the greatness, majesty, strength, holiness, and goodness of the Lord, a sincere believer cannot but praise him. As Christians, we should learn to pray to God in such hymnic adoration focused exclusively on God. Contemplating God’s nature and his abundant grace, we may say that our prayer should be first hymnic prayer, and then petitionary prayer.

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**Lesson 14: Prerequisites to Effective Prayer**

Jesus assured his disciples, “Ask, and it shall be given you” (Mt 7:7), and that “all things, whatsoever ye shall ask in prayer, believing, ye shall receive” (Mt 21:22). Why do believers not usually experience this sort of answered prayer? What other factors pertain to answered prayer?

Today, we’ll explore several biblical requirements for effective prayer.

1. Hindrances to effective prayer
   1. Unbelief (Mt 21:21; James 1:6-7). “Wavering” (KJV) is “doubting.” The word literally means “to divide, to discriminate,” in the sense of being internally divided or doubtful. “Double-minded” (James 1:8) is another way of expressing the same idea.
   2. Disobedience (Isa 59:1-4; James 4:4). God refuses to hear the prayers of unrepentant, worldly people.
   3. An unforgiving spirit (Mark 11:25; cf. Mt 6:12-15). God’s willingness to forgive us is limited by our willingness to forgive others. A bitter, unforgiving spirit marks an unbeliever.
   4. Unconfessed sin (Psalm 66:18; Prov 15:29). To “regard” iniquity (KJV) is literally to “look upon it” with affection and approval. We naturally gaze upon what we find attractive and turn away from what we find repugnant. Hypocritical prayer is ineffective.
   5. Failure to ask or asking with wrong motives (James 4:1-3). “Amiss” (KJV) is literally “badly, evilly.” Prayer must not be for the gratification of one’s sinful passions. Those who intend to (lit.) “squander it on your pleasures” (James 4:3) should not expect anything from God.
2. Prerequisites to effective prayer
   1. Pray (Mt 7:7, 21:22; Lk 18:1; James 4:2)
      1. Prayer is a basic Christian responsibility (see Lesson 1 on the importance of prayer).
      2. Lack of prayer is one obvious reason our desires remain unmet.
   2. Pray in faith (Mk 11:24) and according to God’s will.
      1. We must believe that God exists and that he rewards those who seek him (Heb 11:1, 6).
      2. We must have confidence that “if we ask anything according to his will, he hears us” (1 John 5:14-15).
      3. We must trust that God can do “exceeding abundantly above all that we ask or think” (Eph 3:20). All things are possible with God (Mt 19:26).

Note: Believing a thing will not necessarily make it happen. We must take into consideration all the other prerequisites to prayer as well. Further, unanswered prayer does not necessarily imply that one does not have faith. Even a small amount of faith is enough to move mountains (Mk 17:20).

* 1. Pray in the name of Jesus (Jn 14:14, 16:23).
     1. Specifically, prayer should be made to God the Father, through the authority of Jesus, by the power of the Holy Spirit.
     2. The “name” of Jesus stands for his entire person, character, and nature. To pray “in Jesus’ name” means that we are asking for things that would be consistent with Jesus character. All the blessings we enjoy as Christians come to us via Jesus’ “name,” i.e., his person and work. We should ask only for things that are consistent with Jesus’ great name.
     3. Further, we approach God through the merits of Jesus, not by virtue of our own goodness or work. We have the right to come to God in prayer only because of our union with Christ and his intercession on our behalf. Jesus’ name stands for his authority or privilege; this is the basis for our bold approach to God in prayer.

Note: Merely tacking on the phrase “in Jesus’ name, amen” to prayer does not satisfy this condition. On the other hand, not saying this phrase does not mean you are not praying in Jesus’ name.

* 1. Pray while abiding in Christ (Jn 15:7). Failure to abide in the vine results in fruitlessness, which indicates an immature (at best) or unsaved (at worst) condition. Perseverance in the faith is necessary for prayer to be effectual.
  2. Prayer must be offered by those who have forgiven those who offend them (Mt 18:21f; Mk 11:25-26). Extending forgiveness to others is a mark of genuine Christianity.
     1. Theologically speaking, we know that God’s forgiveness of our sins does not depend upon our forgiveness of others. Justification comes by faith, not by works (Rom 5:1). All our sins are forgiven at the point of salvation.
     2. Failure to forgive others indicates an unregenerate heart.
     3. What is the proper way to handle offenses among brethren? Mt 18:15-17
  3. Prayer must be accompanied by obedience and a desire to please God (1 Jn 3:22).
     1. Obedience – obey his commandments, and particularly, the command to love one another.
     2. Pleasing God – Even when we don’t have a direct command to follow, our desire should be to do what would please God. Broader biblical principles guide us in this case.
  4. Prayer must persevere (Lk 18:1; Rom 12:12; Col 4:2; 1 Thes 5:17). We must continue in prayer steadfastly, attentively, and carefully.

Only when we meet the prerequisites to we have assurance of answered prayer.

**“Lord, Teach Us to Pray”**

**Lesson 15: Prayer and Fasting**

Dan 9:3 *And I set my face unto the Lord God, to seek by prayer and supplications, with fasting, and sackcloth, and ashes:*

Mt 17:21 *Howbeit this kind goeth not out but by prayer and fasting.*

Ac 14:23 *And when they had ordained them elders in every church, and had prayed with fasting, they commended them to the Lord, on whom they believed.*

1Co 7:5 *Defraud ye not one the other, except [it be] with consent for a time, that ye may give yourselves to fasting and prayer; and come together again, that Satan tempt you not for your incontinency.*

The spiritual disciplines of prayer and fasting are mentioned together repeatedly in the Bible.

1. Definition
   1. Fasting is voluntary abstinence from food for spiritual reasons. More broadly, a fast is any time you refrain from doing something you usually do, for spiritual reasons. The Bible refers only to fasting from food.
   2. The NT indicates that fasting is appropriate at certain times. Jesus stated more than once that his disciples would fast (Mt 6:16-17, 9:14-15, 17:21) and the early church participated in fasting (Acts 13:2, 14:23). However, Paul mentions it only once (1Cor 7:5) without recommending it as normal.
   3. Is fasting a necessary element of the Christian life? Apparently not. One is not required to fast in order to live a godly Christian life. Fasting is a practice that Christians may and perhaps should participate in from time to time for certain reasons. But it does not seem to be a universal expectation for believers.
   4. Types of fasts:
      1. In a normal fast, one abstains from all food except water (or other liquids). The human body cannot normally function without water for more than 2-3 days (Luke 4:2).
      2. In a limited fast, one abstains from certain kinds of foods or liquids (Dan 1:12).
      3. In a congregational fast, the whole congregation agrees to abstain for a designated period in order to pursue spiritual goals (Acts 13:2).
      4. In a supernatural (miraculous) fast, biblical characters abstained from both food and water for extended periods without sensing any need for such. For example, Moses spent 40 days on the mountain without eating food or drinking any water (Deut 9:9). This was a miracle, and we should not expect the same to be repeated today.
      5. Other fasts: in the OT, several occasions are mentioned that require fasting. E.g., Lev. 23:14; Num. 29:7; Esther 9:30–31
2. Reasons to fast

Remember that biblical fasting must have spiritual reasons. There may be beneficial health reasons associated with fasting, but that’s not what we are concerned with here. If one fasts, it should be for one or more of the following biblical reasons.

* 1. To strengthen prayer: Fasting brings a note of urgency and sincerity to our prayers. Fasting doesn’t guarantee that God will answer prayer in the way that we desire, but it does show that we are serious and sincere about a matter. Fasting is often associated with prayer (Ezra 8:23; Neh 1:4; Dan 9:3; Acts 13:3). We abstain from food for the purpose of seeking God.
     1. Pray and fast in times of affliction or distress (2 Sam 12:16-17; Ezra 9:5; Lk 4:1-2). Fasting is sometimes described as “afflicting one’s soul” (Isa 58:3). Tearing one’s clothes, weeping, and the application of ashes indicate one’s affliction, humility, and submission to God (cf. Est 4:3).
     2. Pray and fast for wisdom in making decisions (Acts 13:2-3, 14:23). Significant decisions may require additional spiritual exertion.
     3. Pray and fast for deliverance or protection (2 Chron 20:1-4; Ezra 8:21-23; Esther 4:16).
     4. Pray and fast to express repentance for sin (1 Sam 7:6; Neh 9:1-2; Joel 2:12).
     5. Pray and fast to express and/or renew your dedication to God and to worship Him or in preparation for ministry (Luke 2:37; Acts 13:1-3). Fasting as an element of worship seems to have been a normal practice in the early church.
  2. To humble yourself before God (1King 21:27-29; Ps 35:13) (Note: it’s possible to fast without humility [Luke 18:12]). One fasting should not make it publicly visible by looking gloomy (Mt 6:16-18).
  3. To express grief: Especially in the OT, fasting is associated with death and grief (Judg 20:26; 1 Sam 31:13; 2 Sam 1:11-12).
  4. To discipline your body and/or to overcome temptation

While fasting is not an essential aspect of the Christian life, it may be a common part of it, depending on one’s circumstances. It should be more common than it is. Fasting is thoroughly appropriate in many situations, and participation in fasting may support your spiritual health.

**Note:** Always seek medical advice before fasting. Some physical conditions make fasting dangerous.

1. Some of this material follows *How to Pray* by R.A. Torrey (Revell, 1900). Freely available at <http://www.ccel.org/ccel/torrey/pray.html>. Also helpful was C. Samuel Storms, *Reaching God’s Ear* (Wheaton: Tyndale, 1988). Other sources cited as used. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Kevin Bauder, *In the Nick of Time*, “Teach Us To Pray.” 6 April 2012. Central Baptist Theological Seminary of Minneapolis. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. R. A. Torrey, *How to Pray.* [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. C. Samuel Storms, *Reaching God’s Ear* (Wheaton: Tyndale, 1988), 18-19. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. Storms, 32. [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. Storms, 65. [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. From the Second London Baptist Confession (1689), chapter 5, “Of Divine Providence.” [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. Much of this lesson is from Kevin Bauder, “Don’t Pray Like This,” from *In the Nick of Time*, 5/4/12 and 5/11/12. [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
9. The Doxology in the last part of verse 13 does not appear in the earliest NT MSS or in the early commentaries on this passage. Also, various forms of the statement are found in later MSS, some longer, some shorter than what is expressed in the KJV. However, the majority of Greek MS have the statement, it is in keeping with the rest of the Bible (cf. 1 Chron 29:11), and is a fitting conclusion to the Model Prayer. [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
10. Storms, 127. [↑](#footnote-ref-10)
11. Storms, 138. [↑](#footnote-ref-11)
12. Storms, 146. [↑](#footnote-ref-12)
13. David G. Peterson, “Prayer in Paul’s Writings,” in *Teach Us to Pray: Prayer in the Bible and the World*, ed. D. A. Carson, electronic ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 2000), 85. Much of this section is based on Peterson. [↑](#footnote-ref-13)
14. Howard Peskett, “Prayer in the OT Outside the Psalms,” in *Teach Us to Pray: Prayer in the Bible and the World*, ed. D. A. Carson, electronic ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 2000), 25. Much of the material in this lesson follows this article. [↑](#footnote-ref-14)
15. Ryrie, “What is Spirituality?” *Bibliotheca Sacra* (Vol. 126, Page 204-205). Dallas Theological Seminary. [↑](#footnote-ref-15)
16. Kyu Nam Jung, “Prayer in the Psalms,” in *Teach Us to Pray: Prayer in the Bible and the World*, ed. D. A. Carson, electronic ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 2000), 36-49. [↑](#footnote-ref-16)