



TEACH US TO

PRAY

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by Jason Ehmann

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INTRODUCTION

Recently, a friend of mine posed a question to his Bible study group. He asked, “How would your wife react if you talked to her the same way you talk to God in prayer?” It made me think—let me see, how about two 15–20 minute conversations at two scheduled times through the day, with a one-minute statement at the beginning of every meal? Would my wife be okay with that? Of course not.

Yet often, that’s how we talk to God. Piercing, huh?

It’s easy for us to understand the truth that, because of Christ, believers have a relationship with God. But practically speaking, our habits often show that we don’t really appreciate—or even understand—our relationship with God. Our lack of attention to prayer reveals so much about how we view our relationship with God.

Do we really know how to work hard with God in prayer? Do we ever experience intimate conversation with God? Or is prayer just another task to finish so we can move on to the next thing?

As much as we say we understand prayer’s impact on our relationship with God, our practice betrays what we really believe—my practice betrays what I believe. What I want is my heart to hunger to talk with God. I want my prayers to be filled with love and knowledge, but I find myself struggling to get there.

So, what is the solution? How do we change routine speech to intimate communication with God? How do we start talking to God?

It seems like most of our problems with prayer stem from two misunderstandings. First, we don’t understand prayer itself, and second, we don’t understand God’s character. This study aims to equip the believer with a Biblical understanding of the nature and pattern of prayer and its connection to our understanding of God’s character. I trust the Spirit will use His truth to transform our attitudes and practice.

Grace and peace,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "R. J. Ehmann". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a long horizontal stroke extending to the right.

Jason Ehmann

TO THE STUDENT

What's in This Book?

As you work and take notes in your student manual, you are developing a great resource for reference after this study is finished. The more thought you put into your Bible study, the more you'll get out of it—both now and later.

Here's an overview of the contents of your student manual.

Teacher's Lesson Outline

This is an outline of your teacher's lesson. It will help you to follow along during class time and give you a structured breakdown of each lesson's topics.

Verse Memory Chart

This section includes various passages for memorization.

Extra Resources

In the back of your book, you'll find a list of helpful reading resources for learning more about prayer.

There's also a section on practical tips for enriching your prayer time.

How to Get the Most Out of This Study

Class Time

- Prepare before you get to class—bring your student book and a pen, pencil, or nail polish—or whatever you use to write.
- Review the previous lesson. A quick flip-through will refresh your memory.
- Take notes. You aren't limited to just filling in blanks in the outline. Write down your own thoughts and questions during the teacher's lesson.
- Participate in discussions. It's OK to talk.

Student Work

- Pick the best time of your day to study the memorization passages and pray. Try to find a time and place free of distraction. Play some quiet music or go to the library—whatever helps you focus.

- Begin with prayer, using what you've learned in this study so far. Ask God to teach you through the Scripture readings and show you how to grow in holiness.
- Read through the passage and thoughtfully answer the questions.
- Keep a notebook to record your prayers, take notes, ask questions, and write down your Bible study thoughts.
- After you've studied and meditated on the passage, discuss what you've learned with friends or other students in this class.
- Memorize portions of the readings.

How to Study the Bible

Not everyone will have the time or resources to be Super-Bible-Scholar and study these passages for ten hours everyday. Use what time you can to dig into these verses, and consider revisiting them later if you aren't able to dissect them as much as you'd like.

You Are Qualified to Study the Bible

If you're a Christian, you have the ability to study God's Word as much as any theological professor or pastor. These people don't possess a special gift for learning that's only available to full-time ministry workers. Any Christian can—and should—study the Bible and share what they learn.

1. You have the Holy Spirit living in you. He gives you understanding of spiritual truth and helps you remember them (John 14:26; 1 Cor. 2:10–13).
2. The Bible is a living book. Unlike any human-written book, the Bible has a divine Author who actively communicates with His readers. That's why it's possible to read the same passage several times and understand new things about it that you didn't see previously.
3. Ask God for wisdom, and He will give it (James 1:5–6). Our human knowledge won't understand the spiritual nature of God's words. We can only learn truth with His help.

Use Discretion with Secondary Sources

The Bible is its own best commentary. Examine what you read in the context of the entire Bible, and find correlative topics that will give you further understanding of the passage.

Use discretion when consulting study aids and reading resources. People—even those who study the Bible for a living—can be fallible. Sometimes they'll promote their own opinion over truth, especially if they examine a passage outside of its cultural and biblical contexts. Ask God for wisdom and always compare people's words to God's Word and character.

At the end of this book, you'll find a recommended reading list. Including these books in the list doesn't imply that the books are perfect or that you should completely agree with everything their authors say. But they can be helpful, encouraging tools to develop a closer relationship with the Lord.

Digging into the Word

- Here are some suggestions to help you get the most out of your Bible study time.
- Outline the passage or categorize the verses/phrases.
- Examine the context of the passage. What events led up to it? What happened afterward?
- Discover what God reveals about His character in this passage.
- Determine if this passage reminds you of similar people or events in the Bible.
- Find the theme of the passage.
- Note your thoughts and questions about the passage, and what aspects you'd like to research more.
- Meditate on the passage throughout your day.
- Write down at least three questions you have about the passage and research the answers.

With God's help, you can do it! May He bless you in your relationship with Him.

LESSON ONE

WHAT IS PRAYER

Prayer Is Communication . . .

With _____

- When we pray, we communicate with a Person in a relational way.
- Psalm prayers provide a good example of communicating with God.
 - Desperation (Ps. 35:13; 39:12)
 - Happiness (Ps. 86:4, 5, 10, 12)
 - Sadness (Ps. 80:4)

THINK ABOUT IT

- As we pray we need to remember that we are communicating with God. What truths about God should we keep in mind so that we can pray personally?

From Our _____

- The spiritual part of us—often described as the “heart”—communicates with God, who is a _____ (John 4:24).
 - He knows our _____ and _____.

THINK ABOUT IT

- What will we think about if we pray from our hearts?
- How can we keep our thoughts engaged while praying?
- How can we make our language in prayer sound natural and less formal?
- What about “filler phrases” that we use in our prayers?

For Our _____

- God promises to give us all _____ things (Ps. 84:11).

- God promises to _____ for us (Matt 6:25–33).

THINK ABOUT IT

- What are some spiritual needs we have?
- How does God provide for those needs?

For His _____

- Express thanks to God for His _____ and _____.
- God deserves praise because He is the _____.

THINK ABOUT IT

- Besides prayer, what are other ways we can praise God?
- How do we get to know what God is like so that we can praise Him?

Through _____

- We have access to God through Christ's sacrificial _____ (1 Tim. 2:3–6) and by His _____ for us (1 John 2:1).
- Christ's work gives us _____ when we come to God.

According to God's _____

- God's will is His macro-level, omniscient _____ for His _____ and our _____.
- To pray for God's will to be done requires us to have an attitude of humble _____.

For God's _____

- To glorify God means to give Him the _____, _____, and _____ He deserves.
- When we pray purposefully and humbly, we demonstrate that God is _____ to us.

How Can I Change?

Review the survey you filled out at the beginning of this lesson. Honestly evaluate your own prayer life and highlight some areas that need improvement. Spend time asking God to help your heart and mind toward prayer. If you are struggling to evaluate your prayer life, here are some questions you can ask yourself.

- Do I really know what prayer is?
- Do I believe that prayer is a vital part of my relationship to God?
- What does my prayer life reveal about my relationship with God?
- What does my prayer life reveal about my knowledge of God?
- What distracts me from prayer?
- Do I talk naturally to God, or do I use some sort of shallow, formal language?
- Do I pray for my spiritual needs, or do I only inform God of my physical wish list?
- Do I include thankfulness in my prayers?
- Do I pray purposefully for God's glory or mine?

With the Spirit's help, use this evaluation exercise to honestly and humbly examine how you pray.

Devotional Passages

DAY ONE: Luke 1:39–55—Mary's Praise

- What did Mary rejoice over (v. 49)?
- What attributes of God does Mary refer to in her song of praise (vv. 47–54)?

- Why do you think Mary so readily praised God when she learned about Jesus' coming birth?

DAY TWO: Habakkuk 3:1–19—Habakkuk's Prayer of Praise and Trust

- How does Habakkuk portray God when God defended Israel in the past (vv. 2–15)?
- What is Habakkuk's response to his current trouble (v. 16)?
- How does Habakkuk demonstrate his faith in God in verses 17–19?

DAY THREE: 1 Sam. 1:27–2:10—Hannah's Prayer of Praise

- Whom did Hannah credit for her answer to prayer (v. 1)?
- What is the theme of Hannah's prayer in chapter 2?
- Read 1 Corinthians 1:26–31. How do you think this passage relates to Hannah's experience?

LESSON TWO

WHY PRAY

To _____ God

- Prayer teaches me to know God through His _____.
 - The God of the Israelites and of the early church is the same powerful God I know today.
- Prayer teaches me to know God through His _____.
 - Providences are instances in which we see God working for our ultimate good, even if it doesn't seem like it.
- Prayer teaches me to know God's _____.

THINK ABOUT IT

- How has God worked in answer to your prayer requests?
- Can you identify providences in your own life?

To _____ God

- The more we know about God and experience His character demonstrated in our lives, the more we will love God (Eph. 3:14–21).
- We pray not only because we love God, but also to love God more.
- Paul prayed for the Ephesian believers to grow in their understanding of God's love by being grounded in God's love (Eph. 3: 14–21).

To Access God's _____

- Prayer is a means of grace—the power or help that God gives to us to obey Him, resist sin, and do His will.
- Prayer is hard work, and prayer is essential.

To Grow Spiritually

- ◉ Prayer is a spiritual discipline—a practice to help believers to grow spiritually.
- ◉ How does prayer help us grow?
 - Our _____ on God grows through prayer.
 - Our _____ for others grows through prayer.
 - Our personal _____ grows through prayer.

To Demonstrate and Strengthen _____

- ◉ Our beliefs determine our actions.
- ◉ God grows and strengthens our faith.

To _____ God's Command

- ◉ God wills that believers pray (Rom. 12:12; Eph. 6:18; 1 Thess. 5:17).
- ◉ Failing to pray will invite the temptation to sin (Matt. 26:41).

“Prayer will make a man cease from sin, or sin will entice a man to cease from prayer.”

—John Bunyan

THINK ABOUT IT

- How can prayer be motivated by love and obedience?
- What does it mean to love God in prayer?

How Can I Change?

- ◉ Take some time to evaluate why you pray and write your honest reasons in a journal.
 - Evaluate your motives from a biblical perspective. Are your motivations for prayer biblical? Do they reflect a heart of love? Do they demonstrate knowledge of the character of God?
 - What areas of your thinking need to be changed? What practical changes do you need to make in order to change your thinking? Discuss some of your findings with your parents or another spiritual mentor.

- ◉ Read Ephesians 3:14–21 several times.
 - Rewrite the passage in your own words so that you can pray it for yourself.
 - Spend time praying this prayer for yourself and for those studying the topic of prayer with you.
 - At the end of the week, spend some time thinking of the ways God has displayed His love in your life.
 - Write them down so you can remember them and share them with others.
- ◉ Read Psalm 5. Find several characteristics of God for which you can thank Him.
 - How do those characteristics meet specific needs in your life?
 - Write them down so you can remember what you learned about God.
 - Spend time in prayer thanking God for His character.

Devotional Passages

DAY ONE: 2 Samuel 7:1–29—David’s Prayer of Gratitude

- What did David want to do for God (vv. 1–3)?
- What promises did God make to David (vv. 12–14) and to the Israelite nation (vv. 10–11)?
- What did David pray in response? (vv. 18–29)?

DAY TWO: Psalms 136 and 138—David's Prayers of Thanksgiving

- List specific things that David thanks God for in Psalms 136 and 138.
- What statement does David make in faith in Ps. 138:8?
- Why do you think David used repetition in Psalm 136?

DAY THREE: Jonah 2:1–9; 4:1–4—Jonah's Prayer

- What is Jonah thanking God for in this prayer?
- How did Jonah's attitude change by Jonah 4:1–4?
- Jonah's prayers revealed his priorities and what was important to him. What do your prayers reveal that is most important to you?

LESSON THREE

YOUR PART IN PRAYER

Necessary _____ for Effective Prayer

Humility

- Humility demonstrates an inner _____ and _____ to God.
- Humility recognizes that we have no _____ or _____ of our own.

“Humility is born by looking at God, and his holiness, and then looking at self and man’s unholiness.”

—E. M. Bounds

- The phrase *poor in spirit* means to humbly acknowledge our great spiritual need and rely on God to fill it (Matt. 5:3)
- Jesus contrasted humility and pride in the story of the Pharisee and the tax collector (Luke 18:9–14).

THINK ABOUT IT

- If Jesus included you in a parable about prayer, what would He have to say about your humility—or lack thereof—as you pray?

Dependence

- When we recognize that we are empty of goodness and strength, and that God is our one, true _____, we won’t look elsewhere for fulfillment.

- In Hosea 7:14, the people laid around and wailed for food. God doesn't just view this behavior as human weakness—He actually calls it active _____ against Him.

Devotion

THINK ABOUT IT

- What is devotion to God?

- Devotion is a commitment to the relentless _____ of God.
- Isaiah 40 explores the motivation behind this kind of devotion.
 - Isaiah relates God's forgiveness to the people (vv. 1–2).
 - He reminds them of God's glory (vs. 5)
 - As we see God's glory, we become aware of our sinfulness (vs. 5).
 - Instead of despairing, we have confident joy in God's glorious power (vs. 9–31).
- Resting in God gives us _____ to obey Him (vs. 31) and pray consistently.

Consistency

- God doesn't dictate a specific time of day that you should pray. We should always be in a heart attitude of prayer (1 Thess. 5:17). But it's good to pick a time to devote entirely to distraction-free prayer.

Sincerity

- Sincerity means we will do whatever is necessary to _____ with God.
- Sincere prayer means earnestly _____ with God.
- God promises that He will hear us and reveal Himself to us if we pray sincerely (Jer. 29:12–14).

Some content in this section is drawn from the works of E.M. Bounds (1835–1913), well-known author on the subject of prayer. Public domain.

Conditions for Effective Prayer

“God is limited only from the human side; and that he is always willing to give beyond our asking, if the human conditions he has so plainly laid down in his Word are fulfilled.”

—Rosalind Goforth, *How I Know God Answers Prayer*

Praying in _____

THINK ABOUT IT

- What is biblical faith?

- Faith is a _____ expectation, or belief, in something that we can't see yet.
 - Faith in Christ's sacrifice (Rom. 5:1)
 - Faith in God's character (Heb. 10:21–23)
 - Faith in God's promises (James 1:5–6)

Praying God's _____

- We must make sure our requests align to God's will (1 John 5:14–15).
- We should not base our requests on selfish desires (James 4:3).

_____ in God

- When we stay close to God, we will start acting like Him.
- Unless we stay connected to God, we will spiritually wither away (John 15:1–11).
- Abiding in God requires obedience to God's commands and doing what pleases Him (1 John 3:22).

“Let us see that we keep God before our eyes; that we walk in His ways and seek to please and glorify Him in everything, great and small. Depend upon it, God's work, done in God's way, will never lack God's supplies.”

—James Hudson Taylor

Sin

- ◉ Sin breaks our fellowship with God (1 John 1:6).

THINK ABOUT IT

- Does God hear and answer the prayers of an unsaved person?

- ◉ Unconfessed sin hinders prayer (Ps. 66:17–19).
- ◉ God promises forgiveness and cleansing (2 Chron. 7:14; James 4:8–10; 1 John 1:9).

How Can I Change?

- ◉ Take time to evaluate your attitude toward prayer.
 - Are you humble, dependent, devoted, and sincere?
 - Review your lesson to remind yourself what those attitudes look like. Ask God to help you identify areas that need to be changed. Share your thoughts with a spiritual mentor or parent.
- ◉ What could be holding you back from communicating genuinely with God?
 - Do you lack faith? Do you believe that God can do what you think is impossible? Read Isaiah 40:9–31 and remind yourself of God's greatness.
 - Do you lack a desire to submit to God's will? Are you OK if God chooses to answer your prayer differently than you expected? Read Romans 11:33–36 and ask yourself the questions found in verses 34–35.
 - Do you fail to stay connected to God? Do you continually have a close, loving, personal relationship with God? Read John 15:12–17 and remind yourself about the kind of relationship that Jesus wants to have with you.
 - Do you have unconfessed sin in your life? Do you have some sin that you are holding onto even though you know it's wrong? Read James 4:8–10 and humbly evaluate your life. Confess any sin so that you can experience the joy of restored fellowship with God.

Devotional Passages

DAY ONE: Nehemiah 1:1–11—Nehemiah Prays for His People’s Sin

- Who did Nehemiah say had sinned (v. 6)?
- According to verse 7, what sin had Nehemiah and his people committed?
- What had God promised to do for Israel if they turned back to Him (vv. 8–9)?

DAY TWO: Daniel 9:1–19—Daniel’s Prayer for His People

- Why was Daniel praying for his people (vv. 5–10)?
- Why do you think Daniel prayed for other people’s sin as well as his own?
- What did Daniel request of God, and why (vv. 18–19)?

