

TEACH US TO
PRAY

TEACH US TO PRAY

by Jason Ehmann

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P.O. Box 700, 502 W. Pippen St., Whitakers, NC 27891.

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First Printing

ISBN: 978-1-59557-195-3

Layout and Design: Shannon Brown
Editor: C.J. Harris

Published by



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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', with a stylized flourish at the end.

Jason Ehmann

WHAT'S IN THE TEACHER'S MANUAL

Teacher's Lessons

Each teacher's lesson includes the lesson objectives, main text, teacher's lesson outline, and lesson content.

The lesson also includes discussion questions, application, and illustration notes. The digital presentation follows the bolded text—headings and text within the paragraphs.

Student Manual Pages

The Teacher's Manual contains copies of the Student Manual pages. These facsimiles allow you to quickly provide any answers that students miss.

Quizzes

If you prefer, you can use quizzes during class time to review the previous lesson. Or if you are using this study in your ProTeen club, you can grade them for points.

Verse Memorization

This section includes various passages for memorization. You can set aside time for oral verse quizzing, or include a written section with the lesson quizzes.

Lesson Presentations

Digital presentations come with the Teacher's Manual. You can download them at www.positive-action.org. The presentation includes the teacher's outline, as well as discussion questions from the teacher's lessons. The points on the presentations correspond with the bolded text throughout the teacher's lessons.

Extra Resources

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

These resources are included in the Student Manual, as well. Encourage your students to use these resources in their personal devotions.

HOW TO GET THE MOST OUT OF THIS STUDY

Before Teaching

- Even before you start preparing to teach this study, pray for God's guidance and blessing as you teach.
- Read or skim through the entire study so you get an idea of its scope and subject.
- Study the teacher's lesson in advance. You don't need to memorize it or read it verbatim, but familiarity with its contents will allow you to teach smoothly and make the most of your time. Feel free to tailor the amount of content to fit your needs.

- Review the quiz questions beforehand. Make sure you've covered the content on the quiz, or at least let students know if you choose not to cover a particular section that is included on the quiz.
- Collect all necessary materials and teaching aids before class so your time doesn't get wasted or disrupted more than necessary.
- Spend a little time to review each previous lesson with your students. You can use the quizzes as a review tool instead of grading them, if you prefer.

During Class Time

- Begin with purposeful prayer.
- Give the written quiz and verse memory quiz, or use them for review.
- Review key points of the previous lesson.
- Introduce this week's lesson.
- Read the main text. As you teach, read additional texts found throughout each lesson.
- Encourage student interaction in discussions.
- Use the digital presentation to help students follow the outline and fill in blanks in their Student Manuals.
- After the lesson, help students fill in any blanks they have missed.
- Encourage students to spend time meditating and memorizing their memory and devotional passages at home.
- Close in prayer.

VERSE MEMORIZATION CHART

WEEK	PASSAGE	DATE COMPLETED
1	John 15:4–7—Abide in Christ	
2	James 5:13–16—Praying in faith	
3	1 John 1:5–9—Confess sin	
4	James 4:8–10—Draw near to God	
5	1 John 5:14–15—Ask in God’s will	
6	Matt. 6:9–15—The Lord’s prayer	
7	Phil. 2:5–11—Christ’s example of humility	
8	Phil. 4:4–7—Don’t be anxious, pray	

LESSON ONE

WHAT IS PRAYER

OBJECTIVES

- Define the various components of biblical prayer
- Recognize prayer's importance to our relationship with God

MAIN TEXT

- John 15:1–11

TEACHER'S LESSON

Teaching on prayer can be a challenge. Because prayer is intensely personal, it can be a difficult topic to discuss with others. But we need to talk about prayer because it is essential for a healthy, intimate relationship with God. Our fellowship with God always suffers when we neglect to pray purposefully.

In our culture, our busy schedules pull us away from quiet conversation with the Lord. By God's grace, we can change our perspective by growing in our understanding of prayer.

Exercise (optional)

Before diving into the lesson, consider giving your class a survey about prayer—how often they pray, a breakdown of the content of their prayers, and how important (or not) they think prayer is compared to other spiritual disciplines. You can use the sample survey included in the Extra Resources.

This isn't a checklist to see if your students are fulfilling a Christian duty. The purpose of this exercise is getting your class to think about their personal prayer lives and how they can know God better.

This study isn't intended to make us feel guilty about our inadequate prayer lives. Nor should it simply get us to make a decision to pray longer or more frequently. This study's goal is to direct our focus to God and produce in us a desire to know Him better.

Prayer is a vital part of a personal relationship with God, and the key to praying effectively is abiding continually in God (John 15:1–11). So there's a cycle to prayer—we pray to maintain our relationship with God because we have a relationship with God. Because of that relationship, we communicate with Him.

Illustration

Bring a plant to class—try to find one that resembles a vine. Also bring some dead foliage that has fallen off the plant. Use the plant to demonstrate Christ's words about abiding in

God—the branches must stay connected to the plant in order to live, and when they stop “abiding,” they die.

Also point out that the plant and branches “talk” to each other because they are connected—they share nutrients and water. We naturally communicate with God when we abide in Him.

In our everyday relationships—with spouses, family, and friends—we have a desire to communicate because we enjoy those relationships. We communicate to maintain the relationship. When communication fails, the relationship fails.

Definition of Prayer

When we pray, we communicate directly with God. This communication goes both ways. We speak to God, and God reciprocates by listening and responding. He speaks to us through the words of Scripture and answers our requests, often using specific people or situations in our lives.

How do you define prayer? The following definitions can give us some ideas about the meaning of prayer.

John Bunyan stated, “Prayer is a sincere, sensible, affectionate pouring out of the heart or soul to God, through Christ, in the strength and assistance of the Holy Spirit, for such things as God has promised, or according to his Word, for the good of the church, with submission in faith to the will of God.”

The Westminster Shorter Catechism defines prayer as “an offering up of our desires unto God, for things agreeable to His will, in the name of Christ, with confession of our sins, and thankful acknowledgment of His mercies.”

Prayer is broken down into several parts, each existing for a specific purpose. For this study, we’ll define prayer as **communication with God, from our hearts, for our needs, for God’s praise, through Christ, according to God’s will, and for His glory.**

Prayer Is Communication. . .

With God

It’s absolutely amazing that the all-powerful Creator not only invites us to talk with Him, but that He also listens and responds to us as well. God intends to have fellowship with His people, as seen in His closeness with Adam and Eve (Gen. 3:8). Even after sin ruined that fellowship, God made restoration possible through Christ.

So, as believers, when we pray, we communicate with a Person in a relational way. Praying is not about the act of saying words to God as much as it is about the meaning of those words. We understand this in our personal relationships. We don’t just talk with our friends so that we can say that we communicate with them. The content of our conversations reflects our desire to have a relationship with that friend.

The same is true with our prayers. Often we become focused on the act of praying while failing to appreciate the One with whom we are communicating.

The Psalms provide examples of intense, personal communication between the speaker and God. You can find prayers of desperation (Ps. 35:13; 39:12), happiness (Ps. 86:4, 5, 10, 12), and sadness (Ps. 80:4). These Psalms demonstrate the kind of personal communication with God that should characterize our prayers.

Application

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 Hearts

The spiritual part of us—often described as the “heart”—communicates with God, who is a Spirit (John 4:24). As such, **He knows our thoughts and attitudes.** Because we communicate with God spiritually, we don’t need to pray eloquently, or even audibly. A sincere prayer in spirit is more meaningful than a shallow, formal speech directed at heaven.

Because God is omnipresent, we don’t have to go to a specific place, at a specific time, to talk to God. We can communicate with Him anytime and anywhere.

Discussion

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 Needs

As our loving Father, **God has promised to give us all good things (Ps. 84:11) and to provide for our needs (Matt. 6:25–26) if we ask Him.** We show dependence and humility when we make requests of God, recognizing that He alone exists as the all-sufficient answer to our problems.

When we think of our needs, physical things naturally come to mind. We often neglect to pray for spiritual things, even though they are just as—or more—important than physical things. Jesus reminds us not to fret over our physical needs, but to pursue God and His kingdom instead. God promises to provide for all of our physical needs (Matt 6:25–33).

Discussion

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

For His Praise

We can praise God in many ways, and prayer provides one of the most intimate and personal opportunities for worshipping God. Through prayer, **we can praise Him not only for His actions, but also for His character.** Prayer enables us to communicate our gratitude personally to the Source of every good and perfect gift.

It may not feel natural or logical to tell God how great He is. Is God selfish to ask us to praise Him? No! Praising God shows our thankfulness for what He has done and given and helps us connect His works and gifts to His character.

When we compliment a friend, we're not doing it to convince her of her own greatness—we're recognizing the good that's already there. The more talented, beautiful, or amazing a person is, the more compliments we tend to give that person. God's character is perfect, His actions are wise, and His gifts are good, so He deserves the highest praise. **It's not selfish for God to direct us to praise Him, simply because He *is* the greatest.**

So we should praise God in prayer, showing gratitude for His character and actions. Praise will naturally flow from our hearts when we reflect on Him.

This type of praise helps us to recognize God's character, expressing gratitude for who He is instead of simply consuming His gifts. When we praise God, we meditate on Him and imitate Him, by His grace.

For a good example of a praise prayer, read Psalm 96. The speaker directs both people and creation to praise God with words and songs.

Discussion

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

Through Christ

We have access to the Father because of Christ's work—**first by His sacrificial death on the cross (1 Tim. 2:3–6), and continually by His intercession for us (1 John 2:1).**

Just as it's impossible to reconcile with God apart from Christ, so it's impossible to maintain prayer without Christ. Hebrews 4:14–16 reminds us that **Jesus' work gives us confidence when we come to God.** We don't need a priest to act as intermediary for us because Christ gives us direct access to God by His sacrifice.

According to God's Will

God's will is His macro-level, omniscient plan for His glory and our good. Throughout His earthly ministry, Christ prayed for God's will to be done. Christ instructs His followers to pray the same way—to express a desire that God will bring about what He intends to accomplish. **To pray for God's will to be done requires us to have an attitude of humble submission.** Prayer enables us to align our wishes and desires with God's sovereign plans. We pray in order to accomplish the will of God.

For God's Glory

All of these aspects of prayer direct us to the ultimate goal of glorifying God. **To glorify God means to give Him the honor, worship, and praise He deserves.** In simple terms, that means we make His name look good and redirect the praise we're given back to God. We shift the spotlight onto God, not on ourselves, because He is the source of everything. Every request we make, every expression of gratitude given to God, every act of humble submission happens through Christ, to accomplish God's will for His glory.

Our attitude in prayer—evident in both our words and manner—determines if we're really glorifying God. If we approach God casually, or out of duty, we're revealing that He's not that important

to us—that His glory is not the goal of our prayer. **When we pray purposefully and humbly, we demonstrate that God is special to us.**

Strategies for Praying

The material in this section appears in “Appendix A: Practical Tips for Purposeful Prayer,” located at the end of the student manual.

Acronyms

Some people find it helpful to use acronyms to help them remember what to include in prayer. One is ACTS—adoration (praise), confession, thanksgiving, and supplication (requests). Another is PRAY—Praise, repent, ask, and yield. Use one of these acronyms, or develop your own to help you remember what to include in your prayers.

Praise

Glorify God by rejoicing in His attributes. Meditate on God’s character and works, and thank Him for His blessings.

Repent

While it’s ideal to ask God’s forgiveness for sin quickly, sometimes we don’t think about our sin until much later. Take time to seriously reflect on your actions and attitudes each day and confess sin.

It may help to list the things that present temptation to you. Writing these things down can help to solidify them in your mind, making you aware of situations, people, or habits that could make it convenient to for you give in to temptation. A list can also remind you to pray consistently for these things.

Ask

Make requests not only for yourself, but also on behalf of others. Remember to ask according to God’s will, not your own.

Yield

Reflect on what God has been teaching you through your study time, situations, and people in your life. What has He brought to your attention that He desires you to change? What has God taught you through this study that will impact the way you talk with Him?

Thank God for all He has given you—even for the things that don’t seem good to you right now. God desires His glory and our ultimate good, and we can trust His wisdom and power as He conforms us to be more like Himself.

Pray the Psalms

The Psalms are especially great for praising God in prayer, and many provide examples of confession.

Keep a Prayer Journal

Record your prayers in a notebook to help you pray deliberately. By writing down your prayers, you'll have time to think about what you're saying. Later, when you look at a record of your prayers, you can identify specific ways that God has answered your requests.

Manage Prayer Requests

How many times have you told someone you would pray for them, only to realize later that you never did? It's easy to forget prayer requests. Many people find it helpful to keep a running prayer list, writing down each request as it comes to their attention, and praying their way through the list (or dividing it up over several days if it's long).

Another great strategy to pray for missionaries is to collect their cards and pray for one or two families each day. You could keep the stack together in a box or a photo album.

Conclusion

We've learned that prayer can be defined as communication with God, from our hearts, for our needs, for God's praise, through Christ, according to God's will, and for His glory.

Do you talk with God? Are your prayers about you and your needs, or do they focus on God's character and work? Do you have a relationship with God? Are you abiding in Him, depending on Him for everything like leaves depend on a plant?

In the next lesson, we'll look at several reasons why we should pray.

How Can I Change?

Review the survey passed 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 and your students pray.

LESSON ONE

WHAT IS PRAYER

Prayer Is Communication . . .

With God

- 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 Hearts

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

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 Needs

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

- ◉ God promises to provide 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 Praise

- ◉ Express thanks to God for His actions and character.
- ◉ God deserves praise because He is the greatest.

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 Christ

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

According to God's Will

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

For God's Glory

- ◉ To glorify God means to give Him the honor, worship, and praise He deserves.
- ◉ When we pray purposefully and humbly, we demonstrate that God is special 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.

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- Do I talk naturally to God, or do I use some sort of shallow, formal language?
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- 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)?
God, who is mighty, did great things for her.

- What attributes of God does Mary refer to in her song of praise (vv. 47–54)?
mighty, merciful, strong, provider, helper, faithful

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

Answers will vary.

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)?

It portrays Him as powerful and just; He defeated the wicked.

- What is Habakkuk's response to his current trouble (v. 16)?

He will wait for God to defeat his enemies.

- How does Habakkuk demonstrate his faith in God in verses 17–19?

He states that even through suffering, he will rejoice and trust in God, his strength.

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

- Whom did Hannah credit for her answer to prayer (v. 1)?

God

- What is the theme of Hannah's prayer in chapter 2?

praising God for His power

- Read 1 Corinthians 1:26–31. How do you think this passage relates to Hannah's experience?

Answers will vary.

LESSON TWO

WHY PRAY

OBJECTIVES

- Understand biblical reasons to pray
- Realize that prayer plays an integral part in our spiritual growth

MAIN TEXT

- Ephesians 1:15–23; 3:14–21

TEACHER'S LESSON

Why Should We Pray?

In order to understand the *importance* of prayer—and to allow that understanding to impact our actions—we need to understand the *purpose* of prayer.

God knows everything—including our everyday needs (Matt. 6:8)—before we even ask Him, and He accomplishes His will no matter what we do. So why should we pray?

To Know God

As previously stated, it takes regular interaction to get to know someone. When we pray, we don't just learn about God, we learn God Himself. We get an up-front view of His work and character.

Prayer teaches me to know God through His works. God gives us spiritual understanding as we learn more about Him. Read Ephesians 1:15–23. We first learn about God's character through the Bible. We see who God says He is and how He reveals Himself through His actions.

For example, we see God's all-controlling power at work in the account of the Egyptian plagues in Exodus. In Acts, we witness God's invisible orchestration to establish the early church despite incredible opposition.

Sometimes we forget to make the connection that **the God of the Israelites and of the early church is the same powerful God we know today.** God may not use the same means to reveal Himself today as He did in Exodus, but we can still see Him at work—especially through answered prayer.

Prayer teaches me to know God through His wisdom. We also see God at work through what some people call “providences.” **Providences are instances in which we see God working for our ultimate good, even if it doesn't seem like it.** More than coincidence, providences are God's revealed grace in our lives. Sometimes a providence can be a specific answer to prayer, or God

leading us in a certain direction to prepare us for a future purpose. We can meditate on the character of God we see revealed through providences and answered prayer.

Prayer teaches me to know God's love. When God clearly answers both my physical and spiritual needs, I experience God's love. The more I see God's love, the more I know God. Answered prayer helps me to grow in my knowledge of God's love.

To Love God

Read Ephesians 3:14–21. Knowledge and love are directly connected. **The more we know about God and experience His character demonstrated in our lives, the more we will love God.** The more we love Him, the more we want to know about Him. In much the same way as our human relationships continue to grow with this combination of love and knowledge, our knowledge about God fuels love for God, and our love fuels our communication with God.

So **we pray not only because we love God, but also to love God more.** And together these form both the motive for prayer, and also the result of prayer.

There may be no greater evidence of this than in **Paul's prayer for the Ephesian believers in Ephesians 3.** He prays that they would grow in internal spiritual strength (v. 16) and have deep roots in God's love (v. 17) so that they can grow in their understanding of God's love (v. 18). All of this was accomplished through prayer.

To Access God's Grace

Prayer is a means of grace—the unmerited power, or help, that God gives to us to obey Him, resist sin, and do His will. When we struggle with the temptation to sin, or need strength to endure a trial, we can request grace from God and He will give it (Heb. 4:16).

Illustration

Bring an electrical device to class that must be plugged in to work, but don't plug it in right away. Try to use that device, and then ask the obvious question, "Why won't this work?" It won't work because it isn't connected to a power source.

Application

Often this is how we expect our Christian lives to work. We want God's grace in our lives to conquer sin, help us to love Him more, or do something to love our neighbors, yet we do not pray for that grace to be working in us. How can we live filled with grace without taking the time to ask God for it? How can we minister grace to others without asking first for God to give it to us?

Understanding that grace comes through prayer highlights two more truths about prayer—**prayer is difficult, and prayer is essential.** When we believe that God gives grace as a direct result of us asking for it, then we will ask and keep asking. Don't be afraid to pray because it is difficult, but understand your great need and continue to pray because you desperately need God's grace.

To Grow Spiritually

Prayer is one of the spiritual disciplines—that is, a practice to help believers to grow spiritually. Spiritual disciplines aren't a checklist of activities to make ourselves look good or to earn God's favor—because we have no righteousness in ourselves, and there's no way we can impress a holy, righteous God (Rom. 3:10). But prayer, Bible study and memorization, meditation, witnessing, and ministry—done in humility—help us grow.

We have already seen how prayer helps grow our knowledge and love for God and how it gives us access to His grace. In what other ways does prayer help us grow?

Our Dependence on God Grows Through Prayer

Through prayer, we also grow in our dependence on God. When we bring our requests before God, we are confessing that without supernatural help we can't handle the circumstances that we are facing. In prayer, we acknowledge our limitations and thus become far more aware of God's limitlessness. The more we see Him for who He is, the more dependent we will become.

Our Love for Others Grows Through Prayer

The more we spend time thinking of others in the context of our conversations with God, the more we are able to love them as God commands us to. Often our natural tendency is to talk to people about people problems and, by doing so, make them worse. Our love for those with whom we are struggling grows proportionally to the amount we pray for them.

Praying for Other Believers

James 5:16 urges Christians to pray for one another and to confess our sins to one another. Unlike confession to human mediators for forgiveness for sin—such as Catholic doctrine teaches—we “confess” our struggles with others so they can pray for us, not absolve our sin. Also, accountability to a Spirit-filled Christian provides help when we're struggling with a particular temptation.

A small prayer group that meets together regularly can provide great benefits. Intimate fellowship with other believers gives us a chance to understand their struggles better and to provide encouragement and accountability.

Praying for Government Leaders

Paul requests in 1 Timothy 2:1–3 that we pray for all people, including government leaders. These leaders regularly face incredible pressure, and many of them don't know God. Instead of mocking or blaming them for problems, we have a responsibility to lovingly pray for them.

Our Personal Holiness Grows Through Prayer

God delights in our imitation of Jesus Christ. His greatest purpose is to make us look like Jesus. So, when we ask Him to help us be holy, we are asking Him to do something that He has said is His will (Rom 8:29) and something that He takes pleasure in.

To Demonstrate and Strengthen Faith

Our beliefs determine our actions. When we pray, we demonstrate what we believe about God’s character and His promises. We believe that God is faithful and unchanging, and that He will do what He has said. **As God works in our lives, He grows our faith.**

To Obey God’s Command

God commands us to pray (Rom. 12:12; Eph. 6:18; 1 Thess. 5:17), and failing to do so **invites the temptation of sin** (Matt. 26:41). When we neglect to pray, we demonstrate an attitude of proud self-sufficiency that shuts God out of our lives.

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

—John Bunyan

Discussion

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

Love carries meanings of both affection and loyalty. Jesus tells His disciples that if they love Him, they will obey His commands. So our love for Christ is not just an emotional feeling. If we had to wait until we felt a certain way before we spent time praying, we may not pray at all. However, when it’s difficult to incorporate emotion in our prayer life, we can demonstrate our love for God by obeying Him. Through the Spirit’s help, praying out of duty will eventually grow our love for God as we get to know Him better (John 15:7–11).

Conclusion

We’ve looked at the components of prayer and several reasons for praying. But these facts mean nothing outside of a personal relationship with Jesus Christ. Only by accepting His sacrifice do we have access to God. God desires to have fellowship with each one of us and has provided the means to do so through Christ.

In our next lesson, we’ll look at prayer as a means of working together with God, and what part we have 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.

LESSON TWO

WHY PRAY

To Know God

- Prayer teaches me to know God through His works.
 - 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 wisdom.
 - 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 love.

THINK ABOUT IT

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

To Love 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 Grace

- 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 dependence on God grows through prayer.
 - Our love for others grows through prayer.
 - Our personal holiness grows through prayer.

To Demonstrate and Strengthen Faith

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

To Obey 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.

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 - 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)?
David wanted to build a temple for God.
- What promises did God make to David (vv. 12–14) and to the Israelite nation (vv. 10–11)?
God says that He will establish David’s “house” [lineage] forever; God will appoint a place for Israel to safely live.
- What did David pray in response? (vv. 18–29)?
He praised God and prayed for God’s will to be done as God had said.

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

- List specific things that David thanks God for in Psalms 136 and 138.
God's love, faithfulness, truth, strength, preservation, and deliverance
- What statement does David make in faith in Ps. 138:8?
God will fulfill, or perfect, His purpose for David.
- Why do you think David used repetition in Psalm 136?
Answers will vary.

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

- What is Jonah thanking God for in this prayer?
saving Jonah's life
- How did Jonah's attitude change by Jonah 4:1–4?
He was angry and selfish, and he blamed God.
- Jonah's prayers revealed his priorities and what was important to him. What do your prayers reveal that is most important to you?
Answers will vary.

LESSON THREE

YOUR PART IN PRAYER

OBJECTIVES

- Understand that we must have humility, devotion, and sincerity for effective prayer
- Examine the role of faith in prayer
- Study how abiding in God affects our prayer requests
- Realize that unconfessed sin hinders prayer

MAIN TEXTS

- Luke 18:9–14
- Isaiah 40

TEACHER'S LESSON

God teaches us that we need to have certain attitudes in order to pray effectively. But because we still struggle with sin, we have difficulty maintaining these attitudes.

While we can't force ourselves to feel different, we can change our focus from ourselves to God. It's important not to wait on attitude before we change our actions—otherwise, most of us would never get out of bed in the mornings! If we have difficulty changing our attitudes, we should still obey God's commands and ask Him to change our hearts.

These attitudes come from intimately knowing God. How extensively we possess these attitudes in our prayer time reveals how well we know God.

Necessary Attitudes for Effective Prayer

Humility

Crucial for effective prayer, humility provides the foundation for every other attitude.

Discussion

What is humility? Does it mean to demean yourself? (Humility removes the focus off of you and puts it on God. Having a humble spirit means that you are subject to God in everything, and that you define your worth in God alone.)

On what basis do we—sinful, created beings—approach a holy, powerful God? We can approach God only because Christ, through His death, has provided opportunity for reconciliation between God and us.

Humility is a demonstration of inner quietness and submission to God. It is recognizing that we have **no strength or goodness 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

Application

Meditating on this powerful, unmerited gift should produce a response of humble submission in us. But so often we approach prayer with an attitude of stale familiarity and pride, forgetting that prayer is a privilege.

Humility is so vital to prayer that Jesus spoke about it often. Jesus commends this attitude in the Beatitudes (Matt. 5:3). The phrase ***poor in spirit* means to humbly acknowledge our great spiritual need and rely on God to fill it.** Here, *poor* means “absolutely destitute.” We are completely destitute in our spirit. We need God to work on our behalf.

Read Jesus’ parable in Luke 18:9–14. In this teaching on humility, He contrasts a Pharisee and a tax collector as they prayed.

Illustration

To engage the whole class, call for two volunteers to act out the parts of the Pharisee and the tax collector.

Pharisees were men who devoted themselves to Jewish religion. For many Pharisees, their religion became motivated by pride, and they used it to impress others. Jesus repeatedly denounced them for their hypocrisy and hardened hearts against the very God they claimed to serve.

This Pharisee used prayer not as a way to fellowship with God, but as an opportunity to boast. He took pride in his outwardly clean life. His statements about fasting and giving a tithe may have been particularly aimed at the tax collector—a man whose occupation had a reputation for excess. The Pharisee abstained from common indulgences and handled his material resources according to the Law. The Pharisee talked only about himself and the things he had done, as if to convince God that he was a really great guy. The spotlight was on him, not on God.

Tax collectors were despised not only for their job—taking people’s money—but also because they had a reputation for being dishonest and corrupt (Matt. 9:10–11; 11:19). They treated people well only if they were treated well (Matt. 5:46). Interestingly, one of Jesus’ disciples, Matthew, was a tax collector when he was called to follow Jesus. Such a call demonstrated that Jesus came to call sinners to repentance. These people followed Christ while the self-righteous Pharisees rejected Him (Matt. 9:12–13).

The tax collector, however, prayed differently. His burden of sin made him desperate for God’s mercy. He bowed his head in humility—he did not even dare look up (v. 13). He directed his prayer to God alone. Jesus stated that the tax collector was the justified one, rather than the Pharisee, because of his humility.

Application

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

Pride and self-righteousness—the opposites of humility—hinder God’s grace to us when we pray. Pride causes conflict with both people and God, but humility preserves peace and righteousness. If we are proud, we trust in ourselves to resist temptation but ultimately fail.

In James 4:6–10, God urges believers to humble themselves and come near to Him, because He resists the proud. The root of the word *resist* in this passage has a militaristic flavor. It carries the idea that God sets His divine forces against those who are proud—not only defensively, but also offensively. God makes it clear that He desires humility, not pride, as we pray.

Dependence

Humility naturally produces dependence on God. **When we recognize that we are empty of goodness and strength, and that God is our one, true Source, we won’t look elsewhere for fulfillment.**

Dependence implies a sense of exclusivity. We must trust in God alone, rather than trusting in other “gods” (Ps. 16:1–4). We might not literally bow down to a statue, but we can easily practice idolatry by trusting our own abilities and resources to solve our problems, or by looking for solutions other than God.

In Hosea 7:14, the prophet talks about people stubbornly refusing to depend on God. Instead of petitioning God, **the people laid around and wailed for food. God doesn’t just view this behavior as human weakness—He actually calls it active rebellion against Him.**

Application

How many times do we depend on our own resources until an emergency rises, and we finally go to God as a last resort? We must depend on God alone, in every moment.

Devotion

Discussion

What is devotion to God? (**Devotion is a commitment to the relentless pursuit of God.**)

Often, we commit ourselves to so many things—even good things—that we neglect the greatest things. How we manage our time reflects our true priorities, which, in turn, reveals what we think about God.

God instructs us to endure in prayer (Luke 18:1). But devotion in prayer doesn't mean an inflexible commitment to praying for a length of time, or at a certain time of day. Devotion is a heart response to knowing God. When we fellowship with God, we respond with a desire to spend more time enjoying Him.

In **Isaiah 40**, Isaiah explores the motivation behind this kind of devotion.

- In verses 1–2, Isaiah relates God's forgiveness to the people.
- Next, he reminds them of God's glory (v. 5).
- As we see the glory of God, we become aware of our inadequacy and sinfulness (vv. 6–8).
- Yet instead of despairing in our faults, we can have confident joy in the glorious power of our God (v. 9–31).

Meditating on the character of God requires intentional patience. We must quietly rest in the Lord, and He will give us the **endurance we need to obey Him (v. 31) and pray consistently.**

Waiting on God replaces anxiety with calm assurance.

Application

Reflecting on God's glory and forgiveness to us produces a desire to fellowship with Him. What other attributes of God can we study that encourage our devotion to God?

Hebrews 11:6 states that God will reward those who diligently seek Him. If we consistently seek God, we will find Him (Luke 11:9–10).

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.

One option is to schedule prayer time when you do your daily Bible reading. Many people choose to have this time in the morning before they start the day because it gives them a chance to focus on God before anything else can command their attention. Some people do this in the evening before bedtime. Some people do both.

Sometimes starting a new discipline or habit can be overwhelming, so just start with something manageable. You don't have to pray for an hour at a time, but the more consistently you pray, the longer you will want to spend fellowshiping with God.

Sincerity

Sincerity in prayer means viewing our relationship with God seriously. With this attitude, **we will do whatever is necessary to fellowship with God.**

David displayed this kind of desperation for God in several of his psalms. He longed for the Lord's presence (Ps. 84:2), comparing his desire for God to a deer thirsting for flowing water (Ps. 42:1). Whenever David realized that his sin had cut off fellowship with God, he would frantically beg God to forgive and restore him (Ps. 51:7–12).

Sincere prayer means earnestly persisting with God. When we pray this way, we throw our mind, will, and emotions into an exclusive conversation with God.

Daniel sincerely entreated God to forgive the people's sins in Daniel 9:3–19. You can almost hear him groaning in desperation as he repeatedly calls out, "O God," and "O Lord."

Application

Sincerity reflects a reverence for God's name. Addressing Him as Daniel did reflects intense emotion on our part. This is one reason we must not use God's name flippantly—doing so mocks the sincerity that God wishes us to have when addressing Him.

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.

Deal with Distractions

Part of sincerely pursuing God means that we'll do our best to make sure nothing interrupts or replaces our time with Him. Often, when we sit down and try to focus, something or someone interrupts us. These distractions frequently come from inside our own brains.

One tactic to deal with these mental rabbit-trails is to immediately write down whatever off-topic thought disrupts your prayer, and then resume praying. That way, you can relax knowing that you won't forget the thought, and it should stop nagging at your brain. Try to find a quiet, private place to pray, such as an empty classroom, your bedroom, your car, or a park.

Remember that God is always present with you. While He is always ready to talk with you, make sure you have times of uninterrupted prayer to give to Him. Just as you'd try to prevent someone from interrupting an important interview or phone call, take measures to treat God respectfully with your time. Give Him first priority.

Conditions for Effective Prayer

In addition to praying with humility, dependence, devotion, and sincerity, we need to meet certain conditions for God to hear and answer our 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 Faith

Discussion

What is biblical faith?

According to Hebrews 11:1, **faith is a confident expectation, or belief, in something yet unseen.** God gives us the ingredients for faith by showing us Himself and His words. Faith is our response, a personal choice to believe Him.

Christ instructed us to pray in faith when we make requests to God (Matt. 21:22). There’s no purpose in asking God for things if we don’t believe He can, or will, grant them.

Simply asking in faith won’t manipulate God into granting our requests. We exercise faith with the right motives, submitting to His will. We can pray in faith by studying God’s Word and believing His promises when we come to Him in prayer.

God gives us several reasons for faith—Christ’s sacrifice and God’s character and promises.

Faith in Christ’s Sacrifice (Rom. 5:1)

When we believe that Christ is God and that He died to pay our sin debt, we demonstrate our faith that God will save us. We have salvation through faith (Rom. 10:9–10) and faith alone (Eph. 2:8), not by earning it or deserving it.

Our faith in Christ’s promise of salvation should inspire us to have faith in the rest of God’s words.

Faith in God’s Character (Heb. 10:21–23)

Our faith is as effective as the object of our faith, so when we put our faith in God, we have powerful faith! We demonstrate our faith in the unchanging character of God, which He reveals in the Bible. We trust God’s wisdom, goodness, and power in every part of our lives. We’re choosing to believe that God is who He said He is, and that everything He gives us is good because He is good.

Faith in God’s Promises (James 1:5–6)

The more we learn to trust God, the more confidence we will have in His promises. God has promised certain things throughout Scripture. We show faith by expecting God to do as He has said, and by meeting the conditions He imposes on conditional promises.

We can ask for wisdom, and God will grant it if we believe Him and expect Him to fulfill His promise. God has also promised to forgive sin (1 John 1:9) and heal (James 5:13–18) when we ask in faith.

Praying for Healing

God instructs us to pray for healing, but we must realize several things about praying this way. First, we know that God will heal us, either by removing the sickness or ultimately, by giving us a new, glorified body later in heaven. Second, we must pray with hearts aligned to God's will. Instead of removing our suffering, God may want us to depend on His grace through the pain to glorify Him. He's promised never to give us more than we can bear with His help.

Praying God's Will

To pray effectively, **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)**, but rather on what God desires for us. We will discuss this more when we study the Lord's Prayer in Lessons Six and Seven.

Abiding in God

In order to know God's will, we must stay close to God. When we spend a lot of time with a friend, we begin to resemble that person—even to the point of accurately predicting their responses to situations or ideas.

Marriage provides a good illustration for this concept. Couples who have been married for a long time will sometimes act—or even look—like each other. Husbands and wives will sometimes unconsciously copy their spouse's gestures, speech patterns, or facial expressions.

When we stay close to God, we start acting like Him. John 15:1–11 uses the picture of a vine with branches to show that **unless we stay connected to God, we will spiritually wither away.** Christ promises that if we abide in Him and His words abide in us, He will do what we request (v. 7).

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

Confessing Sin

Sin is a horrible affront to our holy, just God. Though nothing can end our relationship with God (John 10:28–29), **sin can definitely break our fellowship with Him (1 John 1:6).** To stay close to God, we must continually examine our hearts for sin, confess, and request forgiveness.

Discussion

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

To answer this, we might first look at John 9:31. Here, the blind man that Jesus healed defends Christ's ministry by saying that God doesn't hear "sinners." In context, this passage doesn't necessarily refer to prayer, but it indicates that God would not use someone opposed to Him to represent Him.

Some people in the Bible demonstrated their faith in God by asking Him to do certain things, and God, in turn, honored their faith by answering their requests. Examples include many of the people Jesus healed during His ministry—a centurion's servant (Matt. 8:13), a leper (Luke 5:12), and a ruler's daughter (Matt. 9:18), to name a few. In the examples of the centurion's servant and the ruler's daughter, God helped them on behalf of someone else's faith.

In Acts 10, a Gentile named Cornelius followed God and prayed before he even heard the gospel. In response, God sent a messenger to tell Cornelius that his prayers came to God's attention (Acts 10:4) and to send for Peter, who would share the gospel with him.

In the Old Testament, some people had faith in the future sacrifice that God would provide, so God applied righteousness to them based on their faith. In 1 Kings 21:27–29, God withheld sending disaster to Ahab's family because Ahab repented of his sin. Even after Christ's sacrifice, God still saves people by their faith in Christ's finished work.

Ultimately, faith is the critical ingredient. God will hear and answer our prayers when we, by His grace, trust that He will hear us. If we sincerely seek God, God will guide us to His truth and reveal Himself to us (Deut. 4:28–29; Acts 17:26–27).

In the life of the believer, **unconfessed sin hinders prayer. Psalm 66:17–19** states that if we hold on to sin in our hearts, the Lord will not hear our prayer. God resists the proud (James 4:6) and wicked, but hears the prayer of the righteous (Prov. 15:29).

When we refuse to forgive those who have wronged us, we create a wound of resentment in our hearts. God makes it clear that He will not forgive us if we withhold forgiveness from others (Matt. 6:15). In fact, the mercy that we receive depends on the mercy we show to others (Prov. 21:13).

When we humbly confess our sins to God, **He promises forgiveness and cleansing (2 Chron. 7:14; James 4:8–10; 1 John 1:9)**. If we have applied Christ's atonement to ourselves, we will always have opportunity to request and receive forgiveness.

Application

God's mercy and forgiveness doesn't mean that we have a license to do whatever we want because God will pardon us anyway (Rom. 6:1–2). God won't grant forgiveness if we have that kind of flippant attitude toward sin. God's mercy in withholding judgment should inspire love and gratitude in us, creating a desire to please Him.

Conclusion

How we approach prayer reflects our view of God. If we meditate on God's character, we will develop attitudes of humility, dependence, devotion, and sincerity. Only by staying close to God and depending on Him can we have faith and a proper view of sin.

In the next lesson, we'll examine the roles of the Trinity in the life of the believer, and specifically how each Person of the Godhead participates in prayer.

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.

LESSON THREE

YOUR PART IN PRAYER

Necessary _____ Attitudes _____ for Effective Prayer

Humility

- Humility demonstrates an inner _____ **quietness** _____ and _____ **submission** _____ to God.
- Humility recognizes that we have no _____ **strength** _____ or _____ **goodness** _____ 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 _____ **Source** _____, 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 rebellion against Him.

Devotion

THINK ABOUT IT

- What is devotion to God?

- ◉ Devotion is a commitment to the relentless pursuit 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 endurance 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 fellowship with God.
- ◉ Sincere prayer means earnestly persisting with God.
- ◉ God promises that He will hear us and reveal Himself to us if we pray sincerely (Jer. 29:12–14).

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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 **Faith**

THINK ABOUT IT

- What is biblical faith?

- ◉ Faith is a **confident** 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 **Will**

- ◉ 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).

Abiding **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

Confessing 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)?
himself, his people, and his father’s house

- According to verse 7, what sin had Nehemiah and his people committed?
breaking God’s law

- What had God promised to do for Israel if they turned back to Him (vv. 8–9)?
God would scatter them if unfaithful but gather them to a safe place if they turned back to Him.

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

- Why was Daniel praying for his people (vv. 5–10)?
They had sinned and rebelled against God.

- Why do you think Daniel prayed for other people’s sin as well as his own?
Answers will vary.

- What did Daniel request of God, and why (vv. 18–19)?
He requested for the Lord to help them and forgive them by God’s mercy, not the people’s righteousness.

DAY THREE: Psalm 51—David's Prayer of Repentance

- What is David's first request of God in this psalm, and why does he make this request (vv. 1–2)?
He asks for mercy because he needs cleansing from sin.

- What else does David ask for in verses 11–12?
He asks for God not to cast him away, not to remove the Spirit's presence, to uphold him, and to restore his joy.

- What is more important to God than outward sacrifices for sin (vv. 16–17)?
a repentant, humble heart