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# Understanding and Applying PRAYER!

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## **How to pray more effective, less selfishly with more power and purpose!**

This guide is designed to help you and your church get the most out of your prayer time, invite revival and grow your congregation deeper and closer to our Lord! Prayer is essential in your personal walk with and to be the best pastor or church leader as you can be. By being filled with the Holy Spirit, being people of prayer and trained to know and teach the Bible effectively: A powerful synergistic combination!

These studies can also be easily converted into a sermon series, thus you can use them for your Bible study, sermons in personal devotions, church and group use. See our online resources for more Bible studies, curriculums and articles.

## **Why We Pray! Part I**

**Matthew 6: 5-15; 7: 7-12; Luke 3:21; 5:16; 6:12; 9:18, 28; 11:1; 23:46; John 15:4-5; Romans 8: 18-30; James 5:13-18**

How is your prayer life? Is prayer your first response for all thoughts and encounters in your life? If not, we need to examine *why not!*

Have you ever thought through why you do not spend more time with God? What aspects of your time and commitment hold you back from prayer? Most of us do not have the kind of prayer life we should have; in my experience, most people give up because either they do not know how to pray or they do not understand the significance of prayer. Others may have prayer lives but they are not godly or effectual prayers; these tend to be the prayers with only the self-interests or personal agendas in mind. We may know *about* prayer, but is our understanding and practice lined up to Christ as Lord, or to what we want? One might presume that a Christian in a church automatically knows how and why to pray, but few are ever taught the power, relevance, and importance of prayer. Therefore, we go on presumptions and perhaps even model our prayers after someone else, not from what God has communicated to us. Also in paragraph

The purpose of prayer is not just to get what we want; it is lining ourselves up with His thoughts, ways, and precepts. The focus of our prayers is Christ, His

work, and His impact on you, your family, and the world. This is what the Lord's Prayer is about (Luke 11:1-4). The main theme of prayer is our vital connection with God as Lord and Savior, and His empowering us for all we do in life. He is sovereign; He directs our lives as well as the rest of the universe, so we must get in tune with Him. We must lean on and dwell in Him so we are infused with His Way rather than clouded and distracted by our ways or the ways of the world.

If prayer is our connection with God, then to ignore prayer means we are trying to put God out of our lives. When we misuse prayer, we are usurping God's authority and missing out on His best for us. We are treating God like a pet, giving Him the time and affection when it is convenient for us, when it fits our needs, concerns, and occasion. God must come first and prayer helps us make this happen. Prayer is one of, if not *the* most quintessential important aspect of the Christian life. Prayer needs to be number one for the serious Christian to whom Jesus is not merely Savior but also LORD. However, to make entreaty (deep prayer) with God our first priority, we must first receive His redemptive work through the power of the Spirit. Once we have received His amazing gift, and His work is transforming and renewing us (Rom. 12:1-3), prayer becomes our response to Him, and helps us continually commune His Work within us.

Do we truly understand the power, significance, and eminence of prayer? If not, why not? What is in the way of prayer being more momentous in our lives? We need to ask ourselves, *what has happened in my life and how am I responding in prayer to my connection to God? What will it take to become more of a person who has "heartfelt prayer" at my core; what will it take for me to be a "prayer warrior," whose life goal is to make Christ first in all things?* The prerequisite to this type of effective, *prayer warrior* prayer is consistency and growth in our prayers. In conjunction, we learn about prayer and life in general from spending time with Him and His Word, and by continually growing in that prayer life. We also become better equipped to handle all that comes our way.

Prayer helps us see the great expectations He has for us, but this insight does not come about all at once. As with any growth, it is gradual. Prayer is something that does not just happen overnight; it is like planting a seed that germinates, grows, matures, and then produces its fruit. The seed alone does not produce the fruit; it is only after its growth and development from its time in the sun, the water and fertilizer, and its care and cultivation that brings about its bountiful harvest. It is the same with our growth in Christ! Prayer develops as we consistently obey Christ. It is watered by the fertilizer of His Word. The care and cultivation comes from effective, godly teachers. Our nurturing and learning feeds our roots in Him. If we negate our cultivation of prayer, we are negating Christ in our life and the result will be a very slow growth, perhaps even retardation in our spiritual formation. Prayer needs attention and constant tending for effectual growth.

Prayer helps create more of itself. Prayer begets more prayer and that begets greater spiritual formation. When our prayers are not just self-focused but engage others as well, our Christian walk becomes deeper, more relevant, and heartfelt. *Heartfelt prayer* is the sense of passion and urgency that needs to come before progress can take place. This is where prayer becomes more *real* and transfers into an authentic connection with God, not just regarding Him as a *vending machine* for meeting our desires.

Our prayer life grows when we plow the field and plant the seed so it can grow. We must plow away the *weeds* of our selfishness along with the things in life that distract and obstruct us. This must take place to bring more nourishment into our *soil* from His presence, so the seeds of our faith can grow into the mustard tree of maturity and service. We have to know God and His Word first; then we will know the importance of worship and faith development that fuels our prayer that in turn fuels our worship of God and connection with others.

Prayer is reciprocal, as it needs to be a perennial and continual attitude that begets a perpetual, continuous, constant action; thus, prayer is a ceaseless relationship we have with God and that echoes in eternity. Prayer begets our character and maturity and, in turn, our character and maturity help spur on our prayer life. Learning about God and worshiping Him brings us closer to His presence and makes our prayers deeper and more alive.

Passion that honors Christ synergizes our prayer life; it forms from our realization of who He is and what He has done for us. Passion increases prayer from explorations, curiosity, or perhaps a selfish mindset, to a vigorous lifestyle. Prayer becomes more continual and effective as we build on our growing relationship in Him. Thus, the characteristics of knowing Christ, worshiping Him, learning more about Him, and practicing prayer through the work of the Holy Spirit fuel the growth of our prayer life. Then those characteristics *back flow* to cause each one of them to work synergistically better.

Consequently, as our prayer life grows, so does our worship and learning of Christ. As our relationship grows, our gifts and skills grow, our meaning and purpose in life grows, and so forth (2 Peter 1:5-9). Therefore, more prayer will cause us to be more passionate, have deeper worship experiences, become better leaders, develop more knowledge, maturity, and character, and become better servants and friends.

### **Readying ourselves for Prayer**

For real prayer to function at its apex, we need to acknowledge who God is, and see Him as Lord Supreme over all things, including our very lives (Col. 1). We must have this mindset to see God as worth our prayers and surrender, and this worship as "worth" ship. We must seek Him out for all occasions in life so that in all situations, we have a *first response* of praising and adoring Christ for

who He is, and because He is worthy of eternal praise (Isa. 6:1-8, Rev. 4-5). We then develop those great traits of love, faith, and hope that Colossians 1 tells us about. This fuels our attitude of praise and helps produce our attitude of prayer! Prayer requires us to have a mindset and attitude of pursuing our communication with God.

But, do we do this? We have to ask ourselves, *what are we to do first in all situations? Is it to complain, or argue, or be stressed out?* Usually, we do all three! In conjunction, we quickly skip prayer and venture to the art of squabbling and complaining with one another, while blaming God. We then worry, and get anxious and frustrated! What should we have been doing? The answer should be obvious! We are called to *pray*; prayer not only sets a tone for us in our behaviors and insights, but it also brings Christ into the picture with us more powerfully and effectively. Then, we are centered where we should be spiritually as well as in our thoughts and emotions. It is not about getting what we want, as we may get a *yes*, or a *no*, or maybe a call to wait for the right timing. Prayer is also not about seeking God selfishly, and asking, “What have you done for me lately?” forgetting the magnitude of what He has already done for us! God calls us to prayer in all situations we face, the good times and the bad.

In James 5:13-18, we have a series of calls to prayer. It is a call to get ready and align ourselves with God and His interests so we can apply His best for us. We are all indeed called to prayer; it is not a talent, a special ability, or a spiritual gift. It is not for specific times or with certain postures. Rather, it is the communication of an encounter with our loving, living Lord! Prayer is a call, and we need to know the veracity and importance of it.

Prayer is not about compulsory formulas. Rather, it is the encouragement for us to pursue God! When we seek Him, we are ready to engage in the appeals and requests for those who are in need and sick, including ourselves. Being ready in prayer means we can see beyond ourselves to the work of God around us and in others so we can pray effectively. Prayer is not only about what we see in front of us; it is about moving ourselves into God’s plan and purpose, and living in His Kingdom (Psalm 119).

How do we ready ourselves? First, we must have a yearning and desire to commune with our Lord and Savior. The Spirit must persuade us to be yielded and to respond and seek Christ out so He can mold us, indwell us, motivate us, empower us, and shape us to His will—inside and out (Ps. 27:8). We must seek to converse with God so we can have a real, personal relationship with Him.

It all comes down to our willingness and desire. If we do not desire to pray, we will not pray and we will not grow spiritually. No matter whom we are in Christ or our position in the church, if prayer is not our number one personal priority, our desires are skewed and our attention to Christ is amiss! Prayer must be a passion for us, and when it falls away, we should miss it and seek to rekindle it.

The first thing we need for a great prayer life is a great desire to pray! We must give our priority and our time to prayer (Daniel 6:1-3, 10; Mark 1:35; Luke 6:12; 22:39-46).

Do you passionately seek God? If not, then do it! If you do it, do it more! Make an appointment with God and keep it regularly and consistently! Remember, this does not just happen; it is a result of sometimes years of Christian practice and efforts. We must make the determination and commitment, and then stick with it. Real, authentic Christian formation is developed when we give up the rights to ourselves, and hand over our Will to Christ. In so doing, we begin to understand what is important in life, and experience true freedom as the chains of slavery formed by our self-willed actions and thinking are broken. We become transformed and renewed by what He has done; this works deeper and more powerfully as our devotion increases, and we become more aware of whom we are in Him.

We can take great comfort that God is concerned and cares about what we have to say. We can have the expectation that God will be there to receive us (Luke 11:13; Heb. 4:16). We can come to know and enjoy Him and to be with Him for He is already with us. God is gracious and good; He has promised and is eager to respond to us!

A pastor I worked with once told me why he does not pray. He said, "Why should I pray since God is all knowing; why waste my time?" Sadly, this pastor was missing the point of what prayer is all about. His personal life was in ruins, his wife was leaving him, his kids were in rebellion, and his church was in dysfunction. Yet, he refused to see and commune with God in his life and church. It was not that he did not believe God. He just thought *why should I when God already knows*. Thus, he left God out of his life.

Yes, God is all-knowing; He knows what will come from your heart and mouth eons before you say it, but He still wants to hear it! We can never say we do not need to pray because God already knows. Prayer is not about what God knows; it is about our learning and leaning on Him! Our heartfelt prayers reflect our dependence on, and our trust and love of Him. Prayer is obedience and communion! This is the reason we are on earth—to know Him, to learn about Him, and to share Him with others. This cannot happen if we are not communing with Him (Rom. 8:27; 15:18 Eph. 1:4, 5, 11; Heb. 13:21; 1 John 5:14)!

### **Being molded for Prayer**

What is prayer? Prayer is an intimate communication between God and man. It is the wonderful privilege of talking directly to God at any time about anything. We have this opportunity because of what Christ did. The Christian life is about the ongoing, personal relationship you have with God through Jesus Christ and what He has done that is for now and all of eternity. As we are in

Christ and He is in us, we are in a sacred, transcending union. It is as a Bride bestowed to her husband, given each to the other. Prayer is the communication between Christ and His Bride—between Him and us! We must see the sacredness of prayer so we can better receive its impact!

God is a jealous God and wants us with Him without distractions; it is almost like a marriage. We are bestowed to *one* husband as the Bride of Christ. Thus, when we neglect or abuse prayer, we are literally cheating on God just as one might cheat on a spouse! This form of carelessness not only neglects God, but also betrays Him! Yes, fortunately, we have grace, but why would we even desire to cheat on our loving Lord? When we jump to other solutions—even good ones—and we leave prayer out, we are cheating on God. However, this does not mean we should only pray and do nothing else, as prayer requires the motion of our will, hands, and feet in response.

Prayer is the spiritual communication between human beings and God. Just as in a good effective marriage, communication must be present; it must be clear and on going. If not, the marriage decays and even divorces. God will not divorce us, but we can decay our relationship with Him when we neglect prayer or fail to see its relevance. We must have prayer that is real and growing in order to have a viable relationship with God. We talk, He listens; He talks, and we listen. It is a *two-way street!*

But, in this communication, we are not an equal partner, as we are before the Holy God of the universe. It is like a child before his or her loving Father. The Father listens, instructs, challenges, disciplines, and loves. We, as children, may ask, but it is not always in our best interest to get what we want. God, who loves and nurtures us, will say, “No” to what we may think we need and want and we have to see that as OK. He has more knowledge and understanding, and sees beyond what we can see (Psalm 91:15; Isa. 65:24; Matt. 7:7). We can have confidence that God does indeed hear and respond to our prayers!

Prayer is receiving the amazing, redemptive work of our Lord and God Jesus Christ, so His power and purpose can flow into us and then onto others. Prayer is spending time and talking with God, expressing our hearts to Him and our interceding on behalf of others. It is meant to be exciting, powerful, and fulfilling. Just as in a phone conversation, prayer is not a one-way communication. God will speak to us—not necessarily as a burning bush, but often in quiet ways, so we must also listen. However, always compare to Scripture what you think He said, as He will never contradict Himself. That way, you will be able to differentiate your desires from His precepts. There is no need we can ever face that prayer cannot meet; there is never a problem we go through that prayer cannot answer (Psalm 46:10; Matt. 6:7-15, Luke 11:1-13)!

Prayer is the expression of our intimate relationship and union with Him. Our union with Christ is the basis of how and why we are able to commune with Him. This is also described as “Communion” as the Lord’s Supper is also a means of communication, and goes beyond ceremony into real, practical intimacy (Isa. 52:15; 53:12; Matt. 26:26-29; Mark 14:22-25; Luke 22:15-20; 1 Cor. 11:17-25)! It is not to be just a ritual in our church or a quick thing we do before bed, but an enduring, passionate attitude of building our relationship with Christ. It is about who we are in Christ, so we can see His Holiness and His availability to communicate with us and us with Him. This involves a gift; as we present ourselves to God, our will is laid aside and our desires are put on hold so His plan and eminence can be seen we can respond to Him (John 3:30).

We are to make ourselves available and bestowed to Christ. We give ourselves to Him just like in a wedding ceremony where the pastor asks *who is giving this bride to be married* and the parents respond, *I do, or we do*. We are in union with Him through His gift of grace, Spirit, and faith to us and communication with Him. All this is rooted in what He has done for us on the Cross. He has personally done this for you; you did not deserve it! Thus, we need to see that prayer is not just casual conversation, or something laid aside until we need Him; rather, it is a deep, metaphysical union between the Holy, Awesome God of the universe and us. He is beyond any human means of communication, yet, He allows us this communication! Prayer needs our attentiveness and utmost respect so we are molded to Him. Prayer is indeed most sacred. Let us never take it for granted. We must see prayer as a privilege and go before Him with the utmost respect, reverence, and adoration! (2 Cor 5:11 Eph. 5:25)!

Something must happen in us for this attitude of prayer to come about. That is, we must see Him—really see God. We will not see Him literally. Since God is eternal, omnipotent, and omniscient, He cannot be seen with human eyes. We must recognize His presence, His reality, His purpose, His love, His care, and His plan as He enfolds us. This comes about from developing our relationship with Him. Through a steady diet of our spiritual formation, we become more aware of Christ and His work. Then, we can resound with faith and maturity. Thus, as we grow, our communication with Him grows. Our faith becomes honed; it becomes more prevalent and powerful.

Prayer is not just an exercise we do. Rather, it is active communication with God. It is the most important action for us in any manner or endeavor. Prayer is not about our will; it is rather a means to seek His (Matt. 6:33).

Many people, including pastors, make the mistake of thinking that prayer is the preparation for whatever we do. This is true to a point, but prayer is not merely preparation! Oswald Chambers said, “Prayer does not just prepare us for ministry and service, prayer *is* our ministry and service.” Prayer is not just a means to prepare us for the encounters and battles of life, prayer *is* the battle we

do in life! Prayer is more about being the greatest work we can do than the results we receive from it!

Remember, our obedience is what is important, not how others respond to us. We are even called to bless those unreasonable people, and we do that by remaining true to His Lordship. You cannot be responsible for how others respond and treat you when you are acting in godly character (Rom. 12:14-21; James 5:13-18).

### **The Battle over Prayer**

Do the things above seem ominous, too hard to do—perhaps impossible? We need to ask ourselves, *why is it so hard for me to pray?* If you do pray, what keeps you from praying more? Why is it hard to pray when most Christians have experienced its benefits? After all, prayer is so satisfying it soothes us. Even secularists, who do not acknowledge God either personally or redemptively, see its power and relevance in such areas as medicine, personal improvement, and one's attitude about life. Is it a paradox or a battle? The battle over prayer is the battle over the will—ours versus the world's, God's direction versus our desires. Do we follow God's way or our way? The battle will march on; both the casualty and the chief armament are prayer!

The first casualty is that we forget! We forget what prayer is all about even after we experience it first hand. The devil desires this; what is it that you desire? Prayer clears and occupies the field for the planting and harvest, and prepares us for action and service. Yes, we struggle in prayer against the ways of Satan and his antagonism to Christ and His rule (Matt. 4:1-11; John 8:44, 14:30; Acts 26:18; 1 Cor. 7:5; 2 Cor. 2:11; Eph. 2:1-2; 6:10-20 1 John 5:19), but this is not always where the prime battles take place. The fact is, the power and authority Satan has over the Christian was broken at the cross and his doom was sealed (Matt. 25: 41; John 12:31; 16: 9-10; Col. 2: 15; 1 John 3:8). Christ has given us power in His name over all the power of the Enemy. Yes, he still can persuade and manipulate, but we can resist his influences (John 4:7; 1 Pet. 5: 8-9). More significantly, our prayer life protects us from his assaults (Matt. 6: 13; Eph. 6:14-20).

From my personal experiences and studies, it seems that Christians are engaged in an escalating personal, moral, and spiritual battle. We quickly think this is all about spiritual warfare, and a lot of it is; but, that is not all of it. We are in a fight with our very selves over prayer and the growth of our soul. Those things with which we fill our life and that take over our mind and time are the munitions of this battle! We wage war between our idea of what is important, what we desire, versus what God says is important, and what we should desire. Thus, prayer is pushed aside even when we know we need it. We are literally struggling in prayer against ourselves (Rom. 7:14-25, Gal. 5:16-24, Eph. 2:3)!



Prayer is at the forefront of most, if not all conflict we will face. Prayer is the conflict because, although we need it, we either forget it or do not desire it!

This is something left over from our sinful nature even though we are in Christ. We also struggle in prayer against the ways of the world. We struggle with our will that is in conflict to God's as well as the worlds. Which side of the fight will we take? Are we seeking the objectives and approval of the world or the love and approval of God? Will we fight against God or against our sinful selves (John 16:33; 1 John 2:15-17, 5:4-6; Phil. 1:27-30)?

The decisive battles from the conflict with our desires, the ways of Satan, and the world are usually hidden from our mindset. We see what we want to see, but God wants us made aware of our inner conflicts so we can fight, and so we can seek Him. He has given us the tools of prayer and spiritual growth so we can win the war within us. This is nothing new; read any biography of great Christian leaders and saints who are real prayer warriors. They, too, have struggled on the inner battlefield, fighting out these issues of righteousness and redemption. The key to winning is to know that God is our ally (Luke 10: 17-20; Matt. 28:18-20; Col. 1: 13; Heb. 2: 14-15; Rev. 12: 11)!

### **Prayer is a Relationship**

Perhaps, one way to see our prayer life is as a *relationship*. A relationship is a living, growing entity that needs the fuel of attention and heart. We need to allow prayer to build slowly—like a relationship. Growing our prayer life is like growing a relationship. We start off as acquaintances; then, as we get to know each other, we become more confident and thus spend more time together. The time spent helps us get to know each other, and that helps build our trust, intimacy, submission, and so forth.

To make it work, as with any friend, we must desire to know and pursue him or her. In prayer, it comes down to *Lord, I want to know You!* Then, we must engage in the pursuit of knowing Him, regardless of how we feel or think. Therefore, we need discipline to make the time for growth, both in prayer time and impact. If it is important for you to do this with friends, work, or school, then your relationship with God should be even more important! God wants us to be intimate with Him, as in personal, active, and intimate! It is not about duty or obligation; rather, it comes out of the gratitude for what He has done for us. We have a love relationship that takes our hearts to be involved. Christianity is never to be passive; it is always to be active! Our participation must include our minds, hearts, and hands (Psalm 5:1-3; Ps 55:17; 88:13; 143:8; Isa 32:2; Prov. 23:7; Dan. 6:10; Matt. 6:6-7; Heb. 4:16)!

The building up of our spiritual intimacy does not develop automatically. We have to hunger and thirst for it. Our faith formation, through prayer, goes beyond knowledge and understanding, beyond practices or formulas; it is where

faith is core and the Spirit is the lead. Thus, when we become a Christian, we start to pray; and that prayer life builds as we learn more about our Lord—both His precepts and Him personally. We desire to accept what He has given, and to seek more of Him in our lives. As our minds gather the knowledge of whom and what our God is, our heart needs to respond to it! However, it is not just the knowledge; it is what we do with it. We cannot advance our time and intimacy with God unless we make the effort to do so. Most importantly, we must allow the work of the Spirit to flow through us in all endeavors. (Psalm 32:5-6; 69:13; 84:2; 95:7-8; Heb. 10:7; 11:6).

When we are new in Christ, He knows us deeply beyond what we can fathom. However, we do not know Him beyond what the Spirit has laid in us, and that is limited to what we have received, learned, and taken to heart. We can be with a friend, not really knowing him or her, just as we can be a Christian and not really know God. Our closeness with Christ as Lord is at its beginning; this can apply to a brand new Christian or one who has gone to church for decades but has done nothing with his or her faith, who received His love and redemption but that was all.

We need to know a person so we can know more about that person and grow closer to that person. It is the same with our connection to God. As we begin our wondrous journey of our spiritual formation and prayer (1 Chron. 16:11; 22:19; Psalm 105:4; Isa. 26:8-9; Hos. 10:12; Joel 2:12-13; Amos 5:4-6, 8, 14; Zeph. 2:3; Matt. 6:33; James 4:8; Rev. 22:17), we start to take what He has given and pursue Him further. Spend time with Him, be available to Him, become acquainted slowly, and build your friendship consistently. Open your heart to His touch of love! Don't hurry; just enjoy Him so He becomes more than just an acquaintance. Seek Him deeply! Seeking God is not about salvation, for we cannot do that; rather it is our pursuit of growing in Him *after* we have been saved (Matt. 12:33; 18:3; Mark 10:15; John 3:3, 5; 14:9; Rom. 3:11; Titus 3:1-8).

As you grow in Him, you build your relationship with Him so the time you spend, the impact you receive, and your impact upon others grows, too. We become His friends more and more (John 14-15). Again, as with any relationship, we need to put in the desire, effort, and time to seek intimacy and seal that bond. He already has us, and, in His view, we are bound to Him for eternity. The growth and bonding needs work from our side! We must build a real, impacting friendship so we can spend more time together, know and grow more, and desire Him to use us more. This is beyond emotions; it is our growing response to His favor and grace so we are partaking in Him (Rom. 8:16-17; Titus 3:5; 2 Pet. 1:3-4; 2:2; 1 John 5:1). This trust leads to more obedience. We rally from our disappointments and learn to grow in experiences as well as failures and sufferings to the point that we jump at any chance to know and grow in Him, regardless of what is around us (Psalm 125:11; Peter 4-5).

We pursue God because He first loved and pursued us. He is active in the world and desires to be active in us. It is up to us to take what He has given and build on it. Then, we can have the assurance of who He is, and we can build up our faith and prayer lives, which leads to stronger character, maturity, and spiritual formation. We become what he has called and formed us to be (John 10:3-5; 1 John 4:19). We have His love and His voice; it is up to us to hear and respond!

### **Prayer is a Recognition of God's Person, Purpose, Provision, and Presence**

When we grow more in our prayer life, we will see more of God in our lives, more realization of Him and His power. Thus, everything we do will be affected in a positive way as a response of His work in us and our personal adjustments in becoming less of ourselves and more of Him (John 3:30; Gal. 2:20-21; Phil 3:1-14). James 5 calls this the *power of faith*; it refers to trusting in God and then being faithful towards our intercessory duty to others. It does not mean a *special power*, as some have proclaimed; rather, it is a call to action to show our Christian community our faith displayed as we care for one another.

Yes, God does heal today, but healing is not guaranteed or even normative. How we respond and learn concerns God over all else—even an actual healing. A healed body is of no good without a mind and heart centered on Him. It is merely a temporary restoration; it is of no eternal use. The power of God is never to be a show; His work in us is a more powerful and desirable venture!

The result of our prayer life will enable us to praise our Lord with unity and willing loving hearts along with other Christians. The James 5 passage calls this, *Sing songs*. This is one aspect that is never for show—it is real worship and not just music. It is a response of praise from our love. In worship, we are the performers and Christ is the audience. It is the same with prayer. What Christ is doing in us should bring real, authentic prayer and worship. It is not about form, function, or type; it is about our hearts showing our love to Him. Prayer and worship share the same heart and attitude (Eph. 5:19; Col. 3:12-17; James 5:13).

A real prayer life will bring an attitude of confession and cleansing of sin because of the commitment of our all to God. God's purpose, His plan, is to make us His children (1 John). He is the good parent who guides His children and protects them. At the same time, He does not over-protect them so they lose opportunities to please Him.

One of the roles of the Holy Spirit is to be our Advocate before the Father and to make all experiences work to the glory and purpose of God, regardless of what we face in pain, suffering, and hardships. In the big picture, we are not meant for this world, but for eternity. We are here temporarily, but with hope for what is to come. Christ will see us through if we trust and obey in His way. When

we understand this deeply, we are able to trust our Lord in all things. We can grow through our perseverance, and becoming stronger and more mature in the faith! Just think how transformed your life would be just by changing your perceptions of what you now see in front of you to seeing Christ in front of you!

Colossians 1:9-14 gives us some very valuable insights on prayer. Paul gives us the motivations and reasons why we pray. *Live a life worthy of the Lord and please him in every way.* He tells us not to *stop or cease to pray!* This means that in the proper and honorable sense, we are always to pursue God and to seek Christ and His wisdom and knowledge through prayer and the Word (Ex. 28:30; 1 Sam. 12:23; Prov. 1:2-7; Col 1:9-14). We are to *walk worthy of the Lord*, which means to pursue God, His righteousness, and His precepts, so He becomes more and we become less. This is our *walk with God*, meaning our living out the daily Christian life. It is never a walk in our own will and strength; this would bring pride and disobedience to our loving Lord (Lev. 26:3; Ezek. 36:27; John 3:30; Gal. 2:20-21; 5:16; Col. 1:9-14; Phil. 3:10-14).

How we do this? Colossians continues to tell us by saying that God *qualified us*. Paul boldly states that Christ alone accepts us. No entity in the universe has better qualifications than our Lord Jesus Christ (John 14:6; Rom. 3:23; Gal. 2:21; Eph. 1:1-11; 2:8; Col. 2:16, 18, 20-23)! The church at Colosse taught, which Paul corrected, that other supernatural beings brought them wisdom, and they needed to get this wisdom through channeling in order to grow in faith. Also, they taught that these beings could also hinder a person from seeking truth- a blatant contradiction. Thus, believing and seeking pagan gods or our own inclinations shows our lack of faith in the One True God. We need to see the goal, our *inheritance!* This meant for the Jews the Promise Land, but more appropriate it is having God as our God, for us the Christian it is having Him live in us, and our possession of the world to come. We become “joint heirs” (Acts 3:25; Rom. 8:17; Gal. 3:29; Titus 3:7; Heb. 6:17; 11:9; 1 Pet. 3:7) of His promises. He is the Light to shine on our life and path, the world is the darkness we avoid the evil while bearing the Light by our deeds (Psalm 27:1; Isa. 9:2; 42:6; 49:6; 58:8-10; 60:1).

One more reason why we pray, as stated in Colossians, is He *delivered us*. This denotes rescuing a slave from captivity, as we are slaves to sin and darkness but we obtain freedom in Christ (Gal. 1:4; Eph. 2:1-3; 6:11). He rescues us from the *power of darkness*, which refers to sin and the ways of the world that are meaningless and hopeless without Christ who is the Perfection. Only He has the power and authority to be the Light and shatter the darkness on our behalf (2 Cor. 3:15; 4:4-6; 6:14; Eph. 5:8-14; Phil. 2:15; 1 Thess. 5:5). He has *redeemed us*. In the Greek, this means to free a slave by paying the price for him. We are the slaves that have been freed! We receive this forgiveness because Christ redeemed us; He paid for our sins (Rom. 8:23; 1 Cor. 4:8-13; Col. 1:21-22; 2:13, 17, 20; 3:9-10).

Why is prayer important? Prayer is like a divine telephone of communication! It lines us up with Christ, and helps us be sensitive to His Spirit and to the needs of others. God, in His time, gives us a complete understanding of His will for our lives. The key is asking Him for this wisdom and insight. The focus is our spiritual formation; then, from our growth in Him, the opportunities and abilities to know and meet His call will come. When we focus on Christ, all the other things and stuff in life start to line up better; then we honor Him as Lord better!

Goodness and kindness come from a transformed heart poured out to Him. It does not flow from just the will to do it; we have to be the person, in Christ, to do the work to which He has called us. He gives us the strength and power to be in Him and to allow His love and fruit to flow from us. In Him, we can do all things; apart from Him, we can do nothing. With His power and purpose in us, we have the endurance, hope, and patience to overcome all that life throws at us—even stress and suffering!

Our identity and joy is in Christ alone! Let us be real, authentic Christians who are thankful for who He is, what He has done for us—His rescue, His Kingdom, His freedom, His forgiveness of our sins, and His purchase of our being. Christ is our inheritance, hope, and our very lives both here on earth and for eternity to come. Therefore, let us live the Light; let us live out our lives as worthy (Col 1:9-14).

Do we fully understand that we have been rescued from sin and darkness, from hopelessness and despair? Has that *hit home*? To venture beyond our saving faith, we have to take heed and be encouraged because God is our Rescuer! Therefore, we are to respond in gratitude for His gifts (Col. 2:7; 3:17; 4:2)! Thus, to grow in our prayer lives, we must desire to experience a meaningful relationship with Him from the depths of our innermost being, all stemming from whom He is and what He has done!

## **How to Pray Part II**

### **Matthew 6: 5-15; 7: 7-12**

How can I pray? What if I have never been taught how to personally pray or to talk to God? What if I grew up in a church that never had conversational or personal prayer? What if I only know liturgy? What if I offend God?

If you think that you do not know how to pray, you need to ask yourself, *do I know how to talk and listen*? If you know how to talk to another person, then you know how to pray! Prayer is basically our communication with the Great Sovereign God of the Universe who wants the best for us and to hear from us!

The great wonder is not so much in how we pray, but that God is willing to listen to us! The great, wonderful *fallout* from our redemption is our ability to pray real and effective prayers that God actually hears and to which He responds! God will actually speak to us through His Word, and the Holy Spirit teaches and convicts us through the Word. The fact is, our prayer time with God is basically our conversing with Him, through which we express our gratitude for whom He is, what He did for us, and discover our purpose in life. Thus, through our prayers, we can be taught, we can grow, and we can be convicted so we can apply His precepts to our lives and affect those around us, too.

Prayer is coming to God through discussion, learning, and relationship building. It is the channel of communication between Christ and us. We give ourselves to Christ as He has given Himself to us—much like a man and woman give themselves to each other in marriage. Since God has given Himself, what is in the way of our being able and willing to respond?

Prayer is not just talking to God; it is also meant to further link us to Him and develop our relationship with Him so we can build our faith, character, and maturity. Remember, we have access to God; we have permission to come to Him! Wow! What a privilege we have (Rom 5:1)!

We need to see that God is jealous when we do not spend time with Him. In the Greek language the illustration is referring to us, when we do not spend time with God it is like we are cheating on a spouse (2 Cor. 11:1)! He has taken care of the able part; because of Christ, we have direct access. The most incredible thing in the universe is the ability to talk directly with the Creator and Sustainer! We can do this because we are spiritually united; because of His redemption on our behalf, we have unity. This is communion, not the ritual with the bread and wine, but the intimate relationship that the ritual symbolizes. Prayer is the communication.

Prayer also helps keep us conscious of His work in our life. He is here with you now, so do not ignore Him or leave Him out of your life and decisions. He is to be the primary foundation and for whom we are to be and do; and, we must commune with Him to make this happen. When we commune with God, our lives begin to line up to Him more fervently and powerfully. We gain more of Him in our lives, more of His will and insight, more of His direction and will. Thus, we will become dependent on Him and not the feeble ways of “self” with our needs, emotions, or the world. Our opportunities and call will be clearer and our lives given a greater purpose and impact for the Kingdom. However, the key is to get beyond being selfish and more into *how I can grow and contribute*. It is not about what I can get, but what I can do. Consequently, the more we pray, the more He is in our life, and more specifically—the more we feel and see Him involved!

Nevertheless, as a pastor, I have been amazed over the years at how many Christians just do not pray! I hear all kinds of excuses why they do not—from the theological, “why should I, since God already knows everything,” to the

failed expectations of “I have tried and it does not work,” or “God never answers my prayers.” In addition, there is “I just do not have the time,” or “that is just for you.” But, what I get most from the folks who do not pray is feeling-based excuses, “I do not know how; and, when I do, I feel nothing.” I think that many Christians may try prayer and soon give up on it because what they expect does not come about when they want it. They get frustrated because they do not get the answer they seek, do not feel the power and impact they thought they would get, or just get frustrated because the time and efforts become overwhelming. We live in a fast-food and fast-paced culture where we see a television show that illustrates a problem and a solution in a 30 minute time frame; therefore, when the work of God takes more time and patience than we are used to, we give up because we want results *now*. We need to see prayer beyond our timing and expectations; rather, we should see prayer as relational, something that is not supposed to be fast-paced or instant-result orientated.

For us to even start to change our perception and expectations on prayer, we need to realize it is God at work in us, and allow Him to work at His pace. Prayer takes fortitude, as in the time and patience we are to put in it and in the time and patience God is working in us, slowly crafting and molding us. It is a learning endeavor, too. Learning to pray is like learning a new language. It takes that time effort; if we do not use it, we lose it; and, with prayer, we just end up not doing it. We also have to see that we are all in a process of learning and growing. Whether we spend three or more hours or five minutes a day in prayer, we are always learning and growing. There are no experts in prayer, as we are all apprentices.

### **Our Motivations!**

So, how do I pray? When this is asked of me I always point the person to Matthew 6:9-13 or Luke 11:1-4. These passages are both called the *Lord's Prayer*. However, they are not prayers; rather, they are “patterns” or templates for us on how to pray. Many Christians over the centuries have memorized these passages as prayers and recite them every day like a mantra. This memorization is a great thing to do, but the passages are not prayers; rather, they are the instructional guides on how to pray. To recite these passages as prayers is like giving a recipe to your dinner guests while forgoing the preparing of the meal. You may think this is silly; who would eat a recipe? But, this is exactly what we are doing with prayer! It is like getting a picture of a car and thinking you can drive that picture to work.

The passages in Matthew and Luke give us the quintessential template on how to pray. Jesus is calling us to a relationship with Him; and, to do that, we are to seek Him. We do this with communication, as we would talk with anyone, with the emphasis on our sincerity. Jesus, in the verses preceding the Matthew passage, is attacking hypocrites who just make a show of it. Their prayers—public or private—were not genuine. We have to be real and poured out to Him

(John 3:30; Gal. 2:20-21; Phil. 3:1-14). To make this real and effective, Jesus gives us a systematic *how to do it* checklist. We can then know how and for what to pray, so our own needs do not get all of the attention, and we will not grandstand ourselves with pride and hypocritical actions. Thus, we are not to approach prayer to get what we want, but to get closer to God, as that is what He wants!

Jesus tells us that our prayers are not just selfish wish lists to get God to cater to our needs and whims; rather, their true purpose is for us to be shaped by what He has revealed, and to grow in character, perseverance, and maturity. The reason Jesus is using very strong language, as in condemning those self-gratifying prayers, is that they had bad motivations. Bad motivations come from an improper understanding of God, His precepts, and His call; thus, they seek approval from people and are unconcerned about God (Matt. 11:25; John 11:41; Acts 27:35). The Jewish leaders knew better; to them, God knew everything. Thus, Jesus was challenging their hearts and motivations, not their knowledge.

We have to realize that not all prayers are acceptable to God (Prov. 28:9; Isa. 59: 1-2; Luke 18:9-14; 1 Pet. 3:12), because God looks for our motivations first, which is crucial. Jesus is not saying in the Matthew passage not to pray publicly; rather, it is about our influence on others. Our private prayers are the ones that shape us; our public prayers are the ones that are to help others to be shaped and be in spiritual agreement to express praise, worship, seek forgiveness from God and one another, confess sins, make petitions for one another, and teach one another (Luke 11:2-4; Acts 1:14; 4:24).

Jesus often taught His disciples about the importance of perseverance, faith, and humility in prayer (Luke 11:1-13; 18:1-14). He wanted them to realize that prayers are directed to God, not people, and are to be heard by God, not others (Psalm 65:2; Heb. 11:6). Therefore, make sure your motivations are upright, and that you are offering up the kind of prayers that will please God! Real, authentic prayers are intimate, not a 'business model' as the pagans and Greeks saw prayer.

Prayer is not about what we want or us; it is about growing close to God. It is acknowledging that He is the Boss, He is Sovereign and Lord, and we are to be grateful beyond measure for the relationship and communication we can have with Him (Col. 1:15-23; 1 Thess. 5:16-18). Prayer is a two-way communication between God, our Creator, and us! We are made for relationships, and communication is essential for effective, relational growth. For the Christian, prayer is one of the main ways to grow in faith and maturity in our Christian formation; alongside this includes getting into the Word with personal study and devotions, solid, group Bible study, teaching, and the various disciplines of the faith.



Consider this, why waste your time with repetition when our God is sovereign; we do not need to use superfluous words! God is not swayed by the quantity of our words, but by the quality of our heart, offered with a merciful spirit (Matt. 18:21-23; James 2:13). We get far more out of any conversation when we say things differently and say new things. Would you tell your mom or spouse the same sentences over and over again? Then why do this with God? Jesus was condemning the Jewish leaders who, to get what they wanted, used *overload prayers* to tire God out with their many prayers and formulas that were repeated over and over again. The point of the condemnation is that they knew better! Do we know better? What are our motivations in prayer—to grow closer to Him or just to get what we want? The answers will help determine where we are in our spiritual formation.

Thus, prayer is sacred and of the utmost importance, and is not to be just a liturgical exercise or repeated rhetoric. Rather, it is to be a part of our passionate yearning for Christ's work in our life. If we diverge from our prayers to *vain repetitions*, saying something to catch the attention of others, or just having to say something so we are heard, they will have no value or meaning. We must see this as empty and vacant compared to the call of our Lord! This is not to say we should not persist in asking God for something, as long it is biblical (Luke 18: 1-8), but we are not to be wrapped up in our own words, how we say them, try to fit a pattern (other than Jesus pattern), or to impress someone. Just make sure your prayers are not insincere and meaningless repetition (Matt. 26: 36-44; 2 Cor. 12:7-8)! Prayer must be sincere, heartfelt, and real! God is impressed by what is in your heart, not with your quantity or quality of words.

Abraham Lincoln was asked why he was not praying that God would be on "our" side during the American Civil War. He responded, "We do not pray that God is on our side; we pray that we are on His side!" Are you on His side? We can start by keeping our prayer life focused on God, not what others are doing. We are to keep our eyes on God, not on people! If you only seek God for your needs, you will never understand God or yourself, or His wonderful plan for you (John 17:22)! Your faith will be on your terms only. How sad that would be! How much you would lose out on the growth and opportunities He has for you!

### **The Pattern of Prayer**

First off, there is no "method" or process on how to pray, as there is no specific principle on how to talk to your mom or best friend. We just do it. Yes, there is edict, attitude, and good ways versus bad ways to communicate. Thus, God does give us a pattern as a checklist to make sure our time and attitude are lined up to more of His will and less of ours. We must make sure we use our prayer time with purpose and effectiveness.

The disciples had trouble understanding what prayer was all about! During their day, prayer was about mere rituals and complicated liturgy that was not

understood by the people, and it was greatly misused. The Sadducees did not believe in prayer and the Pharisees made a convoluted show of it. Thus, prayer by the religious leaders of the day was regulated to meaningless, elaborate rituals intended to entertain the public or to make themselves look good. These “pre-made” prayers seemed unapproachable to the people because they themselves did not know how to pray!

Jesus starts out telling us that prayer is not a mystical mystery; rather, we can, by ourselves and without a priest, go before our Holy God and make our petitions and our heart known to Him and commune with Him. Jesus is basically showing us how to relate to Him through intimacy, emptying our will so our heart is exposed to Him as we would with any true, intimate encounter. Thus the mortar of prayer built the Early Church until it disintegrated into the chaos that it was in Jesus’ day. Prior to the Reformation, prayer had reverted again to mere ritual and meaningless rhetoric. The prayers were all in Latin and contained elaborate theological terms that the people did not understand. No one was given an opportunity to be educated to learn it unless he was a priest or a physician. Luther and Calvin were challenged to seek Christ; in so doing, they relearned what prayer was all about and communicated that to us.

This model of prayer from Mathew 6: 9-13 and Luke 11:1-4 place the emphasis on God and His glory (as all models must be), not on man! This is called *brevity* (brief and sincere). We ask that God be glorified before we can seek our request in a clear and concise manner. However, being brief does not mean being limited in the time you spend with Him. The more time you spend in prayer the more you will grow in your Christian formation. The point is to be sure you are not praying in circles with *vain repetitions*. Rather, cover more ground with requests for others and praise for God.

Let’s look at some of the key words from Matthew:

- *Father* is the Aramaic word for *daddy* or *papa*—a very dear, intimate, personal reference of honor to the head of the family. It includes endearment and love without fear of reprisal. In our prayer life, we are to first see God as God, to reverence Him, and be devoted to Him. For us, this means we have been called to intimacy with Him. This does not mean to be taken as we say *daddy*. It is not a cheap saying, or a word to put God in just a *friend* category. We need to realize that we are adopted in His family, and He loves us ever so deeply. We must see God as Sovereign and Holy, to be feared with reverence and respect. Yet, He is still God, Creator, and Sovereign (Duet. 7:21; Neh. 4:14; Psalm 48:1; 86:10; 95:3; 97:2; 145:3; Dan. 9:4; 1 Cor. 13:12; Heb. 12:28,29)!!
- *Hallowed be Your Name* means our prayer life is to focus on His holiness, mightiness, and the omnipresence (He is everywhere transcending time and space), and omnipotence (all powerful) of God. He is the holy Judge, Creator,

Savior, and Sustainer of all things; yet, He personally knows and loves us with deeper and more love than we could ever comprehend. So, we are commanded to keep His name holy, as in the first two commandments. This helps us understand the wonder and majesty of our incredible God (Isa. 5:16; 29:23; Ezek. 36:23; 38:23; 39:7, 27; Zech. 14:9)! Reverence is the true response that leads to worship for all who come before God (Psalm 89:5-18; Prov. 1:7, 29: 3:5-9; 2 Cor. 7:1; Eph. 5:21; 1 Thess. 5:12-13; 1 Pet. 2:13-14; 3:15a). It is recognizing and honoring the authority of God with awe and fear because He is God, and He is more awesome than anything or anyone—period! This helps us to take the incredible knowledge of His majesty and apply it to our lives so we will walk with confidence in our Lord, and operate with respect to Him and to the others whom He knows and loves. This is essential in how we pray so we will not be anxious or fearful of what will happen or distrust God.

- *Kingdom come* is an essential theme in Matthew. It means government; it means our prayer life is to see Him as God and the One in charge. It is the need to be organized for purpose and direction. This means we are to yield to the exercise and implementation of our God's "Lordship," that He is our King, and hence the name, "Kingdom of God." He is sovereign; He is the total monarch of the universe. His rule is absolute. When we refuse to be governed and controlled, anarchy and chaos will result because of our sinful nature, and will cause harm to others. Thus, it is our responsibility to obey God. This characterizes our personal identification and relationship to our Lord and Savior! Our need is to bow to His Lordship for our betterment and growth! This will keep us going on the right path through the pandemonium of life (Matt. 4:23; Eph. 2:18; 2 Pet. 3:13-14)!
- *Your will be done* further expounds that in our prayer life, we are to seek His character and sovereignty in all things, and not attempt to bully or manipulate what we want over what He has called us to do! His needs must precede our needs because He wants what is best for us! Then, we can take comfort in the awareness that God is not hidden, nor is His will so mysterious that we cannot find it. He has our back and our best in mind! God's influence, glory, and presence are all around us; God is *all present*, "omnipresent," and we have no escape from Him. He reveals His presence to us in countless ways. Understanding this helps us to know from whence our direction in life comes. This is foundational for all aspects of who we are and what we do. What motivates us and creates in us our actions and behaviors will translate in our relationship with God and how we are with those around us. This will help us become the person that God desires and calls us to be.
- *Give us our daily bread* means we can go to God. Our prayer life does not consist of just requests for food and stuff, but also a seeking of what is necessary for now and in the future (Prov. 30:8; Matt 6:19-34). It is imagery, comparing to the manna for the wandering Jews. Just as God provided for

them, He will also provide for us. As our life becomes more fulfilled in the coming Kingdom, we can come before God and request His provision for our needs. He wants to take care of and provide for us, so let Him!

- *Forgive* means our prayer life is to seek reconciliation with others. We have to realize that we are all sinners; we still have sin and we still do sin. Thus, we must always not only be aware of it, but also always repent from it and seek forgiveness. This is a must, a daily act, not just when we think about it or wait to be convicted of it. We must be willing to *daily* seek forgiveness from God and others (Matt. 5:22-25)! Our behaviors are reflections of our motives, each one leading to another, as a chain reaction. Our refusal to deal with sin through repentance will have lasting and dire consequences, both here on earth and for eternity to come! We also must be aware of the serious, destructive nature of anger and how it blocks our relationships, growth, and prayer life with God (Psalm 37:8; Prov. 6:16-19; Rom. 12:18-21; Gal. 5:19- 21; Eph. 4:31; 1 Pet. 3:7)! Do not neglect your motives and the root causes of broken relationships, sin, and murder. By being persons who seek reconciliation, we will avoid needless strife and stress in our lives—especially in the church. Having an unforgiving attitude is fatal to worship and prayer; we cannot truly worship God or pray to Him with a heart of anger, contempt, or bitterness! When we seek to worship Him in that state, it too is an extreme insult to Him! This bad attitude will have lasting consequences into judgment and eternity! If you are not able or willing to forgive others, God will be able, but unwilling to forgive you! If we truly desire to be His disciples and be committed to prayer, we will be as committed to reconciliation with others as He is with us (John 3:5; 1 Pet. 1:22-23)! We are to forgive others in response to the fact that we have been forgiven. However, the forgiveness we may give to others will never compare to the forgiveness Christ has given us! (See our Character study on *Forgiveness*.)
- *Do not lead us into temptation* means our prayer life will greatly help us not sin when we are tested or we go through trials, and will help us through them (Psalm 141:3-4). In fact, I have seen many studies over the years that stated that married couples who pray together regularly rarely divorce! Prayer keeps us in His will and away from temptations. Trials are primary means for growth and maturity. That does not mean prayer will keep us from them altogether. If that were so, we would never grow spiritually. We have to be persons who have received grace and have the knowledge of what we have in God first in our mindset. Then, as we are able to see how we have been forgiven, we can really, truly forgive others.

We can see from these passages a clear pattern of prayer that will please our Lord and God, and that acknowledges Him as Sovereign, so we can trust and grow in Him. True prayer comes from a sincere and humble Christian, offered with a merciful spirit, who is not interested in making a public display for the sake of pleasing others or seeking prestige. Prayer will help us see His

perfection and receive His mercy and grace to help us, and others through us, in times of need, so we can find that peace that guards our hearts and mind (Phil. 4:6-7; Heb. 4:14-16). In order for this to happen, we must be willing and able to open and surrender our heart and Will to Him. If not, we will be living on the wrong floor of life!

## The ACTS of Prayer

A.C.T.S is an acronym or axiom that points us to the Lord's Prayer and other Scripture, and gives us precepts so we can divide up our time and purpose to engage in prayer with a correct devotion and attitude. "ACTS" refers to the precepts of prayer—the categories of Adoration, Confession, Thanksgiving, and Supplication.

- **A**doration, means to worship and acknowledge the majesty of God—Praise be to God! *Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name.* This is about the greatness of God, His incredible omnipresence, omnipotence and omniscience, His sovereign nature and rule, and His complete holiness. It also indicates the incredible, wonderful privilege that He cares for us and hear us. This means our prayer life is to recognize His Sovereignty so we can honor Him as LORD over all, over our lives and all that is around us. This helps us trust Him and place Him first in our lives. This is to be our duty and desire that comes from our gratitude for what He has done for us. We can see the awesome privilege we have to know Him and to commune with Him. We come to understand His love and grace for us, so we can have a greater delight in Him, not just as a necessity, a law, or a ritual, but living our life because of who He is. When we truly love the Lord, we will reverence Him and grow in our relationship to Him. This transfers to us in a prayer for further dedication. We are to be dedicated to God not just by our words, deeds, and promises but also by our will, heart, and mindsets and with our whole being. Knowing that God is in charge helps us realize we belong to God and we are not our own; we are in Him, a much greater purpose. This means when we pray, we should begin our time adoring and praising God. Praise Him for who He is! Then, look over all that is in your life (even if you think you do not have much) and all He has done for you. God delights in your praises!
- **C**onfession. *Forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors.* This means we are to see our sins and agree with God about the things that we have done wrong. During our prayer times, things will come to our mind that will not be pleasant to recall. We will be convicted of our sins and failure, where we have not been truthful, or have exaggerated or missed His precious opportunities for doing good. We will have genuine sorrow for what we have done and left undone. Then, we are called to deal with it and make restitution where we can, seeking His forgiveness and going to others for forgiveness where we wronged them. Keep track of these items that God brings to us, our sins. Know that God will *forgive me all my sins.* *Confess* also means we are

called to be accountable to one another, to state what we are going through and are struggling with to someone in confidence who will listen and help guide us by His Word. It is not about going to a pastor or priest, but to God directly, in and with accountability, with another trusted person, small group, or mentor. We cannot grow closer to God when we have unconfessed sin in our lives; these sins act as a barrier, cutting off our communion with Him. We cannot do the Christian life by ourselves; it is not a spectator or individual sport! Christianity is not for *lone rangers*; it is for community (1 John 1:9)!

- **T**hanksgiving—for *Thine is the Kingdom and the power and the glory forever*. This means in our prayer life, we are to be grateful for what He has done for us. We are to go over His mercies, all that He has done for us. They are more than you know! He truly and deeply loves you beyond your ability to fathom it. He provides, nurtures, and protects you and gives you hope and a purpose for life. Look at your family, friends, health, home, love, work, books, fun, a night of rest. In our times of prayer, we are to bring our attitude to His will. Remove your pride and seek Him first and foremost in all occasions so to live your life in gratitude to God for all things. Have the inward awareness that God has indeed been with you "all through the day."
- **S**upplication, *Give us today this daily bread . . . Lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from the evil one* is a fervent, personal petition, letting God know of our needs. This is called *petition*, our earnest, humble request before God. It is the seeking of not only personal needs, but for the needs of others as well. It is sharing our requests before God with the attitude that He does provide, but it may not be what we want or think we need. We need to learn how to depend upon Him and to express and develop real, impacting faith. This is only one small component of our prayer life, yet, most will spend most of their time and energies here while others, seeking to be humble, never venture here. It probably accounts for over 95% of all prayer requests. This is not to be our only aspect of prayer. We are to intercede for others, seek forgiveness of our sins, seek His will, and most importantly, we are to praise and adore Him! Petition is a vital component, but not the only piece. Make sure you have a well-balanced prayer life that is not selfish, but that does not ignore your needs either. In this component, we are also to make intercession for others—*Your kingdom come, Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven.*" To pray for others is **intercession**, the understanding of the needs of others and bringing those before God. This is exercising love and kindness, and showing our unity in the Body of Christ (John 17). Start to make a prayer list. Pray for others as their needs come to you; pray for your city, state and country, your leaders, missionaries, government officials, and persecuted Christians in the world, as well as God's for guidance, wisdom, and opportunities for you and your church and all that can come to you, and for you and them to grow and to serve. Be specific and be real!

The Lord's Prayer and this ACTS guide that is derived from it help center us and keep us on His track. This is not meant to be a rigid blueprint or for us to have *canned* prayers; rather, it is a method and guide to help us build our prayer time. This ACTS has been around for many decades and has served many countless Christians well. It should serve you well too! Use this method to ask God for guidance all through the day. Use this as a discipline to praise Him, be thankful, and to seek needs. Every breath you take, every step you make, and every task you do is to be spent in Him. You are already His child, so live that way as people of prayer. Fore think and foresee your day with Him.

We can pray for forgiveness, for our nation, show our gratitude, and even pray for the weather. Thus, in all things, we are to be in personal and collective prayer with other believers. Remember, prayer is not just a means to get what we request; it is the means to line us up with God, His precepts, and His presence. Prayer can meet all things and needs, and in everything we will ever face in life, from the trivial to the utmost of importance, prayer can and must be a significant part! We can take confidence that our prayers are heard and are answered. No matter what we need or face, we have Christ! Thus, we must preface, surround, and empower everything we do by prayer. It is never to be an afterthought, rather our first thought, our principle action, and our primary plan.

Stuck? Here are some practical helps:

- Break up your prayer times. Spend time when you first get up; look over your day and all that you need to do, seek His help, and be open to His opportunities and His presence for growth, learning, and more! Then, spend some more time with Him when you are about to go to bed. Use this time to go over your day, what you have learned, and what you can do better in the future. And then, commit yourself to God again.
- Do not be overwhelmed; start to take baby steps—that is, start with five minutes a day in the morning and again in the evening before bed. Then, slowly start to add to it. Keep in mind our Lord's Prayer; give praise to God, seek His will, and seek His instructions, His Kingdom. Do not forget to listen! Ask for forgiveness of your sins!
- Concentrate, that is, *focus* on God. The priority is your sanctification, your learning, and your growth in Him. This is best done in a quiet place, free from distractions. Thus, praying in front of the TV with your favorite show on is not a good idea. This disrupts God and keeps you unfocused!
- Seek to free your mind of stress, worry, and distractions, so Jesus is the only One and item in your mind. This is hard and takes practice, but the more you do it, the better you will become at it.
- If you still feel stuck in prayer, read the newspaper and pray for items in your nation and in the county in which you live, and for your neighbors. Also, read

though the Bible and pray. Seek first the kingdom of God! Ask God for the mission that He has given you.

- Read a Bible passage or sing a hymn and use these as prayer templates.
- Find a quiet place where there are no distractions.
- Try to pray out loud; this will help you concentrate! Use the Lord's Prayer as a great and the best template. Remember, it is a model for prayer and not a prayer! Go through each petition/stanza and spend time in it. You can also use the 10 commandments or Colossians 1.

Try to start with *baby steps*—10 minutes a day for a month. Then, in the second month, increase it to 15 minutes, the third month, 20 minutes, and so on. Your goal is to have at least one hour of a day in prayer—free from distractions and a wandering mind. If this is too much and your mind wanders, just remember to break the time up throughout the day—one-third in the morning, one-third during the midday, and one-third before bed.

We end our prayers with *Amen*, which means, "So let it be!" It is the wording of your confidence in God and His love for you. This is an affirmation of the goodness and power of our loving God who has heard us and is acting upon the prayer we have offered. It is trust in and reliance on your relationship with God. One day, you will get to heaven and then you will realize all that prayer did on this earth; you will be amazed at how God used you and you will be ashamed of what you missed praying for. The remembrances of all people in need, prayers for loved ones, leaders, pastors, and our church will have made a real difference! So, pray! And, make sure your prayers are real, authentic, not too general, and not weak, and you will be mightily used!

## **The Pursuit of Prayer**

## **Prayer Part III**

Psalm 84; Matthew 26:36-46; 27:45-46; Luke 11:9-13; Philippians 4:6-7; Colossians 4:2-6; 1 Thessalonians 5:18; James 4:8

### **Do you feel connected to God when you pray?**

If not, have you considered your outlook on prayer? It seems that most Christians view prayer as a happening but not a habit, an occurrence but not an occupation, and rarely with fervency. And, if it is a habit, is it also a relationship? Prayer must be more because God wants to be more in our lives! Prayer must be moved from the occasional occurrence to the rendezvous of our relationship. For that reason, I challenge you to examine your spiritual direction; if it is not good or as it should be, take a careful look at how you view and practice prayer! Ask



yourself *how can I make it more?* and, *What is in the way of this happening?* Consider that no one has a sufficient prayer life. Even Billy Graham says his prayer life is not what he would like it to be—and he spends one to three hours in prayer a day! Thus, to know if we have a vital prayer life, we need to realize that one of the main indicators is a desire for more! Do you want more?

To pursue a more vibrant prayer life, we have to be willing and able to saturate ourselves with it and in it! Also, we need a desire to move our prayer life from the occasional extracurricular activity to a passionate pursuit, and carry out prayer sincerely, earnestly, and vibrantly with His Spirit and Truth! This means prayer must become more than a just thing we do; rather, it becomes an attitude and a constant pursuit. We grow beyond our regular prayer times; we still have them, but we no longer limit ourselves to pray just at those times. We realize that because Christ is constantly with us, we can constantly commune and converse with Him wherever we are and whatever we are doing.

Prayer is our primary means of communication with our Lord. It is also the bond that builds community, churches, and marriages, as it energizes and brings out God's love! It is a marvel and a wonder that we, as created human beings, can obtain direct communication with God, the Creator and Sustainer of the universe! Prayer shows us His love and concern for us just by His allowing us to make our presence and requests known, and His even further, unfathomable love in that He earnestly hears us and gives us an answer and intervention! Prayer is precious; it is not to be a half-hearted endeavor or just an empty routine, an unctuous ceremony, or a meaningless ritual. Prayer is not about the recitation of words nor is it about posture, place, or expression usage; it is an outpouring of the posture of our heart to His. Prayer is an expression of our connection of love for what Christ has done for us in giving each of us this precious relationship with God. It shows our love and dependence on Him. It is a primary avenue for learning about and growing in Him, and being better equipped in life to touch others in His Name. Therefore, it is a relationship of dependency, as any real growth must involve the surrender of our will to His. Prayer pulls us up by the roots and plants us further in His presence and His will. Beware! We are deceiving ourselves if we think we can live our Christian lives without prayer, as one could be married or have a child and never have communication with that spouse or child. It could be done, but the relationship would be absent and soon would be null and void; we cannot *do* life on our own. Even if we could (and many Christians seem to try it), God just might let us; this would really be a time for fear and dropping to our knees!

The pursuit of continual prayer does not happen overnight. It may take years to develop the discipline for prayer to become second nature, automatic, and continual. Normally for most Christians, prayer is intermittent when we have the time, when we schedule it, and so forth. We still should do our scheduled prayer times; however, the point is that we do it *not only* at our scheduled prayer times! We do this not to just maintain our relationship with Christ, but to empower

it further, to build it, and pursue Him totally in our lives. This is not just a job—it is our *main* job. It is not just a function—but our *main* function. It is not just a preparation—but our *main* preparation. It is not just a calling—but the *main* calling of our Christian lives. It is not a duty—but our *main* duty. It is the groundwork and structure of His foundation upon which we build all we do. To be vital and useful Christians, we must be praying Christians—not just for a few minutes a day or when it is convenient, but always and continually in a reverent attitude of prayer! Prayer is meant to line us up in Christ and to conform us to Him, so it builds us up in Him.

There are all kinds of reasons and excuses we can give for not doing this, such as *time* or *I do not know how*, but the bottom line is that this is our direct call from our Lord. It is His high calling upon our hearts and we must respond to Him. Our churches in the West are failing, as a whole, because prayer has been left out. We think we have moved beyond the checklist mentality to see if we have done our devotions, spent time in prayer, or witnessed to someone today. We think we have become more mature. But, if we really take a close look, we will see that we are not spending a significant amount of time in prayer, and our devotions are lacking! Consequently, our churches and personal lives become lacking of His presence and power. When we leave God out and chase our own ideas and trends thinking we are honoring Him, we are actually forsaking Him and leaving behind a wrecked church instead of a triumphant church! What the church needs and what God wants is that we not just talk about or plan for prayer, but that we actually do it—and do it persistently! We are to be committed to prayer by actually scheduling and practicing it as much as is conceivable. Then we will see God's mighty work in our lives, both personally and collectively as a church (Luke 11:1; John 4:23-24; 7:37-38; Acts 2:33).

### **We are called to Prevailing Prayer**

Does this seem unfathomable and unrealistic to you? Consider that our Prevailing Prayer unlocks the warehouse of God's endless love, forgiveness, grace, and power. Prevailing Prayer subsequently moves us so we can move others to know Him, too. Prevailing Prayer will help move the church to move the world! Prevailing Prayer is our fervent, consistent, and to a degree, persistent prayer until we get through what we are dealing with, whether it is in our personal life or our intercession for another person. Prayer is the conquering force, as it must conquer our will so we can take hold of His. It places the ramps to lay siege to the problems of life while surrounded by the fortress of His love. The real questions we have to ask are *why am I not doing this? Why is my church not doing this* (Psalm 2:8; Matt. 6:5-15; 12: 9-21; Luke 18:1; 1 Thess. 5:17; Heb. 10:22)?

Maybe to you and/or to your church, prayer is a means to getting what you want. When we are praying for some kind of emotional or physical healing, are we really seeking Him or just expressing our wishes (Matt. 7: 7-12; Luke 18:1-8)?

Are we seeking His truth or ours? The Pharisees did not want the truth or what God had; they only wanted their postulations and the power to rule (Matt. 23). Are we robbing God of the opportunities He tries to give us? Do we mix them up with habits, pride, and traditions? Do we make grandstand pretences, showing off our faith while we have a heart full of soot? Do our attitudes, desires, and passions line up with the precepts of His Word, or express our own selfish political agendas? Passion is paramount, but it has to be grounded in God's truth, not the ideas and desires of man. We must seek initiative and inspiration from Christ, not from traditions. Do not practice your faith through the filter of traditions or habits. Rather, filter faith through the clarity of God's Word! Prevailing Prayer will help us navigate through what is selfish and not right to what is of God and is His plan. It is all about being conformed to Him, not to our ideas or desires.

Prayer is not just about what our own needs are. It is about putting our lives and experiences in Him, sharing our days and lives, both in times of urgency and times of happiness, times of stillness and times of stress, and bringing others into our thoughts and prayers. It is about getting spiritual direction for all we do in life. Continual and effective prayer will build our relationship with God. We will come to realize that He is in charge of all that happens in our lives, and that we are in His Hands. How we interact with Christ as Lord and respond to others is rooted in how we communicate. Our spiritual growth and how we connect to God with an effectual relationship is determined by how effective our prayer life is. It can be put this way: all we do in life is based on our ability to communicate, and our principle communication is to our loving Lord!

We are made for prayer. However, prayer is not just a means to fill our needs. It is not a tool used merely to get our way and will. Prayer is to bring us closer to Christ. Never waste your time with God seeking what you cannot have. Just as the role of the Holy Spirit is to intercede for us, we are called to do the same for one another (Mark 11:16-17; 1 Cor. 6:19; Heb. 7:25). So, do we?

To further receive His empowerment, we must pursue prayer significantly, earnestly, and uncompromisingly with humility because Christ and His wonders are already at our disposal. To be conformed to Christ is never a platform to manipulate Him or demand what we want! God is not our divine bellhop who delivers the luggage of our wishes! Prayer is not just for a crisis or a dilemma; if this is all we do with it, we are expressing a serious emptiness of our trust and His work in us. If you never talked to your best friend except when you urgently needed his or her assistance for some personal problem or to help you move, how "best" would your friendship be? To keep that friendship "best," a deeper relationship of genuine trust and communication must be pursued joyfully. This is how we are to approach God with our appeals! When we make Him irrelevant in the rest of our lives, we will be blinded to His opportunities and empowerment. However, prayer will open our eyes to Him and what He has for us.

The key to practicing prayer more effectively is to know more about Him. The disciplines of the faith will help empower your prayer life as your prayer life will empower your faith and discipline. Each begets the other; each needs the other. The disciplines of daily reading and knowing Scripture will help expose what you need to pray for. Fasting will help empty your self-will and make you more focused on Him. Fellowship will help you see the needs and opportunities of others, and so forth.

### **How our Prayers get Through**

Remember, as a Christian you are a child of God; your prayers are always heard! There is no prayer that is too small, too big, or too hard. But also remember, when we are not living our lives for Him, our prayers will be hindered. What about putting more bounce in our prayer step? First, as I have already stated, He indeed hears us! We can have the confidence to go before Him and address Him. This is an incredible opportunity—far greater than it would be for any famous person you idolize to come to your door for dinner! Going before God is more precious and real than meeting for a private audience with the president of the USA. Our audience is Christ who loves and hears us (John 14:6; 16:23-27; Rom. 8:34)!

Prayer is not like just trying to get the laundry done, nor is it a grocery list of things to do and get. Rather, it is our existence in Him, from the innermost enclaves of our being (Rom. 12:12, Eph. 6:18; Phil. 4:6; Col. 4:2; 1 Thess. 5:17; 2 Thess. 1:11; 1 Peter 4:7; Jude 20). For effective prayer to happen, we must come to God and acknowledge His Sovereignty and Holiness. He knows us beyond that we know ourselves; nothing can be hidden from Him. So, we have to be real, be honest, be ourselves, and make sure our motives are right. We cannot pretend; He always knows. When we are real, we are honoring Him! We need to have a soul that desires to be in God's courts (Psalm 84:2, 10; John 10:9). We need to desire to be with Him, to praise Him, and to bring Him glory (Psalm 50:14-15; 100:4; 1 Cor. 3:16, 23; 6:19-20).

Even though we are heard, we can be heard clearer and better when we increase our receptivity. As a better radio antenna will get you better reception, a better Christian life and the antenna of our faith will further empower our prayers. First, our attitude must be sincere and humble. Remember, we are going before our Holy LORD, so we must acknowledge His holiness, not just our friendship with Him. This means being reverent and worshipful. Then, through our frailty, reality, and humbleness, we are to pray continually. Then we can examine what we are saying to our Lord. Our words and thoughts should be specific and to the point. We can enjoy communing with Him, but say what we came to say. And, as I have said before, never, never seek to manipulate and control the Sovereign God of the universe! We are never to seek to manipulate God to get our way, even as we are not to do so with others. In this spirit, we can come to one another and seek accountability and reconciliation.

Our prayers get through when we can confess and be on guard with sin, so it stops rather than fester or escalate. And, as Elijah demonstrated to us (First Kings 17-21), always remember that a righteous person is a praying person. We cannot do anything of meaning or significance for our Lord unless we are a person and a church of prayer!

Many times, I have felt stuck in my prayer life. I could pick up the church directory and pray through it (which I do one or more times each week), or pray through the newspaper (which I still do), but I felt I needed more. I sometimes did not know what to pray for other than the obvious trials and pains of ministry life and the needs of being a missionary. I learned over the years to try to be more specific; when I do that, many more items come into my mind to pray for and my times of prayer go fast, and yet I still want so much more. I always seek to see the intimacy of my relationship with Christ and build from that. As I go through my daily life, I try to have a mindset of prayer and pray naturally as I go to the store, drive, visit with people, and write. The more I do this, the easier and automatic it becomes. I have even found myself starting to pray for people in movies and on TV, and then quickly realizing, *OH! This is not real!* Years ago, to build my prayer life, I would first consider my family, then friends, church members, coworkers, neighbors, and acquaintances. Then, I would move to political and religious leaders and organizations, then to current events, through countries where I know the people who are working there, and so forth. I still do this, but it has become more automatic, and more items come to my attention than I ever considered before, such as praying for pastors who have fallen and their families. To pray more, consider your community and the events around you. Learn more about them so you can pray for them specifically (without gossip!). This is a necessity for a church to grow and thrive (Mark 10:50-52; Phil. 4:6). If the church is to be better connected to the purpose and reason we exist (which is Christ), we must commune more in and with Him (Matt. 6:5-8; 21:22; Phil. 4:19; James 1:6-8; 4:8)!

The next key to a vital prayer life is to realize that all that is around us (us included) are in Him and in His sovereign control. He hears us before we can even think of what to say. Because He is worthy, we can have confidence in Him (1 John 5:14-15). Thus, we use this knowledge to further our faith and trust in Him. We have a God who is worthy of our praise and thus we can surrender ourselves to Him (Psalms 37:5; John 3:30; Gal. 2:20-21; Phil. 3:1-14)! We need to surrender our will over to His, including our attitudes, ideas, and inspirations so His purpose can take hold of us. Then, we can know more about what to pray for and what not to pray for, stuff that is outside of His will, or what is not best for us or our church, and allow His great and best work to transpire regardless of the outcome, because we know that His will be the best outcome! The more we know Him, the more we know for what and how to pray. Do not let your prayers be limited because your understanding of and your trust in Him is limited! We need to get our attitude lined up, allow our pride to be relinquished so our

obedience and love will overcome our distractions. Then, we can pray more earnestly and with more perseverance because our faith, confidence, and will are in Him (Matt. 6:10; 19:26; Mark 12:30; Luke 18:1-8; Eph. 3:20; 6:18; 1 Thess. 5:17).

Remember, one of the roles of the Holy Spirit is to bring our prayers in an expedited way directly to God. He is the One who increases our prayers, as in supercharges them and fills us in on what we need to know—like cement to bricks—and He even architects it for us! We must allow Him to be our Guide and fill us up with His presence, power, and the specifics we need for what we do not recognize or comprehend. Best of all, He is always with us (John 14:16-17, Rom. 8:26-27; Heb. 13:5-6; 1 John 2:1)!

### **Our Response to Prayer!**

How does all of this happen? The key is being continually devoted to Christ. *Continue earnestly* (Col. 4:2-6)! This phrase in Colossians continues the theme to *set our minds on things above*, meaning to be in “fullness” with Christ (Col. 3:2). This attitude is what spurs on our commitment and our outreach. Without persevering with Christ, we cannot persevere persuasively, or even at all with others. Our fullness in Christ will reflect His work in us and be the beacon of hope to others! In Colossians, *praying* refers to more of a “militant prayer,” as in urgent and vigorous, not weak or superficial. Prayer is our dependence on Christ and our platform for His power (Eph. 1:15-20; 6:18-20). Because of what Christ did for us, we will want the same for the lives of others (1 Cor. 16:9).

Do you realize that when we devote ourselves more to Christ, we have more opportunities in life and ministry? Why would any Christian not want that? The call is simple and the action to make this call, to be devoted to Christ as Lord, is a simple endeavor. To have a mindset that our relationship with Christ must be preserving and persevering, our will needs to be open so it can be shaped and formed by Him! Yet, this can be very hard for most Christians! First, we are to be in prayer—in direct communication with Christ. And, when we engage in prayer or in any action regarding our Lord (and that would be all things in life), our minds are to be alert. We are also to be grateful, to have a thankful attitude and composure. When we have these right attitudes, then we have the right aptitude. With a heart and mind shaped by Christ, we can remember others and keep them in specific prayer. Then, we will see the opportunities that He brings us and be able and willing to proclaim His message of grace to those around us in a good attitude and lifestyle. As Saint Francis said, *if you need to, even use words*. Then, we can place ourselves into situations where God will use us to impact others. But the key is to remain in Him and not allow the world and its evil desires to influence us; rather, be the influencers to them!

Prayer—earnest and real prayer—will help us go beyond ourselves and into the lives of others. By our example and faith, others will be spurred on further

in the faith by our attitudes, lifestyles, and deeds. It is about Christ's work, not our efforts. We can then walk closer with and wiser in Him so we will see the opportunities He has for us. We then can do them, not by our abilities, but by allowing Him to work in and through us. Paul was in prison when this letter was written. He did not seek to be released, even though he must wanted to be. Rather, he sought how the Lord could use him, regardless of his situation. This was an example of real prayer, to allow *Thy will*, not *my will*. Paul sought opportunities for ministry, not opportunities for his freedom. In other words, he placed the call of God over his perceived needs and desires, even if they were good (2 Cor. 13:7; Eph. 1:16-23; Phil. 1:9). Perhaps we can grow ever so much more with such a mindset, to see opportunities to make our Lord known and not just to make ourselves feel good (1 Cor. 16:9; 2 Cor. 2:12; 1 Pet. 3:15-17; Rev. 3:7-8).

When we have the right attitude and aptitude to set our minds on Him, we can be used more powerfully and effectively for those around us. Our prayers and deeds will show His love and care. Our relationships and the people we have prayed for will ooze His love and precepts because our minds will be focused on Him, our hope and heart poured out to Him. Others will see Christ through us and receive the power and impact of the Spirit as God uses us as examples. What an incredible opportunity we have! Let us make the most of it (Psalm 1:1-3; 119:97-104)!

### **The Power of Prayer**

James 5:13-18 tells us in the context of prayer to *sing songs*, meaning to praise our Lord, in unity, with willing, loving hearts. It can be a literal song we sing, but it actually is more of an attitude and passionate reverence. This is an aspect of real worship and music, which is never a show; rather, it is the response of our love giving praise. We, as a congregation, are the performers, and Christ is the audience. Real, authentic worship is to be inspired by who Christ is and what He is doing in us. It is not about form, function, or type; it is about hearts showing love to Him. Prayer and worship share the same heart and attitude (Eph. 5:19; Col. 3:12-17).

When James tells us about the *power of faith*, he is referring to trusting in God and then being faithful in our intercessory duty to others. It does not mean a "special power" as some have proclaimed; rather, it is a call to action, showing our Christian community and faith displayed in our care toward one another. What matters to God over anything else is how we respond and learn. It all comes down to asking, being real, being honest, being ourselves, and making sure our motives are right. We will know our prayers are being heard when we show the love and care of our Lord. If we are earnestly praying, and perhaps are frustrated that the answer we desire has not come, remember that while we are waiting, God is working immeasurably more than we could ever know (Matt. 21:22; John 14:14)!

Prayer needs perseverance! Still feel stuck because that power is not there? Then, as Jesus told us, *keep asking* (Matt. 7: 7-12)! Jesus shows us the virtue of perseverance and its application in prayer. Our motivation to persist in our service to God is the desire to draw near to Him for what He has done for us. Consider the amount of time the Apostles, and even Jesus (when He walked this earth), spent in prayer. Now, consider how much more we need to pray, and compare that to how much time we actually spend in prayer. The Christian life does not run on autopilot. It needs persistence and constant navigational resetting as well as hands-on steering. It needs passion and conviction so His truth can get through. In order to line up our lives with His plan and will, we have to be willing and able to surrender to His concerns. We do this through knowing His Word and praying, which leads to our spiritual growth and Christian formation. The benefit of surrender is we have more security in Christ, which gives us more confidence, faith, peace, and empowerment for life and ministry (Psalm 1:1-3; 119:97-104).

Remember, prayer is not a vending machine where we can pick what we want, and what we want to do. Rather, it is aligning our mindset with His. Many people have mistaken the passage in Matthew 7 to think that God is a divine bellhop who will give us what we seek and what we want if we just have enough faith. But, that is plainly not the message this passage is meant to give us. Yes, we are to seek, we are to knock, and we are to be persistent with our prayers. But, we are not to seek only our selfish concerns. Prayer is seeking the Sonship/Lordship of Christ because He is in control, not just because of a friendship with Him. Prayer is the instrument with which to seek His Will , not ours.

Jesus tells us blatantly, *ask and it will be given*. This is a very bold and direct statement, which is rare if not non-existent in other languages and cultures of the time, including Hebrew law and writings. He is telling us that we have the right and the ability (by what Christ has done on the cross) to go directly to God in prayer. There is no need for intermediaries, special priests, or rituals. There is also a promise in this passage that gives us the confidence that He hears our prayers and even answers them. But, we are not to assume that God will answer our every whim or desire. We are not the focus of the prayer, nor are we God. He, God and Lord of the universe, is sovereign, and His will is to be sought, brought into our hearts and minds, and then put into practice. We also are to have confidence and trust that His answer is best! We often seek those things that are not beneficial or right for us because our view, understanding, and thinking do not include all of the information. We only see our temporary and immediate needs, whereas God sees it all, even the outcome.

Take it to heart that our God is willing and able to give! He wants to give every good and perfect gift to us! It is up to us to ask so we can receive it! But remember, we are always to seek what is according to His will and character as the prime prize! Prayer is a relationship to build, mold, and grow us deeper in His



heart. It is not just an “asking machine” even if you have the right and pure motives, and spend your time interceding for others, as we all should. Jesus is telling us to keep on asking (inquiry), seeking (finding it), and knocking (then it will be opened to you so you can find it), and it will be given to you. Asking, plus action and perseverance equal a quest for the character and growth to be a more mature Christian. It leads us to go deeper in our relationship and be of more use to God and others.

Prayers are not to be just memorized. Rather, they are to be passionately pursued! Prayer, along with the power we receive from it, calls for commitment and is something to be accomplished! God desires that we be in close relationship to Him, not merely seeking what we can get. He will give us what we need and much more! If we only seek what we think we want, we will never have a clue to what maturity and surrender mean. Our motives, obedience, and perseverance will be the keys! Be in love with Him. Seek His presence, and be persistent in your prayers. If you fear you will ask Him for the wrong thing, remember, we all do that. As you draw closer to Him, you will learn the right things to ask. Prayer is persistence and learning! Have you asked, sought, or knocked today?

### **Beware of the Barriers**

Have you ever wondered that if God gave you whatever you wanted, what bearing or what impact it would have on your life and faith? Would it be a hindrance? Perhaps we need to think through our dreams and wishes to their logical conclusion and impact from God’s perspective. At best, what we may want may be not best for us, and at worst, it may be totally detrimental and even fatal. Prayer has some strings to it. Obviously, we need to be saved in Him, but He also requests that we trust and obey Him. His answers to our prayers are conditioned upon our abiding in Him and His will (John 15:7; James 4:3; 1 John 5:14-15)! How sad it is that so many Christians never enjoy God's favor simply because they do not ask or ask for the wrong things!

If we would have an effective prayer life, we have to recognize and remove the barriers that hinder our prayers. Yes, God is Omnipotent and Omniscience, but our prayers will be ignored if we are not right with Him as well as with one another! The first and main barrier is *not forgiving one another*, for either trivial or big things. If we sin or do something we are not supposed to do to another person, God is aware and so are we! Our pride may cause us to rationalize it is OK, but it is not OK. We must seek forgiveness when we realize we have done wrong and God brings it to our attention. The power and veracity in prayer happens when we are right with Him! Forgive others for their “minor” transgression (everything is minor compared to what God has done for us!) because He has forgiven us for the massive sin barrier we had that we could never have paid by ourselves (Matthew 5:23-24; Mark 11:24-25; 1 John 2:9-11).

The second hindrance to our prayers being heard is *how we are living our lives*. Are we living as we say we are, as we are supposed to be? We will not be perfect; forgiven, yes, but we still have the responsibility to have character and integrity as His children and representatives. Therefore, the sins we commit toward others need to be addressed before God. We live the Christian life through forgiveness and grace, but it also includes character and responsibility. We are not righteous, but we are called to live and treat others as His children, to the best of our efforts. We are not to be good or slightly better than the others we know. We are to set our hearts and minds on Him and live our lives in response to His promises and work and with gratitude for what he has done for us. The key is to realize that He is indeed trustworthy. We can demonstrate real, authentic faith by being obedient; we can do this when we are faithful and trusting in Christ. To honor God, we have to live for Him within His precepts and model His Fruit and love. If this is not happening, then we are not being acceptable to Him, rather pretenders in the faith. Why, then, would God answer us (John 9:31; 15:7-8; 2 Cor. 5:20; Heb. 11:6; 1 Peter 3:12; 1 John 3:22-23)?

The third reason our prayers become “air balls” in His court is because we are not taking hold of what He is calling us to do. If we are complacent, doing nothing with our faith and only using Him as a divine vending machine, we are exhibiting reckless and disrespectful behaviors. We all are given gifts, abilities, and a call to pursue the Christian life for His glory. We all are special, uniquely called and gifted to serve Him. We can be bold in our faith and take our trust and faithfulness to the next level. This is all about being devoted to Christ as our LORD and responding with our trust to who He is all aspects and concerns of our lives. This means being committed—not weakly or halfheartedly or when it is convenient, but fully and wholly in Him. Thus, we must examine our lives and behaviors carefully. Are we being hypocritical or inconsistent? What about pride and humbleness? Which ones come from you? (I know I have to check myself all of the time.) If we are not being humble, or if we have a problem with pride, what are we going to do about it? Being obedient is not just a call; it is a necessity from our respect for His Sovereignty and our response of faith in Him (2 Chronicles 7:14; Heb. 4:16).

Do you need any other reason why you should pray or why your prayers should be a foundational aspect of who and what you are and do? The best reason is because Jesus did! God calls us to seek His presence both individually and as a body of believers with one mind and voice. So, why don't we?

Are you having trouble spending more than 10 minutes a day in prayer as I do at times? Here are some tips that are timeless and work. First, we need to desire and be ready for it so we can focus on Him. Whatever it is—in a classroom, with a friend, or with God—we have to focus our attention without distractions or preoccupations with other thoughts. We must get our minds off the clutter of life and on Christ as Savior and LORD. Slow down and be quiet so that thoughts and desires are in neutral. Start to remember how God has helped and

answered you in the past. Use a pattern such as the Lord's Prayer in Matthew 6:9-15; use each stanza as a template and then insert your own intercessions, requests, and supplications. Remember to confess sins and seek forgiveness, have gratitude for all that He has done (what you see and what you do not see), and give Him praise and glory. Our goal in prayer is the practice of being in His presence, which is what we will be doing in eternity. Let us go before Him with our active faith and humbleness in conjunction with our fervency and perseverance. Do not leave your home and engage the world without first feeding your soul with prayer and His Word (Matt. 6:33; 2 Cor. 13:14; Col. 3:17; 1 John 5:14).

I write this not as an expert but as a learner who struggles. Prayer takes practice and work; it does not come quickly in the night. It takes many days and nights to begin and a lifetime to pursue. It is not about getting what we want, manipulating, or being selfish. It is all about surrendering ourselves to Him. It is a journey, it is an integral and essential part of our faith, and it is to be a continual pursuit (Psalm 71:1-8; Phil. 4:6-7; James 4:8)!

### **The 190 Bible References Of God's Promise to Answer Your Prayers:**

Ex 6:5, Ex 22:23, Ex 22:27, Ex 33:17, Ex 33:18, Ex 33:19, Ex 33:20, Deut 4:7, Deut 4:29, Deut 4:30, Deut 4:31, 1 Kings 8:22, 1 Kings 8:53, 1 Chron 28:9, 2 Chron 6:1, 2 Chron 6:2, 2 Chron 6:3, 2 Chron 6:4, 2 Chron 6:5, 2 Chron 6:6, 2 Chron 6:7, 2 Chron 6:8, 2 Chron 6:9, 2 Chron 6:10, 2 Chron 6:11, 2 Chron 6:12, 2 Chron 6:13, 2 Chron 6:14, 2 Chron 6:15, 2 Chron 6:16, 2 Chron 6:17, 2 Chron 6:18, 2 Chron 6:19, 2 Chron 6:20, 2 Chron 6:21, 2 Chron 6:22, 2 Chron 6:23, 2 Chron 6:24, 2 Chron 6:25, 2 Chron 6:26, 2 Chron 6:27, 2 Chron 6:28, 2 Chron 6:29, 2 Chron 6:30, 2 Chron 6:31, 2 Chron 6:32, 2 Chron 6:33, 2 Chron 6:34, 2 Chron 6:35, 2 Chron 6:36, 2 Chron 6:37, 2 Chron 6:38, 2 Chron 6:39, 2 Chron 6:40, 2 Chron 6:41, 2 Chron 6:42, 2 Chron 7:13, 2 Chron 7:14, 2 Chron 7:15, Job 8:5, Job 8:6, Job 12:4, Job 22:27, Job 33:26, Ps 9:10, Ps 9:12, Ps 10:17, Ps 18:3, Ps 32:6, Ps 34:15, Ps 34:17, Ps 37:4, Ps 37:5, Ps 38:15, Ps 50:14, Ps 50:15, Ps 55:16, Ps 55:17, Ps 56:9, Ps 65:2, Ps 65:5, Ps 69:33, Ps 81:10, Ps 86:5, Ps 86:6, Ps 86:7, Ps 91:15, Ps 102:17, Ps 102:18, Ps 102:19, Ps 102:20, Ps 145:18, Ps 145:19, Prov 2:3, Prov 2:5, Prov 3:6, Prov 10:24, Prov 15:8, Prov 15:29, Prov 16:1, Isa 19:20, Isa 30:19, Isa 55:6, Isa 58:9, Isa 65:24, Jer 29:12, Jer 29:13, Jer 31:9, Jer 33:3, Lam 3:25, Ezek 36:37, Joel 2:18, Joel 2:19, Joel 2:32, Amos 5:4, Amos 5:5, Amos 5:6, Zech 2:3, Zech 10:1, Zech 10:6, Zech 13:9, Mat 6:5, Mat 6:6, Mat 6:7, Mat 6:8, Mat 6:9, Mat 6:10, Mat 6:11, Mat 6:12, Mat 6:13, Mat 7:7, Mat 7:8, Mat 7:9, Mat 7:10, Mat 7:11, Mat 18:19, Mat 18:20, Mat 21:22, Mark 11:24, Mark 11:25, Luke 11:5, Luke 11:6, Luke 11:7, Luke 11:8, Luke 11:9, Luke 11:10, Luke 11:11, Luke 11:12, Luke 11:13, Luke 18:1, Luke 18:2, Luke 18:3, Luke 18:4, Luke 18:5, Luke 18:6, Luke 18:7, Luke 18:8, Luke 21:36, John 4:10, John 4:23, John 4:24, John 9:31, John 14:13, John 14:14, John 15:7, John 15:16, John 16:23, John 16:24, John 16:26, John 16:27, Acts

7:34, Acts 22:16, Rom 8:26, Rom 10:12, Rom 10:13, Eph 2:18, Eph 3:20, Heb 4:16, Heb 10:22, Heb 10:23, Heb 11:6, James 1:5, James 1:6, James 1:7, James 4:8, James 4:10, James 5:16, 1 John 3:22, 1 John 5:14, 1 John 5:15.

Go through each of these passages one day at a time as a template for prayer (This was sent to us by a supporter of our ministry).

## **Outlines of Prayer Studies**

Below are several outlines of how we can pray and lead your church to be people of prayer! These are from the writings of Pastor Richard Krejcir and Seminary Professor Robert Boyd Munger produced in the 1980's.

### **I. The Preparation for Prayer**

- 1. Desire** – Want to seek Him out.
  - Ps. 27:8 for a personal relationship with God. The first thing you need to do is you have to want to pray!
- 2. Decision** - Give prayer your priority time.
  - Daniel did. Daniel 6:1-3) 10
  - Jesus did. Mark 1:35; Luke 6:12; 22:39-46. Make an appointment with God.
- 3. Determination** – Make a commitment and keep it.
  - Learning to pray is like learning a new language. It takes time effort and use.
  - We are all beginners with prayer.
- 4. Expectation**- God will be there to receive you. Luke 11:13; Heb. 4:16.
  - He is gracious, good, eager response.
  - Come to enjoy Him, to be with Him, and He with you.
  - Use of meditation, hymnal, devotional guides, etc.
- 5. Have a place for prayer.**
  - Jesus did. Mark 1:35; Luke 6:12; 22:39
- 6. Listen for God's Word to you.** Matt. 4:4; John 15:7; II Tim, 3:16-17.
- 6. Pray specifically,** Mark 10:50-52; Phil. 4:6.
  - Faith sized requests
  - Be definite - "give me this mountain" Josh, 14:12.

**7. Pray persistently.** Luke 11:5-10~ 18:1-8; Matt. 26:36-46

**8. Pray freely and fully.** Pour out your heart. Matt. 26:36-46; 27:45-46

**9. When difficult or unreal pray audibly or you can write out the prayer**

**10. Pray confidently with thanksgiving.** Phil, 4:6-7; I Thess, 5:16-18,

Robert B, Munger

## **II. Leading the Church to be People of Prayer**

1. The leader must be a person of prayer.

- The spirit of truth honors what we are more than what we say.

2. Model prayer in personal relationships.

- We reproduce what we are over period of time.

3. Preach, teach, witness, and encourage prayer.

4. Practice corporate prayer in small groupings with staff, officers, group leaders, etc.

5. Train small group leaders through giving them an experience of corporate prayer.

6. Schools of prayer are helpful giving instruction and experience of prayer in groups of 3 or 4.

7. Times of international, national and congregational crises are an opportunity for extended prayer.

8. A "30 day prayer covenant" between two people is helpful for many.

9. Let the pastor-leader share own experiences of prayer and request others to pray for his/her needs when appropriate.

10. Key to prayer: is the presence and power of the Holy Spirit.

**On Building a Prayer Team: some Important Qualities.**

1. **Qualifications:** Commitment to Christ, one another, and Christ's work in the world (John 20:19-23; Romans 12:1-21).
2. **Attitude:** View each other and all things through the eyes of Christ, with faith, hope, and love, (John 13:34-35).
3. **Direction:** with Christ, under Scripture, by the Holy Spirit (Mt. 18:19-20).
4. **Relationship:** Function as a team, members of Christ's body-open, honest, caring, serving (Romans 12:5, I Cor. 12:12-27).
5. **Resource:** Almighty God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit (Eph. 1:15-23, 3:14-21).

### **III. PRINCIPLES of PRAYER in SCRIPTURE**

#### **“Man shall not live by- bread alone”**

**The Scriptures is our primary means of knowing God and growing in His grace.**

Joshua 1:7-8; Ps. 1, 19, 119; Mt. 4:1-11, 7:24-29; John 8:31-32, 15:1-11; Col. 3:12-17; II Tim. 3:15-16; Hebrews 4:12; J Peter 1: 22-2:2.

Some suggestions for hearing and receiving the Scriptures into our mind, heart and life.

#### **1. Study with purpose.**

- To be with God, and deepen your personal knowledge and relationship with Him, this is our priority in life! Ps. 27:8
- To be with Jesus and learn of and from Him. Phil. 3:10; I John 1 :3-4
- To let the Bible be a window on God and a mirror on self. James 1:21
- To know and do God's will. Mt. 7:24-29, Rom. 12:2, Col. 1:9
- To be strengthened in faith and obedience. Rom. 15:4.
- To be equipped and ready for Christ's service. II Tim. 3:15-16

#### **2. Study with proper sense of our ultimate Reality.**

- God, being God, is to be the most important Person in our lives, honored heard, known and worshipped.
- God, being God, should have primary place in our lives, recognized, trusted, served with joy.
- God, being God, is to be trusted, loved and enjoyed.

### **3. Study with expectation.**

- He has a personal word for us. Mt. 4:4; Ps. 119:25; 28, 50, 72, 89, 90, 105, 130; Prov. 6:20-23; Ps. 40:7-8; Jer. 15:16, 23-29, etc.

**4. Study with a plan:** consecutive reading, book study, topical study, verse by verse. Luke 24:27, Acts 17:11

### **5. Study with a pencil and notebook.**

- "Thoughts disentangle themselves and are clarified passing through the fingertips onto a page.'
- Address the paragraph with questions such as: Who? Where? When? What? Why? What does it say about God? About myself? Any example to follow? Error to avoid? Duty to perform? Promise to receive? Prayer to offer?
- Write your reflections in first person singular.

### **6. Study with personal application in mind.**

- Write down what you are going to do about it. Ja. 1:22-25

**7. Study with willing to give an eager response.** "Walk in the Light." Mt. 7:22-29; Mark 4:1-29; Luke 11:28; John 8:12; I John 1 :5-7.

**8. Study with quiet confidence in God.** Mt.14: 22-33; Mt. 8:5-13; John 15:1-17; Eph. 3:20; James 4:3; Jude 24-25.

**9. Share what you have learned with others.** Mt. 28

FROM ROBERT MUNGER

## **IV. A SIMPLE FORMAT FOR PRAYER**

(Insights from "Teach Me to Pray" by Dr. William E. Sangster.)

**MORNING PRAYER :** Devote 10 minutes as a minimum as early as possible in the morning.

**ADORATION:** Think on the greatness of God--the incredibility of it that He should hear us at all. Does not the wonder of it almost strike you dumb? Praise be to God that God is the God, God is!

**THANKSGIVING:** Go over your mercies. They are more than you know. Thank Him for health, home, love, work, friends, books, fun, a night's rest. . . .If you lack health, or home, or sleep, there are other great mercies to mention. Think on them till you glow with gratitude.

**DEDICATION:** You are dedicated to God already with whole-life vows. Nonetheless, follow the lead of the hymn writer: "That vow renewed shalt thou daily hear." You are not your own. Nothing you have is your own. You are a "given" man or woman. You belong to God.

**GUIDANCE:** Ask God for guidance all through the day. Fore think and foresee your day with Him. In imagination go over every task which you know the day has in store for you and meet it with Him. Even the things you cannot foresee will be better met because of this discipline.

**INTERCESSION:** Pray for others. Have a prayer list. Praying without method is not serious prayer. When you get to heaven and realize all that prayer did on this earth, you will be ashamed that you prayed so ill. The casual recollection of people in need, or prayers only for one's dear ones, or prayers too general--common weaknesses as these are--can all be overcome by a prayer list kept up to date and daily used.

**PETITION:** Some masters of prayer have no place for personal petition. Clement of Alexandria had none. He and many like him were content to leave God to give them what was good. Yet Jesus taught petition--and that is enough. But keep petition in a minor place. Nothing more reveals the juvenility of our prayers than praying with persistence and passion only when we want something for ourselves!

**MEDITATION:** It is a good thing to conclude prayer, as well as to begin it, with meditation: deep brooding on love, wisdom, beauty, joy, light, peace, power, freedom, and holiness. A hymn may help you here.

**EVENING PRAYER:** Plan for some minutes at the end of the day.

**CONFESSION:** Things will come to your mind, which will not be pleasant to recall. A failure here, a bit of posing there; something not strictly truthful, exaggeration; and missed opportunities for doing good. . . . deal with each separately. Itemize your sins. Do not bundle your beastliness or pettiness together in one of those all inclusive phrases, "Forgive me all my sins." Blush over them in their separateness, claiming forgiveness and a greater wariness in the future. Make restitution where you can.



**THANKSGIVING:** Every evening will bring its occasion for gratitude to God for morning prayers answered and for help through the day. Let the day close with a warm, inward awareness that God has indeed been with you "all through the day."

**BEFORE SLEEPING:** Commit yourself to God again. "Father, into thy hands I commend my spirit."

**REVIEW THE DAY:** Run over it backwards in the recollected presence of God, and you will almost certainly have a double need.

## V. Our Pattern for Prayer

Matthew 6:7-15, Luke 11:1-13

1. **Acknowledgement for who God is**, this worship as "worth" ship: Praise and adoration of Him who is worthy of eternal praise (Is. 6:1-8, Rev. 4 , 5) .

2. **Response of our personal adjustment.**

- a. **Recognition** of God's Person, purpose, provision and Presence.
- b. **Confession**, cleansing, commitment of all to God.
- c. **Petition:** Asking and receiving of God's offered grace and help as He promised.
- d. **Response:** Letting God be God to us, in us and through us.

3. **Communion** with God the Father, God the Son, and God the Spirit, three as One.

4. **Intersession**, Ministering before and with God for others.

5. **Thanksgiving** Honoring God with our trust and obedience.

## II. Prayer as A.C.T.S.

A = **ADORATION.** "Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name."

Not as duty but desire, not as law but love, not as demand but delight, not as necessity but privilege, not as ritual but relationship, not "in order to" but "because of. "

C = **CONFESSION.** "Forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors."

T = **THANKSGIVING**. "For thine is the Kingdom and the power and the glory forever."

S = **SUPPLICATION**.

- a. **Petition**. "Give us today this daily bread . . . Lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from the evil one."
- b. **Intercession**. "Your kingdom come, your will be done on earth as it is in heaven."

Amen means "So let it be!" An affirmation of the goodness and power -of God who has heard and is acting upon the prayer. "With Thanks giving."

From the notes of Robert B. Munger

## VI. Suggestions for Effective Group Prayer

1. **Form Group in circle**. For a short session of prayer, stand and join hands. This helps us 'form up' and concentrate. Try not to be scattered all over the place (One for all, (us together) and all for One (Jesus)).
  - We are going before the presence of God, and must do so with glad hearts and a wiliness to be together in unity and love.
  - We must never go before God in petty political power plays, jockeying for control or attention.
  - We need to be as a team, listening with care to others, with the same passion we have for our own requests. This is Christian community!
  - Christianity is not a solo endeavor, that God only has 'me' in mind; of course He loves and cares for you, and has you in His mind! He also loves and cares for others too, even those people you do not like!
  - It is best to keep groups under 10, 4 to 8 works best. If you have too many people, break them down, and go to separate rooms if possible.
2. Each person needs to be ready and **eager to participate** (a passion for His presence).
  - We must not be in prayer when we have our hearts and minds pointed elsewhere.
  - We are to give God our best, which is our focused attention!
3. **Make one request at a time**, for effective concentration **just make 1** personal prayer concern at a time, introduced by 1 member at a time. Then all can be in prayer for that 1 item. As the request is given, others can best

participate by listening in silent prayer. Then all join up in prayer, and afterwards repeat the process with the next request or item.

- When we just blurt out a long laundry list of prayers they get forgotten and our minds are busy being focused on remembering them. Thus the prayer (s) lose out there passion and attention of us before God.
  - You do not have to stop the prayer, to get the next request. Make your petition in a state of prayer!
4. Make your **request uplifted** in audible prayer by at least by one (covered in love).
- One person at least should speak, so it sets a tone for the rest in prayer. Although there is nothing wrong with just silent group prayer. But be aware that silent prayer alone will lose a lot of peoples focus and attention, as their minds wonder off.
  - Others may pick up from others their audible prayer, and restate it in their own words, or use it as a focal point for their silent prayer.
  - Do not all pray audibly all at once; it becomes disjointed and confusing (not to God, but to us, who need to keep focused). Remember God is a God of order, not disorder (I Cor. 14).
  - You can always add a word of amen, which means 'make it so', and gives your loving support. Amen does not mean it is over, the words of the prayer may stop, but not our attitudes and reverence to Christ.
5. **Wait in silence** before God until another member introduces a personal concern.
- Don't feel you always have to say something!
  - There is nothing wrong with silence. We must not allow it to distract us or cause us to be uncomfortable. Because the words of others may be silent; however, He is still there. God is the audience and the focal point of the prayer, not those beside you!
6. It is OK for each participant to pray as many times as they have concerns--but for only one request at a time!
- Do not be in a rush!
  - Listening is as important as speaking, in most case more important. Listening to others and to God!
  - Never, never, never, never use prayer to convey gossip!!!
  - Keep confidences in the prayer group, and do not bring details into the prayer that others have no business of knowing. God already knows!
7. Be sensitive and responsive to the leading of the Holy Spirit and the love of Christ!

See 'Christian Community' article

Suggestions by Rosalind Rinker modified and expanded by R.J. Krejcir

## VII. Are you transformed by the Word?

We can master the entire Bible and, even be totally transformed by the Word; but, if nothing comes from it, it is meaningless and nearly worthless. This is one of the main points of the book of James. Our faith must have a response to it. Yes we may be saved, but what good is it if we do nothing with it. This quality of being transformed is essential in building an effectual prayer life!

With the knowledge we have learned, it becomes our responsibility! And then we are to ask, "how then do I live?" What can I do now, today, or this week to implement the instructions given to me with my relationship to Christ, to others, and to myself?

True application comes only from the result of a life transformed. You may do good works without Christ, but they are out of a sense of obligation and guilt, and not out of a response to our sin nature that has been covered by grace creating a willing and loving heart to model the character of our Lord!

- The fruits of the Spirit are the result of a life transformed by Christ.

**How we are un-transformed:** *"The acts of the sinful nature are obvious: sexual immorality, impurity and debauchery; idolatry and witchcraft; hatred, discord, jealousy, fits of rage, selfish ambition, dissensions, factions and envy; drunkenness, orgies, and the like. I warn you, as I did before, that those who live like this will not inherit the kingdom of God."* (Gal. 5:19-21)

**How we are transformed:** *"But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control. Against such things there is no law. Those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the sinful nature with its passions and desires. Since we live by the Spirit, let us keep in step with the Spirit. Let us not become conceited, provoking and envying each other."* (Gal 5:22-26)

- God uses His Word to transform us, it is what we do, and what He does. He sends us His Spirit, we respond.

**REMEMBER:** Application comes out of a Changed life and leads to a life transformed! Rom 12:1-3

**SOMETHING TO CONSIDER:**

- Satan would like nothing better than for you not to do the above!!! Do not procrastinate. Press on!!! Do not assume that because you understand something that you have applied it!!! Do not get frustrated. You cannot expect instant results.
- Studying the Word and prayer without putting any application to it is like buying a nice new car, taking it home and keeping it in your garage. Then all you do is sit in it and pretend you are driving, listening to the radio, but never actually turning it on and going anywhere with it.
- When we read God's Word and do nothing with it, we become the biggest fools in the universe!
- This area of putting feet to God's Word and prayer is the most neglected aspect of our Christian life! But it is at this part where our lives change and God uses us to change others.

**"Discussion:"** THINGS TO VIEW, ASK, AND APPLY:

Take your passage, (choose a short book like II or III John or Jude or...) and go through it together or in small groups with these steps.

1. Jesus urged us to build our lives on His Word. (See Matthew 7:24-27)
  - What must I do to make God's Word real in me?
  - What must I do to make prayer more real in me?
  - When will what I learned end up in my day planner?
  - What is my response?
  - The Word of God is to lead us to model the character of Christ, to be formed in the image of God.

Mediate over the passage you are studying, that is reflect on it, ponder it, and think of it so that you are seriously going over the passage over and over in your mind. Then the memorization will become easier since the verse(s) have rooted in you!

- **Pray** to ask God how to implement His truth to you.
- **Tell Others.** Remember Matthew 28. The best way to remember what you learn is to teach others.
- **Accountability.** Let someone else you know and trust hold you to your promises especially as it relates to the study of God's Word.

**Beware!!** The more knowledge we have, the more accountability and responsibility we have to God. This is why Moses was not allowed into the Promised Land, when he seemingly disobeyed God by hitting a rock with his staff. It may not seem much of an offense to us, but before God, Moses knew better than anyone else. Fortunately for us today, we have grace!

### “Going Deep:”

Have a student read the following passages (it is always better focused to go deep by turning out the lights and light a candle):

*“But it has now been revealed through the appearing of our Savior, Christ Jesus, who has destroyed death and has brought life and immortality to light through the gospel. And of this gospel I was appointed a herald and an apostle and a teacher. That is why I am suffering as I am. Yet I am not ashamed, because I know whom I have believed, and am convinced that he is able to guard what I have entrusted to him for that day. What you heard from me, keep as the pattern of sound teaching, with faith and love in Christ Jesus. Guard the good deposit that was entrusted to you—guard it with the help of the Holy Spirit who lives in us.” (II Tim. 1:10-14)*

- You can stand in an ice-cream shop all day long and stare at all of the flavors. But no enjoyment or satisfaction will come until you bite into a scoop for yourself!
- Remember the Word of God's purpose is to transform us into the image of God, to model His character!
- Discipleship is following Christ and not just beliefs, ideas, or causes. Too many people are devoted to a doctrine or a cause in the name of Christ, but not Christ Himself! That is how we got the Inquisition and Crusades.

*“For this reason I remind you to fan into flame the gift of God, which is in you through the laying on of my hands. For God did not give us a spirit of timidity, but a spirit of power, of love and of self-discipline. So do not be ashamed to testify about our Lord, or ashamed of me his prisoner. But join with me in suffering for the gospel, by the power of God, who has saved us and called us to a holy life—not because of anything we have done but because of his own purpose and*

*grace. This grace was given us in Christ Jesus before the beginning of time.” (I Tim. 1:6-9)*

## **VIII. CHRISTIAN COMMUNITY**

Even rats run in packs

**The main point:** Christianity is to be a personal team endeavor; it is never just about solitary, or personal agendas. There are times when we need to be alone, especially in our devotions and study. However, the bulk of the Christian walk is in a community experience. That pools the gifts and resources of not just one leader, or the elders, or the volunteers, but everyone as a team for His glory. It is this understanding of what is a true Christian God centered community that will facilitate growth, maturity and a positive and productive church environment.

If not the church will be a collection of loose cannons on deck, that all move to there own accord with out unity or purpose. Resulting in holes being blown into our hull, causing the community to sink and drown.

So the point is this: The church is where we all need to participle and encourage each other together in worship, fellowship, and outreach. And the church is the community of believers, not the building!! So if the community is at McDonald's the church is at McDonald's.

This cannot be accomplished by just a pastor or strong willed leader. A true Christian community is a venture led by God's precepts and Person with godly centered leaders who walk the path first, as led by Him, all working together for His glory.

### **A summary theology of Christian community**

#### **I. Community is clearly stated in the Deity**

- God is one. Deut.6: 4; Gal.3: 20 yet three. Mt.3: 16ff. 28:19; II Cor.13: 14; I Pet.1: 2
- The nature of reality is love in an eternal relationship.
- Love seeks to love and be loved.

#### **II. Community in humanity**

- Essential for fulfillment of our humanity. Gen.1: 27. 2:18

#### **III. Community in incarnation**

- Jesus born into the human family. Luke 2:4.22.40
- Jesus called 12 companions. Mark 3:14

#### **IV. Community in Christ**

- We are in the family of God. John 1:12; Mt.12: 46-50; I John 3:1
- We are members of Christ's Body. Rom.12: 5; Eph. 4:15-16
- The church is more than an organization of like-minded people; more than an ecclesiastical organization; more than a religious fellowship or task force. It is a spiritual organism in Christ, the family of God.

#### V. **SO IF?**

- If God Himself is a perfect unity and harmony of Persons.
- If human nature is fulfilled in close-knit unity and love.
- If the church is Christ's Body maturing in mutual self-giving serving in mutual support of its members.

#### **THEN we are to follow Him in example with love!**

- And we will see the full potential of maturity, growth, evangelism, outreach, and prayer. Because the church is realized and accomplished in community, as our Lord attended. Mt. 18:19-20; Acts 1:14.4:24

### **IX. “Getting away from Distractions!”**

We at Into Thy Word Ministries will provide you with the “map” of discipleship tools, questions, and a how to guide in studying the Bible; but you must provide the will. To surrender our will to God’s will is the essential element of being a growing Christian. God’s Word provides the way; you simply provide the means.

There are many ways we can study the Bible effectively and prayer. There is no “best” way, only that we do it! Many Christians feel all they have to do for Bible lessons is sit in a pew, turn on the television or radio, or naturally receive their knowledge for being a Christian; but this is not how to transform our lives. We must read and get into the Word of God ourselves: Through prayer, hard work, discipline, concentration, application, and even more **prayer!**

So set aside time each day free from distractions and go for it with passion and vigor. Let Christ transform you through His Word.

*“For the Word of God is quick and powerful, and sharper than any two edged sword, piercing even to the dividing asunder of soul and spirit, and the joints and marrow, and is discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart.” (Hebrews 4:12 KJV)*

#### **PRELUDE INTO GOD’S TREASURE CHEST:**

**ATTITUDE:** Start with the proper attitude! You are going before a Holy God, so adjust yourself with these attitudes:



**REVERENCE:** (Hab 2:20, Psalm 89:7) Prepare your heart and mind, you are not going to a football game! Be quiet; clear your distracting thoughts and desires away!

**YOUR WILL:** (John 7:17f) We must be willing to not only read but to obey God's decrees! It is not about you, it is about God! Make it your choice!

**ANTICIPATION:** (Psalm 63:1) We must come before God with eagerness and expectancy. This is not a chore; it is fellowship with the creator of the universe, what better time could there be!

**BE ALERT:** (Prv 1:7; 3:5-6) Find a time where you are most alert and awake!

**BE IN LOVE:** (Job 23:12; Jeremiah. 15:16) Fall in love with His Word! Have the appetite, as it was better than your favorite meal! Do not let it be just a duty! The love will increase as we increase in our effort and study!

*"Open my eyes that I may see wonderful things in your law."* (Psalm 119:18)

**A very important point:** For this to work, you must have a relationship with Christ, with your trust in His grace. Without it you are programming a computer without any knowledge of its language or design. You may attempt it, but all you will get is *"foolishness;"* as Scripture tells us, the knowledge will be hidden from you.

*"The man without the Spirit does not accept the things that come from the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him, and he cannot understand them, because they are spiritually discerned. The spiritual man makes judgments about all things, but he himself is not subject to any man's judgment."* (I Cor. 14-15)

In God's eyes it is far more important **why** we do something than that we do something, even good. (I Sam 16:7, II Chron 25:2) Thus we do not want to do the right thing with the wrong attitude and motives.

## Discussion

Open: Have all the students tie each other's wrists behind them with masking tape, so they cannot move their hands. The teacher will have to read the Bible passages. They cannot try to break free and must remain sitting down! Do not tell them why they are being tied!

1. What is it like not to be able to move your hands?
2. Read Hebrews 4:12 in several versions if available. Explain that this imagery is like an animal being cut opened and the guts coming out! (Girls should like this one)

Q. Why does the bible use this imagery to describe itself?

3. How can the Word of God get into you so you become divided and everything is exposed in you? (Explain the importance of surrendering our will, so God can use us. He usually does not when we get in the way.)
4. How can you develop a good attitude, and why would that be important in life as well as bible study?
5. Why is reverence so important, what does it mean to you?
6. Why should we be alert?
7. What happens when we do something such as operate heavy machinery or drive a car when we are not alert?
8. Have you ever set aside time to do devotions and read the Bible by yourself on your own accord?
9. If so, how did it go? How long did you last?
10. If you stopped, why and what would be the essential ingredient (s) to keep plugging away at it?
11. How powerful is God's Word in your life?
12. Have you ever anticipated something real bad? What was it like to anticipate? How did you feel when you received the anticipated answer?
13. See scriptures I Sam 16:7 & II Chron 25:2: Why is it more important to have a **why** to do good stuff instead of "just do it?"

### **Application:**

Place a \$5 bill on the table in front of the students (do not expect it back) and ask them to try to get it without breaking their masking tape cuffs. Explain having a negative attitude is cutting them off from the blessings and wonder that God has in store for them. You may not be rich or famous, but that is not important, it is the positive attitude of life and receiving His redemption and blessing that will give you meaning and true happiness that no car, job, house, spouse or anything that could ever bring you!

Negative attitudes will tie us up from experiencing life, joy, fulfillment, peace, love and happiness! Negative attitudes will also get in the way of refusing to give our will up for our Lord and savior. Go through the next week being fully aware of your attitudes, keep a journal of them, that is keep track of your negative attitudes and positive attitudes. Then notice your feelings and responses in those situations.

### **Going Deep:**

“Prayer Walk.” Spend as much time as you can, or schedule this at a different time, maybe after church, or before church next week, instead of games for youth group, etc.

Go to a public place such as a shopping mall and greet people at random and say something nice and uplifting.

(Do not witness your faith for this exercise. You can and should at a different time, because it will give you much different results. Maybe have 2 of your group witness, and the other 2 just greet. Try it!) At the same time be praying silently for the people you are talking too. Notice the attitudes of the people you are encouraging, and notice your attitude as people return kindness or bitterness. Keep in mind how you can be a bitter free person who is an encourager to others.

## **X. JESUS ' Model to Know God's Will Matt. 26:36-46**

1. His strong assurance. "Father."
  - The character of God.
2. His encouragement. "My father!"
  - Experience of the Father's trustworthiness.
3. His outreach for others. "Watch with me!"
  - Wanted others with Him in the struggle.
4. His acknowledgment of need. "Sorrowful--even to death!"
  - Owned His feelings openly--amazing freedom from guilt!
5. His acceptance of individuality. "A little farther!"
  - Willingness to go it alone. Ultimately we stand before God as a solitary!
6. His persistent appeal. "If it be possible!"

- The petition not answered--the person was! His dominant desire always had been to glorify the Father (John 17:1-5) and save the lost (Luke 19:10). That deepest prayer was heard!

7. His acceptance of the Father's better Way. "Never-the-less."

8. His immediate experience, inner peace, and power endure.

9. His ultimate answer, His resurrection, ascension, and outpoured spirit.

## XI. LEARNING TO PRAY FROM OLD THE BIBLES PERSONALITIES

Some of the most important examples and principles of prayer can be found in the Old Testament accounts of the relationship between different people and God. These prayers are worthy of careful study as a means to build our own life of prayer. We can learn from them why people prayed, how they prayed, and what happened when they prayed. A partial list of some of the more significant prayers is listed below:

Abraham: Genesis 18

Jacob: Genesis 32

Moses: Exodus 3-4; Exodus 32

Hannah: I Samuel 2

David: Psalm 51 (see 2 Samuel 11 ) ; Psalm 139

Solomon: I Kings 3; 2 Chronicles 6

Elijah: I Kings 19

Elisha: 2 Kings 6:8-23

Hezekiah: 2 Kings 18-19

Jehosaphat: 2 Chronicles 20

Ezra: Nehemiah 9

Isaiah: Isaiah 6:1-8

Jeremiah: Jeremiah I: 1-10

Jonah: Jonah 2

1. Read the passage through to gain an understanding of the historical and personal situation of the person praying. Who is praying and why?
2. Outline the prayer. Identify each separate idea expressed. What are the parts of the prayer? What is said to God about God? About the person or people praying? About the situation? What request is made? What confession? What praise and thanksgiving?

3. Ask: What do I learn about God from this prayer? About the people of God? About myself and my situation? What parts of this prayer can I pray? Which parts are strange to me? What challenges my faith? How did God answer this prayer? How do I want him to answer me? How will I wait for His answer?

## PRAYERS IN THE LETTERS

Ephesians 1:15-23 3:14-19

Philippians 1 :3-5 1: 9-11

Colossians 1:3-5 1 :9-14

I Thessalonians 1:2-3 5:23-25

II Thessalonians 1: 11-12 3:1-2

Philemon 4-6

Hebrews 13:20-21

1. What is the setting, occasion or context for the prayer? Who is praying for whom?
2. Is anything said about the One being prayed to? What names, titles, or characteristics of God are mentioned and highlighted in the prayer?
3. Is there a statement of thanksgiving? What is Paul thankful for?
4. What requests or petitions are made on behalf of the Christians? List each clause separately. Are there any cause and effect relationships suggested in the prayer? E.g. I ask for. . . so that. . . will be true. What pronouns, connectives, adjectives, adverbs, verbs are used?
5. Is there a central or main thought expressed in the prayer? Why did Paul pray this, do you think? Why does he think this is important?
6. Attempt to restate the requests made in your own words.

## PRAYING THE PRAYER:

1. Write or carefully think your way through the various statements of the prayer placing yourself in the prayer. What are you thankful for? What characteristic of God mentioned can you rejoice in? How are the needs expressed in the prayer your needs? How do they challenge your faith and life? Pray each request for yourself as seems appropriate.
2. Whom do you need to pray for? Go through the prayer putting in the person or group of persons for whom you are concerned. Move each general petition to make it as specific as possible towards the people for whom you are praying.

E.g. "Help them to have the knowledge of your will in the decisions being made about. . .

## **XII. Prayer as a Battlefield for the Believer**

Why is it so hard to pray when it is so rewarding personally and redemptively? A paradox? The Christian is engaged in a personal, moral and spiritual battle. Prayer is at the forefront of the conflict.

- Prayer clears the field for action, service merely occupies the field.
1. We struggle in prayer against ourselves. (Romans 7:14-25, Gal. 5:16-24, Eph. 2:3, etc.)
    - The downward drag of our fallen nature, "the flesh," at times is acutely experienced in prayer. "No person ever became a saint in his sleep."
  2. We struggle in prayer against the World (that condition of human affairs alienated from God and opposing his will). John 16:33; I John 2:15-17,5:4-6; Phil. 1:27-30, etc.
    - Are we seeking the ambitions and approval of the world or the will and approval of God?
  3. We struggle in prayer against the adversary. Matt. 4:1-11; I Cor. 7:5; II Cor. 2:11; Eph. 6:10-20, etc.
    - a. The reality of Satan and his opposition to Christ and aid' Christ's rule. John 8:44, 14:30; Acts 26:18; Eph. 2:1-2; I John 5:19 etc .
    - b. His power over believers was broken at the cross and His doom sealed: John 12:31; 16: 9-10; I John 3:8; Col. 2: 15; 'Matt. 25: 41.
    - c. He is to be resisted. John 4:7; I Pet. 5: 8-9.
    - d. Prayer delivers from His assaults. Matt. 6: 13; Eph. 6:14-20.
    - e. Christ has given us power in His name over all the power of the Enemy. Luke 10: 17-20; Matt. 28:18-20; Co. 1: 13; Heb. 2 : 14-15; Rev. 12 : 11.

The decisive battles of the world are hidden and all the inner conflicts are but the reverberations of that more real and inward war. Real prayers have been

warriors who on the inner battlefield fought out the issues of righteousness and redemption with God as their ally.

Robert B. Munger

### **XIII. Prayer as Worship**

**1. Public Worship.** We "congregate" as a redeemed family to worship God. Ps. 122:1; Acts 2:42, 46-47; Heb. 10:25.

- Worship is an end in itself, not merely a means to an end.
- We do not worship to become holy. We are made holy to worship.
- We do not worship to get ourselves "charged up" for evangelism.
- We evangelize in order to bring men and women to worship the true God.

**2. Private Worship.** John 4:24

**3. Worship through life, love, service and witness.** Rom. 12:1; Heb. 13:15-16; I Peter 2:9-12.

**4. Praise joined with prayer in Scripture.** Phil. 4:6; I. Th. 5:16-18.

- The "house of prayer" is to be entered with praise and thanksgiving (Ps. 100:4; Mark 11:17).
- Scripture calls us to worship, praise and thanksgiving. Ps. 9:11; Heb. 13:15; I. Pet. 2:9; Rev. 19:5.
- Because of who God is. I Chr. 16:29; Ps. 18:3,96:9; Is. 6:1-8; Ram. 11:33-36; Rev.4:8-11.
- Because of all He has done. Ps. 103:1-5; Luke 17:17-18; Ro. 12:1; Rev. 5:11-12.
- Because of all He is now doing.
  - The common mercies of life, health, food, shelter, security, and peace.
  - The assurance of God's presence, provision, and mercy.
  - The people around us--family, friends, colleagues, brothers and sisters in Christ.
  - The privileges given us in life.
  - Opportunities before us for love, service and witness.
  - The high calling given us and the privilege of prayer.

**5. Because God is at work for good even when things go against us.** Ro. 8:28-29; II Cor. 4:7-12.

- "Always and for everything give thanks." I. Th. 5:18, "giving thanks in all circumstances." Eph.5:20
- "Jesus took the cup and gave thanks" Mt. 26:27, I Peter 1:3-9
- Peter miserably denied his Lord. Mk.14:66-72, Acts 3:11; 4:13.
- Stephen was martyred for his witness, yet in ...Acts 7:51-8:1; 26:12-19.
- Paul was under pressure "beyond ability to endure" (II Cor. 1:8-11; 2:14-17.

Though giant rains put out the sun, Here stand I for a sign. Though earth be filled with waters dark, my cup is filled with wine. Tell to the trembling priests that live under the deluge rod, One nameless, tattered, broken man Stood up and drank to God. G.K. Chesterton

**6. Because of all God will do.** I Cor. 15:20-28; Phil. 2:9-10; I John 3:1-3; Rev. 22:3-5.

**7. A pattern for private worship.**

- Look up - in adoration.
- Offer up- in whole 'souled out' dedication.
- Gather up- in heartfelt praise and thanksgiving.
- Get up - go with God in commitment and confidence .
- Reinforce - with teammates in Christ.

**8. Praise also releases God's power.**

## **XIV. PRAYER IN THE NAME OF JESUS CHRIST**

**I. The staggering promise of Jesus.** John 14:12-14 (see 15:7, 16:25-27).

**II. The "greater works" understood in the following context.**

A. The sovereign authority of the crucified and risen Lord "because I go to the Father." John 14:12 (Matt. 28:18-20, Phil. 2: 9-10).

B. The coming Holy Spirit. "Another companion" to be given believers. (John 14:18-25, 15:26, 16:7-15)

C. Through His Body, the church (Acts 1:1, Eph. 1:19-23, 3:20, Phil. 1:13, etc.)

**III. Christ promises greater works in the world through His people by the Holy Spirit.** John 17:16-26, I Pet. 2:9.



- A. Greater in extent. Universal, no longer merely local. For all believers everywhere.
- B. Greater in numbers, i.e. the rapid expansion of church (Acts 1:8)
- C. Greater in nature. Reconciling, redeeming, birthing in God's forever family (Eph. 2:7-10, etc.)
- D. Greater in influence and permanence. An eternal work. John 15:16.
  - Jesus died--a failure in eyes of the world. No visible fruit. "All forsook him and fled". Contrast "Your fruit shall remain."
- E. Greater in authority and power (Matt. 28:18-25, Eph. 1:15-23).

#### **IV. Christ promises greater works in the believer by the Holy Spirit (John 16:7)**

- A. A new life, God's indwelling (John 14:17 and 23)
- B. A new love for God (Romans 5:5)
- C. A new love for one another (John 15:9-17)
- D. A new obedience issuing from new trust and love in Jesus Christ (John 14:15-21)
- E. A new peace and joy (Christ's) John 14:15-18, 25-27; 15:26-27; 16:4-15.
- F. A new perception of truth--the real world of God (John 15:26; 16:13).  
The Spirit of truth bears witness to Christ, unfolds reality; exposes error; convinces of sin, righteousness and judgment; quickens with Christ's life; imparts faith and dispels doubt and fear; confronts us with the loving God.
- G. A new witness to the world (John 15:26-27).
- H. A new strength. The Holy Spirit is given to us as our Enabler.
- I. A new personal, moral and spiritual productivity--"much fruit" (John 15:5; Gal. 5:22).
- J. A new, abiding presence of God, a divine companion of the heart (John 14:15-17).

#### **V. The meaning and use of the Name**

- A. The Name stands for the person, all the person is and has done.
- B. Our prayers are heard through the person, work and worth of Jesus Christ (Romans 5:1-2, Heb. 10:11-22).
- C. *"Prayer is endorsed by the name when it is in harmony with the character, mind, desire and purpose of the party named"* (Samuel Chadwick).
- D. The use of the name may represent legal union (John 16:23-24). As a treasurer signs the checks on the account of his company or a lawyer

exercises "power of attorney," the one who gives his name to another stands aside to let the other act for him in his interests. The one using the name subordinates his/her interests to the interests of the one whose name is being used.

- E. The use of the name may represent his union, as a child carries the name of parent. We are baptized in the name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit. We belong to God. We are children of his family. Therefore seek His help to honor His name, do His will, serve his interests and boldly ask Him to protect us from evil and show us His loving kindness.
- F. The use of the name may represent a love union, oneness of heart. Earnestly desiring to please Him. Offering up all to him, receiving all from Him, trusting Him in all (II Cor. 5:14; Phil. 1:19-21, I Pet. 5:7, etc.).
- G. The use of the name in the early church "Rejoicing they were counted worthy to suffer shame for the name." (Acts 3:6, 11-16; 5:41).

Robert B. Munger

## **XV. Prayer Principles from Jesus**

### **Prayer is to be:**

- Centered in the will of God
- In accordance with the character of God
- Offered in confidence
  - That God hears
  - That God responds
  - That God answers
  - That God is good
- Concerned for the glory of god
- Offered in the Name of Jesus
  - Access to God
  - Power in prayer – Through the Holy Spirit
  - Power against the enemy
- Persistent
- Offered in faith

From the notes of R. Hestenes 9/85

## **XVI. REFLECTIONS ON PRAYER IN THE LIFE AND TEACHING OF JESUS** R.B. MUNGER

I. The importance of prayer for the Christian is established in two words, "Jesus prayed." He was "the man of prayer."

1. In prayer Jesus was equipped and empowered for service (Luke 3:21-22,5:15).
2. In prayer Jesus called and sent His disciples (Luke 6:12-13, 10:2, 22:44-51).
3. In prayer His glory was revealed to others (Luke 9:18-20, II Cor. 3:18).
4. In prayer Jesus was strengthened to do the Father's will (Luke 11:1; 22:39-46).
5. In prayer Jesus overcame death (Matthew 27:45-46; Luke 23:46; Hebrews 5:7).
6. Jesus is now praying for us (Luke 22:31-32; Romans 8:34; Hebrews 7:25).

II. Jesus taught His disciples to pray as He prayed (Luke 11:1-13, 10:2, John 14:12-14, Luke 18:1, 22:46, Phil. 1:19-21, Acts 7:60).

III. The purpose of prayer is to relate to God as Father, Jesus as Friend, the Holy Spirit as Helper and to receive all that God desires to give and do. (Luke 11:1-13).

IV. Some suggestions for personal conversation with the Father

1. Give prayer priority. Jesus did. (Mark 1:35; Luke 6:12, 22:39-46).
2. Have a place for prayer. Jesus did. (Luke 4:42, 22:39).
3. Pray with an open Bible. (John 15:7; I John 5:14) .
4. Pray with an open, forgiving heart. (Matthew 6:9-15, 18:21-35; Mark 11 :25, 6)
5. Pray definitely for specific requests. (Mark 10:46-52; Philippians 4:6)
6. Pray persistently. (Matthew 26:36-46)
7. Pray freely and fully. Pour out your heart. (Matthew 27:45-46).

8. When prayer seems unreal or difficult, pray audibly.

9. Pray expectantly and thankfully. (Luke 11:9-13; Philippians 4:6-7; I Thessalonians 5:18).

10. Pray in the strong name of Jesus Christ. (John 14:13-14) On the ground of His merit and purpose for His sake because we are His and bear His name.

11. Let Christ pray through you. (Romans 8:26-27; Hebrews 7:25). Ask His to do what you think He wants done - in you, in others, in the world.

12. Pray with others. (Matthew 18:19-20; Acts 1:14, 2:1, 13:1-3). "Prayer is more caught than taught" through association with intercessors. The power of united prayer.

Let the conversation with Christ and the Father continue through the day. Luke 18: 1-8

## **XVII. REFLECTIONS ON PRAYER IN THE LIFE AND TEACHING OF JESUS**

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## **XVIII. THE IMPORTANCE OF CORPORATE PRAYER**

### **I. The Importance of Prayer with Others**

#### **A. Taught by Jesus and the Apostles.**

- We are to pray "Our Father" (Matt. 6: 9) as well as "Father" (Luke II: 2).
- His special presence promised (Matt. 18:19-20).
- Taught by the apostles

#### **B. Practiced by Jesus and the Apostles.**

- Luke 22:39-45, Acts 1:14 ("with one accord devoted themselves," "joined together constantly"), 2:42,3:1,4:23,24,31,6:4, 12:5, 12,13:1-3, 26:36-38, 21:5, etc.
- The apostles' plea for prayer -- Romans 15:30,2 Cor. 1:11, Eph. 6: 19-20, Phil. 1:19, Col. 11:3, 2 Thess. 3:1, etc.

### **III. Some Personal Benefits of Praying Together**

- A. Through **Association** we learn and grow (Luke 11:1-2).
- B. Through **Stimulation** of sharing, prayer, doing we venture more.
- C. Through **Validation** of answers to prayer we believe God for more.
- D. Through **Sharing** of faith and life we understand more about God, ourselves, and how we should pray.

### **IV. The Special Word of Jesus Concerning United Prayer (Matt. 18:19-20)**

- A. The incredible scope of the promise, "Anything!" (Emphatic)
- B. Where the prayer is answered "on earth"--right here !
- C. The context of the promise: Matt. 18:1-35. Concerns relationships.
  1. Right attitude toward oneself (1-5).
  2. Right attitude toward "little ones" : children, the weak, the helpless, "little people" (5-14) .
  3. Right attitude toward those offending us (15-35). Key to the whole passage.
- D. Those addressed by the promise: Disciples (Matt. 17:22). (Not the multitude of listeners.)
- E. The promise is directed:
  1. To those gathered in Christ's name. (John 14:12-14,16:23-24, Acts 3:1-16, etc.)
  2. To those guided by His Word and will. Willing to follow" before they knew where He was going. with Him, for Him, under Him, obedient servants!

3. To those agreed with Christ and one A symphony harmonizing together another under baton of the Maestro.
4. To those receiving with confidence His promise to hear and respond (Mark 11:20-25).

#### **IV. Some Suggestions for Prayer Together: Conversational Prayer**

(See Rosalind Rinker, Prayer: Conversing with God.)

**Traditional Prayer:** Monologue Impersonal Language of the head Guarded, formal, unrevealing Without personal confession Insensitive to others Involves only the one No acceptance or forgiveness given or received

**Conversational Prayer:** Dialogue Personal "I" "my", J Language of the heart Open, honest, simple With personal confession Sensitive to others Involves all Acceptance and forgiveness given and received

Developed by Robert B. Munger

## **XIX. THE IMPORTANCE OF CORPORATE PRAYER**

### **I. The Importance of Prayer with Others**

#### **A. Taught by Jesus and the Apostles.**

- We are to pray "Our Father" (Matt. 6: 9) as well as "Father" (Luke II: 2).
- His special presence promised (Matt. 18:19-20).
- Taught by the apostles

#### **B. Practiced by Jesus and the Apostles.**

- Luke 22:39-45, Acts 1:14 ("with one accord devoted themselves," "joined together constantly"), 2:42,3:1,4:23,24,31,6:4, 12:5, 12,13:1-3, 26:36-38, 21:5, etc.
- The apostles' plea for prayer -- Romans 15:30,2 Cor. 1:11, Eph. 6: 19-20, Phil. 1:19, Col. 11:3, 2 Thess. 3:1, etc.

### **III. Some Personal Benefits of Praying Together**

- A. Through **Association** we learn and grow (Luke 11:1-2).

- B. Through **Stimulation** of sharing, prayer, doing we venture more.
- C. Through **Validation** of answers to prayer we believe God for more.
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## **XX. The Priority of Private Prayer**

### **Scriptural references:**

Abraham (Gen. 19:27)

Moses (Exodus 17:8-13)

David (Ps. 5:3,27:4, 7-9); Proverbs (8:17, 34-35)

Daniel (6:1-10)

Jesus (Matt. 6:6, Mark 1:35, Luke 5:16)

We can view most elements of prayer as a two-way communication with God our Father:

### **I. Speaking honestly to God about ourselves.**

A primary giving of love is self-disclosure. "Only when we are willing to put our true selves on the line, to be taken for better or for worse, to be accepted or rejected, does true interpersonal encounter begin. Martin Luther's first law of successful prayer was, *'Don't lie to God! We must tell him the truth of our thoughts, desires and feelings, whatever they may be.'*"

### **II. Effective prayer is Listening to God.**

#### **God approaches us through:**

**Our mind.** By His Spirit and truth, God helps us see persons, problems and possibilities through His eyes and in His perspectives.

**Our will.** Admitting our helplessness, He comes through prayer to put new desires into our will with new power.

**Our emotions.** God comes to us through prayer to forgive, cleanse, heal, calm, disturb and infuse with His love.

**Our imagination.** God imparts vision, opens the understanding to see new possibilities to project His purposes and promises into future possibilities.

**Our memory.** Through the stimulation of stored memory in prayer we are reminded of God's grace and goodness to use in times past making more firm our faith and gratitude in the present.

### **III. Conversation: A Dialogue of Word and Deed.**

From the notes of Robert B. Munger

## **XXI. The Lord's Prayer as a Pattern of Prayer**

Suggestion: After praying for oneself, pray by name for others one by one. Me-John-Mary.

**Monday:** "Father," today let (me, John, Mary) be assured that you are my Father in truth, knowing all about me, caring infinitely for me, to be trusted in every situation to be working for my good. (The more specific the prayer the better.)

**Tuesday:** "Hallowed be your name. " Father, today may you know joy because of me, that in my problems and perplexities, my faults and my failures, my satisfactions and my successes at the deepest level of my being, I am trusting you and want your name honored.

**Wednesday:** "Your Kingdom rule in every your will and moment of the come, your will be done." Father, may you aspect of the life of me. Help me to know do it instantly and joyfully through every day.

**Thursday:** "Give us today our daily bread." Father, you know the heart hungers, the longings of the soul within me, which no one else may know. Meet those needs. Strengthen me, supply me this day with the Bread from Heaven.

**Friday:** "Forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors. " Father help me to be honest, open and right with you and others, particularly where relationships are tense, uncomfortable and guarded. May your unconditioned and everlasting acceptance of us sinners liberate us to forgive and love.

**Saturday:** "Lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from the evil one." Father keep me from any misstep. Protect me from the adversary. May every testing

mature and strengthen me in your purpose. Deliver me from discouragement and keep me in your peace.

**Sunday:** "For thine is the kingdom and the power and the glory. " Father, today I praise you for all you are doing in my life.

You have begun the good work. You will complete it for your glory. Amen.

From the notes of Robert B. Munger

## **XXII. THE WAY OF PRAYER**

(From The Way, by E. Stanley Jones)

### **Prayer is Reality**

- "To Talk with God". No breath is lost-Talk on!
- "To Wait on God" No time is lost-Wait on!
- "To Walk with God" No strength is lost-Walk on!

**Prayer Is Receptivity**--Receptivity to Reality

**Prayer Is Response**

**Prayer is Renewal**

**Prayer is Revision**

**Prayer is Relaxation**

**Prayer is Release**

**Prayer is Rejoicing**

**Steps toward a real prayer Life**

Breathe a prayer for help as you begin life's most important exercise. Remind yourself that God is more anxious than you to set up this relationship of two-way prayer.

- Determine that a vital prayer life is worth while--the most worth-while thing in life.

- Decide how much time you can give to this prayer exercise.
- Organize the rest of the day around this prayer time. Don't let the rest of the day decide this prayer time.
- Fix the time in the morning, if at all possible. If you fix your prayer hour at night it will be backward looking. If you fix it in the morning it will be forward-looking.
- Prime your prayer pump by reading from the Scriptures to you. Let God speak through the Word.
- Still the mind before and after reading the Word. In that stillness God and your deepest desires can meet.
- If the mind wanders, do not be dismayed. Pray for the thing to which the mind wanders.
- Pray for yourself. I find myself praying less and less for things, and more and more for right relationships. For if I get the right relationships then the things needed will come as a corollary. The purification of the loyalties is the essence of purification. If there is anything in your life about which you cannot pray, bring it up relentlessly and expose it to God's presence and to His suggestions.
- Pray first for yourself, and then go out into concentric circles reaching out into ever-widening spheres. You will grow with the reach of your prayers.
- Pray for people whom you dislike and who may dislike you. That will sterilize any bad thought that may infect you.
- After you have prayed for others, ask if there are any "orders of the day" and then listen.
- When you Pray these prayers "in Jesus' name," that means in His character, not yours!
- Believe that He hears your prayers and will give what you need, at the time needed.
- Do everything that comes to your mind that would help answer the prayers.
- Drop it into the subconscious mind, and let it there be a prayer-attitude running through both the conscious and the subconscious attitudes.
- Let prayer be the climate of the day.

- If you have to wait for anybody or for anything, such as a train or an elevator, fill in that waiting time with prayer.

**Go and be a person of prayer as our Lord has called you to!**

## **XXIII. THE PROBLEM OF UNANSWERED PRAYER**

Learning to focus on God's promises and not our expectations.

*"Have faith in God... Whatever you ask for in prayer, believe that you have received it and it will be yours."* Mark 11:22-25 (N1V)

**How do we understand this in the light of unanswered prayer? Some reflections:**

**A. The promise is breathtaking but the application has some limitations.**

1. Such faith doesn't mean all prayers are answered. That would mean chaos.
2. Not faith in human faith. Our trust is to be "in God." not in the 'strength' of our faith.
3. Not faith in our prayers. Jesus teaches we are not heard for our many words (Mt. 6: 7-8).
4. Though prayer God enables us to believe, ask, and receive more than is humanly possible.
5. Faith involves risk. It ventures. (Mark 1: 14-20; John 11: 14-16; Phil. 1: 19-21, 29-30 etc..).
6. Our trust is to be in the trustworthiness of our faithful heavenly Father.
7. God reigns. Jesus, the Messiah will enter into his Kingdom. His followers may stake their lives on that (Mark 14: 61-62; Eph. 1:15; 23; Phil. 2: 9-1; etc..).
8. Then we are to be about his business through believing prayer and bold obedient action. "Expect great things from God. Attempt great things for God" (William Carey).

## **B. Prayer can be answered several ways**

YES- as a parent delighted to please the child (Luke 11: 9-13).

NO- for the sake of the child and the highest good for all.

NOT 'YET - need to learn more be mature enough to handle the answer properly.

A BETTER WAY - the Father's answer to Jesus was the Garden of Gethsemane (Mark 14: 33-36; Phil. 2: 5-11; to Paul. II Cor.12: 7-10).

## **C. The context of Mark. 11: 20-25**

1. The triumphal entry of Jesus into Jerusalem (vs. 1-10).
2. His temple experience - a foretaste of His rejection and crucifixion.
  - Israel-the barren fig tree soon to be cursed (vs. 20-21; Mark 13: 1-2).
  - His sorrow and grief (Luke 19: 41).
  - The coming failure, doubt and despair of the disciples (Mark 15: 50.72).
3. His disciples will also meet opposition and persecution.
  - They may not see all their hopes and prayers realized (John 15: 18-21; Heb. 11: 39).
  - Faith's perspective goes beyond space and time (Heb. 11: 1-39).
4. Ultimately God will grant us far more than we can ask (John 14: 1-3; II Cor. 4: 17; Eph. 3: 20-21; I Pet. 4: 13; John 3: 1-3; Rev. 21: 3-4.22: 3-5).
5. Our trust is to be in God at all times and in all situations (Mark 4: 35-41.6: 35-43; II Cor. 1: 9-10; I Thes. 5: 23-24; I Pet. 4: 12-13; Phil.1: 12-2:18).
6. Remember God's primary purpose for us in Christ (John 14: 1.17: 24; Ro. 8: 28-29; Eph. 4: 15-16).
  - To be with Christ. like Him for Him forever (I Pet. 1: 3-9; I John 3: 1-3).

## **D. Conditions for answered prayer.**

We need to be asking:

1. According to the will of God (II Chron. 7: 14; Jer. 29: 13; John 9: 31. 15: 7; I John 3: 22.5: 14-15).
  - Obey His commands. Do what pleases Him (I John 3: 22).
2. With a sincere and genuine heart (Ps. 145: 18).
3. With a forgiving heart free from resentment and with love (Mark 11:

24-25).

4. With right marital relationships (I Pet. 3: 1-7).

- Being right with others (Mt. 5: 21-26; Col. 3: 12-15).

5. With confidence in God's goodness rather than a complaining attitude (Ps. 37: 5-7).

6. With Divine deliverance from Satanic opposition (Dan. 10: 12-13; Eph. 6: 10-20).

7. With right motive. In the name and for the sake of Jesus Christ and the glory of the Father (John 14: 12-14. 10: 23-24).

8. With faith - personal trust in God's trustworthiness.

Let go. Let God handle it. Let Him be in control (Mark 11: 22-25; Luke 23: 46; Heb. 11: 6).

E. God's primary eternal purpose will take precedence over our secondary desires, even of His love.

1. Abraham (Ro. 4: 16-22).

2. Jacob (Gen. 32: 22-32~~).

3. Daniel (Dan. 9: 1-3.20-23).

4. Job (Job 42: 1-6).

5. Jesus (Mark 14: 33-36; Phil. 2: 5-11).

6. Paul (II Cor. 1: 9-10; Phil. 1:12-2:18).

7. Peter (I Pet. 4: 12-13).

8. You

## **F. The prayer of faith; in the Object not the Subject in God!**

- At times the gift of an inner witness of assurance (Mark 11: 24).

Prayer does mighty things. It does not change God's intentions. Although it may change His action by opening the way for His love through our repentance as well as our sincere obedience and faith. Let God say, give and do through us what He wills. Why fight it, He is God and you are not, guess who will win!

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***"The LORD bless you and keep you; the LORD make his face shine upon you and be gracious to you; the LORD turn his face toward you and give you peace." Nub. 6:24-26***