



Lesson 6: prayer

What is prayer? Prayer is simply talking to God. You don't need to use any special language; just talk to God like you would to anyone else you respect and honor.

It's important that we communicate with God. God speaks to us through the Bible, and we speak to God through prayer. Further, God uses our prayer to advance His program. That is, His will is often fulfilled in answer to our prayers. And God repeatedly tells us that we should pray. So prayer is a very important part of the Christian life.

Prayer is not just asking for things. In prayer, we acknowledge that God is in control of all things and that we depend on Him for all things. We don't pray in order to change God's mind or His plan.

Matthew 6:5-15 gives us much information about prayer. Note the following from this passage:

1. The wrong way to pray
 - a. showing off .5
 - b. empty ritual .7
2. The right way to pray
 - a. Begin by acknowledging who God is. .9-10
 What does "hallowed" mean?
 Other examples of this:
 - 1 Chronicles 29:10-12. *Notice that David does not get around to asking for anything until vs. 18.*
 - Nehemiah 1:5f
 - Nehemiah 9:5f
 - b. Ask for what you need. .11
 "Daily bread" speaks of daily needs, not luxuries or conveniences. God promises to meet our needs, not to give us everything we want.
 - c. Ask for forgiveness. .12 *see also 1 John 1:9*
 - d. Ask for help. .13
3. How to pray
 - a. Pray according to God's will. 1 John 5:14, 3:22
 God answers prayer according to His own will and good pleasure. All our prayers must submit to God's overall plan, which cannot be thwarted or changed.
 - b. Pray often. Psalm 86:3; 1 Thes 5:17
 - c. Pray for others. 1 Thes 5:25; 1 Timothy 2:1-2
 - ☐ Church – pastors & teachers, deacons, missionaries, events, plans
 - ☐ Parents, family members
 - ☐ Governmental leaders – president & cabinet, House and Senate, courts, state and local government, etc.

- ☐ Friends, school, teams, etc.
 - d. Pray over your food. 1 Timothy 4:3-5
 - e. Pray privately. Matthew 6:5-6
 - f. Pray persistently. Colossians 4:2
 - g. Pray to God, in Jesus' name, through the power of the Holy Spirit. Acts 12:5; John 16:24; Eph 6:18
- 4. A pattern for prayer:
 - ACTS -- Adoration (i.e., praising God for who he is) Nehemiah 9:6-7
 - Confession 1 John 1:9 Confession is simply agreeing with God about the nature of your sin. We ought to confess and forsake sin before asking God for anything.
 - Thanksgiving 1 Thes 5:18
 - Supplication Phil 4:6 Supplication is asking for things. It's not wrong to ask God for things you need or want. However, note that one should not ask for things just to "consume it upon your lusts" (James 4:3).
- 5. Hindrances to prayer
 - ☹ (James 1:6-7)
 - ☹ (Isa 59:1-4)
 - ☹ (Mark 11:25)
 - ☹ (Psalm 66:18)
 - ☹ (James 4:3)
- 6. Hints for effective prayer
 - ☐ Plan your schedule so you can pray daily. Mornings are often the best time, but work out your schedule in a way that suits you best.
 - ☐ Find a quiet place away from distractions so you can concentrate.
 - ☐ Use a list. Pray through the church directory. Use the prayer lists available.
 - ☐ Keep track of answered prayer. Keep a prayer journal.
- 7. Corporate prayer

Acts 12:5 *Peter was kept in prison, **but the church was earnestly praying to God for him.***

Corporate prayer occurs when the church assembles to pray. Seek to participate in opportunities for corporate prayer at your church. The Wednesday evening service usually emphasizes prayer.
- 8. Misconceptions about prayer
 - ☹ Prayer does not inform God of anything he doesn't already know. God knows what we need before we pray (Matt 6:32).

- ⊗ Prayer is not some kind of secret formula or special key to unlock a special door to God's blessings. Prayer is more than just reciting a certain set of words. Man cannot bind or unlock the accomplishment of God's will. *E.g., Prayer of Jabez book – underlying principle is wrong.*
- ⊗ Prayer is not a means of changing God's mind or getting what you want. Humans cannot change God's eternal plan for the universe. God does not wait around, hoping for us to pray so that he can accomplish his purposes.
- ⊗ God is under no obligation to answer prayer in the way that we want. Praying for lengthy periods, fasting, or other similar behaviors do not strengthen our prayers or make it more likely that God will answer us according to our desires.

Conclusion: Prayer is an essential aspect of the Christian life. It's an act of worship and a means of fellowshiping with God. Each day you should set aside a little time to pray. Don't neglect prayer.

Discussion:

1. Why is prayer an important part of the Christian life?
2. Can prayer change God's eternal will (his decrees)?
3. What did Paul mean by "pray without ceasing"?
4. What answers does God give to prayer?
5. If God knows what we need, and if prayer doesn't change God's eternal plan, why should we pray?