

Lesson 6: Prayer

For the last two lessons we have focused on studying the Bible. First, we looked at studying the Bible individually, then we considered how to conduct a group Bible study. Today we turn our attention to prayer. While studying the Bible and prayer may not seem related at first, we'll soon see that they are very interconnected. Before we look at this connection, though, let's consider some of the things the Bible itself says about what prayer is and why it is important.

Why Do We Need to Pray?

GOD COMMANDS US TO PRAY

- Read Luke 18:1–8. What does this passage tell us about prayer?
- How and how often are we told to pray in Ephesians 6:18?

THROUGH PRAYER WE RECEIVE MERCY AND GRACE FROM GOD

- Hebrews 4:16 is a reference to prayer. Read Hebrews 4:14–16. What does it mean to “receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need?”
- How should we approach God’s throne of grace?
- What does 1 Peter 5:6,7 tell us about receiving grace and mercy from God?

THROUGH PRAYER WE RECEIVE WISDOM FROM GOD

- Read James 1:5–8. What does it mean to “lack wisdom,” and when might we find ourselves lacking wisdom?

- What are we to avoid when we are asking God for wisdom?

How Should We Pray?

INVESTIGATING THE MODEL PRAYER

In Matthew 6:9–13, Jesus gave His disciples a model prayer. Have someone in your group read this prayer aloud, and then answer these questions together:

- What different things is Jesus teaching His disciples to pray about?

- What do you notice about the order of the items in the prayer?

Many people think of prayer as an opportunity to ask God for things, but it is much, much more than that. More than anything else, prayer enables us to communicate with God and hear from God, and thus to align ourselves with His will. In many ways God uses prayer to change us more than to change our circumstances.

UNDERSTANDING THE ELEMENTS OF PRAYER

A popular way of remembering the various elements of prayer is to use the acronym **ACTS**:

ADORATION: This is another name for praising God. When we praise God, we are pointing out the greatness and goodness of His character. The wonderful thing is that when we praise God, we experience happiness ourselves!

We always start with adoration, because prayer is first and foremost about the glory of God. One of the biggest mistakes people make in prayer is allowing their prayers to become need-based, rather than worship-based. Eventually this gets terribly boring and deflating. A great way to prevent this is to spend at least one-quarter of your allotted time on the adoration step, and during this time, *do not ask God for anything!*

In your group, take two or three minutes right now and express adoration for God in prayer.

CONFESSION: Read 1 John 1:8,9. What does this passage tell us about confessing our sins?

To confess our sins to God is simply to admit that our sins are, in fact, sins. It does not mean to work ourselves into a sad mood, though it is natural that we feel remorse when we properly recognize our sins as offensive to God. Usually we confess our sins by naming certain sinful actions we have committed, or certain sinful thoughts and attitudes of our hearts. There is also much biblical precedent for confessing group sin to God, such as the sins of our family or nation.

Take two or three minutes before God and offer confession to Him.

THANKSGIVING: This is a critical aspect of prayer (see Philippians 4:6; 1 Thessalonians 5:18). While there is some overlap with adoration, thanksgiving tends to be more focused than adoration on specific benefits that God has given us. This could be as basic as thanking God for our food, or it could be thankfulness for a circumstance in our lives—even a negative circumstance that we realize God is going to use for our good.

Stop right now and take two or three minutes as a group to thank God for what He has done.

SUPPLICATION: This is a word that we don't use very often in everyday speech, but it just means asking for something. This is the part of prayer that most people think of when they think of prayer, but we place it last, not because it is unimportant, but because of the need to enter into this phase of prayer with the right mindset. Remember that we can and should ask God to help us, but we also should pray for others we know and even those far from us.

Instead of going to God in supplication right now, let's discuss a few things that are particularly helpful as we consider what we might ask God for.

ASKING ACCORDING TO GOD'S WILL

When considering how we ought to pray, we should remember God's promise in the Gospel of John:

1 John 5:14,15

And this is the confidence that we have toward Him, that if we ask anything according to His will He hears us. And if we know that He hears us in whatever we ask, we know that we have the requests that we have asked of Him.

This is good news for those who desire to pray!

Notice that God says He will grant requests that are asked "according to His will." This is especially important to remember in the "supplication" aspect of prayer. We can say that our supplications (requests) are according to His will if certain things are true:

We pray in Jesus' name (John 14:13). Praying in Jesus' name is not a matter of saying, "In Jesus' name, Amen" at the end of a prayer (though that's not a bad thing). The idea here is that when we pray, we recognize that we are asking whatever we ask as those who are unified with Jesus, calling on His power and seeking things that will honor Him and advance His mission.

We abide in Jesus and His words abide in us (John 15:7). Abiding in Jesus is a profound subject, but for our purposes we can summarize it by saying that those who abide in Christ are trusting what He says in daily life and experiencing the filling of the Holy Spirit (Ephesians 5:18) as a result. This indicates that choosing not to trust Jesus and His words hinders our prayers.

We submit our wills to God's will. Read Luke 22:39–43. What do you think Jesus meant by saying, "Nevertheless, not My will, but Yours, be done" (verse 42)?

In certain cases, we know already that God will bring something about if we ask for it. For example, in James 1:5–8 we learned that He promised to give wisdom to those who request it in faith. Sometimes, however, we don't know if God wants something to happen, such as when we pray for our offer on a house to be accepted.

In such cases, we follow Jesus' model by presenting our requests earnestly, knowing that God may have a better housing situation in mind for us, and sometimes explicitly acknowledging, as Jesus did, that we want God's will rather than our own.

In light of all this, take a few minutes as a group and offer requests to God according to His will.

PRAYING ACCORDING TO THE BIBLE

God is pleased to hear us express our hearts to Him, but prayer becomes powerful when we shape our prayers according to the Bible. The best way to learn to do this is to connect our study of a passage with prayer. Let's say that you have just studied a passage of Scripture following the Sword Method. You now have answered four basic questions about the passage:

- What does this passage tell me about God/Jesus?
- What does this passage tell me about man?
- Are there any examples to follow?
- Are there any commands to obey?

Note that each of these questions provides direction for prayer. For example, in question 1, we identify what a passage has taught us about God/Jesus. These things we have identified become items to praise God for, such as His wisdom, goodness, power, holiness, etc.

- How might the things we learn about mankind guide us in prayer?
- How about examples we see? How do those guide our prayers?
- How should our prayers reflect any commands we see in a Scripture passage?

You get the point by now. Our study of the Bible is important in its own right, but it is also important if we want to pray effectively.

Looking Forward

TIME TO PRACTICE

Let's practice prayer in the ACTS model by looking at Psalm 1. First read the Psalm, and then use the Sword Method to write down answers to the four questions below:

- What does this passage tell me about God/Jesus?
- What does this passage tell me about man?
- Are there any examples to follow?
- Are there any commands to obey?

After you have done this, take some time as a group to pray through Psalm 1, making sure to include adoration, confession, thanksgiving, and supplication, in that order.

Let's review today's lesson. You learned a number of things today:

- Why we need to pray
- How we should pray
 - The model prayer
 - The elements of prayer (the ACTS model)
 - Asking according to God's will
 - Praying according to the Bible

Good work! The skills you learned today will serve you for a lifetime if you utilize them. Let's get that process started.

SET GOALS AND PRAY

Take a moment and prayerfully consider how God's Spirit might want you to put this lesson into practice. Identify a short-term, measurable action step—an "I Will" item—that you can accomplish by His help this week. Then share these "I Will" items with one another and close the meeting by praying for one another that God will help you through His Spirit to succeed.