



The Christian Life

Module 8

Prayer

MODULE EIGHT

Prayer

INTRODUCTION

Prayer is one of the most potent forces in the world today. Everyone can pray, although, as we shall see, God seldom hears the prayers for the unrighteous unless they are coming to Him for forgiveness through Jesus Christ.

Yet strangely, many Christians know very little about prayer. Some think of prayer only as “pleading with God” when a crisis comes. Others are selfish about their prayers. They pray only when they want something from God. Sadly, some people know prayer only as something the pastor does in church on Sunday morning.

But the truth is that prayer is much more than any of these things. **In this lesson we will help you understand what prayer really is and what it can do for your life and ministry.**

One of the aims of this study is to teach you how to pray. You can experience the power of prayer. James points out in his letter that Elijah was a human “as we are.” **His prayers held back the rains and then brought them once again** (James 5:17-18).

And according to the Word of God, **YOU** can pray like Elijah!

1. THE MEANING AND VALUE OF PRAYER

STUDY Acts 12:1-17.

From the study of this passage you can see the value and power of prayer. When King Herod (not Herod the Great who tried to kill the baby Jesus, but his grandson, Herod Agrippa I, ruler of Galilee) violently persecuted the Church, the early Christians turned to **earnest prayer**. Verses 6-17 tell us of an incredible series of miracles which might not have happened **except for the prayers of simple believers like each of us**.

Few would doubt that prayer is one of the most powerful agents in the world. But what is prayer? Is it simply asking God for help and for things, or is it more than that?

Simply, **prayer is communication** with God. By communication we mean not only a verbal interchange, but also an **emotional** and **spiritual** encounter. God is not just a listening ear in the sky. He is much more than that. He is deeply involved with our frustrations and our joys, our defeats and our triumphs. **Through prayer we share ourselves with Him, and He shares Himself with us**. Prayer is the highest form of communication known to man.

STUDY 1 Timothy 2:1.

It has probably been obvious to you from our discussion that prayer is **not** simply asking God for help or for things. While prayer can and should include petitions, it is much more than “God, give me this and give me that.”

What Prayer is All About

Paul says that Christians should pray for all people, and in so commanding us he uses four words or phrases which tell us what prayer is all about.

The first word is simply translated **pray**, and this is the most common word for prayer in the New Testament. It has a general meaning and would include anything one might say to God. However, it has the connotation of **worship**, and truly real prayer is an act of worship. Just as we love to hear the praises of others, **God loves to hear the praises of His people**. Hebrews 13:15 says, “Therefore, let us offer through Jesus a continual sacrifice of praise to God, proclaiming our allegiance to his name.”

We have much to praise God for! But sometimes we’re so busy telling God our problems we forget to praise Him for His great love. The Bible says that God is enthroned on the praises of His people (Psalms 22:3), and often it is when we begin to **praise God** that our problems start to shrink in size until we can see a possible solution. Praise God first. And then petition Him for your needs. Soon you will see a difference in your life.

The second is the phrase, **ask God to help** (supplication), a translation of the Greek word, for the idea here is that of **humbly** calling upon God. The word does mean to “earnestly petition God”, but it is to be done with all humility, recognising God as our Creator, Sustainer, and **Provider**. One who **demand**s things of God should not expect to receive anything.

The third word Paul uses is **intercede**. While the Greek meaning of the word is close to petition, the implication here is that it is **prayer for someone other than the person praying**. Intercession is properly defined as “petition to God in favour of another.”

There is no prayer less selfish and at the same time more beautiful in the eyes of God than a prayer for someone else. It is probably true that most of us are serving God today because a Christian took time to pray for us.

This kind of prayer often requires patience. But don’t let this stop you from being persistent, for you will be blessed along the way.

The fourth phrase in this verse is **give thanks**. It is more than **saying** thanks. It is an **attitude** of thankfulness and gratitude. How often we forget to thank God for His help and blessings! **Whenever you pray, make thanksgiving an integral part of your communication with God.**

So prayer, then, is more than petition for personal gain. It is also **worship, intercession, and thanksgiving**, as one **humbly communicates with God**. Now let us look at several scriptures which illustrate the value of prayer.

The Life-Changing Power of Prayer

STUDY Luke 6:27-28 and 1 John 4:19-21.

One of the hardest things to do is to love a person who acts like he can't stand you or who has abused you. The human spirit in each of us has a tendency to retaliate in kind: Love for love, hate for hate, and abuse for abuse. But John writes that **no man can really love God if he has hate in his heart for his brother**. We are, in fact, **commanded by Jesus** to love the very ones who would despise us and do evil to us.

To be sure, loving our enemies is not an easy task. We will discuss the subject in more depth in Lesson Ten, but for now it is important to note that **prayer for one's enemies is one of the keys to loving them**. If you have never prayed for one who has abused you, try it! You'll be amazed how God will give you a heart of love.

SELF-STUDY #1

STUDY Psalm 32 in detail. This is David's teaching on the blessings of God's forgiveness, which comes through prayer. Some of the teaching is given in proverbial language, but see if you can answer the following questions:

- (a) (vs. 1-2) What kind of a person is David referring to by phrase, "whose lives are lived in complete honesty!?" _____
 - (b) (vs.3-4) What was wrong with David when he refused to confess his sins to God?

 - (c) (v.5) What happened when David confessed his sins to God? _____

 - (d) (vs. 6-7) What does David say God will do for a person who honestly repents of his sins? _____
 - (e) (vs. 8-9) How does God want us to respond to David's teaching?

 - (f) (vs. 10-11) What is the ultimate experience of a person who prays the prayer of confession and receives God's forgiveness? _____

-

STUDY Psalm 34:4 and Philippians 4:4-8.

King David of ancient Israel not only experienced God's forgiveness, but also the blessing of being delivered from all his fears. If anyone had reason to fear, David did, for he was a man who was hunted by his enemies. But David says that when he **sought the Lord**, God answered him and took away **all of his fears**.

Many people are overcome with fear. If you are like most people you are no exception, for all of us know fear from time to time.

But praise God! He has the answer for fear!

And that answer is **prayer**. God's formula for worry is found in the above passage in Philippians. You should mark it well in your Bible.

First of all, Paul writes that we should **rejoice in the Lord**. And we have something to rejoice about. Remember, 1 John 4:4 says that Jesus Christ, who lives within us, is greater than anything in the world. **Through Him we can conquer all worry.**

Paul goes on to give us his most important advice. And that is **pray**. The instructions he gave Timothy are good for us today. Our prayers should be humbly given with praise and thanksgiving. Then God will help us. Our fears will be replaced with His peace - a peace the world will never begin to understand.

Paul adds in verse 8 that instead of thinking negative thoughts we should think positively. Many people do not set aside their negative thoughts even when they're praying! But to conquer worry one must pray with a positive attitude.

These are just a few examples of the value of prayer. Later in the lesson we will look at several men and women in the Old and New Testaments who discovered the power of prayer. But the best examples of all will be **your own**. The more you pray the more you will understand and appreciate the value of prayer-filled life.

2. PROPER ATTITUDES IN COMMUNICATING WITH GOD

Some people wonder why God does not hear their prayers. While there are several reasons for unanswered prayer, one of the major reasons is that people often approach God with **improper attitudes**. In this section we will show you how **proper** attitudes both of the heart and the mind can make quite a difference in your prayer life. Listed below are seven attitudes which you should note well.

Some Keys to Answered Prayer

(1) A desire to serve Jesus. STUDY John 15:6-7.

Jesus warned that if a man did not remain in Him he would be cast forth as a dead branch and thrown into the fire. It is tragic yet nevertheless true that not everyone who receives Christ as Saviour continues to follow Him. Jesus Himself said in the Parable of the Sower (Matthew 13:1-23) that some would fall away from Him through the attraction of the delights and riches of the **world**.

On the other hand, Jesus said if a person was really living for Him - **giving Him first place in his life** - whatever he asked would be done for him. This is the first key to answered prayer.

(2) An obedient spirit. STUDY 1 John 3:21-22 and 5:14-15.

John states boldly that if we are obedient to God we will “we will receive from him whatever we ask.” He adds in Chapter 5 the qualification that it is only when we pray according to His will that He hears us (responds). Then we can have the confidence that our prayers will be answered.

You can see how each of these scriptures is tied together. **If you abide in Christ, you will be obedient to God. His desire will become your desires and your prayers will be according to God’s will.** And then you will be seeing some marvellous results in your prayer life.

(3) A desire for righteousness. STUDY James 5:16-18.

Sin will always get in the way of prayer. But our desire for righteousness causes God to hear, to respond, and to bless.

James says the prayer of a righteous person has “great power”. To illustrate his point, he tells how the famous Old Testament prophet Elijah stopped the rains for 3½ years and then brought them again through **his prayers**. Elijah was a righteous man who prayed according to the will of God. Yet at the same time James points out that **he was a human being just like we are**.

Can your prayers have the same power as Elijah’s? Yes! The only qualification is that you be willing to **live the same righteous life as Elijah**.

(4) A contrite heart. STUDY Isaiah 57:15.

The word contrite refers to a “grieving for sin”. In other words, it means to be sorry for sin. Sorry enough to do something about it.

All of us slip and sin from time to time (see 1 John 1:8). As long as we repent God does not hold the sin against us. It is only when we enjoy sinning, or refuse to admit we are sinning,

that we get into trouble. Unconfessed sin will hinder prayer every time, but genuine repentance will bring about God's quick response.

(5) A forgiving spirit. STUDY Mark 11:25.

It's not easy to forgive others. But Jesus, after He had told the disciples to have faith when they prayed, then instructed them that the first prerequisite to answered prayer is to forgive the actions of others against them. Why? Jesus said, "**so that**" God could forgive the one who was praying of his sins.

No wonder some Christians have a lot of problems! No wonder they seem to get nowhere with their prayers! People who harbour grudges have made judgements against people and situations and need to forgive. **Forgive** - and God will answer your prayers.

(6) Humility, STUDY Luke 18:9-14 and 1 Peter 5:5.

We have already talked at some length about the importance of humility in prayer. In this parable Jesus warns us not to become self-righteous, but to openly and honestly bring out lives before God. "Those who humble themselves will be exalted."

(7) Faith. STUDY Mark 11:24.

We discussed faith in the previous lesson, and so we will not go into detail on the subject again. However, it should be noted that we have placed faith last for a reason. For, while it is a dynamic part of a successful life, it is useless to exercise faith **unless** the previous six attitudes are characteristic of your life. **Faith cannot cover a multitude of sins.** But when our lives are in harmony with Jesus Christ, **faith is a powerful force in appropriating all that God has for us.**

3. HINDRANCES TO ANSWERED PRAYER

Not only can one have improper attitudes in prayer, but our lives can be cluttered with a number of hindrances to even receiving an answer from God. Check and see if any of the following hindrances have cluttered your prayer life.

(1) Ignoring God. STUDY Proverbs 1:22-23.

The words of this proverb may appear to be harsh, but in reality they are not, for they present the picture of people who have totally rejected not only the wisdom and knowledge of God, but also His love. They are people to whom God has spoken many times (vs. 24-25), and yet they have chosen to ignore Him. And so He is forced to declare, "When they cry for help, I will not answer". (v.28).

We cannot expect God to answer our prayers when we have turned Him off and shut Him out of our lives. And we do just this when we refuse to obey His word or do His will. How tragic that many miss out on the blessings God has promised to those who listen to Him (v. 33). And that includes the blessing of answered prayer.

(2) Sin. STUDY Psalms 66:18-20 and Isaiah 59:1-2.

It was mentioned in the previous section that the attitude of righteousness is necessary for a successful prayer life. These two passages of Scripture further emphasize this point. The psalmist, while realising that God would **not even have listened to him if he had unconfessed sin**, praised God because He answered his prayer.

Isaiah the prophet tells us that the desire of God is to help those who call upon Him. **But sin separates us from God so that He does not even listen to our prayers.** Sin is deadly. You cannot know the power of prayer if sin is a habitual part of your life.

(3) Mistreatment of wives. STUDY 1 Peter 3:7

Husbands, did you know that your prayers could be hindered by the mistreatment of your wives? Listen to Peter! In his day a woman, unless she was born of noble blood, was often little more than a "thing". Jesus elevated women to their proper place in the sight of God. And, as Peter writes, **she is your equal partner in God's gift of new life** (see also Galatians 3:27-29).

God, in fact, although He has ordained husbands to be the heads of families, and wives to be submissive to them, does not see a man as better than a woman. **A Christian woman is just as precious in the sight of God as a man is.**

And so Peter points out that a man who mistreats his wife in any way should not expect God to answer his prayers. **One might infer that the reverse is true also.** It is a beautiful thing when husbands and wives reciprocate love.

(4) Selfishness. STUDY James 4:3.

James speaks rather strongly against "give me" prayers. It's important to consider **why** we are praying for a certain thing **before** we approach God with our request.

(5) Out of harmony with God's will. STUDY 1 John 5:14-15.

We have already discussed this aspect of prayer and will not go into detail again. However, it should be noted that John says when we pray according to God's will we know that **we will receive our requests.** There is a dynamic about being in the will of God

which affects every area of our lives, not the least of which is the assurance that God will answer our prayers.

Someone may ask, "What if I don't know the will of God?" What is the remedy for that situation?

First of all, Romans 8:26-27 tells us that the Holy Spirit prays for us when we do not know how to pray. Paul says that the Holy Spirit "pleads for us believers in harmony with God's own will" (Romans 8:27). Secondly, if you do not know God's will, **ask** Him! Both Jesus (Matthew 26:36-46) and Paul (2 Corinthians 12:2-10) sought God's will, and **He told them exactly what His will was.**

More than anything God desires that we do His will here on earth. He will not withhold that information from us. Many times, of course, God's will for us is already written in the Bible. But many specifics, such as what job He wants us to have, can only be known through prayer and listening to the Holy Spirit communicating with our spirits. So remember, when in doubt, **ask!** God will **delight** in telling you His will.

(6) Doubt. STUDY James 1:5-8.

We've already looked at this passage in our lesson on faith, but it's worth examining again.

Have you ever been on the ocean or on a lake when a windstorm came up? If so, you recall how the wind tossed the waves to and fro, and probably rocked the boat you were riding in! James says a person who doubts is like a wind-swept wave, totally unstable and incapable of receiving anything from the Lord.

God wants us to have faith in Him, faith that He really does love us and wants to bless us; and faith that nothing is impossible with Him. If you have any problems exercising faith, go back and restudy Lesson Seven. God will help you conquer doubt with a positive, dynamic faith in Him.

4. RESULTS OF PRAYER IN THE OLD AND NEW TESTAMENTS

STUDY 1 Chronicles 4:9-10.

Throughout the Bible there are vivid examples of the results of prayer by men and women of God. First we will look at a little known man by the name of Jabez.

On first glance it might appear that Jabez prayed a “give me” prayer. He asked God to bless him in several ways. But verse 9 tells us that he was an honourable man, indicating that he served God and kept the law. It is **not** wrong to ask God to bless us when we are walking in His ways. For, when we are living for Him, God delights in showering blessings upon us.

SELF-STUDY #2

STUDY the amazing story of King Hezekiah’s answered prayer in 2 Kings 20:1-7, and then answer the following questions:

- (a) What was about to happen to Hezekiah? _____
 - (b) Where did Isaiah the prophet get his information that Hezekiah would not recover? _____
 - (c) What is the content of his prayer? _____

 - (d) Did God wait long to answer his prayer? _____
 - (e) What was it besides Hezekiah’s prayer which influenced God?

 - (f) What does this incident reveal about God’s response to our prayers?

-

The Prayer Life of Jesus

STUDY Luke 6:12-16.

The amazing thing about this story is that Jesus found it necessary to pray **all night**. **If Jesus, being the Son of God, needed to spend so much time in prayer, how much more do we need to pray?**

What was Jesus praying about? Luke does not tell us, but it is fairly safe to assume that He was seeking God’s will as to the ones He should pick to be the Twelve Apostles. For, when it was day, the first thing He did was pick twelve men from among His followers to be specially appointed as apostles.

One of them, Judas, became a traitor. But the others, following the death and resurrection of Jesus, fulfilled the Great Commission (see Matthew 28:18-20) by taking the Gospel to various parts of the known world. You can see how important Jesus’ prayer of the night before became.

As the records of the Gospels show, Jesus prayed often for His apostles and disciples. The entire 17th Chapter of John is a beautiful and precious prayer not only for His followers then but **for us also**. You might want to take a look at it on your own. It will bless your heart.

STUDY Acts 4:24-31.

Before we discuss the prayer, let's look at the historical background. This was in the early days of the Church, not long after Jesus ascended into Heaven. Peter and John had been arrested because they were preaching that Jesus was the resurrected Christ; and for healing a cripple in Jesus' name. (For the whole exciting story, study Acts 3:1-4:31).

When Peter and John were released they reported back to the disciples. Then, instead of retreating to their homes in fear, they all (verse 24) had a **prayer meeting!** What did they pray for? **More miracles, and the power to preach the Good News of Jesus even more boldly!**

And how did God respond? The building they were meeting in was literally shaken by His power. The rest of the Book of Acts is an **exciting account of miracles and the boldness of the apostles and disciples** as they preached Jesus all over the Mediterranean area, Asia Minor, and on up into Europe. Tradition states that the early Church even went down to Africa.

Suppose these mighty men of God had **not** prayed? The whole course of early Church history might read differently today. Because they realized the importance of a disciplined prayer life, things began to happen for them. So it is today that you can also have a powerful and effective prayer life.

5. HOW TO DEVELOP AN EFFECTIVE PRAYER LIFE

STUDY Colossians 4:2 and 1 Thessalonians 5:16-18.

There's only one way to develop an effective prayer life, and that is to **pray**. All great men of the Bible, including Jesus spent much time in prayer. We are not told how much to pray, but rather to "**pray constantly.**" **The more you pray, the more you will receive from God, and the more you receive from God the more you will pray.** Prayer produces prayer.

More often than not, someone will ask, "How do I pray?" First of all, you must remember that prayer is communication of one's total being with God. In prayer not only do you talk to God, but you communicate with Him through your mind and your emotions. **Prayer is a sharing of yourself with God.**

While one should approach God with all humility, **you should feel free to talk to Him even as you would a close friend or a loved one.** Express your joys and your sorrows to Him. Ask Him for understanding and guidance.

And don't forget the power of intercessory prayer. Spend a good portion of your prayer time praying for others.

It's also important that we don't get into the rut of repeating form or "said" prayers, for this is an easy way to cut off our effectiveness. Rather, be specific when you pray. If you have trouble with this, pray that God will help you take a personal interest in others and their prayer requests. Soon you will find you will never run out of things to pray about.

STUDY Luke 18:1-8.

Last, but by no means least, **have patience in prayer.** God sometimes responds immediately, and those are blessed moments in prayer. But on other occasions the answer may not come right away. God may simply be telling you to wait.

Yet whatever the case, we can be assured that God does love us and that He does answer prayer. **The effective prayer of a righteous person does have great power.**

Moreover, **God needs your prayers. Prayer is spiritual power.** God needs the power of your prayers to work on behalf of His servants around the world. God may not call you to preach or teach, but **He has called each of us to pray.** So get in the habit of praying, and you will know the joys that only a life of prayer can bring.

SELF-STUDY #3

1. What is prayer? _____
2. Give the meaning of each of the four words Paul uses for prayer.
 - (a) Supplication _____
 - (b) Prayer _____
 - (c) Intercession _____
 - (d) Thanksgiving _____
3. One of the best ways to love one's enemies is to pray for them. T () F ()
4. Even though David was a man of prayer, he was greatly afraid of God. T () F ()
5. List Paul's three steps to conquering worry.
 - (a) _____
 - (b) _____
 - (c) _____
6. Once you have received Christ as your Saviour, you can never turn away from Him. T () F ()
7. God will automatically answer our prayers if we say the words, "In Jesus' name." T () F ()
8. A desire for righteousness results in answered Prayer. T () F ()
9. Some grudges are justified. T () F ()
10. Faith always brings God's quick response no matter what our hearts are like. T () F ()
11. God does not even listen to our prayers if we deliberately sin. T () F ()
12. Which of the following should you do if you do not know God's will for your life.
 - (a) Open up your Bible and put your finger.
 - (b) Seek out a wise Christian to prophesy over you.
 - (c) Read a horoscope.
 - (d) Ask God to show you His will.
13. Why did God answer King Hezekiah's prayer?
 - (a) God loved him.
 - (b) He needed Hezekiah to defeat the enemies of Israel.
 - (c) God wanted to demonstrate His power.
 - (d) Hezekiah was the only person who really loved God.
14. Jesus did not really need to pray but did so as an example for us. T () F ()

15. The early apostles and disciples needed frequent prayer meetings. T () F ()
16. The number one key to developing an effective prayer life is to pray. T () F ()
17. How should a person talk to God.
 - (a) With fear
 - (b) Freely sharing your innermost self.
 - (c) With pious words and phrases.
 - (d) All of the above.
18. A person can talk to God any place and any time. T () F ()
19. We do not need to pray unless we can think of something urgent to pray about.
T () F ()
20. God really does need our prayers. T () F ()

ANSWERS TO SELF-STUDY #1

- (a) A person who has not deceived himself into thinking he is sinless (see I John 1:8 and 10).
- (b) He was sick.
- (c) God forgave him.
- (d) He will protect him from trouble.
- (e) He wants us to receive it in humility and follow David's advice.
- (f) He is filled with God's love and joy.

ANSWERS TO SELF-STUDY #2

- (a) He was about to die.
- (b) From God.
- (c) He simply reminded God that he had always done right in His sight.
- (d) No.
- (e) His tears.
- (f) He sometimes changes His mind!

ANSWERS TO SELF-STUDY #3

- 1. Communion with God
- 2. (a) To humbly (OR earnestly) petition God
(b) To worship and praise God
(c) To pray for someone else
(d) To have an attitude of thankfulness
- 3. T
- 4. F
- 5. (a) Rejoice in the Lord
(b) Pray
(c) Think positively
- 6. F
- 7. F

8. T
9. F
10. F
11. T
12. D
13. A
14. F
15. T
16. T
17. B
18. T
19. F
20. T