



PRAYER 101

12 INTERACTIVE BIBLE STUDIES
FOR SMALL GROUPS AND INDIVIDUALS

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Growing Our Conversation with God

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Prayer 101: Growing Our Conversations with God
12 INTERACTIVE BIBLE STUDIES FOR SMALL GROUPS AND INDIVIDUALS
Leader's Guide
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INTRODUCTION

“Now Jesus was praying in a certain place, and when he finished, one of his disciples said to him, ‘Lord, teach us to pray...’ (Luke 11:1)

In the first sentence of Tim Keller’s book, *Prayer: Experiencing Awe and Intimacy with God*, he says the following: “In the second half of my adult life, I discovered prayer.”¹ This statement gave me great pause in my attempts to write a study on prayer. But Keller goes on, and this time quotes the great D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones:

Prayer is nonetheless an exceedingly difficult subject to write about. That is not primarily because it is so indefinable but because, before it, we feel so small and helpless. Lloyd-Jones once said that he has never written on prayer because of a sense of personal inadequacy in this area.²

Let me just say that I already felt inadequate to write on prayer simply based on my own personal struggles – I’m inconsistent, I’m easily distracted, I’m undisciplined. Then I read of theological greats like Keller and Lloyd-Jones feeling ill-equipped and almost gave up. I’m humbled and intimidated at the task ahead, but then it occurred to me – isn’t that a good place to be when thinking or writing about prayer?

I say all of that – not simply because it’s true – but because I’m fairly certain most of you teaching this material feel intimidated by the subject. Maybe you share the inconsistencies and distracted mindset I so often have? And if you aren’t intimidated by teaching on prayer...you should be. But remember, that’s a good place to be.

In many ways, prayer is a difficult thing to define. If we’ve grown up in the church, we’ve heard people pray, we’ve prayed, and many of us have been taught about prayer, but it’s a mysterious thing. In one sense, we don’t know what’s going on. That is, we cannot fully grasp what it means for a wretched sinner to come into the presence of a holy and just God who spoke all things into being. Our finite minds simply cannot grasp that.

In another sense, we do know what’s taking place. We know that a holy and just God welcomes sinners into his presence because he looks on us through the righteousness Christ accomplished and the Holy Spirit is interceding for us with “groanings too deep for words” (Romans 8:26b). However, even knowing this truth from Scripture, we are talking about something that’s beyond our finite capacity. We are talking about something that is too deep for words.

¹Timothy Keller, *Prayer: Experiencing Awe and Intimacy with God* (Dutton, 2014), 9.

²*Ibid.*, 18.

Yet, the Scriptures are not silent on teaching us to pray, and God expects his children to pray; therefore, it is our job to teach it to the next generation. However inadequate you feel in your own life, remember that teaching from a point of weakness and humility is a great starting point.

Like our other study, Bible 101, this study is aimed at middle schoolers but could be easily adjusted for high schoolers. The lessons are designed to be taught in a thirty to forty-five-minute time slot, but they also could be modified to fit into your schedule.

As is the case with our other studies, this is available for free. RYM seeks to serve the local church, and offering resources for free is one way we do that. We also hope to periodically revise our resources in order to improve upon them, and offering them for free guards you from a need to continually make additional purchases.

With that said, RYM is a certified 501c3 organization. We are sustained by God's grace alone, and his grace is made manifest in various ways. One of those ways is financial support from churches and individuals donating to this ministry. If you feel led, please give financially to support this work and others we are involved in.

One last word about the study. Be encouraged by the great privilege it is to teach students truths from God's Word. Prayer and Scripture reading are a Christian's daily sustenance – we simply cannot live without them. God has chosen you to teach on prayer to these students. By his grace, you can be passing on biblical truths about this great gift that can impact students, families, and churches in years to come. *Pray* that this would indeed be the case. Remember, you are praying to a God who does more than we can ask or imagine.

HOW NOT TO PRAY

LESSON 1

What is prayer?

[Allow five minutes for answers. Break students into groups or have them write a definition on a notecard.]

READ: Matthew 6:5-8; what do we learn from this section? [Allow answers.]

- How does Jesus begin to teach his disciples about prayer? Jesus begins teaching his disciples how NOT to pray before he tells them how to pray.
- As we begin to understand prayer, it is important to say what it is NOT in order to help us know what it is.
- Let's look more closely at what Jesus says prayer is NOT.

Two Main Things:

- Prayer is NOT performance (verse 5) – The hypocritical people Jesus is referring to are the Pharisees. They loved to pray in the synagogues and street corners. Why did they do that? [Allow answers. ANSWER: They wanted to be seen and receive praise.]
 - Why do you think Jesus is telling the disciples (and us) about this? [Allow answers.]
 - Jesus is warning us that this will be a temptation in our own hearts. We will seek the praise of others, and the praise of others is rewarding.
 - READ: verse 5c, “Truly, I say to you, they have received their reward.” The praise of others is rewarding and fulfilling BUT it is temporal. We don't need to downplay the temptation of having others praise us – it's human nature.
 - What does Jesus say in verse 6c? “Your Father who sees in secret will reward you.” The “reward” we get from the praise of man is nothing compared to the reward from the Father.
 - We must be cautiously aware of the temptation to perform and receive the praise of man when we pray.
- Prayer is NOT using fancy speech (verse 7) – The Gentiles would pray using many words and fancy speech. This was also for performance, like the hypocrites, but Jesus focuses on something else here. What is it? [Allow answers. Hint: What do you think “empty phrases” means? ANSWER: Jesus is addressing the use of words without thinking.]
 - Ultimately, what Jesus is teaching is the importance of the heart when praying. These Gentiles were using a lot of words and familiar phrases, thinking that those special words would make their prayers effective.

- Jesus, however, calls all those words “empty phrases,” telling us that there was no meaning behind what they were saying. They were simply speaking words without thinking about them. They were simply saying words while their hearts were not engaged.
- What do you think Jesus is trying to teach us from this? [Allow answers. ANSWER: Our heart will often be disengaged in our prayers.]
- I once heard someone say, “We must pray in order to pray.” What do you think that means? [Allow answers.]
- The person was teaching this truth about our hearts being disengaged. They were saying that we need to ask God to help our hearts to engage before we can even hope to pray. Prayer is crucial to everything we do, even prayer itself.
- This is something we will discuss more as we go; just remember these two main points about how NOT to pray. What were they? [See if students can answer.]

Using Words Rightly:

Jesus just warned us about using “empty phrases” and “many words,” BUT words are obviously necessary when praying – we have to use them. Are there certain words we should use when praying? What are some of the words you use? [Allow discussion.] Let’s think about some of the more common words we use in prayer and their meanings.³

- First, we need to know that whenever we begin talking to God, we often use a title to address him. What’s a title? [Allow answers. ANSWER: It’s a certain name that displays respect.]
 - For example, if someone said, “Hey, you!” is that showing respect to you? Typically, it isn’t. However, if someone said, “Hey, Bobby or Sally,” that’s showing respect because they’re using the “title” or “name” that’s been given to you.
 - Well, when we address God, it is vital to use proper titles that have been communicated to us. Could you imagine praying to God by saying, “Hey, you!”?
 - Here are some common titles we use. Let’s think about the meaning of each one to guard against these becoming empty phrases:
 - God – What does this title mean? [Allow answers.] This tells us that God is Deity or Spirit. In other words, he is not human.⁴ This makes Him above us and beyond us. Using this title should humble us and make us aware of the fact that we are coming before a Being who is unlike anyone on the face of the earth.
 - Creator – What does this title mean? [Allow answers.] One way to look at this title is to look at ourselves. That is, we are creatures. Once again, the Creator is unlike anyone or anything in all creation. This also means we are

³TEACHER’S NOTE: The point of this exercise is to guard against “empty phrases.” Be sure to tell students that’s what you’re doing as you explain the meaning behind some of these words.

⁴TEACHER’S NOTE: We know that God took on flesh in the person of Jesus Christ, but he also remained fully God. It’s important to tell students this, but the point is not to get bogged down in a deep theological discussion on the Incarnation.

inferior to the Creator. God being Creator also tells us that we are known by him. As Creator, God knows everything about us. He knows how our hearts, brains, eyes, and ears function. He knows our thoughts, etc. God created every part of us; therefore, he knows everything there is to know about us. He knows us better than we know ourselves.

- Lord – What does this title mean? [Allow answers.] This title implies leadership and authority. It is a kingly title. When we call God “Lord” we are talking about his sovereignty; what’s that? [Allow answers.] His sovereignty means that God is reigning and ruling over all of creation. If you approached an earthly king in an inappropriate way, you could be killed. When you approach God as Lord, you must know that your life lies in his hands and that everything in creation is under his authority.
- One important truth we know about God is that He is triune. What does that mean?⁵ [Allow answers.] READ: Genesis 1:26-27; In these verses, we learn that there is one God, but He is plural. He is Father, Son, and Holy Spirit (Matthew 28:19).
- While each person of the Godhead is equal, they are given specific titles, and certain responsibilities are typically attributed to them. We need to be aware of that in our language as we pray.
- Father/Heavenly Father – What does this title mean? [Allow answers.] Although earthly fathers are imperfect and flawed, this title is meant to convey a loving and caring relationship. Deep love and admiration from God to us is communicated through this title. It is a title that communicates his protection from our enemies. Safety and security are implied by this title. Most importantly, we can only use this title because of the finished work of Jesus Christ. Through his righteous life and atoning death on the cross, God the Father has adopted us as his children.⁶
- Savior – What does this title mean? [Allow answers.] This is a title we attribute to God the Son, Jesus Christ. Christ is our Savior because he saved us from eternal punishment and torment. Jesus lived perfectly on this earth by upholding every aspect of the law, loving his Father perfectly, and loving his neighbor perfectly. He gives that righteousness to us and takes our sin upon himself by his death on the cross. Through his incarnation, he is our Savior, if we’ve repented of our sin and placed our faith in his finished work.
- Holy Spirit – What does this title mean? [Allow answers.] The Holy Spirit is the third Person of the Trinity and is our strength in all things. We ask the Spirit for strength to pray, to read the Bible, to fight against sin, to worship

⁵TEACHER’S NOTE: Depending on time and where your students are in their understanding of the Trinity, adjust the content to fit into this lesson. This is not meant to be an in-depth study on the doctrine of the Trinity. It’s simply getting students to think about the Trinitarian language used in prayers in order to guard from empty phrases.

⁶TEACHER’S NOTE: This is another deep theological truth that could take up the entire class, but ensure students understand that this truth is the foundation of the doctrine of adoption.

properly, to guard against temptation, etc. God has given his Spirit to us as the Helper in this life. While the Spirit can sometimes seem neglected, he is equal to the Father and Son in the Godhead.

Listen to what Paul Miller says about his book, *A Praying Life*, “[P]rayer is not the center of this book. Getting to know a person, God, is the center.”⁷ You see, when we think more deeply about the Person we are praying to – and using his titles assists with that – it will affect how we pray.

Review: _____

What did you learn today? [Allow answers.]

- How NOT to pray – the praise of man and using empty words.
- The meaning of specific titles of God.

[Close in prayer.]

⁷Paul Miller, *A Praying Life: Connecting with God in a Distracted World*. (NavPress: 2009), 20.

part one

WHAT IS PRAYER?

LESSON 2

Review⁸

What did we talk about last week? [Allow answers.]

- Jesus taught us how NOT to pray.
- Two main things: We are not to pray to receive praise or pray using “empty phrases.”
- What does “empty phrases” mean? Using words disengaged from our heart.
- What titles for God did we list and what are their meanings?
 - God
 - Creator
 - Lord
 - Father/Heavenly Father
 - Savior/Son
 - Holy Spirit/Helper

What is prayer?

[Allow discussion; see how their answers will be different from last week.]

- One of the simplest ways to define prayer is this: “Prayer is talking to God.” Thinking about this in light of one of God’s titles, it’s a child having conversation with their Father.
- In view of that definition, maybe it would help to define the word “conversation.” What’s a conversation? [Allow answers.] A conversation is an interaction that occurs between two or more people. While we can talk to ourselves, a conversation occurs when at least two people talk. Therefore, to say that prayer is conversation means that we talk and God talks.

How does God talk to us today?

[ANSWER: The Bible. The Bible is crucial to our understanding of prayer and how we are to pray in a God-honoring way.]

- Here’s a verse we read last week, but let’s read this again. READ: Matthew 6:7. What do we learn from this? [Allow answers.]

⁸TEACHER’S NOTE: Please plan on spending 5-10 minutes on review each week. This gets your students talking and allows their brains to “wake up.” It also greatly increases the likelihood that your students will remember what you are teaching when they have it repeated week after week.

- As we said in Lesson 1, the Pharisees used a lot of words when they prayed, and they thought their words made their prayers effective. Jesus is telling us that we must be careful how we talk to God. Most importantly, we must pray from the heart – not with empty phrases. Let’s think about this in a slightly different direction today.

Prayer is Word-driven: _____

We’ve already said that words make up a conversation and that prayer is having a conversation with God. But the Word of God is what makes our prayers different from prayers like those of the Pharisees.

- Listen to this quote from Tim Keller⁹: *“Without immersion in God’s Word, our prayers may not be merely limited and shallow but also untethered from reality. We may be responding not to the real God but to what we wish God and life to be like.”*¹⁰
- What is Keller communicating? [Allow answers.] Immersing ourselves in God’s Word guards us from “shallow” speech and empty phrases. It also guards us from praying to “a god” that we’ve created in our own minds and helps us instead to actually pray to the true God as he’s described in the Bible.
- READ: Jeremiah 17:9; what does this verse tell us? [Allow answers.] We learn that our hearts are poisoned with sin and that they deceive us all the time.
- How does this verse apply to prayer? [Allow answers.] Our sinful heart will shape our prayers. They will shape our prayers in the following ways:
 - Since our hearts are sinful, they are selfish, and that will be the natural bent of our prayers.
 - Since our hearts are sinful, they will blind us and make us blind to ways we should be praying.
 - Since our hearts are sinful, they will lie to us and confuse our understanding of truth.
 - Since our hearts are sinful, they will distort our view of God who is Truth.
 - Since our hearts are sinful, they are prone to wander.¹¹

We Must Let the Word Shape Our Prayers: _____

- Since prayers are a conversation between us and God, let’s think a little bit more about who we are and who God is. Let’s begin with us:¹²
 - READ: Genesis 1:26-28; what do these verses tell us about ourselves?

⁹TEACHER’S NOTE: You may want to write this quote on the board or have it displayed through a projector.

¹⁰Timothy Keller, *Prayer: Experiencing Awe and Intimacy with God*, 62.

¹¹TEACHER’S NOTE: This list could go on and on. After you’ve listed some or all of these, see if the students can add to this list.

¹²TEACHER’S NOTE: Depending on time, you might need to ask for various volunteers to look these verses up. If there is enough time, have everyone turn to the verses so they can read along.

- READ: Romans 3:9-18; what do these verses tell us about ourselves?
- READ: Romans 8:1-2, 14-17; what do these verses tell us about ourselves?
- Now, let's think about God:
 - READ: Genesis 1:1; what does this verse tell us about God?
 - READ: Colossians 1:15-20; what do these verses tell us about Jesus?
 - READ: Romans 8:26-28; what do these verses tell us about the Holy Spirit?
- While we want to heed Jesus' caution about using empty phrases, we must also see that words are vitally important in prayer. Without words, there is no prayer, and the Word of God must be shaping our prayer.

Defining Prayer: _____

There can be many appropriate ways to define prayer; here's one – *Prayer is God talking to us through his Word and his Word shaping what we say to him.*

- Think back to last week and how we discussed the Persons of the Trinity. A Trinitarian way to describe prayer is this: *We pray to God the Father, through the Son, by the strength of the Holy Spirit.*¹³
- You see, the only way we can approach a righteous God, is by being righteous. Are we righteous? [Allow answers. ANSWER: Only Jesus is righteous.] That's why it's correct to say that we pray to God through Jesus – he is our righteousness. This is also why most people conclude their prayers by saying, *"In Jesus name I pray, Amen."*
- But we also say, "by the strength of the Holy Spirit." As we said last week, the Spirit was given to us as our Helper and he is our strength in all things.

Review: _____

What did you learn today?¹⁴

- Prayer is talking to God or having a conversation with God.
- The Bible is vital in our prayers.
- Our hearts are sinful, and God's Word guards us from making prayer about us.

¹³TEACHER'S NOTE: Be sure to explain this to students and see if they have any questions.

¹⁴TEACHER'S NOTE: Take some time here to make sure your students are leaving with an understanding of the overall objectives of the lesson.

part two

WHAT IS PRAYER?

LESSON 3

Review

What did we talk about the last two weeks? [Allow answers.]

- Jesus taught us how NOT to pray.
- Two main things: We are not to pray to receive praise or pray using “empty phrases.”
- What does “empty phrases” mean? Using words disengaged from our heart.
- What titles for God did we list and what are their meanings? God, Creator, Lord, Father/Heavenly Father, Savior/Son, Holy Spirit/Helper
- Prayer is talking to God or having a conversation with God.
- The Bible is vital in our prayers.
- Our hearts are sinful, and God’s Word guards us from making prayer about us.

As we learned last week, the Word of God is vital in shaping our prayers. Not only does it guard us from our sinful hearts, but it often makes our prayers more God-honoring. With those things in mind, there are certain elements – or parts – we should look for in prayer.

- J.I. Packer says that the Bible teaches that prayer is a four-fold activity, and the four basic parts to prayer are: adoration/praise, confession/forgiveness, thanks, and petition/supplication.¹⁵
- Are there any other parts you would add or take away from this? [Allow discussion.]
- Before we look at these elements of prayer in deeper detail, please know that you don’t have to pray each of these parts in order for your prayers to be effective or acceptable to God. For example, there are times we can simply give praise to God or ask him for help. You don’t have to go through each element of prayer every time you pray.
- Remember, though, that the Bible does teach about these four elements of prayer, and they are important. Remember also that our hearts are sinful, and we will be prone to make prayers about ourselves. Knowing these four elements can guard us from being overly self-focused in our prayers.

¹⁵ J.I. Packer, *Concise Theology: A Guide to Historic Christian Beliefs* (Tyndale: 1993), 187.

The Four Elements:_____

As we get into these four elements of prayer, keep in mind how a knowledge of God and a knowledge of self shape our prayers. As we discussed last week, what the Bible says about God and humanity is crucial to our understanding of these elements.¹⁶

- *Adoration/Praise* – READ: Psalm 136¹⁷; what are some reasons the Psalmist gives us to praise God? [Allow answers.] Truly reflecting on God’s character moves us to praise. When you consider who God is and think about his titles and his attributes, it will move your heart to praise. This is why the Christian life is filled with singing – it’s a natural response to who God is.
- *Confession/Forgiveness* – READ: Psalm 51:1-5¹⁸; Thinking about all the reasons we have to give praise to God should also move us to humble confession. How do you think praising God moves you to confession? [Allow answers.] When we reflect on God’s goodness, righteousness, and kindness, we contrast that with our sinfulness. Looking at God’s character humbles us and highlights our selfishness.
 - Listen to what the Westminster Confession of Faith says about repentance, “[Mankind] ought not to content themselves with a general repentance, but it is every [human’s] duty to endeavor to repent of his particular sins particularly” [WCF 15:5]. What do you think this means? [Allow answers.]
 - Basically, the Westminster Divines¹⁹ were communicating the importance of repentance. Not only do they call repentance a grace from God, but it is something we must continually practice as Christians. Also, we must be specific in naming certain sins and confessing them to God.
- *Thanks* – READ: Psalm 100; what are some things you are thankful for? [Allow answers.] Who gave you all the things we just listed? We all have food, shelter, and clothing. We have been given so much, and God continues to heap blessings upon us. All good things come from his hand, and the greatest thing he gave us is the gospel. There is a perfect existence waiting for us because of the finished work of Jesus. Praise God!
 - How often do we grumble and complain? You see, God gives us so much, but our sinful hearts often focus on what we don’t have. Knowing that should move us to confess our sin of ingratitude and ask God for forgiveness.

¹⁶TEACHER’S NOTE: You may want to pause and ensure that the students understand what this means. Perhaps ask them to repeat what you just said or see if they have questions. The point is this, knowing the titles of God will move us to praise. Knowing that we are sinful will move us to confession. Therefore, the prior lesson has great impact on what you are about to teach.

¹⁷This Psalm is 26 verses, so you may want to get several students to read. Another option is getting the students to repeat the refrain, “for his steadfast love endures forever.” After all, this is the way the Psalm was intended to be read.

¹⁸Be sure to give the context of this Psalm which is explained in the Introduction.

¹⁹TEACHER’S NOTE: Simply explain to the students that this was the title given to the men that composed the WCF.

- To be sure, we live in a broken world, so there will be sadness and reasons we might not always feel like giving praise. There are times to mourn. Still, we also must have joy because of the gospel.²⁰
- *Petition/Supplication* – READ: Psalm 3; this is the element of prayer we often use, and God welcomes his children to come to him with requests. It is interesting that this part of prayer is listed last in the four elements. We can certainly rush into God's presence and ask for certain things because of the finished work of Christ. Even so, we should also come into his presence with thanksgiving and confession just as often.
 - What are David's requests? [Allow answers.] Ultimately, David asks to be saved. Saved from whom/what? His enemies. Do you know who his enemy was? His own son, Absalom.²¹
 - This was obviously one of the low points of David's reign – his own son had become his enemy. It's important to think about the emotional turmoil David was going through as he wrote this Psalm; it adds weight to what is said.
 - How does David begin this Psalm? [Allow answers.] He begins with lament/sadness. In other words, he doesn't begin with praise. You see, our God is gracious and knows we are weak. He invites us to come to him in weakness.
 - It's interesting to also note that David quickly turns his prayer into praise. By verse 3, what does he say? [Allow answers.] Although there is deep sadness in David's words, he remembers that God is his shield, his glory, the lifter of his head, and that he answers prayers.
 - In times of joy or sadness or anywhere in between, run to God and talk with him. Christ has purchased a way to him for broken sinners like us. We are welcomed into his presence at all times and without specific order.
- NOTE: What book of the Bible did all these references come from? [Allow answers.] This should teach you that the entire book of Psalms is a helpful resource to aid your prayers. Use the Psalms constantly when you pray. Pick a Psalm, read through it, and turn verses into prayers.²²
 - Here's an example:
 - READ: Psalm 1:1-2; how could you turn this into a prayer? [Allow answers.]
 - ♦ "God, please guard me from the counsel of the wicked. Give me strength to not delight in the way of sinners."
 - ♦ "God, please help me to love your law and meditate upon it day and night. Forgive me for the lack of desire I have for your Word and how often I neglect it."

²⁰TEACHER'S NOTE: Be sure students know that it's okay to be sad because life in a broken world is sad at times. God understands our sadness, and we can come to God when we're sad. We will discuss this more later, but be sure to comment on the fact that Christians can grieve, but we grieve with hope.

²¹TEACHER'S NOTE: Without getting into details, you can point students to 2 Samuel 15 to explain why David is fleeing from his son. Although there are many chapters that explain events leading to the division between Absalom and David, this chapter provides clarity.

²²TEACHER'S NOTE: We will spend more time in a later lesson discussing the Psalms.

- ♦“Thank you for giving me the treasure of your Word. Thank you for giving us a book that assists us in shaping our prayers.”
- ♦What elements are present in the above examples? [Allow answers.]
Petition, Confession, Thanks.
- READ: Psalm 23; how could you turn this into a prayer? [Allow answers.]
 - ♦“Thank you Lord for being my Shepherd. Thank you for watching over me and protecting me.”
 - ♦“You are worthy to be praised because you faithfully care for me, even though I wander from you like a sheep. You are so steadfast in your love for me.”
 - ♦“Forgive me for my discontentment. Even though you’ve cared for me like a shepherd, I confess that I often want worldly things that cannot satisfy. Help me to be satisfied in your Fatherly care.”
 - ♦What elements are present in the above examples? [Allow answers.]
Thanks, Confession, Petition.²³

Review: _____
[What did we learn today?]

²³TEACHER’S NOTE: Depending on time, do some more examples with your students. Simply pick some more Psalms and have students think through them. They can write them on notecards, work in groups, or do them aloud. This could greatly help them shape their prayers. Also, note that Donald Whitney’s book, *Praying the Bible* (Crossway: 2015) is a great resource for this.

part three

WHAT IS PRAYER?

LESSON 4

Review

What did we talk about over the last several weeks?[Allow answers.]

- Jesus taught us how NOT to pray.
- Two main things: We are not to pray to receive praise or pray using “empty phrases.”
- What does “empty phrases” mean? Using words disengaged from our heart.
- What titles for God did we list and what are their meanings? God, Creator, Lord, Father/Heavenly Father, Savior/Son, Holy Spirit/Helper
- Prayer is talking to God or having a conversation with God.
- The Bible is vital in our prayers.
- Our hearts are sinful, and God’s Word guards us from making prayer about us.
- The four elements of prayer: Praise/Adoration, Confession/Forgiveness, Thanks, Petition/Supplication

Last week we talked about the four elements of prayer. There are some who like to think of the acronym *ACTS* to help them remember this. Does anyone know what that stands for? Adoration, Confession, Thanksgiving, Supplication. [Some students might have already discussed this in the last lesson.] As I said, these are important elements that help us to pray in a way that’s honoring to God, but this is not a strict rule we must always abide by. Let’s look at some other elements that could be a part of prayer.

Other Elements:

- *Lament*: READ: Psalm 3 – This is a Psalm we read last week; what’s the context of this Psalm? [Allow answers.] David is being hunted down by his own son. How does David begin this Psalm? [Allow answers. ANSWER: With sadness/lament]
 - Are you always happy? Is life always easy? NO! We live in a sinful, broken world, and that makes life difficult, frustrating, sad, and hard. Therefore, sometimes our prayers can be sad.
 - Tim Keller says this: “[A] category of petitionary prayer that looms large in the Bible has traditionally been called lament when it appears in the Psalms. This is a prayer of someone in suffering and difficulty...”²⁴
 - Keller goes on to quote J.I. Packer this way: “J.I. Packer comes right out and calls this kind of petition ‘complaining.’ He admits that no one likes people who whine

²⁴Tim Keller, *Prayer*, 233.

and complain, but he points out that in the Bible, when ‘bad things happen to good people’ ... they complain with great freedom and at considerable length to their God. And Scripture does not seem to regard these complaining prayers as anything other than wisdom.”²⁵ [Allow discussion.]²⁶

- An important note: While it is important to know that we can go to God with lament, we must do this appropriately. God’s will is perfect, and he is in control of all things, even the difficult circumstances you are going through. Therefore, in the midst of our lamenting, we must pray that we will trust in God’s will and know that whatever difficult providence we are going through is for our good, if we are his children.²⁷
- *The Approach:* In an earlier lesson, I said that we must pray in order to pray. That is, we must get in the proper mindset for prayer. Think about it: we are sinful humans approaching a righteous God; therefore, we must ask God for help in our prayers.
 - Tim Keller talks about an “approach” as we begin to come to God. “Ask [God] for his presence and help as you read and pray.”²⁸
 - Think of it like this: most churches have a section of their worship service entitled “The Call to Worship” or a variation of that. What’s interesting is the fact that “The Call to Worship” is part of the worship service. We’re already worshipping, but we’re asking God’s Word and Spirit to move our hearts to worship.
 - Because of our sinfulness, we need great help in prayer. Therefore, before you really begin to pray, it is good to start asking God to help you pray -- to give you a proper mindset to pray. Here are some thoughts about a proper mindset:
 - Humility – We are sinful; God is holy.
 - Fear – God is the all-powerful, righteous Judge, and we deserve his wrath.
 - Joy/Strength – Because of Jesus Christ’s finished work, we can come before God. He welcomes us and loves us as his child.
 - Dependence – We have no strength or abilities apart from God. We are dependent upon God for every breath and every beat of our heart.
 - Openness – God sees each of us to our core. He knows our thoughts and what we do in secret. Share your heart. Be completely open.
 - Can you think of anything to add? [Allow answers.]

²⁵Ibid., 234.

²⁶TEACHER’S NOTE: Since this is a lengthier quote, be sure to pause and foster discussion among students. Make sure that they see that the Lord welcomes us to come to him with lament/complaints. He is a Father who deeply cares for his children and encourages us to come to him.

²⁷TEACHER’S NOTE: I understand that this could be opening up a can of worms, but this is not the time to get into discussions on the origins of evil, etc. It is important, however, to help students know that in their lament they must not grow bitter or angry at God. They must submit to his will. It is also important to tell your students that God does bring about difficulties in his children’s lives, but it is ultimately out of love and for our good. (See Romans 8:23; Philippians 1:6.)

²⁸Keller, 252.

- *Closing:* How do people typically end prayers? [Allow answers.] I think the most common way is this: “In Jesus name, Amen.” We’ve already said that we pray in Jesus’ name because that’s the only way we can approach God. If we attempted to come before a holy God in our own “righteousness,” we would be destroyed. The righteousness of Christ clothes us; therefore, we can confidently come before God.
- READ: John 14:13-14 & 15:16; it is clear that we are told in Scripture to pray in Jesus’s name. A danger of this, however, is that it becomes an empty phrase like we spoke of in lesson 1.
- Bryan Chapell points out another truth about praying in Jesus’ name: “We are supposed to be saying that everything we prayed for was offered ‘in Jesus’ name’ – for his honor and purposes. When we pray ‘in Jesus’ name,’ we pray for his sake more than our own...[It] reminds us, as well as commits us, to submit all our requests to the glory of Jesus.”²⁹
- In Bryan Chapell’s book, *Praying Backwards*, he encourages Christians to begin by saying, “In Jesus’ name.” He says that this reorients our heart and mind on Jesus and not ourselves.
 - “When Jesus’ priorities come first, our prayers will change,” says Chapell. “They will be less self-oriented, more Christ-directed, more blessed, and ultimately most satisfying to our hearts...Praying backwards simply ensures that he comes first in our thoughts so that we are prompted to make him first in our priorities.”³⁰
 - Again, there is no specific form to follow in prayer, but it is important to think about what we are saying and to whom we are talking. Prayer is ultimately about God’s Kingdom and not ours. It is good to be reminded of this in order to shape our prayers and take the focus off of us.
- What does the word “amen” mean? [Allow answers. ANSWER: “Truly” or “so be it”] Why do we say “truly” at the end of our prayers? [Allow discussion.] Bryan Chapell says that it means, “I really mean this.”³¹
- READ: John 14:6-7; The word “amen” is meant to confirm a statement. As we just read, God is truth, and when we say “amen,” we are stating that we believe God is true. It is a statement of confidence in the One to whom we pray. Although God might not answer our prayers in the way we want him to, he always answers prayers and hears his children because he is true.³²

Review:

What did we learn today? [Allow answers.]

[Close in prayer.]

²⁹Bryan Chapell, *Praying Backwards: Transform Your Prayer Life by Beginning in Jesus’ Name*. (Baker Books: 2005), 13.

³⁰*Ibid.*, 16

³¹*Ibid.*, 13.

³²TEACHER’S NOTE: We will discuss “unanswered prayers” and the word “amen” in later lessons.

WHY SHOULD WE PRAY?

LESSON 5

Review

What did we talk about over the last several weeks?[Allow answers.]

- Jesus taught us how NOT to pray.
- *Two main things: We are not to pray to receive praise or pray using “empty phrases.”*
- *What does “empty phrases” mean? Using words disengaged from our heart.*
- *What titles for God did we list and what are their meanings? God, Creator, Lord, Father/Heavenly Father, Savior/Son, Holy Spirit/Helper*
- *Prayer is talking to God or having a conversation with God.*
- *The Bible is vital in our prayers.*
- *Our hearts are sinful, and God’s Word guards us from making prayer about us.*
- *The four elements of prayer: Praise/Adoration, Confession/Forgiveness, Thanks, Petition/Supplication*
- *Other elements – Lament, Approach, and Closing: “In Jesus’ name, Amen.”*

One of the things we mentioned last week is that our prayers are ultimately about God’s Kingdom and will, not our own. This is a key answer to the question, “Why should we pray?” Let’s look at that first.

Reasons:

Why should we pray? [Allow answers.] There are seemingly infinite reasons to pray because our God is infinite, and he’s the main reason we pray. That said, here are some primary reasons to pray.

- *God’s Kingdom* – READ: Matthew 6:33; Everything that has existed and will exist, exists under the Kingdom of God. In other words, it’s all about him, and we live in his Kingdom. Our prayers, first and foremost, communicate that we are humbly living under the Kingship of God.³³
- *The Bible Instructs Us To* – READ: Luke 11:1-2; what do we learn here? [Allow answers.]
 - First, we see that Jesus prayed. Jesus was the only sinless man to walk the face of the earth; if he needed prayer, we surely do. Plus, if we are to follow after him, we should pray.
 - Second, Jesus also said, “When you pray...” Not “if” but “when.” In other words, this implies that it will be something you do.

³³TEACHER’S NOTE: We will spend an entire lesson on “The Lord’s Prayer.” You can make note that Jesus teaches that God’s Kingdom is one of the primary things to pray for in that prayer, but know we will discuss this later.

- *Communion* – Jesus needed prayer because he longed to be with his Father. He longed to talk with him and be in his presence. As God’s children, we should long to commune with him.
 - Think of it this way, God knows absolutely everything about you, and if you are his child, he loves you and will never leave you. You don’t have a friend that is this faithful. Spending time with God will increase your love for him.
- *Dependence* – READ: 2 Corinthians 12:7-10; what do we learn from these verses? [Allow answers.] One thing we learn is that God’s ways are not always our ways. Paul begged/prayed for God to take the painful “thorn” away, but he did not. What did God give Paul instead? [ANSWER: Grace]
 - We learn here that there is strength in weakness. Even though this world will tell you that you’re independent and that message is trumpeted by much of the world, the Bible says the opposite – humans are dependent creatures.
 - We are completely dependent upon God for the next day, hour, minute and second of our lives. Praying reminds us that we are small, weak people who need God every day.
- *Sin* – READ: Romans 7:15-8:1; what do we learn here? [Allow answers.] It is encouraging to know that the Apostle Paul struggled with sin just like we do. Paul is talking about the spiritual battle that’s taking place in his heart (and ours).
 - We are constantly assaulted by this world, our flesh (sinful nature), and the devil. Since this three-fold attack never rests, we must be praying to fight against it.
 - READ: Ephesians 6:10-12; spiritual warfare is a real thing and we do not need to believe otherwise. Scripture is clear that there is demonic activity fighting against us; therefore, prayer is calling upon our Mighty God – who is much stronger – to fight alongside us against these forces.
- *Encouragement/Joy* – READ: 1 Thessalonians 5:16. (Note: This is one of the shortest verses in the Bible.) What is the Bible commanding here? JOY!
 - As we’ve said, we don’t always have joy. Life is hard because we live in a broken world; therefore, we are going to deal with trials and afflictions.
 - Even though that is true, Jesus Christ is also true, and he has finished the work the Father sent him to do. Because of this reality, we can be confident that we will – one day – dwell in a perfect existence of peace and joy.
 - Living in view of eternity with God is one way we can experience joy now. While we are going to be sad and there are times to mourn, the Bible tells us to have joy; therefore, this is something we can and should pray for. Further, true joy should be rooted in the gospel of Jesus Christ.

God Already Knows: _____

READ: Exodus 7:1-6; what do we learn here? [Allow answers. ANSWER: God knows the future because he plans the future³⁴.] If God knows the future, why do we even bother to pray? [Allow discussion. See above answers/reasons.³⁵]

³⁴As Douglas F. Kelly says, “Nothing happens at random with God. There is no such thing as chance or luck or even fate, because he has planned it all in love. The God who is in control has a personal interest in what is happening as he fulfills his purpose.” If God Already Knows, Why Pray? (Christian Focus: 2014), 49.

³⁵TEACHER’S NOTE: This is designed to make students wrestle a bit. Press them to challenge their thinking. We don’t want to discourage them, but rather for them to be sharpened because the world will ask these questions.

- There are many possible ways to answer this question, but I think it comes back to the primary reason we pray – God. One additional reason to pray which we have not already mentioned is that we pray to worship and praise God. If you remember, adoration and praise were listed as parts of prayer in lesson 3.
- As we said, God knows our frame, and he knows that we are weak. For example, he knows we are prone to worry and anxiety. Instead of only praying to God about your worries and anxieties, also praise him for who he is.
- You see, the more we praise God and worship him in our prayers, the larger he becomes in our minds, and our other fears and anxieties are drowned out.
- Yes, God already knows all your fears and anxieties, and he knows the outcome of the rest of your life. The design of prayer, however, can help us move our eyes off of our circumstances and onto the glory of God. [Allow discussion.]

Does Prayer Change God? _____

READ: Genesis 18:22-33; what do we see here? Does God change his mind? [Allow discussion.]³⁶ When you have any questions about the Bible, it is vital to interpret them with the Bible. Here are some important verses to keep in mind with this question:

- READ: Hebrews 13:8 – What does this teach us? [God does not change. The fancy word for this is the “immutability” of God.]
- READ: Joel 2:13 – What does this tell us? [God is slow to anger.]
- READ: 2 Peter 3:8-9 – What does this tell us? [God is compassionate/patient and works on a timeline that is different from ours.]
- READ: Isaiah 55:8 – What does this tell us? [God’s understanding is far beyond ours.]
- Now, let’s think about the question again – Does prayer change God? – in view of these verses.
 - To our minds, there are times when we read Scripture, and it appears that God changes his mind, like the example from Genesis. On the other hand, we have Scriptures that tell us God never changes.
 - The other Scriptures are telling us that he’s compassionate, patient, and works in a time frame that is not constricted to our way of measuring time.
 - We also must see that God’s wisdom, power, and reign exceed our understanding; therefore, he works in ways that baffle our small minds.
- Listen to Douglas Kelly: “God made his world and ordered his plan in such a way that when we become burdened and concerned over some situation, He uses it for good, even to further His purposes. In fact, He lays the burden on us. For example, we find ourselves under pressure, in a predicament that we cannot resolve, and so we begin to pray.”³⁷

³⁶TEACHER’S NOTE: This is a huge question that exceeds the scope of this lesson; however, it’s important to discuss it because most students’ thinking will lead in this direction. Be sure to tell students that you’re not going to spend too much time on this, but encourage them to wrestle with it. You may want to use this question as a topic to have ongoing discussions with students in one-on-one or small group settings outside of the classroom setting.

³⁷Ibid, 53.

- What is Douglas Kelly saying? [Allow answers.] He is telling us that God is ordering everything that ever happens. He is working behind things we do not even understand, and he brings situations into our lives that often move us to pray; therefore, it is more accurate to say that prayer is actually changing us...not God.³⁸
- In some ways, this will remain a mystery to us, but do not let that discourage your faith. Our God is infinite and we are finite; if we understood everything about God it would lead us to question his infinite nature. In other words, there should be things about God that puzzle us.

Review: _____
What did you learn today? [Allow answers.]

[Close in prayer.]

³⁸TEACHER'S NOTE: Once again, this is a brief answer to a very complicated question. It would probably be good to pause here and discuss with students and answer some questions they may have. As already stated, be sure and carry this question outside the classroom with your students.

part one

WHEN SHOULD I PRAY?

LESSON 6

Review

What did we talk about over the last several weeks?[Allow answers.]

- Prayer is talking to God or having a conversation with God.
- The Bible is vital in our prayers.
- Our hearts are sinful, and God's Word guards us from making prayer about us.
- The four elements of prayer: Praise/Adoration, Confession/Forgiveness, Thanks, Petition/Supplication
- Other elements – Lament, Approach, and Closing: "In Jesus' name, Amen."
- Why do we pray? God's Kingdom, God tells us to, Communion, Dependence, Sin, Encouragement/Joy
- Does prayer change God?

Last week we looked at various reasons we should pray. We saw that God is sovereign and rules over every aspect of life – even the things we pray for. He knows what we're going to pray before we do, and that's a thought that baffles our mind.

Now that we've seen that we should pray, a question we may have is: "When do we pray?" This may seem like a silly question until we consider some of our schedules. Many of us are so busy that it seems like there's no time to fit prayer into our schedules. As we have seen, however, prayer is vital to our lives so let's consider some answers to this question.

Jesus' Example:

Jesus was more than just a good role model for us or someone to aspire to be like. He was and is the Son of God who redeemed a sinful people. Nevertheless, he does give us good examples of how we, by God's grace, should aspire to live. READ: Mark 1:35; what does this verse tell us? [Allow answers.]

- This verse tells us that Jesus got up, very early, and sought a quiet place to pray. Why do you think he did that? [Allow answers.]
- Jesus really was a celebrity, and people were constantly seeking him out. Therefore, he had to get up early – before anyone else – so he could have some quiet with his Father.
- What are some things his example tells us? [Allow answers.]
 - Prayer is important; it was the first thing Jesus did when he woke up.

- Think about the things you do when you first wake up. Often the first things we do shape the rest of the day for us. Taking time in the morning to calm our hearts before God and pray to him prepares us for the day ahead.
- I think the main take away from Jesus' example is that prayer should be the first thing we do when we wake up.
- We see that the morning is a good time to pray; what are some other times we should pray? READ: Luke 6:12; Matt. 14:23; what do we learn from these verses?
 - Jesus also prayed for long periods of time and at night. This does not mean that there is anything wrong with short prayers. If you remember, Jesus critiqued the Gentiles for their many words (Matthew 6:7).
 - At the same time, nothing is wrong with longer prayers because we read that Jesus prayed lengthier prayers.
 - From Jesus' example, we conclude that morning prayers are important and evening prayers are important. We also see that he prayed for a long period of time. These truths should shape our times of prayer as well.

Pray in Private and in Public:_____

READ: Matt. 6:5-6; Luke 5:15-16; what do we learn from these verses? [Allow answers.]

- Jesus definitely was an advocate for private prayers. We saw above that Jesus prayed early in the mornings and prayed into the evenings. Why do you think Jesus encourages us to pray in private? [Allow answers.]
 - One clear answer comes from his contrasting the prayers of the hypocrites/Pharisees. They were performing, as we discussed in Lesson 1. Praying in private guards us from praying just to receive the praise of mankind.
 - Another possible answer is that it fosters greater focus. Because our hearts are sinful and will be prone to care what others think of our prayers, we will be tempted to make prayer more of a performance. However, when we are praying in secret to God alone, we don't care what others think.
 - Right along with the above, when we are praying alone to God we will be more open and vulnerable. We said that an important element of prayer is confession. We will often not confess specific details of our sins in front of others; therefore, it's important to pray private confessions of sin to God.
 - There are many other reasons why private prayers are important, but I think the broad answer is this – it fosters a deeper intimacy with God.
- If Jesus tells us to pray in secret, why do we pray in public? Why are corporate prayers a part of our public worship? [Allow discussion.] While Christians are to heed Jesus' caution about our hearts seeking the praise of people through our performance, this does not mean that public or corporate prayers are forbidden.
 - The Psalms are the only inspired hymnbook we have, but they also contain prayers – Psalm 17 for example. The Psalter can serve as a model for corporate prayers and singing.

- Acts 2 also records a sermon by Peter and concludes with people repenting and being baptized. It's hard to imagine that there weren't prayers offered when repentance and baptism were taking place. Plus, the section ends with a description of the church's fellowship. READ: Acts 2:42-47
 - These prayers were likely in house meetings as well as the Temple. Keep in mind that many houses back then had large courtyards which could seat hundreds.
- READ: 1 Timothy 4:13; what does this have to do with prayer? [Allow answers.] You really cannot separate the Word and prayer; the two go together. Sinful men cannot expect to preach the Word faithfully apart from prayer, and preachers cannot expect God's people to hear the Word apart from prayer. Surely, prayers were being offered in the early church in a public setting.
- Prayer is also something that is taught. That is, parents teach their children to pray through their own example. The same can be said of pastors as they pray before their congregation. They are setting an example of ways in which others should pray.

Pray Without Ceasing: _____

As we answer the question – when should we pray? – many are familiar with the statement, “Pray without ceasing.” READ: 1 Thessalonians 5:17; what do you think this means? Does it really mean that we never stop praying? [Allow discussion.] Here are four things John Piper tells us about “praying without ceasing”:³⁹

1. *Dependence* – “[T]here is a spirit of dependence that should permeate all we do.” This does not necessarily mean that we are literally praying all the time, but it means that our hearts and minds are aware of how utterly dependent we are on God for every breath we take. An understanding of dependence is vital to this prayer. [Allow discussion.]
2. *Repeatedly* – “Praying without ceasing means praying repeatedly and often.” Even though we are not literally praying every second of our lives, prayer should be a continual practice that occurs repeatedly throughout the day. If we truly believe the truth of our dependence on God, it will move us to pray throughout the day--when you're driving, getting ready in the morning, daydreaming, exercising, etc.
3. *Don't Give Up* – “Don't ever come to a point in your life where you say, ‘Prayer doesn't work. I am done. I am giving up on prayer.’” The command to pray without ceasing is telling us that even when it may feel that God isn't answering your prayer, do not give up. Keep praying. God loves his children and hears every prayer they ever pray.

³⁹John Piper, Ask Pastor John Podcast. Episode 933: How Do I Pray Without Ceasing? <https://www.desiringgod.org/interviews/how-do-i-pray-without-ceasing>. (Last accessed: October 16, 2017)

4. *Routine* – “I think it is important to notice that, in real life, some discipline in regular times of prayer during the day keep this kind of ‘without ceasing’ prayer alive.” That is to say, it is those times of regular prayer – like Jesus modeled for us – that fuel our praying throughout the day. When we can begin the day in prayer, it keeps us in that dependent mindset, which assists us in praying repeatedly without giving up.

Review:_____

What did you learn today? [Allow answers.]

[Close in prayer.]

part two

WHEN SHOULD I PRAY?

LESSON 7

Review

What did we talk about over the last several weeks?[Allow answers.]

- Prayer is talking to God or having a conversation with God.
- The Bible is vital in our prayers.
- Our hearts are sinful, and God's Word guards us from making prayer about us.
- The four elements of prayer: Praise/Adoration, Confession/Forgiveness, Thanks, Petition/Supplication
- Other elements – Lament, Approach, and Closing: "In Jesus' name, Amen."
- Why do we pray? God's Kingdom, God tells us to, Communion, Dependence, Sin, Encouragement/Joy
- Does prayer change God?
- Prayer in public and private
- Pray without ceasing [see below]

Last week we ended with a discussion about 1 Thessalonians 5:17. Does anyone remember what that verse said? [ANSWER: Pray without ceasing.] What did we say that it meant? Dependence, Repeatedly, Don't Give Up, and Routine. While we said that the verse does not literally mean that we never stop praying, it does mean that we're doing it often throughout the day and that we have a mindset of dependence upon God.

As we continue to look at the question – *When should I pray?* – the idea of "praying without ceasing" shapes that question. What follows are ideas for when you should pray. This list is not exhaustive, but these are important times when Christians should pray. Utilizing these times of prayer will move you in the direction of praying without ceasing.

Reading God's Word

READ: Psalm 1 – This psalm serves as a theme for the entire book of Psalms. It is similar to Jesus' teaching on prayer because Jesus begins by telling how not to pray.

- Psalm 1 tells us how to be blessed by not doing something, by implication telling us what we should do. The psalmist goes on to say that the one who will be blessed will be the one who delights in the law of the Lord.
- Here's a question: Do you delight in the law of the Lord? [Allow discussion.] If we are honest, we do not always delight in God's Word/Law. Therefore, we need to pray that we will delight in reading God's Word.
- This is a point we have discussed frequently, but it is vital. The reading of God's Word and prayer should always go together.

- Practically speaking, always pray before you read God’s Word in your daily quiet times. Pray when you begin to get distracted during your reading. Pray after you finish, asking God to write his Word on your heart and help you apply it throughout your day.

Worship

READ: Psalm 145:1-3; what do these verses tell us? [Allow answers.]
 ANSWER: God is to be praised and worshipped.] We are created as worshippers. God commands us to worship him [Exodus 20]. However, just like reading God’s Word, we don’t always want to worship him. Our hearts are sinful, and we want to worship other things.

- Here’s the reality: God has placed great emphasis on his worship throughout all of Scripture. If it is that important to God, you better believe one of Satan’s primary objectives is to thwart God’s worship.
- What is taking place when you go to Sunday morning worship? [Allow answers.] You must know that war is taking place every Sunday morning. Your sinful flesh doesn’t want to worship God, Satan doesn’t want you to worship God, and this world doesn’t want you to worship God.
- Therefore, you absolutely must ask God – in prayer – to help you worship him. It sounds kind of crazy to ask God to help you worship God. That is, we can’t even worship him properly unless he gives us the strength.
- Here are some practical thoughts about praying for worship:
 - Pray that God would prepare your heart the night before worship.
 - Pray that your pastors would get a good night’s sleep.
 - Pray that God would help you focus and guard you from distraction.
 - Pray that God would help you focus on the words you sing, the words that are read, and the words that are preached.
 - Pray as you’re driving to worship.
 - Pray as you’re sitting in worship before the pastor walks to the pulpit.⁴⁰
 - What are some other ways you can pray for worship? [Allow answers.]

Joy/Happiness

READ: 1 Thessalonians 5:16-18. John Piper helped us answer the question we had last week, and he also provides some helpful contextual thoughts here.⁴¹ What do these verses tell us? [Allow answers.]

- If you notice, the verse “pray without ceasing” (v.17) is sandwiched between two verses that tell us to give thanks. I think we can say that prayer is vital to our joy and happiness.

⁴⁰TEACHER’S NOTE: This also assumes that you’re arriving on time for worship. Without a doubt, people will be late from time-to-time in worship, but strive to get there early so you can prepare your heart.

⁴¹Ibid.

- Because our hearts are sinful, complaining and discontentment come naturally and easily to us. Therefore, it seems that these verses are instructing us that prayer assists in shaping our joy.
- Also, this should remind us that when we experience joy, we should give God thanks. He is the Giver of all things – good things – so during the points of joy and happiness in our lives, we should stop and say, “Thank You” to God.
- What are some practical ways you can do this? [Allow discussion.]

Decisions

READ: Romans 12:1-2; what do these verses tell us? [Allow answers.] The big point we can glean from these verses is this: God owns us, and we are to sacrificially live for his Kingdom, not our own.

- It is this truth that should lie at the foundation of all our decisions. Our entire existence is to point other people to God. Therefore, when it comes to decisions about which college to attend, if we should go to college, what major we should choose, and whom to marry, the truth of pointing others to God should shape those decisions.
- All of that to say, you will be faced with constant decisions in life, and it is wise to pray. Some decisions will be bigger than others, but wisdom tells us to bring our decisions to God in prayer.
- READ: James 1:5; 3:13-18; what do we learn from these verses? [Allow answers.] Wisdom is one of the primary requests we should be making when we pray.

Temptation

READ: Luke 11:4c; what does this verse tell us? [Allow answers.] We will discuss the Lord’s Prayer more fully in a later lesson, but one truth this verse is telling us is that we must pray prior to temptation and in the midst of temptation. Here are four common ways in which we are often tempted:⁴²

- Fear – READ: Psalm 56:3-11
- Worry – READ: Matthew 6:25-34
- Gossip – READ: James 3:6-9
- Sexual Sin⁴³ – READ: 1 Corinthians 6:18-20
- What are some truths being communicated in these verses? [Allow discussion.] It’s interesting that each of these verses takes a specific issue and points us back to God.

⁴²TEACHER’S NOTE: Depending on time, you may want to ask for volunteers to read these various sections. Read each of them first; then address them as one broad statement about temptation.

⁴³TEACHER’S NOTE: There needs to be great caution when teaching about sexual sin. I have kept this discussion very broad and attempted to deal with it in an appropriate way. That said, it may be wise to skip this section. I would at least encourage you to talk to your pastor or elders about this section before teaching it to students.

- Humans will face constant temptation each and every day because we are sinful and we live in a sinful world. Therefore, we should pray that God would “keep us from temptation,” that is, keep us from giving into temptation.
- One biblical truth that assists us in fighting temptation – as these verses illustrate – is shifting our focus off of self and onto God. If we’re tempted to fear, remember that man is not more powerful than God. If tempted to worry, remember that God provides for his children because he’s loving. If tempted to gossip, remember that others are created in the image of God. If tempted toward sexual sin, remember that God owns our bodies.
- Often our temptations are a result of having a small view of God. Whenever we see God enthroned and powerful, that truth will help us fight against our fears. [Allow discussion.]⁴⁴

Review: _____
[What did you learn today?]

[Close in prayer.]

⁴⁴TEACHER’S NOTE: You may want to take some time to ensure the students grasp what you are saying. Students should be praying against temptation, but the reality that we have a big God who is omniscient and omnipotent is one “tool” that assists us in overcoming our temptations.

part one

THE LORD'S PRAYER

LESSON 8

Review

What did we talk about over the last several weeks?

- The four elements of prayer: Praise/Adoration, Confession/Forgiveness, Thanks, Petition/Supplication
- Other elements – Lament, Approach, and Closing: “In Jesus’ name, Amen.”
- Why do we pray? God’s Kingdom, God tells us to, Communion, Dependence, Sin, Encouragement/Joy
- Does prayer change God?
- Prayer in public and private
- Prayer without ceasing [see below]
- When are some times when we should pray?

In Lesson 2, we talked about the importance of the Word shaping our prayers. Let’s go back to Matthew 6 and let this section of Scripture shape our prayers. READ: Matthew 6:5-15; what do Christians often call this prayer? Tim Keller said, “The Lord’s Prayer may be the single set of words spoken more often than any other in the history of the world.”⁴⁵

- Keller goes on to say that this prayer is an “untapped resource” to the Christian. This is due in part to the fact that it is so familiar to each of us.⁴⁶
- To say it another way, the Lord’s Prayer has become so familiar to us that it often becomes an “empty phrase” we recite. Therefore, let’s take some time to think through what this prayer means.

Compare:

Look at Matthew 6:9-13 and Luke 11:1-4. How are these sections alike? How are they different? [Allow discussion.] The variations are slight, but they are different. In the Matthew account, the prayer was given in the Sermon on the Mount. In the Luke account, a disciple asked Jesus to teach them how to pray. Since the Matthew account is more detailed – and often what we recite – let’s look at that version.⁴⁷

“Our Father Who Art in Heaven” What do you think this means? [Allow answers.]⁴⁸ John Calvin breaks this phrase into four sections because there is much that can be said.

⁴⁵Tim Keller, *Prayer*. 109.

⁴⁶*Ibid.*, 109.

⁴⁷TEACHER’S NOTE: Be sure to tell your students that volumes have been written on this prayer, so this will be a limited overview. If you would like to do further reading, consider the following: Tim Keller’s *Prayer* pages 108-119, Volume 2 of Calvin’s *Institutes* Chapter 20 Sections 34-42, and J.C. Ryle’s *Expository Thoughts on the Gospels*. These works shaped this lesson.

⁴⁸TEACHER’S NOTE: In this lesson, we will look at each phrase of the prayer. We suggest that you ask students their thoughts about each section in order to engage them. While there is great depth to each of these phrases, encourage your students to think through this. It may be a good idea to break them into groups.

In essence, he says that the title “Father” should be a title that brings security, comfort, and peace to us.

- God not only cares for his children as a Father, but calling him Father also points us to Jesus Christ. How do you think it does that? [Allow answers.]
- We cannot call God Father unless we have been adopted as God’s children, and we cannot be adopted as God’s children unless we are cleansed in the blood of Christ. [Pause to ensure your students understand this.]⁴⁹

Hallowed Be Thy Name: _____

What does the word “hallow” mean? [Allow answers. ANSWER: Revered, Respected, Blessed, Set Apart] How does this phrase point us to the Ten Commandments? [Allow answers. ANSWER: Exodus 20:7]

- Keller says that it means three things:
 - “It is a request that faith in God would spread throughout the world...”
 - “... that Christians would honor God with Christ-likeness or holiness of their lives...”
 - “... and that more and more people would honor God and call on his name.”⁵⁰
- Keller also quotes Calvin and explains that when we have a lack of gratitude towards God, we are not hallowing his name.⁵¹ What do you think he means by this? [Allow answers.] ANSWER: “To ‘hallow’ God’s name is not merely to live righteous lives but to have a heart of grateful joy toward God...”⁵²

Thy Kingdom Come: _____

Tim Keller says that this is where all human problems come from. Why do you think he says that?⁵³ [Allow discussion.⁵⁴ ANSWER: We were created to serve God, but our sin turns us inward, and this causes all sorts of problems.] In other words, our sin makes us love our little kingdom instead of God’s Kingdom.

- J.C. Ryle also points out that praying this prayer is calling for the defeat of Satan himself. We know that Satan is our enemy, but he is a defeated enemy.⁵⁵
- The Bible tells us that Jesus defeated sin, death, and Satan when he died and rose again. Therefore, praying that God’s Kingdom will come is asking for Jesus Christ to return and fully establish his Kingdom forevermore.

⁴⁹John Calvin, *The Institutes of Christian Religion*, Vol.2 (Westminster John Knox Press), 899.

⁵⁰Keller, 111.

⁵¹*Ibid.*, 111.

⁵²*Ibid.*, 111.

⁵³*Ibid.*, 111.

⁵⁴TEACHER’S NOTE: I understand this may be a challenging thought for your students, but challenge them to think through this.

⁵⁵J.C. Ryle, *Expository Thoughts on the Gospels: Luke Volume 2* (The Banner of Truth Trust: 1858), 2.

Thy Will Be Done, on Earth as it is in Heaven: ____

Keller, once again, makes a very important point when he says – to paraphrase – unless we understand the first part of the prayer, we would never pray this. Why do you think he says this? [Allow answers. ANSWER: When we truly believe that God is our good Father, we will trust him to do as he pleases in our lives.]⁵⁶

- This is a scary part of the prayer. This is not asking for God to give you an “A” on your test, to give you safe travel, or to heal you of a serious sickness. This is asking God to do whatever he wants to.
- Now, it could mean that he gives you an “A,” safe travel, or heals you. But it may also mean that he doesn’t answer your prayers according to your will, but his. However, we can be sure that whatever God wills is completely and utterly wise and good.

Give Us This Day Our Daily Bread:

What do you notice about this section of the prayer? [Allow answers. ANSWER: The focus is now on us.] It isn’t until this point of the Lord’s Prayer that we are even mentioned. And even though we may think we are now in focus, Calvin reminds us of this: “We do not, indeed, bid farewell to God’s glory...”⁵⁷ While we are now praying for our daily bread, God is still in focus.

- This prayer should humble us in our prayers. As we have said, we can quickly make prayers about ourselves and our needs. Without a doubt, we have a Heavenly Father that wants us to come to him. But we also have a Heavenly Father that has a name we should hallow.
- Augustine points to the fact that “daily bread” deals with things that are necessary for living and not luxuries. If we truly focus on the beginning of the Lord’s Prayer, our heart begins to focus on bringing necessities to God and not just superficial things. [Ensure students understand what is being said.]
- Much of what Keller and Luther say is that praying for daily bread is bringing our daily needs before God, but it is also praying for the daily needs of our neighbors. Therefore, praying this should turn our hearts and minds to those in need and what we can do to serve them.⁵⁸

Review: _____

What did you learn today? [Allow answers.]

[Close in prayer.]

⁵⁶Keller, 112.

⁵⁷Calvin, 907.

⁵⁸Keller, 114-115.

part two

THE LORD'S PRAYER

LESSON 9

Review

What have we talked about over the last several weeks?

- The four elements of prayer: Praise/Adoration, Confession/Forgiveness, Thanks, Petition/Supplication
- Other elements – Lament, Approach, and Closing: “In Jesus’ name, Amen.”
- Why do we pray? God’s Kingdom, God tells us to, Communion, Dependence, Sin, Encouragement/Joy
- Does prayer change God?
- Pray without ceasing.
- When are some times when we should pray?
- What new things have you learned about The Lord’s Prayer?

As we discussed last week, our familiarity with The Lord’s Prayer often makes us miss some of its depth. We often repeat those verses week-after-week but give little thought to them. That said, in this prayer are some of the most significant verses that shape our prayers. That is why we have broken it into two lessons – there’s just too much to cover. So, let’s jump back in and finish looking at this prayer.

READ: Matthew 6:9-15

Forgive Us Our Debts as We Forgive Our Debtors:

Why do you think some people say that this is one of the scariest things to pray? [Allow answers.] With this specific request, you are asking God to forgive you in the same way that you forgive others. How well do you do at forgiving others? [Allow discussion.] This prayer should move us to take a long look at our heart and be humbled by our brokenness.

- J.C. Ryle says that with this verse, “We confess that we are sinners, and need daily...pardon and forgiveness.”⁵⁹ It is admitting our brokenness and crucifying any self-righteousness we have. In many ways, as Ryle says, it is saying “Do not forgive me at all,” if we are harboring bitterness and anger towards others.⁶⁰
- Tim Keller says, “Jesus rightly links our relationship with God to our relationship with others. It works two ways. If we have not seen our sin and sought radical forgiveness from God, we will be unable to forgive and to seek the good of those who have wronged us.”⁶¹

⁵⁹J.C. Ryle, *Expository Thoughts on the Gospels, Matthew* (The Banner of Truth Trust: 1856), 43.

⁶⁰*Ibid.*, 43.

⁶¹Keller, 115.

- In short, it's a verse that should humble us in our sin, move us towards compassion for others that have sinned against us, and, most importantly, make us thankful for Jesus who does forgive and love perfectly.

Lead Us Not into Temptation: _____

What do you think this verse implies? [Allow answers.] This verse implies that we are weak. Just like the previous request to “forgive us our debts” should humble us, this prayer should humble us because it implies that we are weak and liable to temptation.

- As J.C. Ryle says, “[This verse] teaches us that we are liable, at all times, to be led astray, and fall: it instructs us to confess our infirmity, and beseech God to hold us up, and not allow us to run into sin.”⁶²
- This prayer is reminding us how weak we are and how prone we are to fall into temptation. It is also reminding us that we are upheld by God's strength alone. If you resist a specific temptation and choose righteously, it is only by God's grace – there's no boasting in our strength.
- Does God tempt us? [Allow discussion.] READ: James 1:12-15; what do these verses tell us? [Allow answers.] God does not tempt us because no evil dwells in him. He does, however, test us in order to conform us more into the image of Jesus Christ.
- Therefore, this prayer is not asking God to keep all testing and trials from us. It is admitting our weakness and need for God's strength in the midst of trial and temptation.

Deliver Us from Evil: _____

What do you think this is asking for? [Allow answers.] How can we pray this when we know that we are sinful, and we live in a sinful world? [Allow discussion.]

- One important thing to note about this particular verse is the fact that it can be translated, “Deliver us from the Evil One.”⁶³ In other words, “God, please protect us from the devil.”
- “Augustine indicates that while the sixth petition is for deliverance from the remaining evil inside us, this seventh petition is for protection from evil outside us...”⁶⁴
- One thing this verse should do for Christians is to remind us that we are under attack. We are at war with forces that are inside us and outside of us. Something we can often miss and something we don't always talk about are the demonic forces that are in this world.

⁶²Ryle, 43.

⁶³Keller, 117.

⁶⁴Ibid., 117

- READ: Ephesians 6:10-12; what do we learn here? [Allow answers.] As Paul tells us, there are spiritual forces at work for our destruction. We do not have time to go into this in detail, but what we need to be reminded of is this: the devil is real, and he does have demonic powers at work in this world. However, the devil and his minions are defeated enemies, and God the Father fights for us and protects us.⁶⁵

For Thine is the Kingdom, the Power, and the Glory Forever:⁶⁶

Why do you think we repeat this phrase if it's not listed in the Bible? [Allow discussion.] According to scholars, the earliest Greek manuscripts did not include this phrase. It was thought to be added later by some scribes, so that is why it is not included in your Bible.⁶⁷

- Even though this is not found in our Bibles, most churches repeat this phrase when they recite it corporately; therefore, what is this statement saying? [Allow answers.]
- In many ways, this phrase is beginning where we started. Jesus begins the prayer by getting his disciples (and us) to focus on God and his Kingdom – not ourselves. After we move to requests for our daily bread, forgiving sins, guarding from temptation, etc., we are reminded that our focus should remain on God.
- All the requests we ask are for the sake of God's Kingdom, provided through his power, and for his glory until eternity. Keller basically says that it ends the prayer with a peaceful reminder of God's goodness, power, and glory.⁶⁸

What part have we left out? [Allow answers. ANSWER: "Amen."] We discussed the meaning of the word "amen" in Lesson 4. Does anyone remember its meaning? [Allow answers. ANSWER: Truly or so be it.]

- It means that we really mean what we just said. In other words, we are praying this from the heart with sincerity. Therefore, this last word should humble us by how familiar the Lord's Prayer has become to us.
- The word "amen" is a good reminder for us to seek to pray this prayer with more focused minds. Obviously, we can only do that by the Holy Spirit. As we said, let's pray so we can pray.

Review: _____
What did you learn today? [Allow answers.]

⁶⁵TEACHER'S NOTE: The subject of spiritual warfare could open up a can of worms, but it must be mentioned in this context. If you would like to do more reading on this, a very short resource is *Did the Devil Make Me Do It? And Other Questions About Satan, Demons, and Evil Spirits* by Mike McKinley (The Good Book Company, 2013).

⁶⁶TEACHER'S NOTE: If your students have kept their Bible's open (hopefully they have) have them look for this phrase.

⁶⁷TEACHER'S NOTE: If any of your students have a good study Bible, or if you do, you can get them to look this up. Most Bibles will contain some footnote about this.

⁶⁸Keller, 117-118.

AN OVERVIEW OF PRAYERS

LESSON 10

Review

What have we talked about over the last several weeks?

- The four elements of prayer: Praise/Adoration, Confession/Forgiveness, Thanks, Petition/Supplication
- Other elements – Lament, Approach, and Closing: “In Jesus’ name, Amen.”
- Why do we pray? God’s Kingdom, God tells us to, Communion, Dependence, Sin, Encouragement/Joy
- Does prayer change God?
- Pray without ceasing.
- When are some times when we should pray?
- What new things have you learned about The Lord’s Prayer?

Well, for the last two weeks we’ve been looking at the most familiar prayer in all of Scripture. Even though this is the one repeated most often from Scripture, there are many other prayers recorded in the Bible.

- What follows is an overview of some of those prayers. Remember, the Word of God must be shaping our prayers, so it is of the utmost importance for God’s people to be people of the Word.
- Let’s look more closely at some of the prayers God has recorded for us. To do so, let us start again by looking to our Savior.

The Garden of Gethsemane:

READ: Matthew 26:36-46; Mark 14:36; Luke 22:42; what do we learn from Jesus’ prayers here? [Allow answers.]

- One of the chief principles we learn from Jesus is this: When he was sorrowful and greatly troubled, there was nowhere else he wanted to be than with his Father.
- We need to thank God for friends and family in the midst of sorrow. These are some of the greatest graces God gives, but our sorrow should move us to long for God’s presence in prayer.
- Other truths we learn:
 - Jesus addresses God as “Father” which can remind us of the Lord’s Prayer.
 - Jesus appeals to God’s will which also reminds us of the Lord’s Prayer.
 - Jesus rushes into supplication – “If it be possible, let this cup pass from me” – this can tell us that God welcomes us to ask anything of him with a heart submissive towards his will.
 - Jesus also shows us that short prayers are okay. While there may have been much

more that wasn't recorded, and it seems like this was the case since the disciples grew weary, we have short prayers recorded from our Savior.
 - Anything else? [Allow answers.]

The High Priestly Prayer: _____

READ: John 17⁶⁹; what are some things you observed from this prayer? [Allow answers.] What follows is a helpful outline and content that appears in The Literary Study Bible.⁷⁰

- Prayer that Jesus would be glorified (vv. 1-5) – Jesus' desire for glory was rooted in the desire that his Father be glorified through him. Jesus instructs us that there is only one God and that Jesus was and is eternal.
- Prayer for the disciples (vv. 6-19) – Jesus' first desire is for his Father's glory, and then he prays for others, i.e., the disciples. One of the primary things he prays for is their unity (v. 11) which teaches us about the importance of Christian unity.
- Prayer for the followers of Christ throughout history (vv. 20-26) – Jesus then begins to pray for you and me; let that sink in. He, again, prays for our unity and says that it will point the world to the truth that God the Father sent the Son (John 16:21, 23).
- What else do we learn? [Allow answers.]

The Prayer of Nehemiah: _____

READ: Nehemiah 1:1-11⁷¹; what are some things you observed from this prayer? [Allow answers.] Here are some truths we observe:

- Like Jesus in the Garden of Gethsemane, Nehemiah turns to God in a moment of weeping and mourning.
- Nehemiah obviously didn't have the Lord's Prayer as a model, so he doesn't address God as "Father in Heaven," but he says, "O Lord God of Heaven."
- He gives proper praise and adoration – "...the great and awesome God who keeps covenant and steadfast love..."
- He acknowledges his sinfulness and the sins of his people. (v. 6-8)
- He also has a heart submissive to God's authority as he continually refers to himself as God's servant.
- What else do we learn? [Allow answers.]

⁶⁹TEACHER'S NOTE: There are larger sections of Scripture to read in this lesson. It may be helpful to break them up and read portions or assign specific readings to various students. Whatever you choose to do, let God's Word be the primary focus of this lesson. Just be aware that the Scripture readings will take up a good bit of time.

⁷⁰Leland Ryken and Philip Graham Ryken, The Literary Study Bible ESV (Crossway: 2007), 1613.

⁷¹TEACHER'S NOTE: There is mention of fasting in verse four, and this is a common practice that often accompanies prayer. Therefore, fasting will be dealt with in greater detail in the next lesson if any of your students inquire.

The Prayer of Habakkuk: _____

READ: Habakkuk 3:1-19; what are some things you observed from this prayer?
[Allow answers.]⁷²

- Once again, Habakkuk did not have the Lord's Prayer as a model to follow, but you can hear his "hallowing" of God's name – "O Lord, do I fear."
- Although some of the imagery would take more time than we have to explore, you can hear Habakkuk proclaiming descriptions of God's power, splendor, glory, wrath, justice, fury, anger, and immensity, i.e., adoration/praise.
- He also proclaims God's fatherly care and protection over his anointed people in the midst of their wicked enemies (v.13).
- How does Habakkuk end the prayer? [Allow answers. ANSWER: Even though pain and affliction come his way, he will rejoice in the Lord.]
- One important truth to learn from this prayer is the variety of words and imagery used to describe God's power and glory. Be cautious in how you speak to God, but employing a wide variety of vocabulary can assist in our prayers becoming too familiar and dry.

Review: _____

What did you learn today?

[Close in prayer.]

⁷²TEACHER'S NOTE: As Leland and Philip Ryken point out, this prayer is a form of poetry that has imagery which may be challenging to understand. Make your students aware of that. Ibid., 1418.

FASTING AND REPENTANCE

LESSON 11

Review

What have we talked about over the last several weeks?

- The four elements of prayer: Praise/Adoration, Confession/Forgiveness, Thanks, Petition/Supplication
- Other elements – Lament, Approach, and Closing: “In Jesus’ name, Amen.”
- Why do we pray? God’s Kingdom, God tells us to, Communion, Dependence, Sin, Encouragement/Joy
- Does prayer change God?
- Pray without ceasing.
- When are some times when we should pray?
- What new things have you learned about The Lord’s Prayer?
- What did you learn from the various prayers last week? Gethsemane, High Priestly Prayer, Nehemiah, Habakkuk

Last week, as we looked at Nehemiah’s prayer, we read, “I continued fasting and praying before the God of heaven” (1:4b). In Scripture, there is a strong correlation between prayer and fasting. Not only that, but there is a deep connection between these and repentance. Therefore, let’s get a better understanding of what fasting is.

What is Fasting?⁷³

READ: Exodus 34:28 and Acts 27:9; what do these verses tell us? [Allow answers.] Someone define fasting. [Allow answers.] The reason we chose these verses is because they show us the very first and very last references to fasting in the Bible. In total, the Bible speaks about fasting seventy-seven times. Joe Carter says, “Fasting is a spiritual practice in which we abstain from food or drink for a specific Biblical purpose.”⁷⁴

- READ: Ezra 8:21-23; what do we learn from these verses? [Allow answers.] Carter tells us that one of the primary reasons to fast is to “strengthen prayer.” He says, “Fasting does not change whether God hears our prayers, but it can change our praying.”⁷⁵
- READ: Zechariah 7:4-7; what do we learn from these verses? [Allow answers.] The focus here is the hearts of God’s people. This is of primary importance when we talk about fasting. While we are all sinful and will rarely – if ever – do something from completely pure motives, we must pray for right hearts as we pursue fasting.

⁷³TEACHER’S NOTE: It is important to state how much Joe Carter’s NIV Lifehacks Bible assisted this lesson. It is a great and unique resource that is helpful for personal growth or student discipleship. RYM recommends that you check this resource out.

⁷⁴Joe Carter, The NIV Lifehacks Bible, (Zondervan: 2015), 333.

⁷⁵Ibid., 317

- READ: Acts 13:1-3; what do we learn in these verses? [Allow answers.] Once again, people point to this verse to describe fasting as a way to strengthen our prayers and focus.
 - David Mathis says this: “Fasting is an exceptional measure, designed to channel and express our desire for God and our holy discontent in a fallen world...For those who feel truly desperate for God.”⁷⁶ [Pause for questions/comments.]
 - Martyn Lloyd-Jones said, “Fasting should really be made to include abstinence from anything which is legitimate in and of itself for the sake of some special spiritual purpose.”⁷⁷
 - What do you think Lloyd-Jones is saying? [Allow answers.] While he affirms that the biblical notion of fasting has to do with food and drink, he is saying that it can include more than that.⁷⁸
 - Something that has become common, and applicable to teenagers, is a technology fast. While you ultimately don’t need your smartphones to survive like you need food and drink, abstaining from technology for a time can help maintain focus in your prayer life.

Do We Have to Fast? _____

READ: Matthew 6:16-18; what do we learn from these verses? [Allow answers.] Jesus teaches us something here that is similar to a lesson he taught on prayer. That is, do not fast so that you may be “seen by others.” This points us back to the previous section about the heart and fasting.

- It is easy to miss the first words of Jesus in this section of Scripture: “And when you fast...” It is important to note that Jesus expected his followers to practice fasting. As Lloyd-Jones says, “[T]hough [Jesus] never taught fasting directly, He certainly taught it indirectly.”⁷⁹
- Scripture does not give us a set number of times to fast – the Pharisees were often focused on a number. Nevertheless, fasting is often connected to prayer, and the Bible seems to emphasize fasting as strengthening our prayers.
- All of that to say, fasting seems like a good practice that Christians should pursue. Remember to keep your heart motives in check when pursuing it, but it can prove to add depth to your prayer life in certain seasons.

Fasting and Repentance: _____

There is so much more that can be said about fasting, but one additional important truth is the correlation between fasting and repentance. Repentance and faith are the two foundations of salvation. Without them, no one can be saved, and we must know that they are a grace from God, i.e. he works them in us.

⁷⁶David Mathis, *Habits of Grace* (Crossway: 2016), 118.

⁷⁷D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones, *Studies in the Sermon on the Mount* (Eerdmans: 1960), 314.

⁷⁸*Ibid.*, 314

⁷⁹*Ibid.*, 312

- While confessing our sins was discussed in lesson 3, the need for continued repentance over sins should be a daily – or consistent – aspect of our prayer life. Not only is repentance needed as entrance into the Christian faith, Christians are to be repenting of particular sins.⁸⁰ [Pause for questions/discussion.]
- READ: 1 Samuel 7:5-6; what do these verses teach us? [Allow answers.] Joe Carter says that fasting is also a means “[t]o express repentance and a return to God... This type of fasting helps us to express grief over our sins and shows the seriousness about returning to the path of godly obedience.”⁸¹

While there are many other aspects of fasting for us to consider, it seems that the practice of fasting could be summed up with this purpose: It fosters deeper intimacy with God. That does not mean that Christians cannot experience intimacy with God through Bible reading, fellowship, or prayer without fasting. Still, the Scriptures seem to highlight an intimacy that’s aided by fasting.⁸²

Review: _____

What did you learn today? [Allow answers.]

[Close in prayer.]

⁸⁰TEACHER’S NOTE: See Westminster Confession of Faith 15:5

⁸¹Carter, 317.

⁸²TEACHER’S NOTE: Be sure to encourage students to search the Scriptures on this topic and to seriously consider this practice. John Piper’s *A Hunger for God: Desiring God through Fasting and Prayer* could be a good place for students to start.

WHAT IS PRAYER?

LESSON 12

Review

What have we talked about over the last several weeks?

- The four elements of prayer: Praise/Adoration, Confession/Forgiveness, Thanks, Petition/Supplication
- Other elements – Lament, Approach, and Closing: “In Jesus’ name, Amen.”
- Why do we pray? God’s Kingdom, God tells us to, Communion, Dependence, Sin, Encouragement/Joy
- Does prayer change God?
- Pray without ceasing.
- When are some times when we should pray?
- What new things have you learned about The Lord’s Prayer?
- What did you learn from the various other prayers we looked at? Gethsemane, High Priestly Prayer, Nehemiah, Habakkuk
- Fasting and Repentance

Well, we’ve come to the last lesson in Prayer 101, so I thought it might be a good idea to end where we began. In Lesson 2 we asked, “What is prayer?” As we just reviewed, you have learned some ways you can go about answering that question. However, today we’re going to answer that question in a way that gives you a certain mindset moving forward. That is, taking all the information we’ve discussed, how will it shape you moving forward?

What is Prayer? A Privilege

READ: Genesis 1:1-5, 26-27; what do these verses tell us? [Allow answers.] God created all things by simply speaking. He possesses a power and transcendence that’s beyond our understanding. He is our Creator, and we are his creatures.

- Prayer is the creature getting to address the Creator of the universe. Let that sink in a minute. The God who has always been in existence, created everything that has ever been, sustains everything that has ever been or will be, allows his creatures to talk to him – wherever and whenever.
- READ: Psalm 8:1-4; what do we learn from these verses? [Allow answers.] God’s glory and majesty are unlike anything else and beyond our finite grasp. Simply put, these verses tell us that God is really big, and we are really small.
- Prayer should humble us and remind us that God is infinite, Creator, powerful, yet he allows lowly, sinful creature to speak to him. Even though we pray anywhere and often, let us remind ourselves that prayer is a privilege beyond comparison.

What is Prayer? A Joy_____

READ: Psalm 100; what do we learn from these verses? [Allow answers.] Again, we read that God made us; he is our Creator. The Psalmist enters into God's presence with joy and praise because God is exceedingly good and his love for his children never fails.

- When we ask, What is prayer? We need to be reminded that it is not only a privilege but a joy. The holy, righteous, and just Creator of all the earth has placed a love upon his redeemed children that will never fade or be removed.
- READ: Hebrews 4:14-16; what do we learn from these verses? Praying to God should remind you that you have a great High Priest who intercedes for you and gives you access to God the Father. Let our prayer serve as a joyful reminder that Jesus Christ has purchased our salvation; therefore, we can approach the throne of grace.

What is Prayer? A Discipline_____

READ: Romans 7:15-25; what do these verses tell us? [Allow answers.] In short, the Christian life is a spiritual battle. Our sinful natures will be at war with the Holy Spirit until we die or Jesus comes back.

- What does this have to do with our prayer life? [Allow answers.] There are going to be times when we don't feel like praying, times when we don't pray, and times when it "feels" like our prayers aren't doing anything.
- When prayer feels joyless and more like a chore, we must pray. As others have said, when we don't feel like praying, those are often the times we need to pray the most. What does that statement mean? [Allow answers.]
- Since we know God is a loving Father and a Father who knows everything, we need to be very honest and open with God when we pray. Don't be afraid to say, for example, "God, I'm tired. I don't feel like praying. Help me pray to you." If you look at the Psalms, as we discussed in previous lessons, there were often prayers of lament.
- Here are some things to ask God as you seek to make this a discipline:
 - Pray God would give you strength to pray when your sinful nature is warring against your desire to pray.
 - Pray God would give you a heart that longs to pray without ceasing.
 - Pray God would give you joy in your prayer.
 - Pray God would give you a longing to be in his presence.
 - Pray God would deepen your prayers.
 - Pray God would give you a hunger and thirst for his Word which fuels our prayers.
 - What are some other ways to pray for this spiritual discipline? [Allow answers.]

Tools to Assist with Prayer: _____

Before we draw this study to a close, let me give you some tools to assist you in feeding your prayer life.

- *The Bible* – Yes, I’m listing that again because it’s that important. Our prayers will be shallow and often self-centered without God’s Word shaping them. Feed on the Bible to give greater depth to your prayers.
- *Books* – God has been so gracious to give us the Bible, but he has also been exceedingly gracious to give us other literature on prayer. Wisdom is listening and learning from those who have lived longer than we have. Thankfully, many godly men and women have written on prayer. We would do well to listen to them. Ask your youth workers, pastors, and parents about good books on prayer.⁸³
- *Listen* – Sometimes it is easy to mentally disengage when others are praying in church or a large group setting. Train yourself to listen to others that are praying and allow not only their language to guide you, but also the form of the prayer. Think about how your pastors begin their prayers as well.
- *The Valley of Vision* – One specific tool I would like to recommend is Arthur Bennet’s *The Valley of Vision*. In my opinion, this is a book every Christian should own. It is a collection of prayers that will encourage you, instruct you, and feed your own prayer life. It may be helpful to read a specific prayer from this book prior to your own prayers. Or, personalize a prayer from the book. That is, as you read a specific prayer, launch off of their words and phrases to pray for those in your life.⁸⁴

Review: _____

What did you learn today? [Allow answers.]

[Close in prayer.]

⁸³TEACHER’S NOTE: You can look at the list of books at the beginning of this study for a good place to start. Some of the books used, like Tim Keller’s *Prayer*, won’t be suitable for teenagers, at least as a starting point.

⁸⁴TEACHER’S NOTE: If you have a copy of *The Valley of Vision*, it may be a good idea to read a selected prayer to your students. Print off some copies for them and allow them to follow along.

SOURCES

- *A Call to Prayer* – J.C. Ryle
- *Practical Religion* – J.C. Ryle
- *Prayer: Experiencing Awe and Intimacy with God* – Tim Keller
- *A Praying Life: Connecting with God in a Distracting World* – Paul Miller
- *Valley of Vision: A Collection of Puritan Prayers & Devotions* – Author Bennett
- *Praying the Bible* – Donald Whitney
- *The Westminster Confession of Faith*
- *Praying Backward: Transform Your Prayer Life by Beginning in Jesus' Name*
- *Concise Theology: A Guide to Historic Christian Belief* – J.I. Packer
- *Spiritual Disciplines for the Christian Life* – Donald Whitney
- *Habits of Grace: Enjoying Jesus through the Spiritual Disciplines* – David Mathis
- *A Hunger for God* – Piper
- *The Institutes of the Christian Religion* – John Calvin

