

KEEPING YOUR PRAYER LIFE FRESH

A Study Outline



Michael D. Taylor

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Definition: Prayer is personal communication with God (Grudem)

I. MISCONCEPTIONS ABOUT PRAYER

A. Prayer is a magic wand.

1. God is like a genie.
2. You rub the vase and God comes out and you pray your request-- "Your wish is my command."

B. Prayer is a fire alarm.

1. It is an act of desperation. "Use only in case of emergency."
2. We've tried everything else; I guess all we can do now is pray.

C. Prayer is a tug-of-war.

1. A religious con game that you play with God where you try to convince God to do something nice for you.
2. You keep pestering God until finally God gets so irritated that He finally says, "Ok, I'll give it to you," and He gives in.

D. Prayer is a religious duty.

1. The basic motivation behind it is guilt.
2. I know I should pray more, I ought to pray, it's something I ought to do.
3. It becomes a duty.
4. You have a sense of obligation that if you don't pray you'll be on God's Bad List.
5. As a result, you go through a meaningless ritual that becomes a rut.
6. You learn memorized phrases and you get caught in religious clichés and say the same thing over and over. It's totally meaningless to you but you know you ought to do it.
7. When you think of prayer you think of one word -- boring!
8. You think, "Why do I have to pray?" It becomes something you endure rather than something you enjoy.

II. WHY PRAY WHEN GOD KNOWS EVERYTHING?

"O LORD, you have searched me and you know me. You know when I sit and when I rise; you perceive my thoughts from afar. You discern my going out and my lying down; you are familiar with all my ways. Before a word is on my tongue you know it completely, O LORD." Psa. 139:1-4

"...for your Father knows what you need before you ask him. Matt. 6:8b

- A. **Purpose No. 1: Prayer is not about informing God but about humbly expressing my dependence on him (John 15:5-7).**

1. Illustration: A deep sea diver depends on the lifeline to THE ship above and can stay down indefinitely. A SCUBA diver carries his own air supply and is self-sufficient but is limited by the air in his tank.
2. As long as you think you're self-sufficient, prayer can have no meaning for you.
3. Our biggest problem in prayer is THAT we don't feel a dependence upon God. We often think we can do everything ourselves.
4. So we go thinking, "I don't need to pray because I know what to do."
5. Praying to express dependency on God says, "God, I admit I have a need. I need your help in my life."

B. Purpose No. 2: Prayer builds my friendship with Jesus (John 15:15-16).

1. God says, "I am the King of kings, and Lord of Lords, and you are my friend and I want to talk to you."
2. We can communicate anytime with Jesus because we are his friends.
3. Most of our problems in life are communication problems.
4. You can't understand a person unless you communicate with that person.
5. Problem:
 - a) We don't think God is interested in us.
 - b) We can't conceive that the Creator of the entire universe is interested in our car payments—our job situation—our aches and pain (Psalm 116:1).
6. Illustration: Cuban missile crisis—President Kennedy & Premier Khrushchev of Russia.
 - a) Almost went to war—but didn't—they established a communication link—a red phone on Kennedy's desk connected directly to a red phone on Khrushchev's desk.
 - b) If anything went wrong they agreed to pick up the phone and talk to each other first.

C. Purpose No. 3: Prayer brings God's joy and peace (John 16:24; Phil. 4:6-7; Rom. 5:1; Col. 3:15).

1. The peace of God comes when we have peace *with* God.
2. Peace comes when we pray about an issue in our lives.

D. Purpose No. 4: Prayer aligns my will to God's (John 14:11-13).

1. Prayer is not so much getting God to do our will as it is in demonstrating that we are concerned that his will be done.
2. Oswald Chambers writes, "Beware of thinking that intercession means bringing our own personal sympathies and concerns into the presence of God, and then demanding that He do whatever we ask."¹
3. Prayer is in large part a matter of creating in ourselves a right attitude toward God's will. "Your kingdom come, your will be done..." Matt. 6:10.
4. D. L. Moody once said, "Every great movement of God can be traced to a single praying, kneeling figure."

III. PRAYER IS PERSONAL COMMUNICATION WITH GOD²

A. Why does God want you to pray?

1. Prayer is to express your trust in God (Matt. 6:8).
2. Prayer expresses your dependency on God as a loving and wise Father (Mat 6:9; Luke 11:9-13; Mat 21:22).
3. Prayer brings you into deeper fellowship with God.
4. Prayer allows you to be involved in activities that are eternally important.

B. The effectiveness of prayer.

1. Prayer changes the way God acts (Luke 11:9-10; 2 Chron. 7:14; 1 John 1:9). James writes, "You do not have because you do not ask" (Jas. 4:2). He implies that failure to ask deprives us of what God would otherwise have given to us.
2. Effective prayer is made possible by our Mediator Jesus Christ (John 14:6; Heb.4:14-16).
 - a) Because we are sinful and God is holy, we have no right on our own to enter into his presence.
 - b) There is only one mediator between God and man, Jesus Christ (1 Tim. 2:5)
3. We are to pray in Jesus' name (John 14:13-14; 16:23-24; Rom. 1:8).
 - a) To come in the name of someone means that another person has authorized us to come in his authority, not our own. We need a mediator to come between us and God, and to bring us into God's presence.
 - b) This does not simply mean adding the phrase "in Jesus' name" after every prayer...after all, none of the prayers in the Bible have the phrase "in Jesus' name" at the end of them.
 - c) That phrase is not a magic formula that would give special power to our prayers.
 - d) Praying in Jesus' name is offering prayers that are consistent with his character and his will (1 John 5:14-15).
4. To whom should we pray?
 - a) Prayers in the NT are usually addressed to God the Father (Matt. 6:9; John 16:23; Eph. 5:20).
 - b) However, some prayers are also addressed to Jesus (Acts 7:29; 1 Cor. 16:22; 2 Cor. 12:8; Rev. 22:20).
 - c) Though no prayers are directly addressed to the Holy Spirit in the NT, there is nothing that would forbid such prayer, particularly when we are asking him to do something that relates to his special areas of ministry or responsibility.
5. The Holy Spirit helps us in our weakness. We do not know what we ought to pray for, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us with groans that words cannot express (Rom. 8:26-27).
 - a) Even when we don't know the right words to pray, the Holy Spirit prays with and for us.

- b) The Holy Spirit does not pray in our place but takes part with us and makes our weak prayers effective.³
- 6. What about unanswered prayer?
 - a) As long as God is God and we are his creatures, there will be some unanswered prayers.
 - b) This is because God keeps hidden his own wise plans for the future, answering them when the time is right.
 - c) Sometimes we don't pray as we ought (Rom. 8:26)...we do not pray according to God's will (Jas. 4:3), or we do not always ask in faith (Jas. 1:6-8).

C. Twelve aspects of a healthy prayer life

1. Praying according to God's will (1 John 5:14-15; Matt. 6:10; 26:39; John 15:7).
2. Praying with faith (Matt. 11:24; 21:22; Heb. 11:1; Jas. 1:6).
 - a) Faith is believing God is who he says he is.
 - b) Faith is believing that God will do what he said he will do.
 - c) Praying in faith gives us a sense of assurance that God hears our prayers and will respond in his wisdom and timing.
3. Living in obedience to God...anything in our lives that displeases him will be a hindrance to prayer (Psa. 66:18; 1 Pet. 3:7, 12; 1 John 3:21-22).
4. Confessing our sins, receiving God's forgiveness, and restoring an intimate relationship with him (Matt. 6:12; 1 John 1:9).
5. Forgiving others (Matt. 6:12-15; Mark 11:25).
6. Living humbly before God and others (Jas. 4:6, 10).
7. Being prayerful throughout each day (1 Thess. 5:17; Col. 4:2).
8. Praying earnestly, not faking emotional intensity (Heb. 5:7; Dan. 9:19).
9. Waiting patiently on the Lord to respond in his own time (Psa. 27:14; 38:15; 130:5-6).
10. Praying in private (Dan. 6:10; Matt. 6:6).
 - a) Find a regular time and a comfortable place.
 - b) Avoid distractions.
 - c) Keep this private prayer time fresh.
11. Praying with others (Matt. 18:19-20; 6:11-13, notice the word "us" throughout this prayer).
 - a) Believers find strength in praying together with others.
 - b) Keep a prayer journal for your prayer group.
 - c) Record the name of the person making a prayer request along with the date.
 - d) Pray regularly for each specific request.
 - e) Ask the person who submitted the request to look for God's response and provide updates to the prayer group.

- f) Offer up praise to God who always hears our requests and answers them in his own wisdom and timing.
- 12. Fasting during times of intense prayer needs (Neh. 1:4; Esth. 4:3; Dan. 9:6; Luke 2:37; Acts 14:23).
 - a) Fasting is not about getting more of God's attention.
 - b) Fasting can provide more time and focus in times of intense intercession, repentance, worship, and seeking God.
 - c) Fasting can increase one's spiritual strength and power.

IV. THE A-C-T-S PATTERN FOR PRAYER

- A. **Adoration**: Reflect on God's nature, and praise him for attributes that especially move you.
- B. **Confession**: Admit your sins, and sinful nature, to God. Be humble and honest before him. Remember that God loves you always and wants the best for you.
- C. **Thanksgiving**: Express your gratitude to God for the ways he has been generous to you.
- D. **Supplication**: Pray first for others, then for yourself. Be specific.

V. TEN PRAYER BUSTERS

- A. **Prayer Buster No. 1: Prayerlessness (Jas. 4:2).**
- B. **Prayer Buster No. 2: Not having a personal relationship with Jesus Christ (John 15:7).**
- C. **Prayer Buster No. 3: Inappropriate requests⁴ (Luke 9:51-55).**
 - 1. The disciples efforts to withhold children from Jesus was refused (Mark 10:13-14).
 - 2. Jesus refused the disciples request to destroy the inhospitable Samaritans (Luke 9:52-55).
 - 3. Jesus rebuked Peter who opposed Jesus' announcement of his imminent death (Luke 8:33).
- D. **Prayer Buster no. 4: Not praying according to God's will (1 John 5:14).**
- E. **Prayer Buster No. 5: Inadequate faith (Jas. 1:5-8).**
 - 1. If your prayers have clouds of doubt hanging over them, they won't go anywhere.
 - 2. Your faith is to be in God, not in yourself (Matt. 11:23).
- F. **Prayer Buster No. 6: Unresolved sin (Psa. 66:18; Isa. 59:1-2).**
 - 1. Example: The sin of cheating God (Mal. 3:5).

2. Example: The sin of cheating the poor (Mal. 3:5).
3. Example: The sin of cheating on wives (Mal. 1).

G. Prayer Buster No. 7: Praying ambiguously.

1. In order to experience the joy of answered prayers, they must be specific; otherwise, the answer may not be recognized.⁵
2. Examples:
 - a) "God bless all the missionaries."
 - b) "God bless our church."
 - c) Using the word "bless" in a non-specific way.

H. Prayer Buster No. 8: Broken relationships (Matt. 5:23-24).

1. Unreconciled relationships with friends (Matt. 25:31-46; Eph. 4:32; Col. 3:13; 1 John 2:9; Rom. 12:18).
2. A husband's improper treatment of his wife (1 Pet. 3:7).

I. Prayer Buster No. 9: Wrong motives (Jas. 4:3).

1. Asking for things that are self-centered.
2. Asking for things that promote one's self.
3. Asking to satisfy your "wants" instead of your needs.

J. Prayer Buster No. 10: Uncaring attitudes (Phil. 2:3-4).

1. Uncaring attitude toward the poor (Prov. 21:13).
2. Uncaring attitude toward fellow workers (Isa. 58:3-9).

VI. HOW TO OFFER A REQUEST TO GOD

A. You must be willing to let God answer in His own time.

1. Example #1: Zachariah
 - a) God did not answer Zachariah's prayer immediately (Luke 1:11-13).
 - b) Zachariah & Elizabeth had no children.
 - c) They prayed for a child, now they were old (v. 7 "they were both well along in years").
 - d) Angel, v. 13 "your prayer has been heard (aorist tense=happened in the past).
 - e) Zachariah's prayer was when he was younger, but God waited to answer until his time was right—John the Baptist—the "announcer" of Jesus as Messiah.
 - f) Mark 11:24, "Therefore I tell you, whatever you ask for in prayer, believe that you have received it, and it will be yours."
 - g) Question: Why does God not always answer our prayers immediately?

- (1) Usually, because he needs to prepare us first. ("Daddy, can I drive the car today?").
 - (2) We usually think we are ready before God does.
2. Example No. 2: Habakkuk
 - a) God did not answer Habakkuk's prayer immediately (Hab. 1:2; 2:6)
 - b) Habakkuk 1:2 and 2:6 (Why are the wicked in Judah not being punished for their sin—why are you allowing such evil to exist?).
 - c) Why does God sometimes not respond immediately?
 - (1) God wants to change you first.
 - (2) He is more interested in making you mature than he is about making your life easy.
 - (3) Pray "change me" rather than change the situation.
 - (4) God's timing is always perfect.
 - d) How long do I pray about something?
 - (1) Until God gives you the answer.
 - (2) Until you get the assurance that you're going to get the answer.
 - (3) Until God says, "No." (No open doors)
3. Example #3: Jairus
 - a) Jesus did not heal Jairus' daughter right away (Mark 5:22-42).
 - b) Jairus—"hurry, Jesus, my daughter is on the brink of death!"
 - c) What happened next (v.24-38)? Woman with bleeding issue gets Jesus' attention (seemingly delayed)—what is Jairus probably thinking at this point?
 - d) What happens next to Jairus' daughter (v. 35)? "Your daughter is dead—don't bother Jesus anymore."
 - e) What does Jesus then say to Jairus? (v. 36)—"*Don't be afraid; just believe!*"
 - f) Notice: Jairus had just seen Jesus heal the woman but probably saw it as a delay to his plea.
 - g) Sometimes God works in other people's lives to show us something important while we are waiting for an answer to our prayers.
4. Example #4: Abraham and Sarah
 - a) God promised Abraham that he would give him a son (Gen. 15:1-13).
 - b) For years nothing happened!
 - c) Abraham & Sarah took matters into their own hands.
 - d) But God waited until it was humanly impossible!
 - e) Warning: Sometimes it gets worse before it gets better.
 - (1) You pray that your finances will get better and you get more bills.
 - (2) You pray for someone to get well, and they get sicker.
 - f) God lets things get to a point of hopelessness in order that he might gain the most glory out of it.

5. Example #5: Lazarus

- a) Jesus didn't raise Lazarus from the dead right away (John 11:1-6; 17-21; 39-44).
- b) Mary & Martha send word to Jesus that their brother Lazarus is very sick.
- c) Jesus was only two miles away (John 11:18), yet he waited two days before going to Jerusalem (John 11:6).
- d) Why did he delay (John 11: 41-45)? —so that many would believe that God had sent Jesus, and that they would put their faith in him.

B. You must be willing to let God answer in His own wisdom.

- 1. We often ask for too little—we often don't pray BIG prayers (Eph. 3:20-21).
- 2. When God answers our prayer in a big way he often answers gradually so we are not overwhelmed by the answer.
- 3. For example:
 - a) A small church prayed for 20,000 members—it happened over many years, 20, 30, 40. The church would have been overwhelmed if it were answered in one week.
 - b) Israel captured the land little by little—probably would have been overwhelmed if they had gotten it instantly.
 - c) John D. Rockefeller: "I'd never give anybody a million bucks—it would ruin them—they couldn't handle it."
- 4. The worst thing sometimes is to get what we asked for.
 - a) Example: Prodigal Son—"give me my inheritance—he got it, and it ruined him."
 - b) When God doesn't answer your prayer the way you want it—he has a better plan.
 - c) God always gives his best to those who leave the choice to him.

C. You must be willing to let God answer for His own purpose.

- 1. Why does God answer prayer the way he does? What are his reasons?
 - a) For our growth.
 - b) For his glory.
- 2. Examples:
 - a) God had a purpose in answering Zachariah's and Elizabeth's prayer the way he did—he gave them John the Baptist.
 - b) Joseph was promised to become a ruler but instead he became a slave—ultimately, it was through Joseph that Israel became a nation (Gen. 50:19-20).
 - c) Paul was imprisoned in Rome where he led many Praetorian guards and some of those in Caesar's household to the Lord; they in turn spread the gospel all over the Roman Empire.
- 3. Remember--
 - a) When your request is not right—God says, "No."
 - b) When you are not right—God says "Grow."

- c) When you pray and the timing is not right—God says “Slow.”
- d) When everything is in place – God says, “Go.”

VII. SEVEN WAYS TO PRAY FOR OTHER CHRISTIANS

“For this reason, since the day we heard about you, we have not stopped praying for you and asking God to fill you with the knowledge of his will through all spiritual wisdom and understanding. And we pray this in order that you may live a life worthy of the Lord and may please him in every way: bearing fruit in every good work, growing in the knowledge of God, being strengthened with all power according to his glorious might so that you may have great endurance and patience, and joyfully giving thanks to the Father, who has qualified you to share in the inheritance of the saints in the kingdom of light.” Col. 1:9-12

- A. **No. 1: Pray that they would know God's will in every situation.**
- B. **No. 2: Pray that they would live a worthy life of the Lord.**
- C. **No. 3: Pray that they would live a life that pleases the Lord.**
- D. **No. 4: Pray that they would bear fruit.**
- E. **No. 5: Pray that they their knowledge of God and his Word would grow.**
- F. **No. 6: Pray that they would have endurance and patience when going through difficult times.**
- G. **No. 7: Pray that they would joyfully give thanks to God.**

VIII. KEY VERSES REGARDING PRAYER

Psa. 34:15. “The eyes of the LORD are on the righteous and his ears are attentive to their cry.”

Heb. 4:15-16. “For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but we have one who has been tempted in every way, just as we are-- yet was without sin. Let us then approach the throne of grace with confidence, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help us in our time of need.”

Rom. 8:26. “In the same way, the Spirit helps us in our weakness. We do not know what we ought to pray for, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us with groans that words cannot express.”

Luke 11:1. “One day Jesus was praying in a certain place. When he finished, one of his disciples said to him, ‘Lord, teach us to pray, just as John taught his disciples.’”

Luke 18:1. “Then Jesus told his disciples a parable to show them that they should always pray and not give up.”

Psa. 142:2. “I pour out my complaint before him; before him I tell my trouble.”

1 Pet. 5:6-7. "Humble yourselves, therefore, under God's mighty hand, that he may lift you up in due time. Cast all your anxiety on him because he cares for you.

Phil. 4:6-7. "Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus."

Eccles. 5:2. "Do not be quick with your mouth, do not be hasty in your heart to utter anything before God. God is in heaven and you are on earth, so let your words be few."

1 Thess. 5:17. "Pray continually."

Eph. 6:18. "And pray in the Spirit on all occasions with all kinds of prayers and requests. With this in mind, be alert and always keep on praying for all the saints."

IX. WHERE TO GET MORE INFORMATION

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End Notes

¹ Chambers, May 4.

² Adapted from Grudem, Chapter 18

³ Life Application Bible, p. 2042.

⁴ Hybels, 74-77.

⁵ Hybels, 45-48.