

# Understanding Prayer

The purpose of this lesson is to develop an understanding of the basic Christian discipline of prayer, to help believers to see the importance of prayer and to challenge believers in regard to the regular and systematic practices of prayer in their lives.

## **Jeremiah 29:12-14**

*Then you will call upon Me and go and pray to Me, and I will listen to you. And you will seek Me and find Me, when you search for Me with all your heart. I will be found by you, says the Lord.*

### **I. What is Prayer?**

- A. Prayer is spending time in conversation with God.
- B. Prayer is the act of beseeching God earnestly for someone or something.
- C. Prayer involves communion with God and a recognition of His presence.
- D. Prayer involves listening to what God wants to say.

### **II. Who provides the greatest example of prayer?**

**Jesus.**

Jesus Christ, who was the only perfect man, gave us a perfect example of communion with the Heavenly Father and, in doing so, demonstrated His absolute dependence on the Father.

- A. Jesus often withdrew from the multitudes to spend time alone with the Father (Mt. 14:23; 6:46; Luke 5:16).**

#### **Luke 5:15-16**

*However, the report went around concerning Him all the more; and great multitudes came together to hear, and to be healed by Him of their infirmities. So He Himself often withdrew into the wilderness and prayed.*

- B. Jesus liked to pray early in the morning (Mark 1:35).**

*Now in the morning, having risen a long while before daylight, He went out and departed to a solitary place; and there He prayed.*

- C. At times Jesus spent all night in prayer especially when He had important decisions to make (Luke 6:12-13).**

*Now it came to pass in those days that He went out to the mountain to pray, and continued all night in prayer to God. And when it was day, He called His disciples to Himself; and from them He chose twelve whom He also named apostles.*

Do you know what requires a lot of prayer and what doesn't? Many people pray about things they don't need to and don't pray much about what actually requires a lot of prayer.

- D. Jesus' prayer life aroused the desire for prayer among the disciples (Luke 11:1).**

Could we say that our personal prayer life is stirring others up to pray?

*Now it came to pass, as He was praying in a certain place, when He ceased, that one of His disciples said to Him, "Lord, teach us to pray, as John also taught his disciples."*

**E. Jesus included others in key times of prayer (Luke 9:28-29).**

*Now it came to pass, about eight days after these sayings, that He took Peter, John, and James and went up on the mountain to pray. As He prayed, the appearance of His face was altered, and His robe became white and glistening.*

**F. Jesus prayed on key occasions.**

1. In the context of His baptism (Luke 3:21).
2. On the mount of transfiguration (Luke 9:28).
3. Prior to his leaving the earth (John 17)
4. In the garden of Gethsemane (Mt. 26:36-46).
5. On the cross (Mt. 27:46; Luke 23:46).

**G. Jesus entire earthly walk (the days of His flesh) was marked by prayer (Heb. 5:7-8).**

*... who, in the days of His flesh, when He had offered up prayers and supplications, with vehement cries and tears to Him who was able to save Him from death, and was heard because of His godly fear, though He was a Son, yet He learned obedience by the things which He suffered.*

### **III. What are some of the main components of prayer?**

There are five principle components of prayer.

**A. Praising God for Who He is.**

This is where we rehearse back to God His awesome attributes—His excellent greatness (Ps. 150:2; Ps. 145:1-3).

**Psalm 145:1-3**

*I will extol You, my God, O King; and I will bless Your name forever and ever. Every day I will bless You, and I will praise Your name forever and ever. Great is the LORD, and greatly to be praised; and His greatness is unsearchable.*

**B. Thanking God for what He has done.**

This is where we acknowledge the fact that everything we have comes from God and show appreciation even for the seemingly small things (1 Th. 5:18; Ps. 100:4-5).

**1 Thessalonians 5:16-18**

*Rejoice always, pray without ceasing, in everything give thanks; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you.*

**Psalm 100:4-5**

*Enter into His gates with thanksgiving, and into His courts with praise. Be thankful to Him, and bless His name. For the LORD is good; His mercy is everlasting, and His truth endures to all generations.*

### **C. Asking God for things that we need.**

This is when we petition God to come to our aid and give us those things that are consistent with His promises and His will for our lives (Phil. 4:6).

*Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known to God...*

#### **James 4:2-3**

*You desire but do not have, so you kill. You covet but you cannot get what you want, so you quarrel and fight. You do not have because you do not ask God. 3 When you ask, you do not receive, because you ask with wrong motives, that you may spend what you get on your pleasures.*

### **D. Confessing our sins to God and asking for His mercy.**

This is where we acknowledge our shortcomings and failures before the God that we have offended (Ps. 32:5-6; I John 1:9). It also involves reinforcing our desire to live a life that is pleasing to the Lord.

#### **Psalms 32:5-6**

*I acknowledged my sin to You, and my iniquity I have not hidden. I said, "I will confess my transgressions to the LORD," and You forgave the iniquity of my sin. 6 For this cause everyone who is godly shall pray to You in a time when You may be found; surely in a flood of great waters they shall not come near him.*

### **E. Sharing our heart with God concerning our destiny and our innermost desires.**

This is where we share our dreams, our visions, our desires, our longings, our goals, our plans and lay them all before the Lord (Ps. 27:4).

*One thing I have desired of the LORD, that will I seek: that I may dwell in the house of the LORD all the days of my life, to behold the beauty of the LORD, and to inquire in His temple.*

Many people struggle with this as they do not think they can be intimate with authority.

## **IV. What attitudes should be involved in prayer?**

### **A. We should pray in faith (Heb. 11:6).**

*But without faith it is impossible to please Him, for he who comes to God must believe that He is, and that He is a rewarder of those who diligently seek Him.*

### **B. We should come humbly before the Lord (2 Chr. 7:14).**

*... if My people who are called by My name will humble themselves, and pray and seek My face, and turn from their wicked ways, then I will hear from heaven, and will forgive their sin and heal their land.*

**C. We should come desiring God's will (1 John 5:14-15).**

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

This means that a large portion of prayer should involve figuring out His will.

**D. We should come with pure motivation (Ps. 24:3-5; Is. 58:6-7).**

**Psalm 24:3-5**

*Who may ascend into the hill of the LORD? Or who may stand in His holy place? He who has clean hands and a pure heart, who has not lifted up his soul to an idol, nor sworn deceitfully. He shall receive blessing from the LORD, and righteousness from the God of his salvation.*

**E. We should come without hypocrisy (Mt. 6:5-8).**

<sup>5</sup> *“And when you pray, do not be like the hypocrites, for they love to pray standing in the synagogues and on the street corners to be seen by others. Truly I tell you, they have received their reward in full. <sup>6</sup> But when you pray, go into your room, close the door and pray to your Father, who is unseen. Then your Father, who sees what is done in secret, will reward you. <sup>7</sup> And when you pray, do not keep on babbling like pagans, for they think they will be heard because of their many words. <sup>8</sup> Do not be like them, for your Father knows what you need before you ask him.*

**V. What are some important considerations if prayer is to become a reality in our lives?**

Jesus was the busiest man on the face of the earth and yet, even at His busiest times, He knew that He had to withdraw Himself for prayer.

Three things are necessary in dealing with the pitch and tempo of life.

**A. A Quiet Place**

1. For Jesus it was the wilderness (Luke 5:15-16), a mountain (Luke 6:12-13) or any solitary place (Mark 1:35).

**Luke 6:12-13**

*Now it came to pass in those days that He went out to the mountain to pray, and continued all night in prayer to God. And when it was day, He called His disciples to Himself; and from them He chose twelve whom He also named apostles.*

2. For the men of old it was a personal altar.

The word altar simply means “a place of slaughter or sacrifice.” For holy men and women of old, it was that personal place of sacrifice that became their own personal sanctuary or “holy place.”

- a. Noah had his altar (Gen. 8:20).
  - b. Abraham had his altar (Gen. 22:9-14).
  - c. Jacob had his altars (Gen. 28:16-19; 33:20; 35:7).
  - d. Moses had his altar (Ex. 17:15).
  - e. Joshua had his altar (Josh. 8:30).
  - f. Gideon had his altar (Judg. 6:24).
  - g. Samuel had his altar (I Sam. 7:12).
  - h. David had his altar (II Sam. 24:24-25).
  - i. Solomon had his altar (II Chr. 6:13).
  - j. Elijah had his altar on Mount Carmel (I Kgs. 18:30-40).
3. As believers who have a passion for prayer and communion with the Lord we need to have our secret place of communion (Mt. 6:6).

*But you, when you pray, go into your room, and when you have shut your door, pray to your Father who is in the secret place; and your Father who sees in secret will reward you openly.*

Your quiet place could be an attic, a garage, a closet, a car, under a tree or an apron over your head. Switch off your phone, the sky won't fall.

## **B. A Quiet Time**

The most common time in the Bible for prayer is the first part of the day. Someone has once said, “Hem in both ends of your day with prayer and it won't be so likely to unravel.”

1. Jesus prayed early in the morning (Mark 1:35).

*Now in the morning, having risen a long while before daylight, He went out and departed to a solitary place; and there He prayed.*

2. The Psalmist encouraged an early morning encounter with God (Ps. 5: 3; 55:17; 88:13; 119:147).

### **Psalm 5:1-3**

*Give ear to my words, O LORD, consider my meditation. Give heed to the voice of my cry, My King and my God, for to You I will pray. My voice You shall hear in the morning, O LORD; in the morning I will direct it to You, and I will look up.*

### **Psalm 88:13**

*But to You I have cried out, O LORD, and in the morning my prayer comes before You.*

### **Psalm 119:147**

*I rise before the dawning of the morning, and cry for help.*

3. The important thing is to develop a daily routine of prayer.

There is a price to pay for this. The more you can build a habit, the harder it will be for you to miss the time. This time should be seen as your “appointment with God.”

### **C. A Quiet Mind (Psalm 131:1-3)**

*LORD, my heart is not haughty, nor my eyes lofty. Neither do I concern myself with great matters, nor with things too profound for me. Surely I have calmed and quieted my soul, like a weaned child with his mother; like a weaned child is my soul within me. O Israel, hope in the LORD from this time forth and forever.*

This will involve a certain amount of thought control. If we are going to hear from God we must shut out the other voices that are clamoring for our attention. Have a note book to write out things you need to remember that are distracting you.

## **VI. In what realms should our prayer life be practiced?**

### **A. Individually.**

Much of our prayer life will be in secret on a daily basis (Mt. 6:5-7).

### **B. With two or three others.**

Often we will solicit the prayer support of others to see special needs met (Mt.18:19-20).

*Again I say to you that if two of you agree on earth concerning anything that they ask, it will be done for them by My Father in heaven.*

### **C. Corporately.**

The whole church will also have a corporate life together in prayer (Acts 2:42; 4:24; 13:1-3).

#### **Acts 2:42**

*And they continued steadfastly in the apostles' doctrine and fellowship, in the breaking of bread, and in prayers.*

1. The local church is to be a household of prayer (Mt. 21:13).

*“It is written,” he said to them, “‘My house will be called a house of prayer,’<sup>[a]</sup> but you are making it ‘a den of robbers.’<sup>[b]</sup>”*

2. The local church a place where the voices of God’s people will be heard in prayer, praise and thanksgiving (Ps.18:6).

*In my distress I called to the Lord; I cried to my God for help. From his temple he heard my voice; my cry came before him, into his ears.*

**Prayer Is...**

- Prayer is trusting God.
- Prayer is going for a walk with God in the woods.
- Prayer is sharing your needs with God.
- Prayer is opening yourself up to God.
- Prayer is opening your eyes to all that you are and depending on God.
- Prayer is washing yourself of the world and immersing yourself in God.
- Prayer is agreement with others that God is able.
- Prayer is calling out to one who cares.
- Prayer is listening.
- Prayer is not just listening, but hearing.
- Prayer is the linking of two spirits about things that count.
- Prayer is reaching out your hand.
- Prayer is the finite calling upon the infinite.
- Prayer is a tiny hand placed in a great hand.
- Prayer is communion with the ruler of the universe.
- Prayer is calling into action all of the forces of the universe.

--Excerpted from an unpublished document by Dick Andrew

### **Prayerlessness Is...**

- Prayerlessness is saying I'm too busy for God.
- Prayerlessness is walking in the dark blindfolded.
- Prayerlessness is the fool saying in his heart there is no God.
- Prayerlessness is wasting time you think you are saving.
- Prayerlessness is seeing only with the natural eyes.
- Prayerlessness is presuming upon God's grace and mercy.
- Prayerlessness is a car with no petrol.
- Prayerlessness is trusting in your own strength.
- Prayerlessness is the pride of life.
- Prayerlessness is counting on someone else to do the praying.
- Prayerlessness is going into battle without armor or weapons.
- Prayerlessness is laziness.
- Prayerlessness is giving into self.

--Excerpted from an unpublished document by Dave Newquest

## Reflection Questions

1. In your opinion what are the common causes of prayerlessness?
2. Are there specific times when you find your prayer life healthier than other times? When is this?
3. What do you enjoy the most about prayer?
4. What do you enjoy least about prayer?
5. What can you do to ensure that you will have an effective prayer life?
6. What do you think are the potential hindrances to your prayer life?
7. Are you involved in any type of corporate (group) prayer?
8. What are the benefits of corporate prayer?
9. What are the drawbacks of corporate prayer?