



Great Commission Coalition

How to Pray

Someone has said, "If you are swept off your feet, it's time to get on your knees." Scripture backs up this claim. In its pages we find ample evidence that Prayer can dramatically change situations, people, and sometimes even the course of nature. Consider the prayers of these Bible characters:

- **Jehoshaphat (2 Chronicles 20:1-30):** Jehoshaphat, king of Judah, was doing all the right things to please God. Then suddenly, without warning, the bottom dropped out. He received a frightening report: "A vast army is coming against you!" Alarmed, Jehoshaphat stopped what he was doing and prayed: "Our God, will you not judge them? For we have no power to face this vast army that is attacking us. We do not know what to do, but our eyes are upon You" (v. 12). We also read that "all the men of Judah, with their wives and children and little ones, stood there before the LORD" as Jehoshaphat prayed (v. 13). Since Jehoshaphat chose to turn the problem over to God, God responds powerfully and answers the prayer of the king and his people (see Philippians 4:6).
- **Hannah (1 Samuel 1:1-20):** Unable to have a child, Hannah prayed that God would give her a son. The Lord answered her prayer, and she gave birth to a son, Samuel, who would one day become one of Israel's greatest prophets.
- **Samson (Judges 16:28-30):** In spite of his previous disobedience to the Lord, Samson prayed, and God returned Samson's strength.
- **Paul & Silas (Acts 16:22-26):** Imprisoned for their faith, these two men pray. Within moments, an earthquake comes and they are free.
- **Peter (Acts 12:1-17):** While Peter was in prison and awaiting execution, the early Church prayed for his release. Within hours, an angel came and escorted Peter out of the prison.
- **Elijah (James 5:17-18; 1 Kings 18:36-38):** This Old Testament prophet prayed and the rain stopped. He prayed again, and the rain returned. Another time he prayed, and fire came down from heaven.

Prayer Is Not Just for Heroes of the Faith

When we read the stories of these great men and women of faith, we may think, "These people were super-spiritual." My prayers could never be answered like that. But look at how Scripture describes Elijah: "Elijah was a man with a nature like ours, and he prayed earnestly that it would not rain; and it did not rain on the land for three years and six months. And he prayed again, and the heaven gave rain, and the earth produced its fruit"(James 5:17-18).

In the preceding verses of that chapter (James 5:13-16), we are told to pray when we are suffering, when we are cheerful, when we are sick, when we have sinned, and for one another. We are then told that "the fervent prayer of a righteous man avails much" (v. 16). It is clear that we are to pray!

The "How To's" of Effective Prayer

No one is better qualified to teach us about how to pray than Jesus Himself. We often read of Him spending the night in prayer. Even on the night before His crucifixion, we find Jesus praying. This may have been one of the reasons His disciples asked Him, "Lord, teach us to pray" (Luke 11:1). His response was something that we now call "The Lord's Prayer." If we were to be completely accurate, we would instead call it "The Disciple's Prayer." The true "Lord's Prayer" is found in John 17, where Jesus prays right before His arrest. It is Jesus' longest prayer on record.

Read Matthew 6:5-13

Make Your Private Prayers Longer Than Your Public Prayers

We can learn something from Jesus' prayer life. Jesus' prayers were short when offered in public, but they were long when He was alone with His Father. All too often, our public prayers are long, while our private prayers are short—or non-existent. In reality, Jesus showed us that it should be the other way around. He encourages this practice further by saying, "But you, when you pray, go into your room, and when you have shut the door, pray to your Father who is in the secret place; and your Father who sees in secret will reward you openly" (Matthew 6:6).

Keep Your Motives Pure

Motive is everything in prayer. As Jesus points out in this passage, it is a sin to pray insincerely. We, like the people Jesus criticizes in this passage, can still be guilty of hypocrisy and self-centeredness in our prayers. We can try to impress others with our devotion to God through our eloquent prayers. It is tragic but true: sin knows no boundaries. It can follow us to the very throne of heaven. As we come to God in prayer, we should make sure that we "cleanse ourselves from all filthiness of the flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God" (2 Corinthians 7:1). Otherwise, our prayers will not be effective. As the psalmist David writes, "If I regard iniquity in my heart, the Lord will not hear" (Psalm 66:18).

Recognize the Objective of Prayer

Jesus gives us a valuable insight into prayer when He says, "Your Father knows the things you have need of before you ask Him"(Matthew 6:8). Prayer is not instructing or informing or bending the arm of God. The object of prayer is not to bend the will of God to mine, but to get my will in line with His. **True praying is not overcoming God's reluctance, but laying hold of His willingness.** Martin Luther once said, "By our praying, we are instructing ourselves more than Him ..." God only answers the requests which He inspires. In other words, just pray God's Word!

Abide in Christ

Jesus gave this incredible promise concerning how to have answered prayer: "If you abide in Me and My words abide in you, you will ask what you desire, and it shall be done for you" (John 15: 7). This verse can be literally translated, "If you maintain a living communion with me, and my words are at home in you, I command you to ask at once for yourselves whatsoever you desire. It's yours."

"Abide in Me"

If we abide in Jesus, we will automatically know God's will, and thus we will ask for it. To "abide" means to maintain a living and continual fellowship with Jesus Christ. You become like two friends who are completely comfortable in each others presence. You are not ill at ease, looking forward to get away from that person. Instead, you enjoy being with that individual and you want to hear what he has to say. This is not to say that we should be overly casual with God. As Jesus points out in this model prayer in Matthew, we should always begin our prayers by recognizing that we are addressing the Almighty

God who is to be revered, worshipped and obeyed. Yet, He is also our Father in Heaven who greatly desires to hear from us and wants to be our closest and most intimate friend.

"My words abide in you"

This speaks of God's Word being at home in our hearts. Our prayers cannot be divorced from our lifestyles. They flow out of a close walk with God. If your life is not pleasing to God, your prayer life will be practically non-existent. Obedience to God certainly plays a part in answered prayers: "Whatever we ask we receive from Him, because we keep His commandments and do those things that are pleasing in His sight"(1 John 3:22). If we give a listening ear to all of God's commands to us, He will give a listening ear to all of our prayers to Him.

Why We Should Pray

You might ask, "If God already knows what we need before we ask, why even bother praying?" Scripture makes a very strong case for prayer in the life of the believer.

#1 Jesus told us to pray. Luke 18:1 says, "Then He spoke a parable to them, that men always ought to pray and not lose heart." We should pray simply because Jesus told us to and emphasized it in His life and teaching. There really is no better reason to pray than this.

#2 Prayer is God's appointed way of obtaining things.

James 4:2 says, "You do not have because you do not ask." Do you ever wonder why you never seem to know the will of God for your life, why you never have any opportunities to lead others to the Lord, or why you always seem to be scraping by? Maybe you haven't seen answers because you've failed to ask God. God wants us to experience the blessings of seeing our prayers answered such as the salvation of a loved one, or perhaps a divine healing, or a wonderful provision. But we first have to ask.

#3 Prayer is the way by which God helps us to overcome our anxiety and worry.

Philippians 4:6 says, "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."

Returning to Jehoshaphat, after praying to God for deliverance, he sent out singers before the army to sing praises to God. They sang, "Give thanks to the Lord, for His Love endures forever" (2 Chronicles 20:21). And their enemies attacked one another. Jehoshaphat understood what it meant to present his petition to God with thanksgiving.

#4 Prayer is one of the ways we make ourselves ready for the return of Jesus Christ.

Luke 21:34-36 says, "But take heed to yourselves, lest your hearts be weighed down with carousing, drunkenness, and cares of this life, and that Day come on you unexpectedly. For it will be as a snare on all those who dwell on the face of the whole earth. Watch therefore, and pray always that you may be counted worthy to escape all these things that will come to pass, and to stand before the Son of Man." As believers living in the last days, our lives should be characterized by watchfulness and prayer (see also Mark 13:32-33).

Whatever concerns you may have at this moment; it is always time to pray! Remember, Scripture tells you to "[cast] all your care upon Him, for He cares for you" (1 Peter 5:7).

Keep Looking To Jesus,

Dennis Robinson