

Basic Discipleship

A Course On New Testament Discipleship

Topic #4

The Christian and Prayer

Objectives: As a result of this study we want to be able to:

1. Understand the nature of prayer.
2. Ascertain if God answers the prayers of non-Christians.
3. Be able to state four reasons as to why we should pray.
4. Discern the different types of prayer illustrated in the Scriptures, while examining five common hindrances to answered prayer.
5. Consider the mechanics of how we should pray.
6. Memorize two Bible promises in relation to prayer.

*Introduction: There is no possible way to emphasize enough the importance of prayer. Andrew Murray, the great Reformed preacher of the 19th century said, “**God works only in answer to our prayers. It is in prayer that we change our strength for the supernatural strength of God.**” The great pastor and preacher Dr. R. A. Torrey wrote, “**Nothing lies beyond the reach of prayer except that which lies beyond the will of God.**” Prayer is one of the greatest resources God has given us, but very often the least used. In this lesson, I hope that we will understand the truths God has revealed concerning the nature of prayer, our need and privilege to pray, and typical hindrances that keep our prayers from being answered.*

I. What Is Prayer?

- A. Prayer simply defined is talking with God—prayer is a dialogue between two people—who love each other.
 1. God’s unconditional & unchanging love for His people is emphasized throughout the Scriptures—and so God recorded through Jeremiah the prophet of His never ending eternal love for believers (31:3):

3 The LORD appeared to him from afar, saying, “I have loved you with an everlasting love; Therefore I have drawn you with lovingkindness.
 2. David, who failed God with both murder and adultery, wrote under the inspiration of the Spirit, of God’s unchanging love in Psalm 103.

17 But the lovingkindness of the LORD is from everlasting to everlasting on those who fear Him, And His righteousness to children's children (Psalm 103:17).

3. Jesus revealed in His high priestly prayer that God the Father loves those who are born again — as much as He loves — His own Son.

22 “The glory which You have given Me I have given to them, that they may be one, just as We are one; 23 I in them and You in Me, that they may be perfected in unity, so that the world may know that You sent Me, and loved them, even as You have loved Me (John 17:22–23).

4. God does not consider those—who have met Jesus Christ in salvation to be His enemies — but now as forgiven people — to be His friends.

15 “No longer do I call you slaves, for the slave does not know what his master is doing; but I have called you friends, for all things that I have heard from My Father I have made known to you (John 15:15).

5. In the thinking of the ancient world—a slave could be a useful and trusted tool—but could never be thought of as a partner.
6. In addition, in the Jewish culture, the relationship between a disciple and His rabbi was not expected to be a “**friendship**.”
7. Yet, the Lord Jesus described the measure and quality of His love for us His disciples, as a love that treats servants as “**friends**” (*cf. Romans 5:10*).
8. So with prayer — simply defined as being — a dialogue between two people who love each other—the Prophet Jeremiah was told by God:

“Call to Me, and I will answer you, and I will tell you great and mighty things, which you do not know” (Jeremiah 33:3).

- B. Prayer is the channel for appropriating God's resources that we might walk with the Lord and please Him.**

14 Therefore, since we have a great high priest who has passed through the heavens, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold fast our confession. 15 For we do not have a high priest who cannot sympathize with our weaknesses, but One who has been tempted in all things as we are, yet without sin (Hebrews 4:14-16).

1. As Christians we have no priest, but Christ & He is able to “**sympathize with our weaknesses**” or our “**infirmities**” (KJV, YLT, ASV)

2. The term “**weakness**” is used — in reference to our *physical* infirmities (Galatians 4:13) & our *intellectual* infirmities as seen in our ignorance in prayer (Romans 8:26) & of our *moral* weaknesses (Romans 6:19).
3. He felt our **physical infirmities** because He incarnated Himself in human flesh & so — we find that Jesus — became **thirsty** (John 4:6) — **hungry** (Matthew 4:2)—**tired** (John 4:6) & He experienced **pain** (John 19:1,28).
4. He felt our **intellectual infirmities** in that in the union of His human and divine natures—each of the natures retained its own attributes.
5. When He embraced perfect humanity it did not make Him any less God, & in retaining His undiminished deity, it did not make him less human.
6. This is why Jesus on the one hand—can be seen as—knowing everything (Matthew 17:27) & on the other hand as not knowing everything (24:27).
7. Christ also understood our **moral frailties** as sinners—in that while He never sinned (2 Cor. 5:21; Hebrews 4:15; 1 Peter 2:22; 1 John 3:5), still He was no less qualified to “**sympathize**” with us in our temptations.
8. The Lord Jesus was “**tempted in all things as we are**” (Hebrews 4:15) in that He was tempted in every realm of temptation—**the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes and the pride of life** (Matthew 4:1-11; 1 John 2:16).
9. Unfortunately, sometimes people have reasoned that because Jesus is God that He could — never know temptation — the same way we do.
10. But in reality, the sinless Son of God knows temptation in ways we do not because having never given into temptation — He knows “**the full strength of temptation**” & so can “**sympathize with our weaknesses.**”
11. If Christ had sinned — He would not have been — any more tender & sympathetic toward us—for sin only makes us—callous & insensitive.
12. Contrary to the way some people reason — if the Christ had sinned, He would have — lost the perfection — of His sympathetic nature.
13. And so, that Christ experienced the full force of temptation without having ever yielded to temptation — makes Him truly sympathetic.

16 Therefore let us draw near with confidence to the throne of grace, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need.

14. In light of these truths, we are admonished to come “**with confidence**” or “**boldly**” (NKJV) because Jesus as our “**great high priest**” is both omnipotent and compassionate—and willing & wanting to help us.
15. One of Satan’s chief strategies is to discourage us from using our access to God through Christ—making us think that Jesus is unapproachable.
16. Coming to Christ “**boldly**” does not mean **proudly** or **arrogantly** or with presumption, but it does mean — that we can come **without reservation**.
17. In approaching Him, we are promised that we will “**receive mercy**,” that is, we will **not receive what we do deserve** and that we will “**find grace**,” **receiving what we do not deserve** because of Jesus’ work on the cross.

II. Who Can Pray?

The promises throughout the Word of God on prayer are not given primarily to non-Christians, but for those who have placed their faith in Christ. Prayer is the high and holy privilege of those who have become children of God.

A. Those who pray must belong to Christ.

1. The Bible teaches us, that prayer is the privilege—of those who are the children of God (John 1:12), and so Jesus can promise us (John 14:13):

**13 “Whatever you ask in My name, that will I do,
so that the Father may be glorified in the Son.**

2. To emphasize the truth that this is the privilege of believers to have their prayers heard and answered — King David tells us — in Psalm 34:15:

**15 The eyes of the LORD are toward the righteous
And His ears are open to their cry.**

3. King Solomon records this same truth for us in Proverbs 15:29:

**29 The LORD is far from the wicked,
But He hears the prayer of the righteous.**

4. We do know—that nearly all the promises in Scripture concerning God answering prayer — are given to those — who have placed their faith in Christ for salvation such that — they can approach God through Jesus.

**5 For there is one God, and one mediator also between God
and men, the man Christ Jesus (1 Timothy 2:5).**

5. Since there — is only “**one God**” — there is need for only “**one mediator**” and that “**mediator**” is “**Christ Jesus.**”
6. Sadly, some by their practice imply that “**Christ Jesus**” is “**one**” among many and so they — have included **angels, saints** & the “**Virgin Mary**” — as other “**mediators.**”
7. In fact, an official doctrine & dogma of the Roman Catholic Church, established by Pope Paul VI in 1964 at the Second Vatican Council, is that Mary — is to be considered — to be the “**Co-Mediatrix.**”
8. However, to teach that the work of mediation in our prayers can somehow be shared between Mary & God’s Son—is exegetically impossible as determined by the preceding clause in this verse.

5 For there is one God, and one mediator also between God and men, the man Christ Jesus (1 Timothy 2:5).

9. To say that Christ is “**one**” among “**many mediators**” is to say that God is “**one**” among many “**gods**” — a thought that is clearly false.
10. Paul simply applies to prayer what Jesus taught in John 14:6, that there is no valid way to approach God — that does not come through Jesus.
11. In our pluralistic world, most people think that any road can lead to God if followed sincerely — or with a good heart (Proverbs 14:12).
12. While not denying Jesus’ deity (1 Timothy 1:2)—Paul is emphasizing Christ’s humanity — because without taking humanity — to Himself, the Lord Jesus could not be a, “**mediator . . . between God and man.**”
13. The nature of a mediator is that he must represent both sides equally — and in this case — “**God and man**” and so, our “**Mediator**” — is both “**God and man**” forever.
14. Even though Jesus is enthroned in heaven above — He is still human, for when the Eternal Son — the Second Person of the Trinity added humanity to His deity—He added it forever—not only for 33 years.
15. And so the “**Mediator**” we have—as our “**great high priest**” wants you to know that He understands your “**weaknesses**” & you can come to Him.
16. This always raises the question, “Does God hear the prayer of the lost?”
17. Interestingly, in describing the prayer life of a Roman centurion named Cornelius — before he heard the gospel & believed in the Lord Jesus, so that he might be saved — Luke records for us in Acts chapter 10:

1 Now there was a man at Caesarea named Cornelius, a centurion of what was called the Italian cohort, **2** a devout man and one who feared God with all his household, and gave many alms to the Jewish people and prayed to God continually.

3 About the ninth hour of the day he clearly saw in a vision an angel of God who had just come in and said to him, “Cornelius!” **4** And fixing his gaze on him and being much alarmed, he said, “What is it, Lord?” And he said to him, “Your prayers and alms have ascended as a memorial before God.

18. He was following the Jewish hour of prayer by praying at the 9th hour, or 3 PM — which tells me God was working in Cornelius’ heart and that he was responding—to all the light that he knew to respond to.

19. Evidently, he attended the synagogue & to the best of his knowledge & ability, Cornelius followed—the Old Testament Scriptures—such that he not only prayed—but he “gave many alms” to—the Jewish people.

20. We do know that Cornelius was not a full-fledged proselyte to Judaism, for he had not been circumcised (11:3)—but he did worship the Lord.

21. In addition, we know for certain — from Peter’s report to the church in Jerusalem—that Cornelius had not yet been “saved” (Acts 11:14).

13 “And he reported to us how he had seen the angel standing in his house, and saying, ‘Send to Joppa and have Simon, who is also called Peter, brought here; **14** and he will speak words to you by which you will be saved, you and all your household.’

22. Nevertheless, God answered — the prayer of a man — who was not yet “saved” but was responding to all the light he had & so the angel said:

“Your prayers and alms have ascended as a memorial before God.

23. The difference between Cornelius—and many religious people today is that he knew that his religious devotion was not sufficient to save him.

24. Many religious people today, are satisfied that their good works will get them to heaven, but apparently by the way God answered his prayer he had been asking God to show him the way of salvation (Acts 11:13–14).

25. So, we cannot say — that God never answers the prayer of an unsaved person for God can show His common grace to any (Matthew 5:43-47).

26. Expressions of God’s grace shown to all people is seen in the fact that God, “causes His sun to rise on the evil and the good, and sends rain on the righteous and the unrighteous” (Matthew 5:45; cf. Luke 6:45).

27. We must never forget—that God is *not against people* desiring for them to go into judgment — but that God is for people not wanting any to be to be condemned (2 Peter 3:9)—but to be saved as stated in John 3:17:

17 “For God did not send the Son into the world to judge the world, but that the world might be saved through Him.

28. We can see why God desired to answer Cornelius’ prayer—in that he was responding to God’s gracious revelation shown to him because God’s desire for him—was not that he perish but that he be saved.
29. So, God can answer the prayer of a lost man if He so choses, especially the lost individual responding to God’s initiative in his life (John 6:44).
30. In addition, God does promise in every instance that He will answer the prayer of a lost person — calling on Him for salvation (Romans 10:13), but the rest of the promises for prayer — are to those who are saved.