

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 (24:36).
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 Messiah 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 chooses, 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).

31. And so, Luke 23:42, we find the thief on the cross who prayed, **“Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom”** & God instantly granted him the gift of salvation (Luke 23:43).

32. In the parable of the Pharisee & the publican—the tax collector simply prayed, **“God, be merciful to me, the sinner”** (Luke 18:13c) and Christ promised him salvation saying, **“he went to his house justified”** (18:14).

33. With this said, while God can answer the prayer of a lost person and while He promises to answer their call in faith to Him for salvation, the rest of His promises—concerning prayer—are for the saved.

34. If you have received Christ as Lord — it is your privilege to learn & to claim His prayer promises—as you address God as your Father, which again, is why God’s promises on prayer belong to 1st & foremost to us.

35. If you are taking this course & have never received Christ—if you will turn to God from your sin and trust Jesus’ death and resurrection for your forgiveness then you will gain the privileges of prayer with God.

B. Those who pray must pray in the name of Jesus.

1. Since Jesus is the only way to the Father (John 14:6) — that makes Him the one intercessor between God and man (1 Timothy 2:5), which is why in the *Upper Room* He promised all who believe in Him (John 14:13-14):

13 “Whatever you ask in My name, that will I do, so that the Father may be glorified in the Son. 14 “If you ask Me anything in My name, I will do it.

2. Later that evening on the way to Gethsemane He said (John 16:23-24):

23 “In that day you will not question Me about anything. Truly, truly, I say to you, if you ask the Father for anything in My name, He will give it to you. 24 “Until now you have asked for nothing in My name; ask and you will receive, so that your joy may be made full.

3. When we pray in “**Jesus’ name**” we are confessing that it is through the merits of the cross and through the righteousness given to us as a gift (Philippians 3:7-8)—that we can approach God in prayer.

4. When we pray in “**Jesus’ name**” we are confessing that we are coming in His righteousness — but also that we are accessing Christ’s power, for He has “**all authority in heaven and on earth**” (Matt. 28:18-20).

5. When Christ invites us to pray — “**in My name**” — He is not giving us some ‘**magical formula**’ but rather an ‘**endorsement**’ & a ‘**limitation.**’

6. He is giving us an ‘**endorsement**’ like a blank check—or possibly like a friend — who says to you — “**You may use my name!**”

7. But in addition, the Lord is giving us a “**limitation**” in that our petition or praise should be in keeping with “**the character**” of God’s “**name.**”

8. It is not by accident that the very first entreaty in the **Lord’s Prayer** is, “**hallowed be Your name**” (Luke 11:2) because any request that does not glorify God’s “**name**” — should not be asked in Jesus’ “**name.**”

9. Simply said, praying “**in Jesus name**” — comes *with parameters* because to know His “**name**” means that *we approach Him* in a way that would please Him and honor Him and glorify Him—because He is God.

13 “Whatever you ask in My name, that will I do, so that the Father may be glorified in the Son. 14 “If you ask Me anything in My name, I will do it.

10. In other words, the “**whatever**” & the “**anything**” in John 14:13-14, is qualified by all that God has revealed in the Bible about prayer.

11. As we will learn, God answers prayer so to honor His “**name**” which is why it is essential that our prayer be in His will (1 John 5:14&15).

12. Remember, prayer is a dialogue—between two people who love each other such that when you love someone, you honor his or her name.

13. When you love someone you would never use their name in an undignified manner — and so any request that does not glorify God’s “**name**” should not be asked in His “**name**.”

C. Those who pray must pray with a clean heart.

1. While sometimes Christians will sometimes speak of God not hearing the prayer of the lost, most of the passages addressing unanswered prayer concern not those who are lost — but those who are saved.
2. For instance— in Psalm 66:18 — the psalmist says of himself:

18 If I regard wickedness in my heart, The Lord will not hear.

3. The psalmist does not say “**If I sin**” God “**will not hear**” — for the Bible teaches we — “**all stumble in many ways**” (James 3:2 cf. 1 John 1:8-10), but rather if we “**cherish**” or “**harbor**” sin — then God will not hear.
4. The Prophet Isaiah drives home the same truth about God’s people who had strayed away from God’s will to serve themselves (Isaiah 59:1-2):

1 Behold, the LORD’S hand is not so short That it cannot save; Nor is His ear so dull That it cannot hear. 2 But your iniquities have made a separation between you and your God, And your sins have hidden His face from you so that He does not hear.

5. The problem was not God, for His strength had not diminished because, “**the LORD’S hand is not so short That it cannot save**” or deliver us.
6. Neither was the problem — that God lacks knowledge of our needs, and certainly — the problem was not that — God is not concerned with our challenges & so Isaiah speaks of, “**His ear so dull That it cannot hear.**”
7. He can *hear* for He is omniscient & He can *act* for He is omnipotent and so, the problem is *not with God’s power or His knowledge* or His interest, but the problem — is with our “**iniquities**” that has broken fellowship.
8. While sin in the life of the true believer—cannot sever our eternal relationship with God—and it certainly cannot separate us from the presence of God, because God is everywhere (Psalm 139:7).
9. Sin clearly does separate us from *fellowship* with God and the blessings that come with that fellowship — such that God wants us — to identify the iniquity within us before we bring our requests & petitions to Him.

10. Much like the Prodigal Son (Luke 15:11-32) who was still loved by his father — when we are in sin — much like the Prodigal Son we are still loved by God but we do not enjoy the benefits of his love.
11. How easy it is for us to blame our problems—on everything except our sin, but it is “**our iniquities**” & not God’s lack of interest or power that will hinder our ability to see God respond and to answer our prayers.
12. So while the above verses are often quoted out of context as a basis for God not hearing the prayers of the lost—the context is in reference to believers who through broken fellowship—have unanswered prayer.

D. Those who pray must have a forgiving spirit.

1. When the disciples watched Jesus pray one of them asked (Luke 11:1):

“Lord, teach us to pray just as John also taught his disciples.”

2. And in His instruction to them — He reminded them that instrumental to effective prayer is to have a forgiving heart to those who wrong us.

14 “For if you forgive others for their transgressions, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. 15 “But if you do not forgive others, then your Father will not forgive your transgressions (Matthew 6:14–15).

3. On another occasion—Jesus gave very similar instruction—in saying:

24 “Therefore I say to you, all things for which you pray and ask, believe that you have received them, and they will be granted you. 25 “Whenever you stand praying, forgive, if you have anything against anyone, so that your Father who in heaven will also forgive you your transgressions (Mark 11:24–25).

4. In the model prayer, the necessity of a forgiving heart is underscored when the Lord instructs us to pray (Matthew 6:12 cf. Luke 11:4a):

12 ‘And forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors.

5. While forgiveness is a mark of real conversion (Matthew 18:21-35), it is also a characteristic of the believer in fellowship with God.
6. While as a general principle a believer will forgive others, it is possible for a believer to withhold forgiveness & so Ephesians 4:32 says:

32 Be kind to one another, tender-hearted, forgiving each other, just as God in Christ also has forgiven you.

7. God teaches us in this verse that our forgiveness **“to one another”** is to be patterned after the forgiveness—that Jesus has shown us.
8. God is commanding us to show—the same kindness, tender heartedness & forgiveness as He shows him—because He knows we can withhold it.
9. In Ephesians 4:32—it is not that we forgive—in order for Jesus to forgive us—but that we are to forgive because He has forgiven us.
10. Two key words in this command are the words **“just as”** because when we think of the amazing way in which Christ has forgiven us — it is dishonorable for us—to withhold forgiveness—from other people.
11. God in Christ — waited for us and wooed us to Himself — He took the initiative in forgiveness even though by nature we were not interested.
12. Over & over again in Scripture—God keeps reaching out to lost sinners for reconciliation even when lost sinners—reject Him again and again.
13. When God forgives us, He does so completely without first setting some kind of probationary period before He forgives—even knowing that the the sin He forgives us of may be committed by us again in the same way.

9 If we confess our sins, He is faithful and righteous to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness (1 John 1:9).

14. Before we come to Christ—in worship and in prayer—we are exhorted to have our hearts clean—both before God & men and so Jesus said:

23 “Therefore if you are presenting your offering at the altar, and there remember that your brother has something against you, 24 leave your offering there before the altar and go; first be reconciled to your brother, and then come and present your offering” (Matthew 5:23, 24).

15. We should never think—that our worship & service towards the Lord justifies bad relationships with others & so it is far more important to be reconciled to a brother—than to come in worship—and in prayer.
16. The Apostle Paul gave a similar command to us in Romans 12:18 that, **“If possible, so far as it depends on you, be at peace with all men.”**

III. Why Are We To Pray?

God gives us many motivations for prayer and when we understand through the renewing of our minds, a fervency begins to develop in our hearts to pray.

A. We should pray because God is glorified through prayer.

1. The Lord Jesus — explained to the disciples in the Upper Room as to how God is glorified in prayer when He said (John15:7-8):

7 “If you abide in Me, and My words abide in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be done for you. 8 “My Father is glorified by this, that you bear much fruit, and so prove to be My disciples.

2. Jesus makes a marvelous promise & an astonishing pledge, but very often the conditions are not met — for He makes plain that the key to getting — what we want — is wanting what — He wants.
3. And the key to wanting what He wants is letting His Word ‘**abide in**’ us.
4. Then we can in faith ask whatever we want and trust God to answer, and it will be answered — for the simple reason that — our wants will not be — out of harmony — with His wants.
5. Jesus tells us that the, “**Father is glorified by this**” — that is our abiding in the Lord—because while coming to Him—with an abiding life we are able to see answered prayer producing “**fruit**” that brings glory to God.
6. A failure to see one’s prayers answered means something is not right in the believer’s life — namely that he is not truly abiding in Christ and in His Word—and so his prayers are improper and left unanswered.
7. The purpose of bearing ‘**fruit**’ is not to bring glory to us but to God and when we show God—working in and through us by answered prayer an unbelieving world will see God at work & “**by this**” is God “**glorified.**”

B. We should pray because God commands us to pray.

1. Jesus admonished & commanded us to pray as seen in Luke 18:1:

1 Now He was telling them a parable to show that at all times they ought to pray and not to lose heart,

2. Some place the emphasis of this parable’s teaching saying if we do not pray we will “**lose heart**” or become so discouraged that we will quit.
3. But if we read the entire parable carefully, Jesus is speaking about our praying “**at all times**” & in the process — we are “**not to lose heart.**”

4. Jesus did not mean — that we should always be — on our knees or in our prayer closets—or that we should go about—with bowed heads & closed eyes but that we should always be in what is called, “**a spirit of prayer.**”
5. With the same encouragement & command to pray, the Apostle Paul instructed us to — “**pray without ceasing**” (1 Thessalonians 5:17).
6. Prayer is much more than the words of our lips, but it really represents the cry & desires & the expectations & the praise that is in our hearts.
7. And so, if our hearts are continually bent towards God — then we will constantly be in fellowship with God, often without ever saying a word.
8. Luke records that Jesus told us this parable — so that we might not “**lose heart**” because Jesus knew it is easy to “**lose heart**” in prayer.
9. We can “**lose heart**” because prayer can be “**hard work**” and so we end up being inconsistent in persevering — because we are undisciplined.
10. Colossians chapter 4, speaks of the necessity & labor of prayer (4:4,12):

2 Devote yourselves to prayer, keeping alert in it with an attitude of thanksgiving . . . 12 Epaphras, who is one of your number, a bondservant of Jesus Christ, sends you his greetings, always laboring earnestly for you in his prayers, that you may stand perfect and fully assured in all the will of God.

11. Paul encouraged the Colossians with Epaphras’ example because he was, “**always laboring earnestly for you in his prayers**” (Col. 4:12).
12. Paul knew that prayer was hard work that required heartfelt labor.
13. It is easy to “**lose heart**” because we are in a spiritual battle & so Satan hates prayer—because he knows that prayer—moves the hand of God.
14. It is easy to “**lose heart**” either through our ignorance of what God has revealed as to — how He works through prayer or due to our unbelief we are not convinced — of the power behind — our prayers.
15. Sadly, too often — prayer becomes a last resort — instead of our first resource & so Jesus ends His parable with a sobering question (18:8b):

“However, when the Son of Man comes, will He find faith on the earth?”

16. This parable that concludes with this question cannot be divorced from the discussion of Christ’s return from Heaven that He just finished.

17. This question of His finding, “**faith on the earth**” — ties in with what Jesus taught in Luke 17:22–37—because the “**last days**” will be filled with corruption and spiritual death and unbelief and apostasy.
18. He just likened His return — to “**the days of Noah**” (17:26-28) and to “**the days of Lot**” (17:28-29) — such that in Noah’s day — only eight people were saved & in Lot’s day only three were saved out of Sodom.
19. Where evil and moral corruption are — judgment must follow (17:37), and so — believers are not to “**lose heart**” especially — as we approach the end of the age that will be characterized by lawlessness & unbelief.
20. Passages like 1 Timothy 4 and 2 Timothy 3 paint a dark picture of the last days and so it is essential that we pray and “**not lose heart.**”

C. We should pray because God delights in the prayer of the righteous.

1. While prayer at times can be “**hard work**” it can also be delightful and refreshing and encouraging for us, and it can be pleasing to God—for He said in Proverbs 15:8:

8 The sacrifice of the wicked is an abomination to the LORD, But the prayer of the upright is His delight.

2. The godly man or woman delights God with their prayer which is why the Lord Jesus could tell the Samaritan woman in John 4:23:

23 “But an hour is coming, and now is, when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth; for such people the Father seeks to be His worshipers.

3. The Lord Jesus had just told this lady, “**an hour is coming when neither in this mountain nor in Jerusalem will you worship the Father**” (4:21) to underscore that it is not the location that makes worship authentic.
4. Prayer & worship are not merely an external act that you can accomplish by going to a place, but it is an issue of the heart that the Father “**seeks.**”
5. Clearly, God does not delight in everyone’s prayer—for Jesus said on another occasion quoting Isaiah 29:13 as recorded in Matthew 15:8:

8 ‘THIS PEOPLE HONORS ME WITH THEIR LIPS, BUT THEIR HEART IS FAR AWAY FROM ME.

6. Prayer is first and foremost an experience of the heart that can only come from a person who is born-again and who is in fellowship with God for it is — this kind of prayer — that delights God’s heart.

D. We should pray because prayer changes things.

1. In light of the fact that God is sovereign over everything in the universe and that He ultimately “**works all things after the counsel of His will**” (Ephesians 1:11), someone might ask, “**Then why should we pray?**”
2. The simplest answer is that God who created us in His image as free moral agents has ordained—both the ends & the means to accomplish His work.
3. For example, He has ordained for, “**WHOEVER WILL CALL ON THE NAME OF THE LORD WILL BE SAVED**” (Romans 10:13)—but He has *also ordained* that that His message go out — through Christians sharing it (Romans 10:14).
4. Our God is over all & so He has determined what will happen, as well as the means that will make happen — what He has determined to happen.
5. And so, in the case of prayer, we know that God has ordained that He will make certain things happen — in response to our intercession — which is why God commands us to pray — because prayer changes things.
6. For instance, prayer can make us strong & keep us from sin which is why Jesus said in Matthew 26:41, “**Keep watching and praying that you may not enter into temptation; the spirit is willing, but the flesh is weak.**”
7. We know in the days of King Ahab — that God ordained a drought as a judgment on the nation — to bring about repentance — a drought both whose start and end were ordained by God (1 Kings 17:1–7; 18:41–46).
8. But from the same narrative — as well as James 5:17–18 — we also know that the start & end of the drought occurred as a result of Elijah’s prayer:

17 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 earth for three years and six months. **18** Then he prayed again, and the sky poured rain and the earth produced its fruit.

9. So, in the case of the drought — it was ordained by God to happen and yet — it happened because Elijah prayed — for it to happen.
10. Both God’s sovereign determination — and the prayers of Elijah brought about the start & end to the drought—because God ordained it to happen and He ordained it would be accomplished through the prayers of Elijah.
11. Please understand, it is not that prayer changes God’s mind—for in the case of Elijah the prophet, he was not giving God new information nor was he presenting to God—something that God had not anticipated.

12. Jesus told us, “**for your Father knows what you need before you ask Him**” (Matthew 6:8) and so our prayer — does not alter God’s sovereign plan simply on our say-so — but prayer nonetheless — does change things.
13. And so, in reference to Elijah’s prayer God can promise us, “**The effective prayer of a righteous man can accomplish much**” (James 5:16b).
14. While we may not know God’s eternal, sovereign plan in all its details, but we do know that He works through prayer and answers prayer.
15. We know that as we pray according to His will, He says yes to our requests.

14 This is the confidence which we have before Him, that, if we ask anything according to His will, He hears us. 15 And if we know that He hears us in whatever we ask, we know that we have the requests which we have asked from Him” (1 John 5:14–15).

16. Even when we are uncertain of God’s will—the Spirit of God promises to intercede on our behalf — translating our prayers into God’s will.

26 In the same way the Spirit also helps our weakness; for we do not know how to pray as we should, but the Spirit Himself intercedes for us with groanings too deep for words (Romans 8:26).

17. Sometimes we do not know — what to pray or — how to pray, but God in our “**weakness**” helps us through the Holy Spirit.
18. The intercessory ministry of the **Spirit** in us—through our One intercessor with the **Father** — the Lord Jesus — is a wonderful and assuring picture—of how our prayers—can be answered.
19. When we do not “**know how to pray**” exactly as you should, **God the Holy Spirit** makes intercession “**for us with groanings**” that cannot be uttered.
20. And so, while **Jesus Christ** is our intercessor in the court of **Heaven**, **God the Holy Spirit** is our intercessor “**in the theater**” of our hearts.
21. In summary, we should pray—because God is glorified through prayer, God commands us to pray, God delights in the prayer of the righteous, and we should pray — because prayer truly — changes things.
22. To live our lives in a “**spirit of prayer**” is to live our lives the presence of God under His authority — all the while being able to enjoy God and allowing all the glory and honor—to go to Him who is worthy.

IV. What Should Be Included In Prayer?

While it is impossible to tightly categorize prayer or to dictate a particular order in the kind of prayer we should exercise, prayer can be summarized into five major categories.

A. We should pray with confession.

1. When God saves us, He credits to our person Christ's righteousness giving us a new status before the Lord (Romans 5:1; 2 Cor. 5:21).
2. When God saves us, He not only wipes the slate clean but He also credits to our account Christ's perfection calling us "**holy ones.**"
3. However, as justified "**saints**" (Romans 1:7)—God still calls us to walk in holiness and when—we fail in our practice—to live out our new position, it is essential that we confess any known sin to God in prayer (1 Jn. 1:9):

9 If we confess our sins, He is faithful and righteous to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.

4. There is no set order to the kind of prayers we may offer God.
5. Sometimes we might first go to God — with "**confession**" of known sin, while other times we might begin our prayers with praise—but then in the process our own sinful hearts are revealed, changing our prayer to "**confession.**"

3 Who may ascend into the hill of the LORD? And who may stand in His holy place?

4 He who has clean hands and a pure heart, Who has not lifted up his soul to falsehood And has not sworn deceitfully (Psalm 24:3–4).

B. We should pray with thanksgiving.

1. The Bible commands us in 1 Thessalonians 5:18, "**in everything give thanks; for this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus.**"
2. In the New Testament, there are repeated admonitions to "**give thanks**" to God and so thanksgiving is always — to be a part of our prayers.
3. In similar fashion, the Apostle Paul instructs the Philippians (4:6):

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

4. That "**thankfulness**" should be a regular part of our prayer life is also underscored in Paul's first letter to Timothy when he says (1 Tim. 2:1).

1 First of all, then, I urge that entreaties and prayers, petitions and thanksgivings, be made on behalf of all men,

- 5. In life there will always be those things that we can complain about, but if we believe in God's providence working everything "together for good" then we will find our hearts filled "with thanksgiving."**
- 6. A prayer of "thanksgiving" not only express gratitude but faith or trust that God has everything — under His sovereign control (Romans 8:28):**

28 And we know that God causes all things to work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to His purpose.

- 7. When we express "thanksgiving" to God — we are not only acknowledging our gratitude to Him — but we are acknowledging — that He is in charge, and that, "without faith it is impossible to please Him" (Hebrews 11:6).**

C. We should pray with worship.

- 1. A prayer of "worship" is similar to the prayer of "thanksgiving" with difference being—that "adoration" focuses on who God is, while prayers of "thanksgiving" focus on what God has done.**
- 2. In the prayer pattern often called 'The Lord's Prayer' that the Lord Jesus gave to all of His disciples, He instructs us to begin with a focus of worship.**

9 "Pray, then, in this way: 'Our Father who is in heaven, Hallowed be Your name' (Matthew 6:9).

- 3. You will often discover that as you focus on who God is, that your heart will not only be filled with praise but that you will be able to approach God with a believing heart for —the other requests — that you have.**
- 4. We see the disciples first focusing on God's character on the occasion when their lives had been threatened — by the religious officials in Jerusalem.**
- 5. They begin their prayer by first praising God as sustainer over all of creation (4:23), as the One who is sovereign over rulers (4:24-25), and as the One who supervises the events of this world (4:27-28).**
- 6. Then after they take the time to remember who God is—then and only then are they able to bring their requests believing Him to answer (Acts 4:29-31).**
- 7. When you and I pray — we need to get our prayers into perspective by not just asking God for our needs—but by praising God for who He is.**

D. We should pray with supplication.

1. The Hebrew and Greek words — most often translated “**supplication**” in the Bible literally mean, “**a request or petition**” & so “**supplication**” is asking God for something—like our daily needs (Matthew 6:11).
2. Unlike an “**intercessory prayer**” — which is praying — on behalf of others, the prayer of “**supplication**” is generally a request for the person praying.
3. The Bible includes many prayers of “**supplication**” especially in the Psalms as God’s people ask for mercy (Ps. 4:1), for God’s leading (Ps. 5:8), for His deliverance from enemies (Ps. 6:4) & from persecution (Ps. 7:1) and so on.
4. Earlier in this session, we studied how Jesus told us not to give up praying for what we need (Luke 18:1-8) —and James 4:2 reminds us that often we do not have what we need—for the simple reason—we have never asked.
5. And so, Paul told the Philippians *that essential to* having “**the peace of God, which passes all understanding**”—that “**will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus**” takes place by, “**supplication with thanksgiving.**”

6 Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. 7 And the peace of God, which surpasses all comprehension, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus (Philippians 4:6–7).

6. God loves us and cares about our needs which is why He invites us to ask.

11 “If you then, being evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father who is in heaven give what is good to those who ask Him (Matthew 7:11)!”

E. We should pray with intercession.

1. Intercessory prayer is the act of praying on behalf of another person.
2. Many times, our prayers include requests for others as we “**intercede**” for them just as Jesus, “**always lives to make intercession for**” us (Heb. 7:25).
3. The whole of Christ’s “**High Priestly Prayer**” in John chapter 17, is a prayer on behalf of His disciples & for all believers to come.
4. Paul reminds us of this ministry of Jesus for us in Romans chapter 8:

31 What then shall we say to these things? If God is for us, who is against us?
32 He who did not spare His own Son, but delivered Him over for us all, how
will He not also with Him freely give us all things? 33 Who will bring a charge
against God's elect? God is the one who justifies; 34 who is the one who
condemns? Christ Jesus is He who died, yes, rather who was raised,
who is at the right hand of God, who also intercedes for us.

5. Because of Jesus' intercessory ministry for us (1 Timothy 2:5), we can now by both example and command — intercede in prayer on behalf of other Christians & for those who are lost — asking for God's will to be done.
6. A good example of **intercessory prayer** is seen in Daniel 9 as *Daniel* intercedes for Israel according to the revealed will of God (2), in a spirit of fervency & humility (3, 5-15), remembering God's attributes (4,7,9,15) & glory (16-19).
7. While **intercessory prayer**—can have many expressions—many times like Daniel did — we come to God on behalf of others — recognizing our own shortcomings — while seeking for God's will to be done.
8. Sadly, in recent decades some evangelical Christians have made those who are committed to **intercessory prayer** to a class of “**super-Christians**” when in reality — all Christians are called to be involved in **intercessory prayer**.
9. Clearly, in Acts 12 when Peter was imprisoned—he did not limit his need for prayer to a special class of people—but asked the whole church to pray (25).
10. Likewise, Paul in asking others to pray for him did not limit his request to those with a “**special calling to intercession**” but invited the whole church to pray (Colossians 4:3-4) because intercessory prayer is for all believers.
11. The idea that intercession is the privilege and calling of only some has no biblical foundation—and it often leads to a sense of pride & superiority.
12. It is a great thing—when we pray for others—and when others pray for us.

V. What Are Some Hindrances To Answered Prayer?

*One of the most rewarding experiences for the Christian is to see his prayer answered.
Unfortunately, many Christians never stop and consider what it is that
might be preventing God from responding to their prayers.*

- A. Unconfessed sin can hinder our prayers. (Psalm 32:3-5; 66:18; 1 John 1:9).
 1. We studied earlier in this section the lesson of Isaiah 59:1&2:

1 Behold, the LORD's hand is not so short That it cannot save; Nor is His ear so dull That it cannot hear. 2 But your iniquities have made a separation between you and your God, And your sins have hidden His face from you so that He does not hear.

2. It is not that God “cannot hear” you — but that He will not “hear” you if there is known unconfessed — unrepented sin in your life.
3. And so, the psalmist in Psalm 66:18—echoes this same truth when he writes, “**If I regard wickedness in my heart, The Lord will not hear.**”
4. The Hebrew word for “regard” (*ra'ah*) refers “to holding on to” or “to cherish” or “to harbor” or — “to give attention to” or “to coddle” — some sin in the life.
5. If we grow — fond of some sin — you can pray with — all the passion and excitement that you can muster — but sin will stop your prayers cold and the problem will not be rectified — until the sin is confessed (1 John 1:9).
6. When we see unanswered prayer, we should not immediately assume that what — we are asking for — is not according — to His will.
7. It is possible that the reason it might not be answered—is due to a sin issue that needs to be addressed & so we should pray as David did in Psalm 139:

23 Search me, O God, and know my heart; Try me and know my anxious thoughts; 24 And see if there be any hurtful way in me, And lead me in the everlasting way.

8. A delayed answer to our prayer — does not mean that God will deny the request, but the delay might be due to sin—that needs to be repented of.
9. King David for nine months — failed to acknowledge his sin to the Lord and for this reason—God did not to answer His prayer until he confessed his sin.

3 When I kept silent about my sin, my body wasted away Through my groaning all day long. 4 For day and night Your hand was heavy upon me; My vitality was drained away as with the fever heat of summer. Selah. 5 I acknowledged my sin to You, And my iniquity I did not hide; I said, “I will confess my transgressions to the LORD”; And You forgave the guilt of my sin. Selah. 6 Therefore, let everyone who is godly pray to You in a time when You may be found; Surely in a flood of great waters they will not reach him (Psalm 32:3–6).

B. An unforgiving spirit can hinder our prayers.

1. Jesus told us in Mark 11:25, “**Whenever you stand praying, forgive, if you have anything against anyone, so that your Father who is in heaven will also forgive you your transgressions**” — otherwise our prayers — will be hindered.

2. Jesus reminds us in this verse — that our prayer for forgiveness will not be honored — unless we ourselves practice forgiveness.
3. Likewise, Jesus said in Matthew 6:15, “**But if you do not forgive others, then your Father will not forgive your transgressions.**”
4. The Lord Jesus did not teach that we earn God’s forgiveness by forgiving others, for this — would be contrary to — God’s free grace and mercy.
5. However, if we have truly experienced salvation forgiveness, then we will have a “**disposition to forgive others**” — as Jesus illustrated in the parable of — the unforgiving servant (Matthew 18:21–35).
6. We learned earlier — that as a general principle — a believer will forgive others, yet it is possible for a believer *to withhold* forgiveness & so God commands us to:

32 Be kind to one another, tender-hearted, forgiving each other, just as God in Christ also has forgiven you (Ephesians 4:32).

7. God teaches us in the above verse—that our forgiveness “**to one another**” is to be patterned — after the forgiveness — that Jesus has shown us.
8. God is commanding us to show—the same kindness, tender heartedness and forgiveness as He shows us—because He knows we can withhold it.
9. These verses describing true Christians — remind us all that since we have the capacity to forgive as born-again people—if we refuse to forgive someone else, then we are living in sin—and God will not hear—and answer our prayers.
10. For our prayers to be effective — our hearts must be clear both vertically with God and horizontally with our neighbor—for Jesus said in Matthew 25:23-24:

23 “Therefore if you are presenting your offering at the altar, and there remember that your brother has something against you, 24 leave your offering there before the altar and go; first be reconciled to your brother, and then come and present your offering.

11. Jesus was essentially saying — *before you go to God in prayer* — do your part to make things right with anyone with whom you have wronged & are at odds at.
12. If after you have gone in humility to make amends with someone, at that point it is up to that individual — to receive your apology and to forgive.

18 If possible, so far as it depends on you, be at peace with all men (Romans 12:18).

13. And if you have been wronged by someone, it is essential that you forgive them, even if they — do not take responsibility — or your prayers will be hindered.

C. An uncaring attitude can hinder our prayers.

1. Solomon reminds us in Proverbs 21:13, “**He who shuts his ear to the cry of the poor Will also cry himself and not be answered.**”
2. Though many proverbs tell of poverty caused by laziness & deceit, other proverbs — express God’s compassion — towards the poor.
3. God cares about the poor and He commands us to have a compassionate heart towards them — lest we “**also cry . . . and not be answered.**”
4. God sometimes through our lack of compassion for people in need will allow us to reap — what we have sown (Galatians 6:9) — for if we are silent to people’s needs God may arrange it — so we will not be heard — in our time of need.
5. If you make your own needs know — which you should (Philippians 4:6), but at the same time—ignore a known need that has brought your way—then by your “**standard of measure it will be measured to you in return**” (Lk. 6:36).
6. This principle of having an “**uncaring attitude**” is also highlighted in the marriage relationship where the husband whom God has privileged to be the leader—has abused his leadership—in not caring for his wife.

7 You husbands in the same way, live with your wives in an understanding way, as with someone weaker, since she is a woman; and show her honor as a fellow heir of the grace of life, so that your prayers will not be hindered (1 Peter 3:7).

7. A godly husband—does not merely share “**the same roof**” with his wife—but he truly lives with her “**in an understanding way**” — for as he knows — what her needs and wants and desires are — then he can better — meet those needs.
8. God reminds us that a husband is not necessarily stronger spiritually than his wife, but generally speaking he is stronger physically & so he is to “**show her honor**” by appreciating her feminine nature—and to respond accordingly.
9. When a husband expects more from his wife than is appropriate, then he is showing her “**dishonor**” & his “**prayers**” are going to be “**hindered.**”
10. While it is assumed that husbands & wives will pray together (1 Cor. 7:5), a husband’s — personal prayer life is indexed — to the care for his wife.

11. God intends the relationship of a married couple to be very powerful display of the love that Jesus Christ has for His Church — which is why the devil does all he can to come between a couple—and make them at odds—with one another.
12. Certainly, while a wife’s prayers can be hindered too—since God has called the husband to lead it is imperative that he does all that he can, to keep harmony in the home by caring for his wife & quickly resolving any strife or disagreement.

D. Impure motives can hinder our prayers.

1. James reminds us — “**You ask and do not receive, because you ask with wrong motives, so that you may spend it on your pleasures**” (James 4:3).
2. By nature, we are self-serving and self-centered & so it is very important that when we make our needs known to God — that we always defer to His will.
3. It has well been said that the purpose of prayer is not to get man’s will done in heaven — but to get God’s will — done on earth.
4. Sadly, sometimes prayer can be used as “**a cloak**” to hide one’s true desires.
5. Over the years I have heard Christians tell me, “**But I prayed about it!**” & so they use this — as one of their biggest excuses — to have their own way.
6. Instead of seeking God’s will — sometimes in prayer, “**with wrong motives**” we can tell God what He is supposed to do & we get angry if He does not respond.
7. Sometimes a Christian—can make a legitimate request to God in prayer, but the motive with which they make it—is illegitimate & so God chooses not to answer.
8. James reminds us that if we are just concerned only with their own “**pleasures**” and not about other people’ needs or God’s glory—then God may not answer.

E. Not asking God through prayer can hinder our prayers.

1. Perhaps the greatest hindrance to “**answered prayer**” is “**unasked prayer.**”
2. Once again James reminds us, “**You do not have because you do not ask**” (James 4:2) — and if you “**do not ask**” — then you will — not receive.
3. Contextually, James is dealing with Christians who are prayerless & the reason they do not pray—is because they have let “**worldliness**”—capture their hearts.
4. As a general rule — the more intimate your fellowship with God, the more you will pray—and the corollary is true—if you are out of fellowship with God your last thought will be to pray.

5. When your heart—is out of tune with God then you will not pray, because “**worldliness**” — always leads — to a “**prayerless**” life.
6. The greatest problem of prayer is not ‘**unanswered prayer**’ but ‘**unasked prayer**’ and it is ‘**unasked**’ because one’s life is out sync with God’s will.
7. As a general principle, God does not give to us—unless we “**ask**” and so, if we are — seeing little happen in our life for God and for His kingdom, it is almost certain because — we have asked — for so little.

“Until now you have asked nothing in My name. Ask, and you will receive, that your joy may be full” (John 16:24).

8. I suppose these five reasons as to why God does not answer our prayers can be — summarized in the one word — “**unbelief.**”
9. It is faith that pleases God — and if our prayer life is wanting — it simply is a reflection that our spiritual life is deficient—because we are not living by faith.

“And 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 seek Him” (Hebrews 11:6).

VI. How Should We Pray?

Prayer can express itself in many different ways, in many different contexts, with many different people, and potentially with many different expressions.

A. We should pray corporately.

1. In Acts 2:42, shortly after Pentecost, we see an expression of **corporate prayer**:

42 They were continually devoting themselves to the apostles’ teaching and to fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer.

2. **Corporate prayer** is an important part of the life of the church, just as much as sound doctrine is—as reflected in “**the apostle’s teaching**” and as much as “**fellowship**” & “**the breaking of bread**” is essential to a healthy local church.
3. Throughout the Book of Acts we see **corporate prayer** (4:23-31; 12:5; 13:2).
4. When the Lord taught His disciples how to pray, He said, “**Pray, then in this way: Our Father who is in heaven**” and not, “**My Father who is in heaven,**” showing us — of our need — for “**corporate prayer**” (Matthew 6:9).

5. The same Holy Spirit who dwells within each believer (Romans 8:9), makes us not just individually, but corporately “**the temple of God**” (1 Corinthians 3:16), & so we are joined together in a unique bond of fellowship found nowhere else.
6. Since we are joined together—God expects us to pray together for **corporate prayer** edifies and unifies us—as we share our common faith (Galatians 6:2).
7. When teaching us about church discipline, Jesus taught us a principle of how essential praying with others is and not just alone by oneself:

19 “Again I say to you, that if two of you agree on earth about anything that they may ask, it shall be done for them by My Father who is in heaven. 20 “For where two or three have gathered together in My name, I am there in their midst” (Matthew 18:19-20).

8. These verses show us that **corporate prayer**—can be as small as “**two or three**,” of Jesus’ followers at a time—or it might be the entire church (Colossians 4:2).
9. He wants us to know that *there is real power* when there is agreement in prayer.
10. And His promise when we exercise **corporate prayer**—is that He is right there “**in their midst**” meaning He is close to everyone—and not just to the leader.
11. When we pray corporately, agreeing with each other — we are cooperating with God to bring about His plan—not trying to bend Him to do our will.
12. While it would be wrong to conclude — that when “**two or three are gathered**” to pray that we receive some kind of **magical prayer power boost**, nonetheless there is a consensus of faith—that can take place—in asking God for His will.
13. **Corporate prayer** is important because it creates unity (John 17:22-23), and it is the vehicle to carry each other’s burdens (Galatians 6:2) & to show our love for each other (Romans 15:30) as we have our corporate needs met (Hebrews 4:16):

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.

B. We should pray individually.

1. In the early church we find examples of both **corporate prayer** & **individual private prayer** — as modeled by the disciples (Acts 4:23-41 cf. Acts 10:9).
2. Christ by example taught us our need to spend time alone with God in prayer

35 In the early morning, while it was still dark, Jesus got up, left the house, and went away to a secluded place, and was praying there (Mark 1:35).

16 But Jesus Himself would *often* slip away to the wilderness and pray (Luke 5:16).

12 It was at this time that He went off to the mountain to pray,
and He spent the whole night in prayer to God (Luke 6:12).

23 After He had sent the crowds away, He went up on the mountain by Himself
to pray; and when it was evening, He was there alone (Matthew 14:23).

3. In His sermon given on the mount, Jesus taught that the real test of your prayer
life is not what you do in **corporate prayer**—but what you do in your **individual
prayer** life — lest we be guilty of the religious Pharisaism — that He condemns.

6 “But you, when you pray, go into your inner room, close your door
and pray to your Father who is in secret, and your Father who sees
what is done in secret will reward you (Matthew 6:6).

4. If we pray only to be ‘**seen by men**’ then we *have become* a religious exhibitionist.

5. If you want to discern if your public praying is legitimate—then a good
starting place is simply to ask — “**What is my private prayer life like?**”

6. It is not wrong to pray in public, unless the only time we pray is in public &
then we are guilty of — the Pharisaical hypocrisy — that Jesus warned of.

7. When Jesus said — “**go into your inner room, close your door and pray
to your Father who is in secret**” — He is admonishing us to have a place
in order to close out the “**on looking eyes of men**” to “**the eyes of God.**”

8. Balance in our private prayer life should not be taken to extremes—because if
all our praying—was to be kept in secret—then we would have to give up all
church worship services — all prayer meetings — and all family prayer.

9. Your ‘**inner room**’ might be *outside* as it was for Christ, or on *a rooftop* as it was
for Peter—or in your *automobile* during your lunch hour—or in a literal closet.

10. The real test of your **individual prayer life**—is not what you do in public but
what you do in private & so Jesus taught we need a place pray secretly.

C. We should pray thoughtfully.

1. Jesus taught that hypocrisy in prayer is not the only sin to avoid in prayer,
for He also wants our prayers to be “**meaningful**” and not “**mechanical.**”

2. **Hypocrisy** in prayer—is a misuse of “**the purpose of prayer**” in that it diverts the
glory of God to man—just like **verbosity** is a misuse of “**the nature of prayer**” in
that it degrades prayer *from something personal* to the mere recitation of words.

3. Jesus taught our prayers need to be thoughtful when He said (Matthew 6:7):

“And when you are praying, do not use meaningless repetition as the Gentiles do, for they suppose that they will be heard for their many words.”

4. The verb translated, **“meaningless repetition”** is the Greek verb meaning **“to stammer”** sounding — a little bit like our English word for **“babble”** and so in the original Greek—it has the sense of **“blah-blah-blah-blah.”**
5. Please understand, the Lord Jesus is not prohibiting **long prayer** for we have noted how one occasion He prayed **“all night”** (Luke 6:12).
6. Neither is the Lord Jesus prohibiting **repetitious prayer** for He Himself repeated Himself three times — using the same words — in the Garden of Gethsemane.

“And He left them again, and went away and prayed a third time, saying the same thing once more” (Matthew 26:44).

7. Clearly, what Jesus is condemning is **“meaningless”** prayer—where one prays without thinking — someone who is all lips — with no mind — or heart.
8. Some modern expressions of **“vain repetition”** — might be seen in reciting the rosary in Roman Catholicism or in weekly liturgical prayers in Protestantism.
9. We can also be guilty of **“vain repetition”** in some of our Evangelical churches, where we are known for our **“extemporaneous prayers”** that we can lapse into mere religious jargon & no heart like in, **“God, bless the gift and the giver.”**
9. Evangelical Christians can also be guilty of **“vain repetition”** for we are known for our **“extemporaneous prayers”** where one might lapse into mere religious jargon with no thought or heart like in, **“God, bless the gift and the giver.”**
10. Sometimes, our prayers are thoughtless if we are trying to impress God by the language of our prayer—or the length of our prayer.
11. Occasionally, some Christians are almost nervous when they pray using God’s name as a **“punctuation mark”** as we would speak to no other living person.

“O Lord, we thank You, Lord, that we can come into your presence Lord. Lord we need you today Lord. Lord will you help us Lord to live for you today Lord.”

12. To sum it up, Christ is forbidding His people to be involved in any kind of prayer where the mouth is running—but where the heart is not engaged.

D. We should pray persistently.

1. In Luke 11:5-8, Jesus taught us of our need to **persist** in prayer when He told the parable of an annoying neighbor and a reluctant friend (see also Luke 18:1-8 cf. Matthew 7:7-11 & James 5:16).

2. The Lord Jesus paints the picture—of a tired and selfish neighbor who does not want to be bothered—but he finally decides to get up and meet the needs of his annoying friend for Jesus wants to show how different God is (Luke 11:9-13).
3. The reason we are *not bugging God when we pray* is because we are His children and we are not **neighbors** or **acquaintances** or even just **friends**—we are family.
4. Likewise, our Father is not like this man’s neighbor for He never sleeps, or gets impatient or irritable & He always delights in meeting the needs of His children.
5. **Persistence** for the bothersome friend *paid off in that he annoyed* his neighbor so much that the neighbor responded, but God is not annoyed for He cares deeply.
6. It is in this context—of knowing that God is eager to respond—that He tells us to keep on asking, seeking & knocking—Jesus is teaching “**persistence**” in prayer.
7. Even if our prayer has not been answered in the way we might expect, we must rely upon God — to answer in His own — perfect time.
8. God uses ‘**persistent prayer**’ to develop a deeper reliance & trust in Him which which will bring out a deeper sense of gratitude & humility in us (James 4:6).

E. We should pray at times with fasting.

1. Comparing the many passages that address fasting—we can define fasting as, “**going without food for a specified period of time for a spiritual purpose.**”
2. The Lord Jesus took it for granted that “**fasting**” would have a place in the lives of His followers — as He taught in Matthew 6:17-18.
3. Today, we lay a lot of stress on daily prayer & sacrificial giving, yet there is very little attention giving to our need to fast & pray.
4. When you study those who fasted in the Bible, you discover several reasons as to why God’s people fasted including:
 - * To humble yourself before God (Ezra 8:21-23; Psalm 35:13).
 - * To intensify your prayer life (2 Corinthians 12:10; Matthew 17:21)
 - * To help discern God’s specific will (Acts 13:2-3; 14:23).
 - * To express repentance before God (Nehemiah 9:1-2).
 - * To seek God’s help for an impossible situation (Esther 4:10-17).
5. The above passages remind us that fasting can have a corporate expression or it can be done in secret not for the praise of men but of God (Mt. 5:16).

F. We should pray expectantly.

1. The Lord Jesus promised in Matthew 21:22, “**all things you ask in prayer, believing, you will receive**” — but how do we get this faith — to believe?
2. **Expectant prayer** is not trying to work yourself up into a certain state of mind — because God does not require you — to have great faith, but to have faith in a great God — for this reason Jesus promised:

20 And He said to them, “Because of the littleness of your faith; for truly I say to you, if you have faith the size of a mustard seed, you will say to this mountain, ‘Move from here to there,’ and it will move; and nothing will be impossible to you (Matthew 17:20).

3. The faith that we must have, has more to do with **the quality of faith** than with **the quantity of faith**—for Jesus taught that faith as small as “**a mustard seed**” (Mark 4:31) — can accomplish great things — if that faith is in God.
4. It is like your eye — *you have never seen your eye* — but only a reflection of your eye in a mirror—even so you cannot see faith—you can only see the evidence of your faith—because faith always looks away—to its object—the Lord Himself.
5. What makes the difference — is not so much — “**the amount of our faith**” but “**the object of our faith**” which will grow through our exposure to His Word & “**so faith comes from hearing, and hearing by the word of Christ**” (Rom. 10:17).
7. Learning the Bible, shows us more of what God is like & what He desires for us, which is the only possible way we can pray according to His will (1 Jn. 5:14–15).
8. God grows our faith as we obey Him—for only those who walk in obedience can pray in the Spirit (Ephesians 6:18) & learn more of what God is like—which in turn allows us to believe & trust Him — for even greater things (John 14:21).
9. If you know—you are abiding in Christ—and you are praying according to the Bible, then approach God in faith — expecting Him to answer — your prayer.

7 “If you abide in Me, and My words abide in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be done for you (John 15:7).

10. Start praying specifically — with “**faith-sized**” requests which are expressions of your faith that are not so large that causes you to doubt if God will answer.
11. Praying for a particular person or issue **in accordance with your faith** does not in any way limit God — but it recognizes ‘**the size of your faith**’ and what you can trust God to do—which will result in your believing Him—for greater answers.

Memory Verses: 1 John 5:14–15 & John 15:7