

WHAT GOD'S WORD SAYS ABOUT PRAYER

A 17-Part In-Depth Study & Devotional



Biblical Counseling Foundation (BCF)

What God's Word Says About Prayer

A 17-Part In-Depth Study & Devotional

Part of the Your Resources in Christ series

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ABOUT THIS BOOKLET

This booklet is intended as a personal or small-group study specifically about prayer, one of the three resources covered in Lesson 3 of the ***Self-Confrontation*** manual. But it is an even more in-depth study about a set of astonishing truths: that God speaks to us through His Word and that He gives us the ability and privilege to speak to Him in return.

The 17 short sections in the booklet are organized into three parts:

1. God's Character and Works as They Relate to Prayer
2. Characteristics of Prayer (What, How, and When to Pray)
3. Conditions and Further Truths with Prayer

We often relegate prayer to the times when we are most desperate. But we find in the Scriptures that the true value of prayer is not so much in God's changing our circumstances but in His changing us. It is more about His conforming us to the image of Christ (*Romans 8:29*), and not so much about trying to conform His will to our desires.

As we will see from Lesson 1, our going to the Lord in prayer helps us to recognize our need for Him and dependence on Him in every circumstance of life. This is part of our abiding in Christ. May the Lord bless you as you study and practice these important truths.

The BCF writing team

ABOUT THE MINISTRY OF BCF

The Biblical Counseling Foundation has been supporting local church ministries with biblical counseling and discipleship materials and training for over 50 years. In addition to the ***Self-Confrontation*** manual and ***Student Workbook for the Self-Confrontation Bible Study***, BCF has published a number of booklets designed for personal and small group study. Among these are:

- *Living Victoriously in the Battles of Life*
- *Buts of the Bible: Biblical Characters and the Crossroads of Life*
- *Your Resources in Christ* (drawn from Lessons 2 and 3 of the ***Self-Confrontation*** manual)
- *Victory Over Failures Plan* (a biblical approach to a changed life)

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SECTION 1

GOD LISTENS

It seems almost unbelievable: God wants to hear from us. He speaks to us through His Word and He directs us by His Holy Spirit. Then He gives us the ability and privilege to speak to Him in return. This is prayer.

As part of our conversation with God, prayer is a vital part of our daily lives. It is to be a natural outworking of our relationship with Him. In prayer, we can adore and praise God for who He is, thank Him for what He has done, seek forgiveness and restoration from Him, and ask Him for needs and desires — both personally and for others (called supplication). Through it, God is glorified. Combined with action, prayer provides an avenue for us to abide in Christ and to be filled with joy.

Prayer is essential to the Christian life and it ought to be a regular practice. As believers, we know that we are to pray. But many in the Church have not been taught a biblical understanding or practice for prayer. As a result, they do not know how (*Romans 8:26*), or may have developed certain unbiblical habits.

Through this study in the Scriptures, we will see how important prayer is, how constantly Jesus prayed, and how fervently we also are to pray. Let's look briefly at three passages to see how the believer's life ought to be permeated with prayer.

SECTION 1

GOD LISTENS

Look up *Colossians 4:2*. In the first part of the verse, what is to be our attitude towards prayer?

Then turn to *I Thessalonians 5:17*. How often should we pray?

Now turn over to *I Timothy*. In *Chapter 2, verse 1*, for whom should we pray?

Read the last part of *James 5:16*. What does God say about the power of prayer?

It would be absurd to say that prayer is inconsequential to God. Because God sees prayer as such an important part of our walk with Him, we should gain a greater biblical understanding of it.

GOD LISTENS

In this first section, we will gain a biblical understanding of prayer and how God responds when we pray.

I. God's character and works as they relate to prayer.

A. He Listens

1. There are many Scriptures that say that God hears prayers. *Psalm 65:2; 69:33; 116:1; Proverbs 15:29; I John 5:14-15* are just a few. Look up *Psalm 34*. In *verses 15* and *17*, whom does God hear?

God has several responses to prayer.

2. Look up *Proverbs 15:8*. What is God's attitude towards the prayer of the righteous (upright)?

3. *Psalm 145:18-19* reiterates that God hears those who follow or fear Him. In *verse 18*, what does God promise?

Did you know that there are some circumstances in which God does *not* listen?

4. Read *Psalm 66:18*. When does God not listen?

SECTION 1

GOD LISTENS

This is a very serious warning for us. If we harbor (hold on to) sin, God will not listen (*Psalms 66:18-20; Proverbs 1:28-29; 15:29; 28:9; Isaiah 1:1-15; John 9:31*).

5. Read *Matthew 6:7-8*. In *verse 7*, what does God *not* give special attention to?

We do not need to get up to a certain quota or say a magic combination of words in order for God to hear us. Nor do we need to coerce Him. He is already attentive, and He already knows. Look again at *verse 8*. What does God know?

God's work through our prayers is often difficult to understand. Think about these points:

- God is omniscient; He knows everything we need before we even ask. Yet He directs us to make our requests known to Him.
- God is a sovereign King who rules over all. Yet He desires to hear from His children.
- God already has His divine will and perfect plans. Yet we see from various Scripture passages that people were able to influence Him and move Him to act.

GOD LISTENS

From an earthly perspective, none of these seem to make sense. Yet God still has a reason that He wants us to pray to Him.

Why do you think God wants to hear from us? Why should we pray?

For further study, you can read *Matthew 6:32* or *Luke 12:30*.

We know that God is powerful enough to step in and solve everything for us. Yet He expects us to pray. Yes, He already knows what we need, but He waits for us to come to Him.

It is like loving parents who see their child working on a project. At some point, they may see that their child needs help. Although they could intervene and help the child, often they wait until he asks for help. They delight to hear the words, “I need help!” from their child. Why? Because it is good for him to acknowledge he needs assistance. It is then that the child appreciates the help, and recognizes his need to learn from and lean on the parents. If the parent stepped in and answered the question before the child saw his need, the child may resent what he might consider the “intrusiveness” of the parent. He may not even learn anything from the experience. In the same way, God wants us to depend on Him. He loves when we run to and call upon Him. Our going to the Lord for help keeps us recognizing our need for the Lord. This is part of our abiding in Him.

We will continue to address the reasons for prayer throughout this study.

SECTION 1

GOD LISTENS

From the Scriptures about prayer you looked at today, is there something you had never thought about before concerning prayer?

How does this impact your life?

GOD LISTENS

With what you have learned, what is something practical you can apply to your prayer life?

Sample

FURTHER TRUTHS WITH PRAYER

Sample

We serve a big and powerful God who is able to do far beyond what we ask or think (*Ephesians 3:20*). We can go to Him boldly with our praise and our requests. In fact, He wants to hear from us and He delights in our prayer.

God doesn't just fill our requests. He knows and cares deeply about us and He will do what is best for us. Sometimes this means He grants our desires and sometimes it means that we wait and learn to depend on Him even more. He is a good and generous Father and in whatever He does, it is always for our good and for His glory (*Matthew 7:11; Romans 8:28, 32; James 1:17*).

FURTHER TRUTHS WITH PRAYER

From commands and observation, we know that prayer is to:

- give God praise and thanks,
- seek restoration with Him (confess sin, ask forgiveness),
- make requests for our own needs,
- intercede for the needs of others,
- ask for wisdom, grace, and spiritual knowledge and growth,
- seek God's will and to express desire for His greater will to be done.

Prayer has many benefits in our lives. For example:

- It develops our faith and trust in the Lord (commanded in *Psalms 37:3-5; Proverbs 3:5*).
- It helps us to recognize God's character and works (as exemplified in *Matthew 6:6, 8, 11*).
- We receive joy and peace in doing it (*John 16:24; Philippians 4:6-7*).
- It is a way for us to set our minds on the things above (commanded in *Colossians 3:1-2; Hebrews 12:2*).

Even though God already knows and provides for our needs, we should not neglect praying. Jesus Himself prayed constantly, both alone and among people, from the beginning of His ministry and even upon the cross. This is one of the great mysteries of Jesus' life on earth: even though He was fully God, He still prayed, making requests of the Father. Jesus could have made everything happen on His own, yet He humbly entrusted Himself and submitted Himself to the Father's will. If Jesus did this, how much more should we?

As you grow in the practice of prayer, feel free to write out a specific plan with requests. Many people use a specific structure and

FURTHER TRUTHS WITH PRAYER

many write a daily plan with a theme of what they pray for each day. Though there is no command or example in Scriptures of writing out prayers, there is also nothing wrong with doing this. A written plan or format can help you focus and remember what you need to pray for. Jesus only cautions us to make sure that our “formats” do not become meaningless repetition. Written plans and requests can also train your mind to be in prayer continually. As you establish a good routine, you eventually might not need a written plan.

God — the Holy, unfathomable Creator of the universe —has invited us into a relationship with Himself. He began it with Jesus’ work on the cross where we can be reconciled and adopted as His children. But He doesn’t just give us a new position. He also gives us the ability to walk and talk with Him in daily fellowship. He speaks to us through His Word and His Holy Spirit, and as part of our relationship, the Lord allows us to speak to Him through prayer. When we do, we will grow in both our knowledge and our dependence upon Him.

May we take advantage of the tremendous privilege the Lord has given us.

COMMAND	SCRIPTURE REFERENCE
Make your requests known.	<i>Matthew 7:7; John 16:23, Philipians 4:6</i>
Take your concerns to the Lord.	<i>Psalms 55:22; Philipians 4:6</i>
Pray consistently, at all times, without ceasing.	<i>Luke 18:1; Romans 12:12; Ephesians 6:18; Colossians 4:2; I Thessalonians 5:17</i>
Pray for others, including those in authority.	<i>Ephesians 6:18; I Timothy 2:1-2</i>
Pray for your enemies.	<i>Matthew 5:44</i>
Pray for those who are sick.	<i>James 5:14</i>
Praise the Lord and recognize His character and works.	<i>Psalms 86:15; Matthew 6:9; I Corinthians 1:4</i>
Pray with thanksgiving.	<i>Philipians 4:6; Colossians 4:2; I Timothy 2:1</i>
Pray for forgiveness.	<i>Psalms 25:11, 18; 51:1; Matthew 6:12; I John 1:9</i>
Pray privately and not for attention.	<i>Matthew 6:5-6</i>
Do not use meaningless repetition.	<i>Matthew 6:7-8</i>
Be sober in prayer.	<i>I Peter 4:7</i>
Pray for workers to be sent into the harvest.	<i>Matthew 9:38</i>
Forgive others so that your prayers may be heard.	<i>Mark 11:25</i>

EXTRA RESOURCES

CHARACTER/SITUATION	SCRIPTURE REFERENCE
Abraham prayed for the King's health to be restored.	<i>Genesis 20</i>
Moses prayed for Miriam to be healed of leprosy.	<i>Numbers 12</i>
Moses prayed for forgiveness of the people of Israel.	<i>Numbers 14:11-19</i>
Hannah prayed for God to give her a son.	<i>I Samuel 1</i>
Samuel the Prophet prayed many times for answers and direction from the Lord.	<i>I & II Samuel</i>
David praised God for His blessing.	<i>II Samuel 7:18-29</i>
Solomon prayed to dedicate the temple.	<i>I Kings 8:22-53</i>
Elijah prayed for life to be restored to the widow's son.	<i>I Kings 17:21</i>
Hezekiah prayed for deliverance.	<i>II Kings 19:14-19</i>
Jehoshaphat prayed for deliverance.	<i>II Chronicles 20:5-13</i>
Daniel had a habit of praying three times a day.	<i>Daniel 6</i>
The early church was devoted to prayer.	<i>Acts 1:14; 2:42; 6:4-6</i>
The early church prayed for boldness.	<i>Acts 4:31</i>

CHARACTER/SITUATION	SCRIPTURE REFERENCE
The early church prayed for Peter while he was imprisoned.	<i>Acts 12:5</i>
Peter prayed (unspecified).	<i>Acts 10:2-4</i>
Paul prayed (unspecified).	<i>Romans 1:10; Colossians 1:3</i>
Paul prayed for salvation for the unsaved.	<i>Romans 10:1</i>
Paul requested prayer.	<i>Romans 15:30</i>
Paul prayed for continuance in the faith for other believers.	<i>I Corinthians 13:7; Colossians 4:12</i>
Paul prayed for further growth for other believers.	<i>Ephesians 1:18; Philippians 1:9; Colossians 1:9</i>
Paul gave thanks for other believers.	<i>Ephesians 1:16; Philippians 1:4; Colossians 1:3</i>
Paul asked for prayer for furtherance of the gospel.	<i>Colossians 4:3; II Thessalonians 3:1</i>
John prayed for health and spiritual prosperity for other believers.	<i>III John 1:2</i>

SCRIPTURES THAT MENTION JESUS PRAYING

Matthew 14:23	Luke 6:12	Luke 11:1
Mark 6:46	Luke 9:18	Luke 22:32
Luke 3:21	Luke 9:28-29	John 6:15
Luke 5:16		

SCRIPTURES THAT RECORD WHAT JESUS PRAYED

Matt 11:25-26	John 11:41-42
Luke 22:41-46	John 12:28
Luke 23:34, 46	John 17:1-26