

Foundations: Bible Truths For Christian Growth

Chapter 6: Prayer

FOUNDATIONS: BIBLE TRUTHS FOR CHRISTIAN GROWTH. *Chapter 6: Prayer*, © 2011 Grace Church of Mentor. All rights reserved. For information please address Grace Church of Mentor, 6883 Reynolds Road, Mentor, OH 44060.

This Chapter on *Prayer* is part of larger printed book FOUNDATIONS. To order the FOUNDATIONS book or for more helpful materials visit Grace Church of Mentor's website: <http://www.gracechurchmentor.org>

Unless otherwise noted, all Bible quotations are taken from the *New American Standard Bible* : 1995 Update. LaHabra, CA : The Lockman Foundation, 1995.



DISCIPLESHIP SERIES

Foundations: Bible Truths for Christian Growth

Chapter 1 – Salvation

God's Gift to You

Chapter 2 – Eternal Security

Your Relationship with God

Chapter 3 – Confession of Sin

Your Fellowship with God

Chapter 4 – Baptism and Communion

Your Remembrance of Christ

Chapter 5 – The Word of God

God's Communication to You

Chapter 6 – Prayer

Your Communication to God

Chapter 7 – The Local Church

Your Place of Ministry

Chapter 8 – Temptation

Your Battle with Sin

Chapter 9 – The Holy Spirit

God's Presence in You

Chapter 10 – Progressive Sanctification

God's Work in You

Chapter 11 – Stewardship

Your Giving to God

Chapter 12 – Evangelism

Your Message to the World

Few Christians, if any, would deny the importance of prayer.

Andrew Murray refers to prayer as “the pulse of the spiritual life.”¹⁵ Yet, most Christians must admit that their prayer lives are lacking. Few believers understand—much less practice—biblical prayer.

Sadly, prayer is talked about much and employed little.

Although volumes have been written about prayer, the Bible, as always, is the best teacher.

What Is Prayer?

A very simple definition of prayer is *communication to God*. God speaks to you through His Word, and you speak to God through prayer. However, the New Testament uses several different words to describe prayer. Two different words for prayer are used in **Acts 1:14** and **Philippians 4:6**. What are they?

1. **Prayer**—This is the broadest and most common term. It especially focuses on God as the object of worship. It emphasizes personal devotion and reverence.

2. **Supplication**—This is a petition or request made to God. It focuses on God as the believer's source of help.

¹⁵ Andrew Murray, *The Prayer Life*. (Chicago: Moody Press) p.8.

Why Should I Pray?

Prayer is not an option for the believer; it is mandatory. What specific command is given in **1 Thessalonians 5:17**? _____

What does **1 Samuel 12:23** teach about forgetting to pray? _____

Sadly, many Christians have the same attitude toward prayer that they do toward spinach: both are good for you, but must be endured, not enjoyed.

“We grow, we wax mighty, we prevail in private prayer.”

C.H. Spurgeon ¹⁶

What a shame! Prayer is a privilege. In prayer you have the ear of the God of eternity. Think of it! You have the glorious honor of speaking to the One who

created you and saved you. You don't *have* to pray ... you *get* to pray! Read the following verses and list some of the many benefits that are gained from biblical prayer.

Hebrews 4:16 _____

James 4:8a _____

James 5:15–16 _____

¹⁶*Lectures to My Students* (London: Passmore and Alabaster, 1881), p. 41.

Philippians 4:6–7 _____

(Hint: God replaces anxiety with what in verse 4.)

What three promises does Jesus give in **Matthew 7:7**? _____

Will God Hear My Prayer?

God is not unwilling to answer prayer. Rather, He is eager! What does God promise in **Jeremiah 33:3**? _____

How is God described in **2 Chronicles 16:9a**? _____

Although God is eager to answer your prayers, you must come to Him on *His* grounds and conditions.

① The Grounds of Prayer

God does not answer prayer because you are worthy of His attention. You have nothing that could gain

“...for we do not present our supplications before thee for our righteousnesses, but for thy great mercies.”

Daniel 9:18

your entrance into God's presence. Therefore, you come on the basis of Christ's person and work. He is God's holy Son, and on the basis of His death on the cross for your sins, you

have access to the Father (**Ephesians 1:3–6**). What instruction did Jesus give regarding prayer in **John 14:13–14** and **John 16:24**? _____

Many Christians close their prayer by saying, “In Jesus’ name, Amen,” without having any idea what the statement means. To pray in Jesus’ name means to pray with His authority. In New Testament culture, the wealthy who were away from home for an extended time would appoint a faithful servant as a personal steward. The steward could then carry on business in the name of his master—with his master’s authority.

When you pray in Jesus’ name, you are in essence saying, *“Father, I know that I have no right to be heard by you, but I come on the basis of my relationship with Your Son, Jesus Christ. Because of what He has done for me, I come to you with His authority and righteousness, in His name.”* It is vital that you pray specifically in the name of Jesus. Only those who have been born again by repenting of their sins and placing their faith in Jesus Christ can pray in Jesus’ name.

What is God’s Name?

It is certainly true that praying ‘in Jesus’ name’ is praying on the basis of His position and authority. Yet, it is also true that we can claim the *specific* names of God revealed throughout Scripture. Here are but a few:

Elohim, *The Great Creator*—Genesis 1:1

El-Roi, *The God Who Sees Me*—Genesis 16:13

El-Shaddai, *God Almighty*—Genesis 17:1

Jehovah-Jireh, *The Lord Our Provider*—Genesis 22:14

Jehovah-Rapha, *The Lord Our Healer*—Exodus 15:26

Jehovah-Nissi, *The Lord Our Banner (of Victory)*—
Exodus 17:15

Jehovah-Mekaddishkem, *The Lord Who Sanctifies You*—
Exodus 31:13

Jehovah-Shalom, *The Lord Our Peace*—Judges 6:24

Jehovah-Rohi, *The Lord Our Shepherd*—Psalm 23:1

Jehovah Tsidkenu, *The Lord Our Righteousness*—
Jeremiah 23:6

1 Peter 2:9 teaches that every Christian has been made a priest by Jesus Christ. Because of our salvation, we can go *directly* into the presence of the Father—we don’t need to go through a human priest. According to **Hebrews 4:14–16**, we need only one High Priest to gain entrance to the Father. Who is it?

1 Timothy 2:5 calls Jesus the _____ between God the Father and men. The Lord Jesus Christ himself is your representative before the Father—you don’t need another!

According to **Hebrews 7:25**, what is Jesus doing on your behalf at this very moment? _____

2. The Conditions of Prayer

Prayer is a conditional covenant between God and His people. Read the following verses and list the conditions God places on prayer.

Psalm 66:18 _____

2 Chronicles 7:14 _____

Matthew 5:23–24 & 1 Peter 3:7 _____

1 John 3:21–22 _____

John 15:7 _____

1 John 5:14–15 _____

*(Note: God's will is not a mystery—it is usually revealed in His Word. Biblical **promises** and **principles** should always guide our prayers.)*

It is essential that your prayers be consistent with Scripture. For example, you don't need to pray for God to "be with" another believer. Rather, thank Him that He has already promised to be with him (**Matthew 28:20b**). Pray *biblically*!

Hebrews 11:6 _____

Matthew 21:21–22 _____

What does **James 1:6–7** say to those who pray in doubt rather than faith? _____

(Some of the best demonstrations of faith are praise and thanksgiving—Philippians 4:6–7)

Luke 11:5–8 (also see **Romans 12:12b**) _____

Matthew 18:19–20 _____

For What Should I Pray?

Many people feel uncomfortable praying because they don't know how to pray. If that describes you, you are not alone. What did the disciples ask Jesus in **Luke 11:1**? _____

In **Luke 11:2–4** (also see **Matthew 6:9–13**), Jesus

Scripted Prayers?

"We pray without a prompter because from the heart."

Tertullian ¹⁷

responded with a model prayer. This prayer—often called *The Lord's Prayer*—has been memorized and repeated by countless people.¹⁸ However, it was intended as an *example* of

prayer, not merely a prayer to be quoted. It teaches us about biblical prayer:

"Our Father which art in heaven,"

- Prayer is based on a relationship with our Father. Those who have never become His

¹⁷ Tertullian, *Apologet*, c. 30. Quoted by C.H. Spurgeon, *Lectures to My Students* (London: Passmore and Alabaster, 1881), p. 54.

¹⁸For the sake of familiarity, we will quote the Lord's Prayer from the *King James Version*.

children through faith in Jesus Christ have no basis on which to call upon Him in prayer.

How does Jesus describe God’s willingness to answer prayer in **Matthew 7:9–11**? _____

- Prayer is addressed to God. Prayer to anyone other than God (*e.g.*, Mary, saints or departed loved ones) is *idolatry* and is expressly forbidden in Scripture (**Exodus 20:3**; **Matthew 4:10**; **1 John 5:21**; **Revelation 19:10 & 22:9**).
- Prayer is God-centered, not man-centered.

“Hallowed be thy name.”

Prayer is—above all else—worship. It is not rushing to God with requests, but bowing before Him in reverence. Prayers throughout Scripture are saturated with praise and thanksgiving. Requests are few and always follow worship. (See **Nehemiah 1:5–11** and **Luke 1:46–55**)

According to **Psalm 100:4**, how should you enter into the Lord’s presence (*e.g.*, “gates” and “courts”)?

The book of Psalms is your “worship textbook.” Want to learn to worship? Study the Psalms:

1. **Praise the Lord for who He is—His character.**

Psalm 86:5, 10, 15 _____

Psalm 103:8 _____

Psalm 106:1 _____

2. **Praise the Lord for what He has done—His blessings.**

Psalm 103:1–5, 10–14 _____

**“Thy kingdom come, Thy will be done
in earth, as it is in heaven.”**

- Prayer is agreeing with *God’s will*, not arguing for yours.

In **Luke 22:42**, Jesus made a request of the Father. With what words did He close His prayer? _____

- Prayer is seeking the furtherance of *God’s work* and *Kingdom*.
- Prayer is motivated by *God’s glory*.

What is Jesus’ motivation for answering prayer, according to **John 14:13**? _____

“Give us this day our daily bread.”

- Prayer is dependence on God for daily provision. It is asking God to meet your needs, not your selfish desires.

What promise does Scripture make in **Philippians 4:19**? _____

According to **James 4:3**, what is one reason for unanswered prayer? _____

**“And forgive us our debts (*sins*),
as we forgive our debtors (*those
who have sinned against us*)”**

- Prayer is dependent both upon your confession of sin and your forgiveness of others.

What warning does Jesus give in **Matthew 6:15**? _____

**“And lead us not into temptation,
but deliver us from evil.”**

- Prayer should include requests for increased godliness. It asks not only for forgiveness of past sins, but also for protection from future sins.

What specific prayer did Jesus command in **Matthew 26:41** that corresponds to the closing of His model prayer? _____

CAR

Jesus’ sample prayer is indeed a model to be followed. Most notably, it demonstrates that prayer begins with worship, then moves on to requests.

The following acronym to help people remember the important aspects of prayer:

Confession, Adoration, then Requests

Jesus mentioned several specific requests in His model prayer, but the Bible has many, many more. Read the following verses to discover more things for which you should pray.

2 Thessalonians 3:1–2 (Hint: The Apostle Paul wrote this passage during a missionary journey. What specific requests should you make to God for missionaries?) _____

Colossians 4:3–4 _____

Matthew 9:37–38 _____

1 Timothy 2:1–5 _____

Matthew 5:44 _____

Hebrews 13:18 _____

James 1:5 _____

James 5:13 _____

Prayer Pitfalls

In Matthew 6:5–8, Christ warns against two errors of religious hypocrites. The first error is the use of prayer as a demonstration of supposed spirituality (v. 5). He teaches that prayer is a matter of private devotion, not public display. G. Campbell Morgan writes that *“prayer is preeminently a matter between the soul and God; certainly not to be a means of advertising self’s piety.”*¹⁹ And C. H. Spurgeon’s words are even more biting: *“It is a little short of blasphemy to make devotion an occasion for display.”*²⁰

The second error is the use of “vain repetitions” (v. 7). Christ is here describing repetitive and thoughtless phrases which are said more out of mere habit. At best, they lack sincerity. At worst, they are superstitious. Remember that you are praying—not reciting or performing—and that your prayer is being attended to by a loving Father (v. 6, 8).

When & Where Can I Pray?

Scripture teaches that you can—and should—pray anytime, anywhere. Remember, **1 Thessalonians 5:17** commands you to “pray without ceasing.” And that “pray-on-the-go” command really is possible, for God knows your secret thoughts (**Matthew 6:6**). Therefore, you can pray silently.

Although Scripture commands constant prayer, it also encourages you to set aside consistent times devoted specifically to prayer. What do you notice about Jesus’ pattern of prayer in **Matthew 14:23** and **Matthew 26:36**? _____

¹⁹*Discipleship* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1973), p. 24.

²⁰*Lectures to My Students* (London: Passmore and Alabaster, 1881), p. 56.

What example do you see in **Mark 1:35** and **Psalm 5:3**? _____

Since Jesus, God's perfect Son, made consistent, fervent prayer a priority, how can you do less?

Private & Public Prayer

The Bible says much about private prayer—times when you are alone with God and seeking His face (Matthew 6:6; Psalm 27:8). Yet, it also stresses the necessity of public prayer—times when groups of believers gather for joint prayer. Notice the following texts and their record of joint prayer among fellow-Christians: **Matthew 18:19–20; Acts 1:14; 4:24–31; 12:12b.**

Oftentimes Christians are hesitant about praying in front of others. Yet, the Bible clearly teaches the value of joint prayer. Work at it. Become comfortable through experience and practice. And begin at your church's regular prayer meeting!

Prayerlessness is essentially arrogance. It is saying to God, *"I have no need of You. I can make it alone."* How much better to humbly kneel before the Lord and acknowledge, *"Lord, I need You. Without You, I can do nothing!"*

"God is vitally concerned that men should pray. God does His best work for the world through prayer."

E. M. Bounds

For a better understanding of biblical prayer, spend some of your Bible study time reading and meditating on some of the prayers recorded in Scripture. Here are some exemplary prayers from godly men:

Ezra 9
Nehemiah 9

Daniel 9
Psalm 51

Scripture Memory

Jeremiah 33:3

Call to Me and I will answer you, and I will tell you great and mighty things, which you do not know.

Psalm 66:18

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

John 16:24

Until now you have asked for nothing in My name; ask and you will receive, so that your joy may be made full.

Philippians 4:6–7

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

By the way, don't forget to review the memory verses from previous chapters! Try them now and see how you do!

Check Your Progress

What are the three most significant lessons that you have learned in this Bible study? Why are they important?

1. _____

2. _____

3. _____

Answer the following questions to measure your understanding of Prayer:

1. On whom does prayer focus (p. 94)? _____

2. What three promises does Jesus make in **Matthew 7:7** (p. 96)? _____

3. What does it mean to pray “in Jesus’ name”? (p. 97–98) _____

4. Why is it important to know the specific names of God revealed in the Bible (p. 97)? _____

5. List several conditions of prayer (pp. 99–100).

6. What is the main benefit of the Lord’s Prayer (p. 100)? How is it abused? _____

7. What are the three main components of prayer (p. 104)? _____

8. What are the two “prayer pitfalls” of **Matthew 6:5–8** (p. 105)? _____

9. Why are both private and public prayer so important (p. 107)? _____

10. Check off the following verses only when you can say them from memory:

- | | |
|--|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Jeremiah 33:3 | <input type="checkbox"/> Psalm 66:18 |
| <input type="checkbox"/> John 16:24 | <input type="checkbox"/> Philippians 4:6–7 |

Do you believe that you know this material well enough to teach it to someone else? ____ If not, review it until you do!