

Prayer 101

Air Dates: September 5-9, 2022

Day One

How many sermons have you heard on prayer? How many books have you read on prayer? It has always been and it always will be a topic to be discussed and an activity to be inspired because prayer is the linchpin of our Christian life. Without it our spiritual wheels tend to fall off and we get nowhere.

Yet, studies tell us that few Christians—I'm talking about true believers in Jesus Christ who have been born from above and found new life in Christ—few really have a significant and effective prayer life. Why? Well, there are many answers to the question of why we don't pray more. One reason is it takes discipline and many haven't learned to be disciplined. That means you have to designate a time for prayer each day and stick to it. Another reason is that prayer has a low priority in our schedules. We leave it for "leftover" time instead of making sure it gets done first.

And then another key reason we don't have effective prayer lives is because we haven't learned how to pray effectively. Prayer is something to be learned. We know that because Jesus' disciples asked him to teach them how to pray, and he did. He gave them a format for prayer which we have called the Lord's Prayer.

Do you follow that format for your own prayer life? Don't you think that if Jesus taught us to pray in that way, we should? That doesn't mean you quote the Lord's Prayer every day, but you structure your prayer to have the same components as our Lord taught.

Prayer is something you learn to do and get better at doing the more you practice it and learn about it. In our business lives, we wouldn't dare "wing it" with an important sales presentation, where a big order was at stake. When something is important to our lives, we plan and prepare and give it a lot of attention. Yet, many Christians approach prayer very carelessly and undisciplined, and then wonder why their prayers seem lifeless and humdrum.

Day Two

The disciples asked Jesus to teach them how to pray, and he did. Obviously, if they needed to learn, so do we. So, I'm sharing a few thoughts on how to structure your prayer time for more effective praying.

Here are my simple first-step suggestions to enroll you in Prayer 101:

First, follow the model Jesus gave us for prayer. You'll find it in Matthew 6 and Luke 11. Briefly, The Lord's Prayer teaches us that prayer should contain:

- **Praise:** "Our Father, Which art in heaven, hallowed be your name"
- **Pledge:** "Your kingdom come; your will be done on earth as in heaven."
- **Petition:** "Give us this day our daily bread"

- **Penitence:** "Forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors."
- **Pleading:** "And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil."

Let's look at each of those briefly.

Praise is essential to an effective prayer life. Every prayer session should begin with praise, as Jesus taught us to do. A large portion of your prayer time needs to be devoted to praise, because this is how you redirect your thoughts to God and get them off yourself. Believe me, that is a most important step in having a meaningful time of prayer.

Praise God for who he is, reciting his attributes and characteristics. Praise him for what he has done, recalling his many benefits to you. Praise the Triune God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Let your mind and heart dwell on the nature of God until your mind is filled up with God.

Then you are prepared to **pledge** yourself to the God of creation and commit your life to his control. I find it very helpful to pray back Scripture verses which I've written in my prayer journal—verses of dedication and commitment. For example, Romans 12:1 and 2 can be prayed as a dedication of your body as a living sacrifice. It is your pledge to God that you are giving him control for the day ahead.

During this pledge time, you are asking that the will of God be done in your life and giving God permission to write the agenda for your life and your day. It is a pledge between you and God.

Day Three

Jesus taught us how to pray and we should therefore pray as he taught us. That makes sense to me, how about you?

We've looked at the first two components of The Lord's Prayer:

- **Praise:** "Our Father, Which art in heaven, hallowed be your name"
- **Pledge:** "Your kingdom come; your will be done on earth as in heaven."

Then we come to:

- **Petition:** "Give us this day our daily bread"

We are told over and over again in Scripture to bring our requests to God, to cast our burdens on him, to tell him what we need, to knock, seek and ask. He is our Heavenly Father, and he loves for us to petition him. That petition time should include our own needs and those of many others. We need to spend a great deal of time in intercessory petition, praying for the needs of others.

Then we need a time of penitence:

- **Penitence:** "Forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors."

During confession we need to be very specific and very honest with God. You can't hide anything from him anyway, so it is far better to get all your dirty laundry out on in the open, confess your sins, naming them one by one, and finding his wonderful forgiveness and cleansing. And as we ask for forgiveness, we have to be willing to extend forgiveness to those who have wronged us.

Then Jesus closed his pattern for prayer with a:

- **Pleading:** "And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil."

Surely we need to invoke and plead for God's protection from the evil that surrounds us every day of our lives. We need to put on the armor of God so that we are able to stand against the evil one, and pray that God will help us to resist Satan and all his temptations.

So, those five words describe what prayer needs to contain in order to pray the way Jesus taught us to. It should always begin with **praise**, then our **pledge** to God, then present our **petitions** to him, come with a **penitent heart** for our sins and **plead** for his protection.

I'm not sure the sequence is essential, except beginning and ending with praise is always good. But your prayer time needs to cover these five areas because that's how Jesus taught us to pray.

Day Four

What I've learned from other godly people who seem to have power in their prayer life is that, first, they are disciplined about praying. And secondly, they have developed a structure for their prayer life that enables them to pray more effectively. Jesus taught his disciples how to pray, and we need to learn as well. So, I've been sharing some ideas that can help you pray more powerfully.

Praying Scripture

Have you learned the joy and effectiveness of praying Scripture? I recommend this highly because it is truly powerful praying. How do you pray Scripture, you ask? There are several ways.

First, as you are reading from the Bible, stop and pray back what you read. For example, I was reading Psalm 39 and like so many of the Psalms, it is a beautiful prayer. I prayed, "Lord, show me my life's end and the number of my days. Remind me of how brief and fleeting is my life, and therefore help me to be focused on what is eternally important and not be swallowed up with the affairs of this world." You see how a Scripture passage can guide you to a very effective prayer.

There are wonderful praise prayers in the Bible which you can use for your own. As you find them, write them in a prayer journal and use them. There are prayers for others that really improve the way you pray for friends and family. For example, pray Philippians 1:9 for people you know and love: "And this is my prayer: that your love may abound more and more in knowledge and depth of insight, so that you may be able to discern what is best and may be pure and blameless until the day of Christ, filled with the fruit of righteousness that comes through Jesus Christ—to the glory and praise of God."

I pray Philippians 4:8 often: "Today, Lord, help me to think only what is true, noble, right, pure, lovely and admirable." It's very important to pray about your thought life. I pray on the armor of God as outlined in Ephesians 6.

These are just examples of praying Scripture, and it will energize your prayer life immensely.

Day Five

Prayer is the linchpin of the Christian life and the more effectively you pray, the more powerful your life will be for God.

Remember, there are all kinds of prayers, as Paul wrote to the Ephesians: "And pray in the Spirit on all occasions with all kinds of prayers and requests" (Ephesians 6:18). Our private prayer time will have a different nature than corporate prayer. We need to be aware of what is appropriate in a group setting versus our personal prayers.

In Matthew 6:8 Jesus is again teaching on prayer and he says don't try to impress God with many words like pagans do. God is not impressed with lengthy prayers. Lengthy prayers do not carry more weight with God just because they are long. We also need to be careful that we don't get into "vain repetitions," which can happen if we just repeat the same phrases and clichés in every prayer without truly thinking of what we're saying.

Phillips Brooks has written: "Prayer is not conquering God's reluctances but taking hold of God's willingness." We don't pray to try to persuade God to do what we want him to do. We pray so that we can align ourselves with his purposes in our lives and take hold of all he wants to do for us and through us.

Prayer is for our benefit. God has no need-to-know. We don't have to educate him; he knows everything before we ask him or tell him. But when we bring our needs and petitions and praise to God, we show him and remind ourselves that we are letting go of the controls of our lives and giving them to the Lord. We are presenting our cares to God, not to inform him of our need, but to demonstrate our trust in him. To show that we recognize our inability and trust his ability.