

2024



Abundant Life

PRAYER SUMMIT

Understanding Prayer

AN EXCERPT FROM THE BEGINNER MANUAL: *LEARNING THE ART OF INTERCESSION*

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Understanding Prayer

The art of prayer can be taught and learned

Payer—this simple yet profound and most sublime of all Christian activities—is the practice of daily communion with God. It is an invitation into the very heart of God where we truly get to know Him in the deepest, most meaningful, and intimate way. Through prayer we get to feel what He feels and become moved by what moves Him. The end result is that we are drawn deeper into a lifelong partnership with a loving God as He accomplishes His eternal plan for mankind through the Lord Jesus Christ.

A thorough biblical understanding of the basics of prayer—its purpose, methodology, and rewards—is essential in helping us become more effective people of prayer, both in our personal lives and in the greater community of believers. Prayer is not a superspiritual activity reserved only for seasoned Christians; God wants all Christians to pray, from new believers to those who have been walking with Him for many years.

THE BASICS OF PRAYER

In order to learn the basics of prayer, five common elements should be explored and understood:

- ☛ The Meaning of Prayer
-
- ☛ The Reasons for Prayer
-
- ☛ The Methods of Prayer
-
- ☛ The Time and Place of Prayer
-
- ☛ The Common Hindrances to Prayer
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The Goal of This Lesson

This lesson is designed to introduce you to the basic principles of prayer. Through this lesson, you will learn the how, what, when and why of prayer and how to overcome common hindrances to developing effective prayer habits.



The Basics of Prayer

In Luke 11:1-2, Jesus explained to His disciples following *their* request that prayer can be taught AND learned. But it requires courage, humility, and a willingness to receive instruction. In order to understand the essential meaning of prayer, it is important to have a thorough knowledge and awareness of the following:

“

Prayer does not come naturally to men. It must be learned. Learning to pray...include[s] knowledge of the laws governing prayer as well [as] experience gained in the practice of prayer.

”

Dr. Harold Lindsell
Prolific Writer, Speaker,
Professor of Apologetics
– Fuller Theological
Seminary
(1913 – 1998)

- **What is Prayer?** Prayer is communication with a loving, holy, and omnipotent God. It is a divine conversation with the heavenly Father during which we discover what is on His heart and mind, and how to articulate it back to Him.
- **Why Do We Pray?** We pray because it is the love language between God and humanity. We pray because God commands it, and because by prayer we become intimately involved with God in bringing to pass the objectives of His Kingdom on the earth.
- **How Does Prayer Work?** In prayer we talk to God and God talks back to us. When a person prays, that person is immediately ushered into the presence of God and receives God’s undivided attention (Heb. 4:16). Prayers offered in faith and partnership with God can effect changes anywhere in the world through the power of the Holy Spirit.
- **When is the Best Time and Place to Pray?** There are no specific requirements in regard to time, place, or even what physical posture to take in prayer. The Lord is never bothered by our timing or intimidated by our circumstances when we come to Him in prayer. Though He transcends all time, space, and matter, God has made Himself available to hear and respond to every prayer of His people, at anytime and in any place.
- **What Are Some of the Common Hindrances to Prayer?** There are many hindrances to prayer that anyone who desires to become a seasoned person of prayer must overcome. The fact of the matter is, prayer is hard work! But the tremendous rewards that await those who obediently submit to the disciplines of prayer far exceed any obstacle that we may encounter.



The Meaning of Prayer

1. Prayer is talking with God. It involves communion and fellowship with the Lord that is fueled and sustained only through love and intimacy.
 - A) Love is the highest order of the kingdom (Mt. 22:37-39; 1 Cor. 13:13).
 - B) Prayer is a love invitation from God the Father into a deeper relationship. The prayer that Jesus taught His disciples begins with the all important phrase, "Our Father..." (Mt. 6:9; Rom. 8:14-16).
 - C) God loves us passionately and desires us to spend time with Him in exploring and experiencing the depths of that love (Ps. 91:14-15).
 - D) When we seek God in prayer, we are given the opportunity to gaze lovingly upon His beauty and splendor (Ps. 27:4). As we gaze upon Him through prayer, we become transformed into His glorious likeness (2 Cor. 3:18).

“

Spending time in the development of a loving relationship with God as Father and Friend should be our greatest motivation for prayer.

”

Dutch Sheets
Pastor & Author



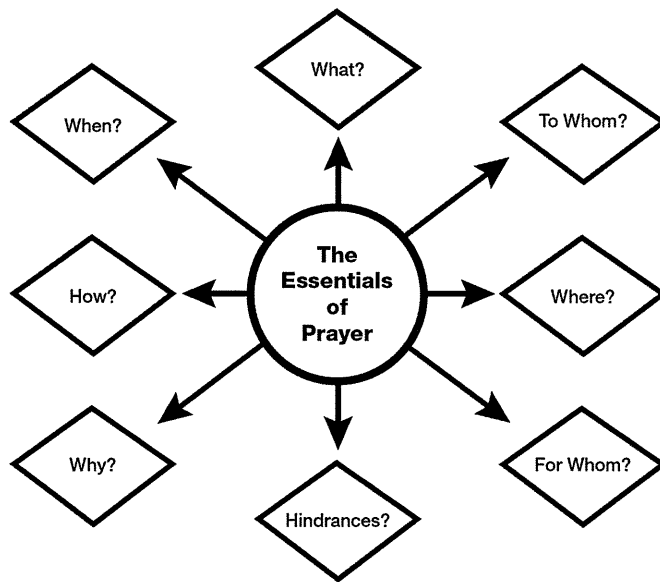


FIGURE 1.1 This diagram illustrates some of the essential questions that a beginning student of prayer must consider when learning to pray.

- 2.** Prayer is talking to God and listening as God talks back to us (Ps. 86:6-7; Isa. 58:9; Jer. 33:3).

- 3.** Prayer is the making of requests to God, both for our own needs and for the needs of others (Eph. 6:18-19; Col. 4:2-4).

- 4.** Prayer is the medium through which we gain the clearest understanding of God's grand plan and discover our individual part in it (Eph. 1:16-23).



The Reasons for Prayer

Why do we pray? In other words, are there reasons for prayer? We pray because God commands it and because prayer works. By consistently exercising ourselves in prayer, we become more intimately involved with God and His plans for mankind.

1. We pray because it is commanded by God.

- A) Jesus uses the phrase “...when you pray” three times in Matthew 6:5-7. This repetition for emphasis highlights the important truth that prayer is not an option for the Christian. To the contrary, it is both an expectation and requirement for true discipleship.
- B) The Lord not only invites us, but He commands and expects His children to pray (Mt. 26:41; Eph. 6:18; Col. 4:2).

2. Prayer allows us to form a partnership with God in bringing His will to pass on the earth (Mt. 6:10; 26:39-41).

3. We pray because prayer works (Jas. 5:16-18; Heb. 11:6).

“

Only a sovereign God can inspire prayer, and only a sovereign God can answer it. A man's concept of God, therefore, determines the depth of his prayer life. Real prayer begins and ends with God enthroned.

”

Ralph Herring
Pastor & Author

“

Watch and pray so that you will not fall into temptation.

”

Mt. 26:41



The Methods of Prayer

When a person prays, that person is immediately ushered into the presence of God and receives God's full attention (Heb. 4:16). Prayers offered in faith can effect changes anywhere in the world through the power of the Holy Spirit.

1. Prayer begins with our approach to God.

“

This, then, is how
you should pray:
Our Father in
heaven, hallowed
be your name, your
kingdom come,
your will be done
on earth as it is in
heaven. Give us
today our daily
bread. Forgive us
our debts, as we
also have forgiven
our debtors. And
lead us not into
temptation, but
deliver us from the
evil one.

”

Mt. 6:9-13

A) We must take the initiative to approach the Lord and talk honestly with Him about what is on our hearts (Ps. 55:16-17; Jer. 29:12-13).

B) The Lord will always answer those who sincerely call upon Him in faith (Ps. 38:15, 145:18-19; Isa. 58:9; Heb. 11:6).

2. Through the Spirit's enabling, we must endeavor to ask for those things that are on God's heart and mind, and not merely be motivated by selfish concerns.

A) As we seek after the things that matter to God, the Spirit of God will place upon our hearts the things He wants us to pray about (Rom. 8:26-27).



B) The Spirit is our helper in prayer. Even when we do not know what to pray for, the Holy Spirit who lives within us knows exactly what is needed at the moment. The Holy Spirit's job is to lead and guide us in all truth, even the truth of what to pray about.

3. God in turn hears our prayers and responds. His answer will come in one of three ways: yes, no, or wait.

A) God answers *yes* when the answer is for His glory and for our good.

B) God answers *no* when the request is contrary to His will and when an answer of *yes* would otherwise bring harm to us.

“

There are three answers to prayer: yes, no, and wait awhile. It must be recognized that no is an answer.

”

Ruth Stafford Peale
American Writer, Editor,
Speaker, and wife of the
late author Norman
Vincent Peale
(1906 – 2008)



It was the answer to his prayers.
Not the one he was hoping for, but an
answer nonetheless.

FIGURE 1.2 God's answers of *yes*, *no*, or *wait* are always a reflection of His wisdom and great love for us.



C) God may sometimes respond with an answer of “wait” when He has something greater in store for us, or He wants us to be in a different season of life.

4. The effectiveness of our prayers depends on whether or not we have met God’s qualifications.

A) Any person can pray to God because God is no respecter of persons (Ps. 145:18; Rom. 2:11, 10:13).

B) However, there are conditions that must be met in order to obtain answers to our prayers. One of God’s primary requirements is that we do not harbor unconfessed sins in our lives. (2 Chron. 7:14; Ps. 66:17-20).



The Time and Place of Prayer

1. The prayer offered in faith and sincerity will work regardless of time, place, posture, volume, or abundance of words. However, establishing set parameters for prayer is indispensable to eliminating the many distractions associated with building a life of prayer.

A) **Time:** Scheduling a set time for prayer and sticking to the schedule helps us stay committed to the daily discipline of prayer (Mt. 14:23; Mk. 1:35; Lk. 5:16, 6:12, 9:28-29).

B) **Place:** Choosing a quiet, comfortable place that minimizes distractions and interruptions is most conducive when spending quality time with the Lord (Dan. 6:10; Mt. 6:6).

C) **Posture:** God is more concerned with the posture of the heart than the posture of the body. The person praying can pray while standing (2 Chron. 20:5-6), sitting (1 Chron. 17:16), kneeling (Lk. 22:41), or lying down (Deut. 9:25-26). These are just some of the postures of prayer. But any posture will do as long as the heart is in submission to God.

D) **Volume:** Prayer is most often a verbal activity but can also be done silently in the mind (1 Sam. 1:12-13; Neh. 2:4; Acts 4:24). Loudness in prayer (though perfectly warranted at times, as seen in Mk. 15:34) is not a prerequisite for acceptable prayer.



The Common Hindrances to Prayer

The following list describes some of the most common hindrances or obstacles to prayer. Overcoming these negative, opposing issues will help significantly in producing a rich, vibrant life of prayer.

- Lack of Knowledge on the Subject of Prayer
- Not Being Sure of What to Pray About
- Not Having a List of Things to Pray About
- Not Sensing a Strong Desire to Pray
- Battling Distracting Thoughts When Trying to Pray
- A Mind that Easily Wanders
- No Scheduled Time or Quiet Place for Prayer
- Too Exhausted
- Watching Too Much TV
- Angry at God
- Angry at the Church
- Involvement in Too Many Recreational Activities
- Being Too Busy with Everyday Priorities and Pleasures
- Preoccupation with Job or Career
- Unforgiveness
- Sinful Habits
- Negative Feelings About Unanswered Prayers

“

In these days there is not time to pray; but without time, and a lot of it, we shall never learn to pray. It ought to be possible to give God one hour out of twenty-four all to Himself.

”

Samuel Chadwick
Wesleyan Minister
and Author
(1860 – 1932)





Prayer Exercise

1. Examine the list of common hindrances and check the ones with which you have the most difficulty.

2. In the left column of the table below, list the hindrances that you have identified above. Then in the column to the right, write down possible solutions to that problem area in your practice of prayer.

Hindrances to Prayer	Possible Solutions

3. Share with others in your study group the area of difficulty and any possible solutions. Compare answers and note if there are answers from your group that will be helpful in overcoming your area of difficulty. Add those to your list.



The Keys to Answered Prayer

God always answers if we ask correctly

Throughout the Bible, we are taught that God responds to prayer. As we seek the Lord, a release of His power and provision occurs. God desires to hear and answer our petitions with a love and passion that is far greater than the intensity of our pain or need. Through the triumphant work of Jesus Christ, all the resources of heaven are made available to us.

Prayer is our privilege and right as children of God. This gift of prayer gives us the confidence to approach God. He delights in answering our prayers offered in faith and humility.

KEYS TO SUCCESSFUL PRAYING

In this lesson, we will examine the following truths that aid in successful praying:

- ☛ Prayers That God Answers
- ☛ The Essential Ingredients of Answered Prayer

The Goal of This Lesson

The purpose of this lesson is to provide the student with proven strategies for success in prayer. We will discuss the kinds of prayers that produce maximum results, and the fundamental approaches to prayer (articulated by Jesus) that will greatly improve our prayer results.



Prayers That God Answers

Although anyone can pray, there are clear stipulations to getting our prayers answered by God. God only answers prayers that are offered in faith, humility, and sincerity, and prayers that are in conformity with His will and character.

1. God answers prayers that **REPRESENT CHRIST** (Jn. 16:23-24).

Note: When Jesus gave the disciples use of His name, He was sponsoring them before the Father.

A) What would Jesus do assuming He lived in you? This question helps you to put yourself in Jesus' position so that a heavenly perspective can be gained.

“

Prayer is the slender nerve that moves the muscles of omnipotence.

”

Charles Spurgeon
English Preacher
(1834-1892)

B) Would Jesus be interested in your request?

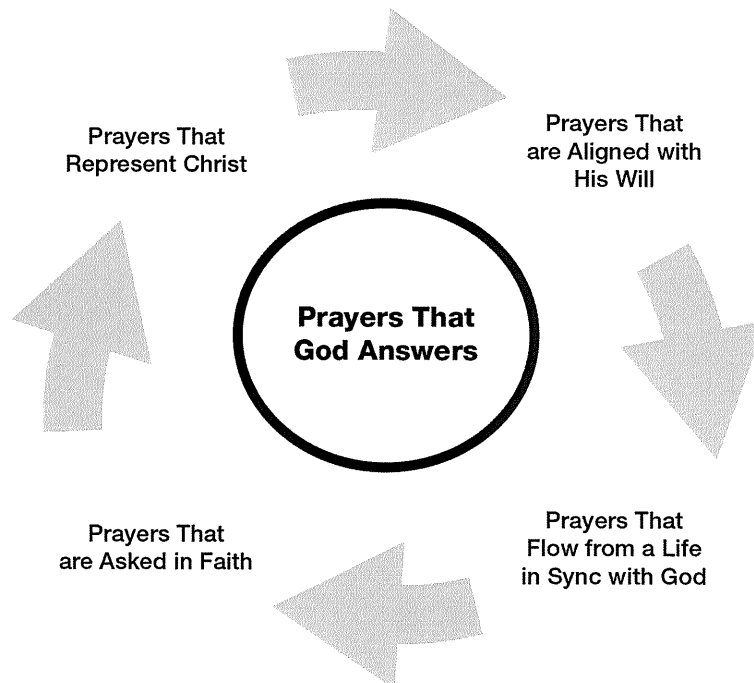


FIGURE 3.1 This diagram shows examples of prayers that God is pleased to answer.





His prayers were finally answered – with a question.

FIGURE 3.2 Our prayers should consider what is on God's heart as a sign of our love and respect for Him.

2. God answers prayer requests that are **ALIGNED WITH HIS WILL** (1 Jn. 5:13-15).

- A) God's will is determined through His word.
- B) God's will is determined through His character.
- C) God's will is determined through godly counsel (Prov. 20:18).
- D) God's will is determined through prayer.

“

[Jesus said] If you remain in me and my words remain in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be given you.

”

Jn. 15:7



3. God answers prayers that come from a LIFE IN SYNC WITH HIM.

Note: When desires are simply hedonistic—self-gratifying—we need to see that pleasures cannot be the main goal of life.

“

Prayer projects faith on God, and God on the world. Only God can move mountains, but faith and prayer moves God.

”

E. M. Bounds
Preacher, Revivalist,
Pastor, and Author
(1835 – 1913)

A) God answers prayers that reflect the reality of people who remain or abide in Christ (Jn. 15:7).

B) God answers prayers that show proper motives (Jas. 4:1-3).

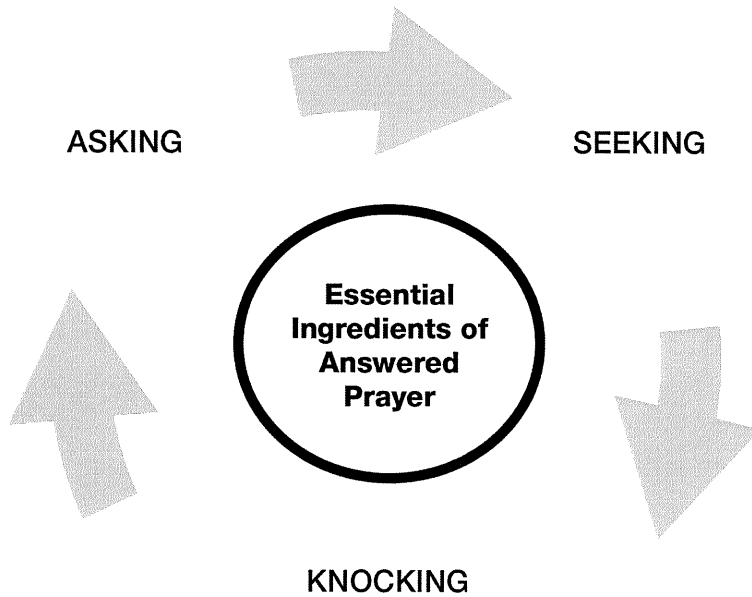
4. God answers prayers that are ASKED IN FAITH (Jas. 1:5-8).

A) Doubt is viewed by God as a deal killer.

B) Faith yields assurance, stability, and a clear focus in prayer.

C) Without the exercise of our faith we cannot please God and God cannot reward us (Heb. 11:6). God is glorified and pleased when He is able to provide for us as a result of our prayers of faith (Lk. 12:32; Jn. 15:7-8).





“

Heaven is full of answers to prayer for which no one bothered to ask.

”

Billy Graham
Renown International
Evangelist

FIGURE 3.3 This diagram illustrates three essential ingredients of persistent prayer.

The Essential Ingredients of Answered Prayer

One of the most essential components for answered prayer is persistence. Immediately after teaching His disciples the pattern of prayer, Jesus told them a parable to reinforce the importance of continued persistence in prayer (Lk. 11:5-10).

1. Prayer includes ASKING.

A) Who is asking?

Jas. 4:2-3 *“²You want something but don’t get it. You kill and covet, but you cannot have what you want. You quarrel and fight. You do not have, because you do not ask God. ³When you ask, you do not receive, because you ask with wrong motives, that you may spend what you get on your pleasures.”*



Illustration: Imagine a stranger coming up to President Obama and asking for \$100.00 versus either of his daughters, Malia or Natasha (“Sasha”), asking him for the money. The point is this: Relationship with the Father matters when *you* pose your prayer request!

B) Why is he or she asking?

C) Is the request a part of God’s will? Is the motive selfish or unselfish?

D) Is the request about the advancement or betterment of God’s kingdom? Is the request redemptive in nature?

E) There are deal breakers to prayer (e.g., disobedience, unforgiveness, etc.) (1 Pet. 3:7).

2. Prayer includes SEEKING.

Note: The word *seek* means to search, pursue, inquire, to go about, and desire.

Ps. 27:7-8 “⁷Hear my voice when I call, O LORD; be merciful to me and answer me. ⁸My heart says of you, “Seek his face!” Your face, LORD, I will seek.”



- A) Whom are you seeking?
- i. God calls us to seek Him.

Dan. 9:2-3 *“²In the first year of his reign [King Darius], I, Daniel, understood from the Scriptures, according to the word of the LORD given to Jeremiah the prophet, that the desolation of Jerusalem would last seventy years. ³So I turned to the Lord God and pleaded with him in prayer and petition, in fasting, and in sackcloth and ashes.”*

- B) What are you seeking?
- i. God’s promises must be sought for our lives (e.g., Isa. 54:13).

Jer. 29:11 *“¹¹For I know the plans I have for you, declares the Lord, plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future.”*



C) How are you to seek God?

i. With all your heart.

“

Prevailing prayer begins with the refusal to at once accept a denial.

It grows to the determination to persevere, to spare no time or trouble, till an answer comes. It rises to the intensity in which the whole being is given to God in supplication, and the boldness comes to lay hold of God's strength.

”

Andrew Murray

Author, Teacher, Pastor,
and Leader of 1860
South African Revival
(1828 – 1917)

Jer. 29:12-13 *“¹² Then you will call upon me and come and pray to me, and I will listen to you. ¹³ You will seek me and find me when you seek me with all your heart.”*

Ps. 119:2 *“² Blessed are they who keep his statutes and seek him with all their heart.”*

Illustration: Lions seek after their prey—their lives depend upon the food that they must find, kill, and eat. How much more should we seek God when the natural needs and eternal destinies of our loved ones depend on it?

Ps. 42:1-2 *“¹ As the deer pants for streams of water, so my soul pants for you, O God. ² My soul thirsts for God, for the living God. When can I go and meet with God?”*

3. Prayer includes KNOCKING.

Lk. 11:9-10 *“⁹ So I say to you: Ask and it will be given to you; seek and you will find; knock and the door will be opened to you. ¹⁰ For everyone who asks receives; he who seeks finds; and to him who knocks, the door will be opened.”*

A) Knocking signifies the use of faith, boldness, and godly confidence in prayer.



B) Be persistent in your praying!

C) Jesus taught that prayer means—“Don’t quit!”

D) Practice shamelessness in presenting your request before the Lord.

“

We do not have
God’s permission
to quit praying until
He gives us some
answer.

”

**Johann Albrecht
Bengel**

Lutheran Theologian,
Scholar and Author
(1687 – 1752)

Illustration: Ben Carson became a world renowned neurosurgeon and his brother Curtis an engineer all because their mother (who dropped out of school in the third grade, married at 13, divorced a few years later), cried out to God for her two boys. She kept on knocking until an answer came.



Prayer Exercise

1. Consider the anonymous quote to the right. In your group, share your thoughts on why this is a misguided statement.
2. Consider two prayer requests that you have made in your life—one answered and the other you feel was unanswered. Using the principles in this lesson, point out why you believe God answered one request and left the other unanswered.

“

Prayer must never
be answered: if it
is, it ceases to be
prayer and
becomes
correspondence.

”

Anonymous

