

# The Spiritual Habits of Jesus Series

## Jesus' Habit of Prayer

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By  
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### At A Glance:

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*These sermon study notes are designed to be a tool used after listening to the sermon. This resource is a guide to help deepen understanding regarding the Scriptures and ideas presented in the sermon. Those who use these study notes are encouraged to look up, read through, and think about Scripture references in this guide. There is more information in these notes than what is presented in the sermon. These study notes are designed to be used as an independent study tool to help the formation of Biblical convictions, character, and conduct.*

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# Jesus' Habit of Prayer

## I. Introduction

### A. Illustration: Elder Prayer on Sunday Mornings

1. The leadership teams have had numerous conversations about what to include in our Sunday morning services and the order in which these activities happen. We want to be thoughtful about the content of our services so that we can make the largest spiritual impact as we can with the time that has been given to us.
2. Service structure is not always easy to determine. There are differences of opinion on how best to use our time. There might be different philosophies for the purpose of Sunday morning services. Individuals may have different priorities. Logistical factors need to be taken into consideration. Perhaps items need to be included for the overall functioning of the church but have minimal, if any, spiritual impact. Having an idea of the big picture must be kept in mind.
3. One activity that we've included for a long time in our services that will remain a priority is having one of our elders come up front to pray. Prayer is important to Jesus, and it is important to Community Alliance Church as well. In our services, we want to emphasize the importance and role of prayer in the Christian life. We know it is only through prayer that we are going to be fruitful. We need God to work in people's lives. Our best efforts, on their own, will not get us very far.
4. In having our elders pray in front of you on a regular basis, we also hope to model what a healthy prayer life looks like. Prayer can be taught through an example. We realize that much of discipleship is caught more than taught. Discipleship happens not merely from the words that are said but from the actions that are performed. Praying regularly and repeatedly in front of the whole church helps people learn how to pray through observation.

B. As we continue to examine the life of Jesus, it does not take long to observe the significance of prayer. Of all the spiritual habits Jesus lived by, one of the most identified practices is that of prayer. Jesus clearly articulated many challenges to prayer, provided a lot of encouragement about prayer, and taught on prayer more than most other subjects; prayer is obviously an important part of Jesus' life and teachings.

C. While it is easy to think of prayer as an unfruitful exercise that doesn't lead to many results, Jesus does not share that opinion. According to Jesus, prayer is a pivotal means of impacting the world and maintaining a close connection with God. Prayer motivates God to act on our behalf because God is relational. Scripture says, in a straightforward and matter of fact way, that we don't have because we don't ask (Jas. 4:2-3). Jesus put unwavering confidence in the importance of prayer to influence the world. The problem of unfruitful prayer is not with prayer itself; it is in praying ineffectively. Let's turn to Jesus' example to learn how to pray well.

## II. Command to Pray

- A. While we've covered Jesus' model prayer, called The Lord's Prayer, in a previous sermon series, we are going to quickly review a particular piece of that model prayer.<sup>1</sup> After observing Jesus praying and knowing John the Baptist taught his disciples how to pray, the disciples of Jesus ask Him to teach them how to pray as well (Lk. 11:1):

<sup>9</sup> Pray, then, in this way: "Our Father who is in heaven, Hallowed be Your name. <sup>10</sup> Your kingdom come. Your will be done, On earth as it is in heaven. <sup>11</sup> Give us this day our daily bread. <sup>12</sup> And forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors. <sup>13</sup> And do not lead us into temptation, but deliver us from evil. For Yours is the kingdom and the power and the glory forever. Amen." (Mt. 6:9-13)

- B. The significant point for our purposes is found in the first few words of Jesus regarding this prayer, "Pray then in this way" (Mt. 6:9). In these words, Jesus commands the action of prayer to be put into practice. He both expects and assumes His disciples will develop the habit of spending time in prayer. Jesus doesn't tell His disciples to pray when life gets too hard to stand, when they really want something from God, or when they feel in over their head. Jesus tells the disciples that prayer should be an activity they participate in during the normal ebb and flow of life. It is to be a present action on their part. For Jesus, prayer is a behavior that is natural for someone with a connection with God. Prayer is to be a daily activity. Like other relationships, a relationship with God involves communication—from the disciple to his Father in heaven. While God does not often speak back, He always speaks regularly and repeatedly through His Word.<sup>2</sup> Any relationship requires time and communication if it is to be healthy. While a relationship with God looks a bit different as God is an immaterial, disembodied being, there are still relational elements to connecting with Him.
- C. Jesus doesn't just command the disciples to be praying; He taught and encouraged them to always pray without being discouraged. This additional teaching will help provide depth and clarity to Jesus' understanding of the command to pray:

<sup>1</sup> Now He was telling them a parable to show that at all times they ought to pray and not to lose heart, <sup>2</sup> saying, "In a certain city there was a judge who did not fear God and did not respect man. <sup>3</sup> There was a widow in that city, and she kept coming to him, saying, 'Give me legal protection from my opponent.' <sup>4</sup> For a while he was unwilling; but afterward he said to himself, 'Even though I do not fear God nor respect man, <sup>5</sup> yet because this widow bothers me, I will give her legal protection, otherwise by continually coming she will wear me out.'" <sup>6</sup> And the Lord said, "Hear what the unrighteous judge said; <sup>7</sup> now, will not God bring about justice for His elect who cry to

<sup>1</sup> The sermon series is called "Learning to Pray Like Jesus" and is available on the church app for those who are interested.

<sup>2</sup> God can and does speak in visions, dreams, through prophets, angels, etc. However, it is extremely rare for God to speak during prayer (it did happen with Peter, Ac. 10:9-20, and Jesus, Jn. 12:28), even for the prophets. Even when God does respond to prayer, the response isn't always immediate (at the time of prayer). One example comes from Nathan and David (2 Sam. 7:1-17). Disciples will set themselves up for failure if they expect prayer to be a two-way form of communication. What is called "listening prayer" is not taught in the Bible as the default, regular, and expected way to hear from God. For more on a related topic people can listen to Greg Koukl's STR Weekly Podcasts *Decision Making and the Will of God: What the Bible Doesn't Say* 10/4/23 and *Decision Making and the Will of God: The Biblical Method* 10/6/23 available at [www.str.org](http://www.str.org).

Him day and night, and will He delay long over them? <sup>8</sup> I tell you that He will bring about justice for them quickly. However, when the Son of Man comes, will He find faith on the earth?” (Lk. 18:1-8)

- D. This command is understood by Jesus to be something that happens, “at all times they ought to pray” (v. 1). Paul picked up on Jesus’ language here and said, “pray at all times in the Spirit” (Eph. 6:18) and “pray without ceasing” (1 Thess. 5:17). To fulfill this command, Jesus anticipates prayer saturating the life of a disciple. Jesus commands disciples to pray frequently and consistently. It is their default setting in life. To pray well is to pray more than once a day for a few minutes in the morning. Prayer is to become the go-to response in every situation—this is a learned behavior. From Jesus’ perspective, prayer is an always open line of communication that can, and should, be used in every situation of life.
- E. Constant communication like this is only possible with God because God is present everywhere (omnipresent) and all knowing (omniscient). Not every phone call we make is answered. Sometimes when we send an email it comes back with an automatic response. Some text messages take days to get a reply. But with God, He is always available. He never sleeps or runs out of energy. God is always working and never on vacation. This allows disciples to have constant access to God whenever they want. What a privilege!
- F. Jesus also connects an active prayer life with a person who has a deep trust in God in His closing rhetorical question, “when the Son of Man comes, will he find faith on the earth?” (v. 8). Faith (trust in God) is the fuel of prayer. A person who doesn’t think God is involved in their life or the course of the world will not spend much time in prayer. If a person is convinced God will not give them anything of benefit, they will not pray, either. An individual who doesn’t think God cares about them will not pray. An attitude of trust in God is the foundation of a healthy prayer life.<sup>3</sup> In short, a person must have the right heart before God prior to developing a healthy prayer life.
- G. What is interesting about Jesus’ teaching is His knowledge and awareness of one of the major challenges to maintaining a healthy habit of prayer, “and not to lose heart” (v. 1). Discouragement and seemingly unanswered prayers can destroy the best prayer lives. Jesus is fully aware of the human tendency to give up on prayer. The temptation to think prayer does not do anything or that it doesn’t work is a real obstacle that needs to be overcome. Knowing this challenge, Jesus specifically teaches people not to get discouraged as they are praying. Repeated petitions to the Judge of Heaven will go a lot farther than the petitions given to an immoral human judge. But even the immoral human judge acts on repeated petitions. Take note of what Jesus assumes about prayer: not every prayer will be answered the first time, and the same request will be repeated multiple times. Jesus promotes a fervency about prayer, “who cry out to Him day and night” (v. 6).

### III. Jesus’ Habit of Prayer

- A. While Jesus commands a fervent, continuous, and trusting prayer life, He goes much farther than merely telling people they should pray. He showed them how to have such a prayer life

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<sup>3</sup> Unfortunately for many people, desperation or pain is the primary fuel of their prayer life. However, these motivations don’t result in a healthy prayer life.

through His example. Jesus lived His own life with a healthy and passionate habit of prayer. Jesus regularly and repeatedly, “would often slip away to the wilderness and pray”. (Lk. 5:16).

- B. Building on what was already learned about solitude, as we notice the tendencies of Jesus’ life, we see Him participating in the activity of prayer when He was alone with the Father. Being alone with God is strongly connected to the practice of prayer. Let’s return to one of the examples of solitude to see how being alone with God is closely connected with prayer in the life of Jesus:

<sup>22</sup> Immediately He made the disciples get into the boat and go ahead of *Him* to the other side, while He sent the crowds away. <sup>23</sup> 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. (Mt. 14:22-23)

- C. Notice how Jesus was “by Himself” and the reason behind this action is “to pray” (v. 23). The most frequently mentioned activity that Jesus did when He was alone with the Father was prayer. As we see Jesus praying, we can learn a lot about prayer from the variety of ways Jesus prayed. A significant part of Jesus’ prayer life was designated time alone with the Father. Jesus prayed in public with other people, He prayed during the busyness of life, He offered short quick prayers, and He prayed for others when He was asked to, but a large portion of His prayer habit was extended private times of prayer with the Father. We even have one example of Jesus spending an entire night alone with God in prayer (Lk. 6:12).
- D. Why did Jesus spend so much time in prayer? One of the main reasons is found when Jesus lets others get a glimpse into His prayer life before He raised Lazarus from the dead. Jesus makes confident assertions about His own prayer life, which gives us a clue as to why Jesus spent so much time and energy on prayer:

<sup>41</sup> So they removed the stone. Then Jesus raised His eyes, and said, “Father, I thank You that You have heard Me. <sup>42</sup> I knew that You always hear Me; but because of the people standing around I said it, so that they may believe that You sent Me.” (Jn. 11:41-42)

- E. Notice Jesus’ unwavering confidence in prayer: “Father, I thank You that You have heard Me. I knew that You always hear Me” (vv. 41-42).<sup>4</sup> There is absolutely no doubt in Jesus’ mind that prayer is communication with a real Person who exists—God the Father. Jesus is also certain that God “always hears” Him. This applies to every single prayer Jesus has ever prayed in His entire earthly life, including the one He is praying at this very moment. Prayer is never a waste of time; God hears and listens to every prayer of Jesus. Even if Jesus’ prayer doesn’t change what the Father decides to do (like the case of His prayer in the Garden of Gethsemane in Lk. 22:40-46), prayer is still meaningful because the Father is listening.<sup>5</sup> Not a single word is wasted. Do I have this perspective and level of confidence in prayer?
- F. Have you ever been in a conversation when either you were not listening to someone who was talking, or you knew the other person wasn’t really listening? I know I have. Those types of

<sup>4</sup> Mt. 21:21, Jn. 15:7

<sup>5</sup> While the fact of God the Father always listening to His prayer is true of Jesus and those who follow Him (Heb. 4:16), this is not true of every person (Jer. 7:16, Isa. 1:15).

experiences can be frustrating for the person who wants to share something with someone else, only to find the person on the other side isn't really interested. This is never the case with the prayers of those who are attached to Jesus. God is always listening because He cares and He loves His own. While this reality about prayer is not true of every person, it is true with those who are living obediently to Jesus. It is this very aspect that makes them spiritually fruitful and effective for the kingdom.

- G. Not only does Jesus know that God the Father always hears Him, but Jesus also knows God's unique role in the world. He has the ability and resources to do what no one else can do. The Person who hears His prayers is also the person who can do whatever He wants to do, and no one can stop Him. "My Father, who has given *them* to Me, is greater than all; and no one is able to snatch *them* out of the Father's hand." (Jn. 10:29). While Jesus is talking about God's supernatural protection concerning His disciples, His point is that God the Father is greater than anyone else. God is the manager and King of everything that has been created. The One who hears is not powerless, but rather, can do anything He wants.<sup>6</sup>
- H. These two powerful motivators lead Jesus to spend so much time in prayer. Jesus knows the Father is always listening to Him, and He also know the Father can do something about every prayer that is prayed. Prayer has incredible creative potential—Jesus Himself said so on many occasions. He taught this reality to His disciples. Prayer is a powerful tool at the disposal of every disciple.
- I. As with everything in the Christian life, the place to understand real Christianity starts and stops with Jesus Himself. Disciples can learn a lot about prayer by studying the passages in the gospels that document the prayer habits of Jesus. To do just that, here is another list of passages of Scripture that involve Jesus participating in the spiritual habit of prayer. Spend some time looking up and reading each passage: His habit of prayer (Lk. 5:16), prior to the Lord's Prayer (Lk. 11:1), His model prayer (Mt. 6:9-13, Lk. 11:2-4), a prayer about His life purpose (Heb. 10:5-9), Jesus praying on a mountain (Mt. 14:23, Mk. 6:46, Jn. 6:15), prior to appointing the apostles (Lk. 6:12), at the Transfiguration (Lk. 9:28), praising God for how He works (Mt. 11:25-26, Lk. 10:21-22), Jesus' longest recorded prayer (Jn. 17:1-26), in the Garden of Gethsemane (Mt. 26:37-44, Mk. 14:32-41, Lk. 22:40-46), to forgive His killers (Lk. 23:34), while on the cross (Mt. 27:46, Mk. 15:34), His dying breath (Lk. 23:46).
- J. Use this set of questions to study the above list of Scripture references about prayer:
  1. What are the logistics of Jesus' prayer (when and where)?
  2. What was the duration of Jesus' times of prayer?
  3. What is the content of Jesus' prayer?
  4. What are the various types and forms of prayer Jesus uses?

#### IV. How to Practice Prayer

- A. Following Jesus' example, we also want to offer specific practical help when it comes to prayer. While many helpful methods of prayer have been developed for God's people to use, we are going to focus on one that is very popular because of its usefulness. Our hope in offering this

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<sup>6</sup> Anything that is a real possibility—that which power can accomplish and that which is consistent with His moral character—that which is morally good.

method of structured prayer is to help you learn how to pray. As with solitude, the main objective is to find a prayer pattern that works for you in a sustainable way. Be encouraged to find a prayer method that appeals to you as an individual according to how God has made you.

- B. A practical tool frequently used in the church is ACTS. The ACTS method of prayer organizes and focuses prayer in a specific way and order. ACTS stands for adoration, confession, thanksgiving, and supplication. A time of prayer can begin with adoration to God for who He is and actions that reveal His attributes. Adoration praises God for who He is. Focusing on God first in prayer helps a person adopt the right posture, attitude, and perspective in prayer. It helps us put God at the rightful center of prayer instead of ourselves. A specific attribute of God from His nature or character can be focused on and appreciated. The Bible is a rich resource that helps us identify these attributes.<sup>7</sup> In this element of prayer, God is to be praised, honored, worshipped, appreciated, and glorified for who He is.
- C. After God has been praised, our prayer time can move to confession. This is when godly sorrow, repentance, and confession of specific failures and sins can be communicated and cleared up with God. Disciples can ask for and openly receive forgiveness from God. Seeking His help to avoid the same moral failings can be involved in this portion of prayer. While almost completely neglected in the modern day of individualism, the dynamic of corporate confession is a Biblical pattern. Parents can confess on behalf of their kids, employers for unethical businesses, disciples on behalf of their city or nation, and church leaders for the church. God does deal with people in groups under some circumstances, and one person can represent others before God (Ezek. 14:12-14).
- D. Following confession comes thanksgiving. While adoration's primary focus is on God, thanksgiving's primary focus is on the individual doing the prayer. This is a time to thank God for what He has provided and done for us. God's good and kind actions can also be used for this purpose. While God's actions in history (found in the Bible) can be used, the more personal, the better. Expressing thankfulness to God for something He has done on the same day the prayer is being offered can be a good habit to get into regarding prayer. This can help a person understand how God works in their life personally and not just in the world "out there" somewhere. People can get a sense of the deep goodness of God. Being thankful in prayer helps draw our attention to the reality of God all around us.
- E. The ACTS method of prayer finishes with supplications. This is the part of prayer that usually comes more easily and naturally to us. Supplications are the requests and petitions we bring to God. Ask God to provide what you need according to His goodness and generosity. This includes the physical necessities we need for survival: food, water, clothing, and in our environment (shelter). We can also ask God to bless us beyond mere survival, including other desires of our heart, as well as fruitfulness for His kingdom. While God may not always give us what we ask for if we want to spend those things on our own pleasure, He is far more likely to answer requests that are centered around Him and His will.

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<sup>7</sup> To learn more about the identity and personhood of God any systematic theology book will have a section called "Theology Proper" which presents and explains the various attributes of God. One such resource is Millard Erickson's *Introducing Christian Doctrine* or Charles Ryrie's *Ryrie's Basic Theology*.

- F. For those who may want to learn more about prayer and go deeper into what the Scriptures say about prayer, a few helpful resources include Herbert Lockyer's *All the Prayers of the Bible*, as well as Ken Boa's *Face to Face: Praying the Scriptures for Intimate Worship Volume One* and *Face to Face: Praying the Scripture for Spiritual Growth Volume 2*. These resources can help us learn more about prayer and experience prayer for ourselves. Start praying, adjust your prayer habit as needed, and stick with it.

**V. Conclusion**

- A. Prayer played a large role in the life of Jesus. He regularly withdrew from His normal responsibilities to have extended times of prayer with the Father. At the same time, Jesus also brought prayer into His regular daily activities. It was a high priority for Him, and He told the disciples prayer should be a continual habit for them as well.
- B. Here is some very wise life advice on how to navigate the situations we face: “<sup>6</sup> Therefore humble yourselves under the mighty hand of God, that He may exalt you at the proper time, <sup>7</sup> casting all your anxiety on Him, because He cares for you.” (1 Pet. 5:6-7). Acknowledge God’s role and authority in your life. Develop a submissive posture toward Him. Communicate with God in prayer because He cares for you. Depend on and trust in His responses to your prayers. These are the building blocks of a healthy prayer life.

**VI. Questions for Further Thought**

- A. What does your prayer life look like? What is involved?
- B. What confidence should a disciple have regarding prayer (1 Jn. 5:13-15)? Will this be true in every circumstance? Why or why not?
- C. What other factors of our lives have an impact on the effectiveness of our prayers? Cite Scripture references when possible.
- D. What might cause a person’s passion for prayer to diminish?
- E. Can you list some specific actions that can help develop a strong and consistent prayer life?