



Jason Smith - Spiritual Habits

Part 1: Prayer

Prayer is our lifeline to God, a sacred conversation that strengthens our connection with Him.

Through prayer, we surrender our worries and anxieties, finding peace that transcends understanding. In Philippians 4:6-7, Paul encourages us to present our requests to God with thanksgiving, assuring us that His peace will guard our hearts and minds.

During this first week, we will dive into the power of prayer, learning to cultivate a vibrant prayer life that sustains us through every season.

Scriptures: Philippians 4:6–7, Matthew 6:5–13, Luke 11:1–13, Psalm 62:8, Romans 8:26–27, 1 Thessalonians 5:16–18

Introduction

WHY SPIRITUAL HABITS MATTER

Imagine someone training for a marathon who never actually goes running. They read books about running, wear all the gear, and even cheer others on—but they never train. It's absurd, right?

My Walk for IRAN at Haworth. Took preparation.

But sometimes, we approach the Christian life that way. We believe in Jesus, maybe even attend church faithfully, but if we're honest, we don't always train for godliness the way Paul encourages in **1 Timothy 4:7–8**:

“Train yourself for godliness. For physical training is of some value, but godliness has value for all things, holding promise for both the present life and the life to come.”

Over the next four weeks, we're going to talk about training—not for a race—but for a full, flourishing life with God. And this week, we begin with one of the most foundational and powerful habits of all: **prayer**.

So with that in mind, let's pray over our day today and our new series *Spiritual Habits*.

PRAYER IS AN INVITATION TO PEACE

Philippians 4:6–7 (NIV)

"Do not be anxious about anything, but in every situation, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus."

Let's be honest—life is loud. Anxiety creeps in through the cracks of our days: through financial pressure, relational tension, work stress, uncertainty about the future, and even our own inner self-doubt.

It's not hard to find reasons to worry. What's hard is knowing what to do with all that worry once it shows up.

That's where the apostle Paul's words in *Philippians 4:6–7* speak directly to our hearts. Paul writes, ***“Do not be anxious about anything...”*** And we think, *Anything? Really, Paul?*

But remember—he's not writing this from a beach house. He's in a prison cell. Facing trial.

Chained and uncertain about what tomorrow holds. And even there, he says, ***“Don't be anxious about anything.”*** Not because he's naive.

Not because he's in denial. But because he knows the power of what comes next: ***“But in every situation, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God.”***

Prayer is how we hand over our anxiety to the One who is actually in control.

And here's the promise: ***“The peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus.”***

That phrase “guard” is a military word—it's the image of a soldier standing at attention, keeping watch over something precious.

Paul is saying that when we pray, God places peace like a sentry around our heart and mind. That's not just relief—that's protection. That's not escape—it's peace that meets us *in* the struggle.

Jesus echoes this same invitation in **Matthew 11:28–30** when He says:

“Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest.”

Prayer is how we come to Him. It's how we lay down the weight of anxiety and pick up the gift of peace.

Psalm 55:22 encourages us,

“Cast your cares on the Lord and He will sustain you; He will never let the righteous be shaken.”

And 1 Peter 5:7 reminds us,

“Cast all your anxiety on Him because He cares for you.”

God is not distant. He cares. He listens. And He responds not with instant fixes, but with steadying peace.

PRAYER IS A CONVERSATION, NOT A PERFORMANCE

Let’s face it—many of us feel intimidated by prayer.

We hear someone pray out loud with beautiful, poetic language, and we think, *“I could never sound like that.”*

We wonder if we’re doing it right. We start rehearsing what to say, worried about how it will come across—even to God.

But Jesus cuts through all that pressure in **Matthew 6:5–6**:

“And when you pray, do not be like the hypocrites, for they love to pray standing in the synagogues and on the street corners to be seen by others. Truly I tell you, they have received their reward in full. But when you pray, go into your room, close the door and pray to your Father, who is unseen. Then your Father, who sees what is done in secret, will reward you.”

Jesus is saying—prayer is not a performance. It’s not about public approval. It’s not about using fancy words. It’s a personal conversation with a God who already knows your heart and just wants to be with you.

You don't need to impress God. He's not grading your grammar. Think of a child talking to a loving parent: simple, unfiltered, real. That's what God wants from us.

We see this again in **Luke 11:1–4**, when the disciples come to Jesus—not asking how to preach or lead a movement—but saying, “*Lord, teach us to pray.*” And Jesus responds with the Lord's Prayer—a prayer that's simple, sincere, and deeply relational.

“Our Father in heaven...” — He's not a distant deity. He's a loving Father.

“Give us each day our daily bread...” — God wants to meet our needs, even the small ones.

“Forgive us our sins...” — He invites us to be honest about our brokenness.

This is a prayer rooted in reverence, yes—but also in relationship and daily dependence.

That's why healthy prayer is not one-dimensional. It's not just asking for things. It's a full, living conversation. A good framework to practice this is the ACTS model:

- **Adoration** – Begin by praising God for who He is. Worship opens our hearts to His greatness. **“Great is the Lord and most worthy of praise...”** (*Psalms 145:3*)
- **Confession** – Be honest about where you've fallen short. Not because God doesn't know, but because bringing sin into the light allows us to receive grace.
“If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just and will forgive

us...” (1 John 1:9)

- **Thanksgiving** – Look for ways to give thanks. Gratitude re-centers our hearts.

“Give thanks in all circumstances...” (1 Thessalonians 5:18)

- **Supplication** – Bring your needs and the needs of others before God. Ask boldly, humbly, and persistently. **“Let your requests be made known to God...”** (Philippians 4:6)

And here's the good news: even when we don't know how to pray, we're not alone.

Romans 8:26–27 reminds us:

“In the same way, the Spirit helps us in our weakness. We do not know what we ought to pray for, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us through wordless groans.”

Have you ever sat in silence and said, “*God, I don't even have the words*”? That's okay. The Spirit prays *with you* and *for you*. God hears not just your words, but your heart.

Prayer isn't just something we *say*—it's something we build over time. That's why our next focus is on making prayer a regular rhythm, not just a reaction. Prayer is a habit to be cultivated, and that's what we'll turn to next.

PRAYER IS A HABIT TO BE CULTIVATED

We've all said it at some point: “*I should pray more.*”

But when we frame prayer as something we “should” do, it starts to feel like a chore. Like flossing or filing taxes—important, but often neglected.

But prayer isn’t a task to check off. It’s a lifeline.

In **1 Thessalonians 5:16–18**, Paul writes:

“Rejoice always, pray continually, give thanks in all circumstances; for this is God’s will for you in Christ Jesus.”

Pray continually. That can sound impossible—are we supposed to be talking to God 24/7?

Not exactly.

Paul isn’t saying you can never stop speaking words of prayer. He’s describing a posture of the heart.

A habit of turning toward God again and again. A rhythm of awareness that God is always present, always near, always listening.

It’s like breathing. You don’t think about every breath you take, but it sustains your life. Prayer, when cultivated as a habit, becomes like that. Not just something you *do*, but something that shapes who you *are*.

Intimacy with God grows through regular, consistent communication. Just like any relationship—whether it’s with a spouse, a friend, a sibling—closeness takes time, intentionality, and presence.

If you only ever talk to someone in crisis, the relationship will stay shallow. But if you talk daily, even briefly, it deepens.

Jesus modeled this for us. Even though He was God in the flesh, He regularly pulled away to pray.

“Jesus often withdrew to lonely places and prayed.” (Luke 5:16)

Even the Son of God needed quiet, consistent communion with the Father. If that’s true for Him, how much more do we?

The good news is—you don’t have to start with hours of prayer. You just have to start somewhere. Habits form slowly, through intentional steps repeated over time.

Prayer is not about doing more. It’s about drawing near.

And when we build this habit—not out of guilt, but out of desire—we open the door to a fuller, deeper life in Christ. A life grounded in peace, sustained by relationship, and shaped by daily connection to God.

CONCLUSION: THE DOOR IS OPEN

Prayer is not about getting it “right.” It’s not about saying the perfect words, sounding holy, or impressing God.

Prayer is about showing up.

It’s about coming honestly—whether you’re confident or barely holding it together—and saying, *“God, I’m here.”*

He’s not waiting for you with a red pen in His hand. He’s not evaluating your performance. He’s waiting with open arms. With peace. With love. With presence.

God wants to hear from you.

In joy or sorrow.

In clarity or confusion.

In strength or weakness.

Whether you have all the words, or none at all.

He simply wants you.

And so today, I want to invite you to walk through the door of prayer. To train yourself for godliness—not by striving harder, but by stepping closer. By building a daily rhythm of real connection with your Father.

Because when you do—when prayer becomes part of your everyday life—you begin to experience what Paul described in **Philippians 4:6–7**:

“Do not be anxious about anything, but in every situation, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.”

That kind of peace is not found in the absence of problems. It’s found in the presence of God.

And prayer is how we get there.

Challenge for the Week

This week, I want to challenge you:

- **Set aside a specific time each day**—morning, lunch break, or evening. Even **5 minutes** can make a difference.
- Use the **A.C.T.S. model**:
 - **Adoration** – Tell God who He is.

- **Confession** – Be honest about your need.
- **Thanksgiving** – Thank Him for His grace.
- **Supplication** – Ask Him for what's on your heart.
- Or use the **Lord's Prayer** as your guide.
- **Write down one thing you're praying for each day.** At the end of the week, look back. See how God met you, guided you, and gave you peace.

This isn't about adding one more thing to your to-do list. This is about opening the door to the life God made you for.