

## Why Do We Pray?

Today we begin our 21 DOP. I hope that you have taken the last week to develop your prayer and fasting plan. If you are just joining in and you are like, “**What prayer and fasting plan?**” I want to encourage you to go back and watch last week’s message (you can do that through the Vertical App or our Youtube Channel) It is not too late to join us in what really can be a very beneficial spiritual exercise and it is something we have been doing as a church for the last several years. In fact, this has become such a discipline in my own life personally that I cannot even imagine beginning my year without it.

This year the theme for our 21 DOP is “HOW TO PRAY”. What exactly is PRAYER?

Pastor John Piper simply defines prayer as intentionally conveying a message to God.

The Billy Graham Evangelistic Association defines prayer as spiritual communication between man and God, a two-way relationship in which man should not only talk to God but also listen to Him.

However we choose to phrase the definition, PRAYER is an intentional act whereby you are engaged in a relationship with God and you are seeking to communicate with Him.

Prayer, because it is one of the most powerful weapons God has given us as His children, is one of those disciplines Satan has deceived us into thinking is something that only certain people are able to do and we make it way more complicated than it has to be. If we are not one of those who feel that way then we probably fall into the other category of those who do not pray because we have allowed ourselves to become too busy and distracted with our daily lives that we have a hard time finding the mind space or time to pray. Over the course of the next 3 weeks I want us to wrestle with 3 questions as it relates to Prayer.

- 1) Why Do We Pray?
- 2) How Do We Pray?
- 3) What to Expect When We Pray? (During the last week we will address the age old question of Does God answer all prayers? And we will also look at what it is that hinders our prayers to God.)

These next three weeks really are a great opportunity for you to put prayer into practice in your life if you will take advantage of it. We have given each of you a PRAYER GUIDE when you came in today. This guide is designed with THREE OBJECTIVES in mind to help you pray. The first objective is to give you a **prayer focus for each day of our 21 days**. This will give you something different to pray for each day. Sometimes we don’t pray because we don’t know what to pray for and we don’t have the mind space to think about what we need to be praying about. The second objective is to help you with **what to say when you pray**. Following the 21 day prayer focus section in our guide we have given you a list of scripture prayers you can pray. One of the most powerful prayers you can offer to God is to pray scripture over a particular situation or

for a certain person. If you feel like you don't know what to say to God when you pray, meditate on these scriptures and voice them as your prayer to God. The third objective for this prayer guide is that you will use the blank spaces at the back to **be intentional in writing down prayers and praying for people when they have an issue or when they make a request of you to pray for them**. When you think of or come across someone in need of prayer we want you to jot it down as a reminder to pray for the person or situation. Remember, one of our Core Values here at VC is PRAY NOW AND SPEAK LIFE. If this is something you have never done before I want to challenge you during the 21 days to be on the lookout for people or situations in need of prayer and to develop this as a new habit in your life. In fact, our prayer is that you will continue to do these things throughout the entire year.

Another opportunity we are providing you outside of our Sunday morning gathering is a mid-week worship and prayer time each Thursday evening at 7. This is a time for us to come together for prayer and to be encouraged. We hope you will take full advantage of this prayer guide and these prayer nights as opportunities and let God help you establish some new rhythms in your life regarding the discipline of prayer.

So as we begin this morning turn with me to **Luke 22** as we deal with the first of our three questions regarding PRAYER: **Why Do We Pray?** Before we can talk about HOW to pray we need to understand WHY we pray. The passage here in Luke 22 provides a beautiful picture of the significance of prayer in the life of a believer.

Jesus and His disciples have just finished their last passover meal together and have left the upper room where they will enter into the Garden of Gethsemane. Jesus, knowing that He is about to be arrested and crucified, begins to prepare himself and His disciples for what is about to take place.

### **Luke 22:39-47 (NIV)**

**39** Jesus went out as usual to the Mount of Olives, and his disciples followed him. **40** On reaching the place, he said to them, "Pray that you will not fall into temptation." **41** He withdrew about a stone's throw beyond them, knelt down and prayed, **42** "Father, if you are willing, take this cup from me; yet not my will, but yours be done." **43** An angel from heaven appeared to him and strengthened him. **44** And being in anguish, he prayed more earnestly, and his sweat was like drops of blood falling to the ground.

**45** When he rose from prayer and went back to the disciples, he found them asleep, exhausted from sorrow. **46** "Why are you sleeping?" he asked them. "Get up and pray so that you will not fall into temptation." **47** While he was still speaking a crowd came up, and the man who was called Judas, one of the Twelve, was leading them. He approached Jesus to kiss him,

From our text, notice some key observations as it relates to Prayer:

First of all I want you to notice that prayer was CENTRAL to Christ's earthly ministry! Vs. 39 indicates that the place Jesus went to is apparently one that He visited often for the purpose of meeting with His Father in prayer. He went there so often that even Judas knows where to look

for Jesus when they come to arrest Him. Luke tells us in **Luke 5:16** “that Jesus often withdrew to lonely places and prayed.” Here is what **Hebrews 5:7** has to say about Jesus and His prayer life. **7 During the days of Jesus’ life on earth, he offered up prayers and petitions with fervent cries and tears to the one who could save him from death, and he was heard because of his reverent submission.** You see, for Jesus prayer was a cornerstone of his earthly ministry because His relationship to the Father was vital to His earthly life. And you know what? It should be no different for us either. The question becomes, How intimate is your relationship with the Father? You see, our prayer life is a direct reflection of our intimacy with the Father. If my prayer life is sporadic, so is my relationship to God.

Secondly, I want you to notice that Jesus had **a special PLACE set aside for meeting with the Father.** (vs. 40a) A special relationship calls for a special place. When the relationship is important to you, you will take the time to make it a priority. We make time to be with those who are special to us. Do you have a special place where you like to meet with the Father in prayer?

A third observation I want you to notice regarding Jesus and His approach to prayer is the important role that prayer plays regarding temptation. **If temptation will take your eyes off of God then prayer is necessary in order to keep your focus on Him.** (vs. 40b) Prayer is our best weapon against temptation. No wonder Satan loves it when we neglect it in our lives. We are never more vulnerable to temptation than when we do not pray.

A final observation I want you to notice from this passage is the three postures Jesus took when He prayed: (vs. 41-42)

- 1) **He made it Intimate** – (signified by His withdrawing to be alone - this was to eliminate distractions)
- 2) **He yielded Himself to the Father** – (signified by His kneeling down - this was a sign of submission to the Father)
- 3) **He let the Father’s will shape the will of His flesh** – (whatever His reason for praying to the Father at the end of the day He wants to do what the Father wants and nothing more)

When we pray we need to take these same three postures! We need to let prayer not just be a list of things we recite to God that we want Him to do but an exercise that shapes our heart and transforms our will because we have been in the presence of our Father.

**John 4:34 (NIV)** “My food,” said Jesus, “is to do the will of him who sent me and to finish his work.

Notice the benefits of prayer exhibited by Jesus’ life:

Jesus had STRENGTH to resist the temptations that would come! The biggest temptation for Him had to be to not follow through with the cross. When we have intimacy with the Father, what can Satan offer us that comes close to what we have with God? Jesus also had PEACE to endure all that was ahead. Before He prayed He was overwhelmed with anguish regarding what was before Him. When we pray it is an opportunity to receive comfort in the presence of the FATHER. Prayer gives the Lord an opportunity to show us that no matter what is ahead in our life, the Father has us in His care. As a result of prayer Jesus allowed the Father to turn His physical fatigue and emotional distress into peace and He was obedient to the Father’s will.

Now compare that with the disciples who chose to sleep instead of pray in the midst of their physical fatigue and emotional distress. The result: they were overwhelmed by the moment. Look at Matthew's account of what transpired next.

**Matthew 26:50-56 (NIV) 50** Jesus replied, "Do what you came for, friend." this was in response to Judas who had come to the garden with Temple guards to have Jesus arrested. **Then the men stepped forward, seized Jesus and arrested him. 51** With that, one of Jesus' companions reached for his sword, drew it out and struck the servant of the high priest, cutting off his ear. **52** "Put your sword back in its place," Jesus said to him, "for all who draw the sword will die by the sword. **53** Do you think I cannot call on my Father, and he will at once put at my disposal more than twelve legions of angels? **54** But how then would the Scriptures be fulfilled that say it must happen in this way?" **55** In that hour Jesus said to the crowd, "Am I leading a rebellion, that you have come out with swords and clubs to capture me? Every day I sat in the temple courts teaching, and you did not arrest me. **56** But this has all taken place that the writings of the prophets might be fulfilled." Then all the disciples deserted him and fled.

Jesus' prayer life here ( to call on His Father) was focused on glorifying God and saving souls, not for self-preservation. In fact consider this!

### **Why Do We Pray? (Three reasons we pray)**

#### **Prayer is an act of OBEDIENCE!**

vs. 40 is not a holy suggestion. Jesus is giving His disciples a command as a platoon leader would be giving men under his charge instructions to properly prepare them for battle. To not heed this order will mean certain trouble for those who do not obey. Prayer is an act of obedience! The church was birthed in prayer and will die without it. Our prayer life will either be the womb through which we the church grow, or the lack of prayer will be the tomb through which churches die. Prayer is not optional!

Btw, commands are not bad! God's Commands are always for our benefit! They are our protection from sinister forces that seek our demise. God's commands when heeded protect our lives and help us to live life to its fullest by avoiding the land mines Satan has set for us.

"No man is greater than his prayer life. The pastor who is not praying is playing; the people who are not praying are straying. We have many organizers, but few agonizers; many players and payers, few pray-ers; many singers, few clingers; lots of pastors, few wrestlers; many fears, few tears; much fashion, little passion; many interferers, few intercessors; many writers, but few fighters. Failing here, we fail everywhere."

— Leonard Ravenhill

The nature of our mission requires prayer because it is a supernatural work & we have a supernatural adversary. The arm of flesh will be ineffective in a supernatural arena as we see with the Disciples. God is our source of strength who will accomplish His work in and through us and who will defeat His adversaries but we must obey His call to pray.

#### **Prayer is the Access Door to God's Wonderful Resources!**

We need to understand something about the resources available to us. These resources are only given to accomplish God's Will and are granted to those with the right heart motives.

**James 4:2-3 (NIV) 2** You desire but do not have, so you kill. You covet but you cannot get what you want, so you quarrel and fight. You do not have because you do not ask God. **3** When you ask, you do not receive, because you ask with wrong motives, that you may spend what you get on your pleasures.

**Robert Law** – “Prayer is a mighty instrument, not for getting man’s will done in Heaven, but for getting God’s will done on earth.”

What are these resources we have access to?

**Salvation from Hell**

**Romans 10:13 (NIV)** for, “Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved.”

**Wisdom to make decisions!**

**James 1:5 (NIV)** If any of you lacks wisdom, you should ask God, who gives generously to all without finding fault, and it will be given to you.

**Strength to overcome the flesh!**

**Matthew 26:41 (NIV)** “Watch and pray so that you will not fall into temptation. The spirit is willing, but the flesh is weak.”

**Power to accomplish extraordinary tasks for God’s Glory!**

**Jeremiah 33:3 (NIV)** ‘Call to me and I will answer you and tell you great and unsearchable things you do not know.’

**Prayer is an act of OBEDIENCE! Prayer is the Access Door to God’s Wonderful Resources!**

**Prayer reminds us that God is in Control!**

Prayer is a faith action that demonstrates we believe God is in control of our lives. When we pray we are saying with our actions that we believe God’s word is TRUE.

**Proverbs 19:21 (NIV)** Many are the plans in a person’s heart, but it is the LORD’s purpose that prevails.

**Psalms 115:3 (NIV)** Our God is in heaven; he does whatever pleases him.

**Isaiah 46:10 (NIV)** I make known the end from the beginning, from ancient times, what is still to come. I say, ‘My purpose will stand, and I will do all that I please.’

When we understand God is in control we can't help but place ourselves in His care. Prayer is a real tangible way to do just that!!

God is not a genie in a bottle waiting to grant your self serving request. Prayer is not a magical formula that unleashes good fortune in your life! Prayer is not a good luck charm or a superstitious exercise in order to gain good luck.

It is an intimate window into the heart of God by which He strengthens you and keeps Satan from distracting you from the most important thing – HIM!

Charles Spurgeon – “Praying will make you leave off sinning, or sinning will make you leave off praying.”

Prayer brings intimacy with God, while sin creates distance between us! Why do we pray? It is all about the relationship!

### **Invitation:**

Will you enter into this 21 DOP with us?

- 1) If you missed last week make sure you go back and watch last week's online and prepare your Prayer and Fasting Plan

### **Identify what you want to see breakthroughs in over these 21 days:**

praying for the freedom from and addicting sin  
praying for the lifting of a heavy burden or to solve an ongoing problem  
praying for freedom from physical or spiritual oppression.  
praying to overcome a mental or emotional issue that is controlling our lives.  
praying for those who do not have what they need and for God to supply  
praying for clear insight and perspective regarding an important decision.  
praying for health or healing  
praying to be more set apart for greater impact  
praying for protection in a difficult or dangerous situation

**Identify what you will deny yourself** (make it sting your flesh and stretch you to really have to depend on God) Everyone can participate even if you don't fast from food or are limited health wise regarding food. Select something that you will give up for the entire 21 days.

### **Identify what you will replace it with that will edify you spiritually.**

- Devotion Material (Bible App devotions)
- Use your free prayer guide to help you pray during this time

- Select a Book to read that will edify you spiritually, select a spiritual movie or movies (i.e. The Chosen TV series)
- **Right NOW media - Text 49775 you will receive a link** - Mention 21 DOP Folders
- More Time Set aside for prayer through the day (have a prayer plan where you focus on certain things so that it doesn't get redundant and include worship music)
- Attend the weekly PRAYER gathering at each location that will take place on THURSDAY evenings
- Plan to be with us each Sunday in January for our Prayer Series as we teach on PRAYER

**Identify someone to hold you accountable to your commitment and who will pray for you during this time.**

**Commit to the full 21 days.**

- 2) Don't let this time be a vain religious exercise centered on you but really allow it to shape your heart and use it as an opportunity to produce faith action in your life where you can minister to others during this time.

**Isaiah 58:6-12 (NIV)** "Is not this the kind of fasting I have chosen: to loose the chains of injustice and untie the cords of the yoke, to set the oppressed free and break every yoke? **7** Is it not to share your food with the hungry and to provide the poor wanderer with shelter—when you see the naked, to clothe them, and not to turn away from your own flesh and blood? **8** Then your light will break forth like the dawn and your healing will quickly appear; then your righteousness will go before you, and the glory of the Lord will be your rear guard. **9** Then you will call, and the Lord will answer; you will cry for help, and he will say: Here am I. "If you do away with the yoke of oppression, with the pointing finger and malicious talk, **10** and if you spend yourselves in behalf of the hungry and satisfy the needs of the oppressed, then your light will rise in the darkness, and your night will become like the noonday. **11** The Lord will guide you always; he will satisfy your needs in a sun-scorched land and will strengthen your frame. You will be like a well-watered garden, like a spring whose waters never fail. **12** Your people will rebuild the ancient ruins and will raise up the age-old foundations; you will be called Repairer of Broken Walls, Restorer of Streets with Dwellings.

- 3) Use this time to cultivate a deeper relationship with God through intimate and intentional prayer (address unconfessed sin if you are a believer) or (invite Jesus into your life for the first time)