

Practicing the Life-Giving Power of Prayer

1. The Essential Rhythm of Daily Fellowship with God.

Prayer as a **daily discipline** and **spiritual formation**.

- Reading the Bible is **breathing in**.
- Prayer is **breathing out**. (An essential rhythm of the Christian life)
- **The Problem:** Fear and intimidation about "doing it wrong" due to formality and tradition.
- **The Foundation:** Bible intake is the foundation of spiritual discipline; **prayer follows next in order**.

1 Thessalonians 5:17–18 (NET) constantly pray, in everything give thanks. For this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus.

2. The Purpose and Power of Prayer

The Purpose: Communication and Fellowship with God

- Prayer is an acknowledgement that God is **active and present** and desires a relationship with us.
- God is attentive to the needs of His people.
 - **Psalm 145:18 (ESV):** The Lord is near to all who call on him, to all who call on him in truth.
 - **1 Peter 3:12 (NET):** For the eyes of the Lord are upon the righteous and his ears are open to their prayer.
 - **Psalm 66:19 (ESV):** But truly God has listened; he has attended to the voice of my prayer.
- God is concerned with the **details of your life**.
 - **Psalm 8:3–4 (ESV):** When I look at your heavens... what is man that you are mindful of him, and the son of man that you care for him?
- Prayer is our **response** to God's initiating action.

- Prayer is the vehicle for presenting our needs and worries to God.
 - **1 Peter 5:6–7 (NIV):** Cast all your anxiety on him because he cares for you.
 - **Philippians 4:5–6 (NET):** Do not be anxious about anything. Instead, in every situation, through prayer and petition with thanksgiving, tell your requests to God.

The Power: Prayer is Life-Changing and Effective

- **John 16:23 (NET):** ...whatever you ask the Father in my name he will give you.
 - **Matthew 21:22 (NET):** And whatever you ask in prayer, if you believe, you will receive.
 - **James 5:16 (NET):** The prayer of a righteous person has great effectiveness.
- **Biblical Examples:** Hannah, Samson, Elijah, Jesus, the Early Church (Acts).
- **Historical Example:** George Müller (praying for provision for 10,000+ orphans).

The Tension: Unexpected Answers

- **God often answers prayers in ways we least expect.**
 - He is more interested in producing **godly character** (waiting and persevering) than simply granting the outcome we desire.
- **Prayer aligns *our* will with *God's* will.**
 - We are not trying to change God's mind. (God doesn't change; James 1:17)
 - **Psalms 37:4 (ESV):** Delight yourself in the Lord, and he will give you the desires of your heart.
 - He will **put new desires** in your heart.
 - Warning: Don't treat God like your "Cosmic Genie" by centering prayers on earthly desires.

3. A Template for Prayer

Jesus taught us **HOW** to pray, not just what to say. It is a **Biblical template**.

The Lord's Prayer (Matthew 6:9–13):

Focus on God's Holiness and Kingdom (v. 9–10)

- **Address:** 'Our Father in heaven...' (pray **to the Father**, in Jesus' name, by the Spirit).
- **Acknowledge:** 'May *your* name be honored (Hallowed) and set apart...'
- **Commitment:** 'May *your* kingdom come, may *your* will be done on earth as it is in heaven...'
 - We are asking God to bring **our will into alignment with His**.

Focus on God's mercy and provision (v. 11–12)

- **Provision:** 'Give us today our daily bread...'
 - *Trust God alone for daily provision, not earthly treasures and power.*
- **Confession:** 'And forgive us our debts, as we ourselves have forgiven our debtors...'
 - *Acknowledge God's mercy and reflect it to others.*

Focus on Deliverance from Evil (v. 13)

- **Protection:** 'And do not lead us into temptation, but deliver us from the evil one.'
 - *God does not tempt us (James 1:13).*
 - *Acknowledge that God's Spirit strengthens and equips us to resist temptation.*

4. How Do I Start a Daily Habit of Prayer?

1. Set a Target: Try to pray for five minutes each day.

- *Developing the habit will lead to a desire to increase the time.*

2. Pray with your Bible: Use one of the Psalms or the Lord's Prayer as a guide.

- *The Bible contains the language of prayer and guides what we should pray for.*

3. Pray from the heart: Be honest with God about your emotions and struggles.

- *God already sees through our pretense and knows what's in our heart (e.g., the Psalms express lament, grief and righteous indignation).*

4. Don't fill your entire prayer with empty words: Pray, stop, and listen.

- *It's not the amount of words that matters.*
- **Romans 8:26–27 (NET):** The Holy Spirit intercedes for us with inexpressible groanings because we often do not know how we should pray.
- *Be transparent, speak from the heart, and let the Spirit intercede.*