

THE GOSPEL OF CHRIST

SPREADING THE SOUL-SAVING MESSAGE OF JESUS

WORSHIP "Prayer"

Introduction by narrator accompanied by a cappella singing:

THE GOSPEL OF CHRIST. Spreading the soul-saving message of Jesus. And now, Ben Bailey.

"Pray without ceasing" (1 Thess. 5:17). Welcome to our study of worship through prayer. Prayer is one of the most important and valuable tools available to a Christian. Paul reminded us of the essentiality of prayer when he told us to "pray without ceasing." That does not mean, of course, that everything in our life is a prayer. Rather, it means that there ought never to be a time when we cannot pray to our heavenly Father. Jesus realized this in Matthew 26:53 when He said during His betrayal, "Do you think that I cannot now pray to My Father, and He will provide Me with more than twelve legions of angels?" The Savior realized the importance of prayer in His life. Notice Matthew 14:23, which illustrates the importance of prayer in the life of Christ. "And when He had sent the multitudes away, He went up on the mountain by Himself to pray. Now when evening came, He was alone there." Jesus left behind His disciples, as well as the crowd that followed Him, so that He could have some "alone time" to pray to His Father. Christians need to realize the importance of prayer.

In our lesson today, we are going to look at three different aspects of prayer. We also will be discussing some fundamentals of how to pray. What are some important things that we need to understand in order to pray to God? Then we are going to examine a biblical plan that can help a child of God pray on a regular basis. And we will examine things for which the Scriptures say that we should be praying.

Let's begin by discussing fundamentals of prayer. The first fundamental thing that a person needs to understand about prayer is that it is something a person has to be taught how to do correctly. Prayer does not "just naturally come," as if we were born knowing how to do it. Rather, it is something we are **taught** to do. In Luke 11:1 we read, "One of Christ's disciples said to Him, 'Lord, teach us to pray, as John also taught his disciples.'" From this we learn that prayer is a taught trait. As we study the Scriptures, learn more about God, and learn more about God's plan for man's salvation, we learn how to pray. Thus, prayer needs to be taught. We learn from God's Word how to pray correctly.

Another fundamental about prayer is that a person must pray with a firm belief in God. In James 1:6 we are told to "ask in faith, with no doubting, for he who doubts is like a wave of the sea driven and tossed by the wind." God will not accept a prayer offered to Him in doubt. We need to pray with a firm belief that God will hear us and bless us. In Mark 11:24 Jesus said, "Therefore I say to you, whatever things you ask when you pray, believe that you receive them, and you will have them." Jesus taught us that if we ask according to the will of God through faith, then our prayers will be acceptable to God. In Matthew 21:22 Jesus said, "Whatever things you ask in prayer, believing, you will receive." All of this, of course, is contingent upon our prayers being offered according to the will of God. We must pray for things that will benefit us and other Christians—not just in regard to worldly things, but in ways that fit with the Scriptures.

Another important fundamental about prayer is that for prayer to be what God wants it to be, prayer must be according to the will of God. In 1 John 5:14 we are taught, "If we ask anything according to His will, He hears us." Here is perfect illustration of praying according to the will of God. In Matthew 26 Jesus is in the garden of Gethsemane praying. He even had asked the disciples to pray with Him. He had known from the time He came to Earth that one day He would have to give Himself as a sacrifice for mankind. He was willing to do that, of course, but His human side prayed, "Let this cup pass from Me; nevertheless, not as I will, but as You will" (vs. 39). That is the attitude that every child of God ought to have. If we are going to pray acceptably, we must pray for things for which the Scriptures teach us to pray. But every one of our prayers should have the overriding theme, "Not my will, but Your will be done, O God."

Another fundamental of prayer is that it must be offered with a humble attitude. In Luke 18: 10-14 we see an example of this. Two men went to the temple to pray. One of them was a Pharisee, and the other was a publican. The Pharisee (the religious man) said, "God, I thank You that I am not like other men—extortioners, unjust, adulterers, or even as this tax collector. I fast twice a week, and I give tithes of all that I possess." His attitude was one of pride, saying in essence, "God, aren't You glad I'm on Your side?" The publican, "standing afar off, would not so much as raise his eyes to heaven, but beat his breast, saying, 'God, be merciful to me a sinner!'" Jesus then said, "I tell you, this man went down to his house justified rather than the other; for everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, and he who humbles himself will be exalted." The man whose prayer God heard was the man who acknowledged that he was a sinner and asked for God's help. He was humble, and he prayed in a manner that was acceptable to God. In Luke 14:11 we find a powerful passage on humility. Jesus said, "Whoever exalts himself will be humbled, and he who humbles himself will be exalted." If we want to be exalted, then we must attain humility in this life. If we are proud, then we will be lowered in God's sight.

Another fundamental about prayer is that we must not pray like the hypocrites prayed in Christ's day. If there was one thing that the Savior despised, it was the fake facade and hypocritical attitude expressed by some of the people of His day. In Matthew 23 we are told that those hypocrites took "heavy burdens, hard to bear, and laid them on men's shoulders; but they themselves will not move them with one of their fingers" (vs. 4), and that they "traveled land and sea to win one proselyte, and when he is won, made him twice as much a son of hell as themselves" (vs. 15). In Matthew 6:5-7 we read this concerning hypocrites.

"And when you pray, you shall not be like the hypocrites. For they love to pray standing in the synagogues and on the corners of the streets, that they may be seen by men. Assuredly, I say to you, they have their reward. But you, when you pray, go into your room, and when you have shut your door, pray to your Father who is in the secret place; and your Father who sees in secret will reward you openly. And when you pray, do not use vain repetitions as the heathen do. For they think that they will be heard for their many words."

In Jesus' day there were hypocrites who stood on the street corners to pray, and who used big words so that everyone would view them as "the religious elite." Yet Jesus said that such people were not the religious elite, and that no one should want to be like them because they did not understand how to pray properly. Instead, Jesus told people to pray privately without being showy so that prayer could be a matter between an individual and his or her God. We are not to pray to be seen by men. We are not to pray to increase our religious status among others. Instead, we are to pray to talk to God.

Prayer also must be accessible. In other words, it must be offered in Jesus' name. In 1 Timothy 2:5 we read, "There is one God and one Mediator between God and men, the Man Christ Jesus, who gave Himself a ransom for all, to be testified in due time." We have God on one side, and man on the other. How can we bridge that gap and make communication possible? Jesus is the Mediator—the Go-between—Who makes communication possible between God and man. In John 14:13-14 Jesus said, "Whatever you ask in My name, that I will do, that the Father may be glorified in the Son. If you ask anything in My name, I will do it." Jesus is the Go-between, the Sacrifice, the Advocate for us. He taught us that in order for our prayers to be acceptable, they must be offered in His name. This is why we do not pray through saints or through Mary. We pray through Jesus. "In Jesus' name" means "by His authority" or "through His power as our Mediator and Advocate." This is why we do not pray to other people. **God** is the Recipient of our prayers. In Matthew 6 Jesus taught His disciples to pray, "Our Father who is in heaven...." So, we pray to God through His Son Jesus Christ. And just mouthing the words, "in Jesus' name" is not what we are talking about here. Rather, we are talking about recognizing Jesus as the Authority, Advocate, and Mediator Whom we must trust to take our prayers before the throne of God.

Another fundamental of prayer that we must understand is that scriptural prayer is always done with "the spirit and the understanding." In 1 Corinthians 14:15 we see just how important it is for us to engage our spirit (our emotions) and our mind. Paul said, "I will pray with the spirit, and I will also pray with the understanding. I will sing with the spirit, and I will also sing with the understanding." Praying "with the spirit" means that we have our hearts engaged and that our emotions are involved. Our prayers must be heartfelt. Praying "with the understanding" means that we think about what we are saying. We must not pray things that are not authorized by Scripture. We must pray in a way that is acceptable to God. We must not let our minds wander so that we think about other things while we are praying, because praying is a very serious matter. It must be done with the spirit and the understanding.

Here is another fundamental that, if not handled carefully, can prevent our prayers from reaching the throne room of God. To pray, we must be right with God and we must be right with other Christians. You cannot pray to God if you are not a child of God. If you are living in sin, you cannot have an acceptable prayer life before God! The Bible says that God does not hear the prayer of a sinner. In Psalm 66:18 we read, "If I regard iniquity in my heart, the Lord will not hear." If we have iniquity in our hearts because we are living in sin, and we are not prepared to do anything about that (but insist on harboring sin in our hearts), then "the Lord will not hear." If you are living in sin, the first thing you need to do is to take care of that sin problem by obeying the Gospel. You must deal with the sin problem before God will hear and respond to your prayers. The blind man in John 9:31 correctly said, "We know that God does not hear sinners." In Proverbs 28:9 we are told, "One who turns away his ear from hearing the law, even his prayer is an abomination." We must be right with God. And we must be right with other Christians. In Mark 11 and Matthew 18 we learn that if we go to worship God and we have something against our brother (or if he has something against us), we need to leave our sacrifice and go make right whatever is wrong. We have to be in a right relationship with God and with other Christians. That is how prayer gives God glory and honor as an act of worship to Him.

Now, for a moment, let's think about a practical plan for prayer. Let's say that we understand the fundamentals of prayer, but we want to develop a prayer life that is regular and that gives God the glory. What does the Bible set forth as a practical plan for prayer? From the Scriptures we learn that praying to God ought to be the first thing we do every morn-

ing. In Mark 1:35 it is said of Christ, “Now in the morning, having risen a long while before daylight, He went out and departed to a solitary place; and there He prayed.” Christ arose early. Perhaps we, too, might need to set our alarm clocks a little earlier each morning so we can get up and pray. Christ got away from things and departed to a solitary place where He could talk alone to His Father. He made a point to start every morning in this manner. We, too, would do well to make this our habit.

Prayer also should be a daily habit. In Daniel 6:10 we read,

“Now when Daniel knew that the writing was signed, he went home. And in his upper room, with his windows open toward Jerusalem, he knelt down on his knees three times that day, and prayed and gave thanks before his God, as was his custom since early days.”

Daniel had a custom. Look at his background. Daniel and his friends had been told that when they heard a certain sound, they were to pray toward an image of their heathen king. But when the sound occurred, Daniel did “as was his custom since early days.” He opened his window and prayed toward Jerusalem three times each day. Daniel had learned to make prayer a good habit. A practical plan for prayer is to get in the habit of praying each day so that it is a regular part of our lives.

Prayer also needs to be a private time between God and us. In Matthew 6:6 we are told, “When you pray, go into your room, and when you have shut your door, pray to your Father who is in the secret place; and your Father who sees in secret will reward you openly.” Prayer needs to be a private matter between God and us. It ought to be something between a person and the heavenly Father.

Prayer also needs to be a “morning, noon, and evening” type of affair. We should pray to God at least three times a day. We should pray to Him in the morning when we arise, sometime in the middle of the day, and at the close of the day. Psalm 55:17 says, “Evening and morning and at noon I will pray, and cry aloud, and He shall hear my voice.” The psalmist had a regular plan for prayer that included prayers at the regular intervals of morning, noon, and evening. During those times, he took time to pray to God and ask for His help.

Prayer should be a constant part of our lives. In Acts 2:42 we read that the first-century Christians “continued steadfastly in the apostles’ doctrine and fellowship, in the breaking of bread, and in prayers.” Prayer was a constant part of their lives. That is the idea behind 1 Thessalonians 5:17 where Paul told us to “pray without ceasing.” Prayer ought to be a constant, ongoing part of every Christian’s life.

Now let’s talk about some proper prayer requests—things for which we ought to be praying on a regular basis, just as the Scriptures instruct us to do. For example, we ought to be praying regularly for the lost. In Luke 19:10 we are told that Jesus came “to seek and to save the lost.” Christians are to “go into all the world” to teach the Gospel to the lost (Mt. 28:19-20). From the example of Jesus we learn that we ought to be praying for the lost. In Matthew 9:36-39 the Bible says,

“Jesus went about all the cities and villages, teaching in their synagogues, preaching the gospel of the kingdom, and healing every sickness and every disease among the people. But when He saw the multitudes, He was moved with compassion for them, because they were weary and scattered, like sheep having no shepherd. Then He said to His disciples, ‘The harvest truly is plentiful, but the laborers are few. Therefore pray the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into His harvest.’”

Jesus looked out upon people and saw that they were weary, scattered, and tired. They had no one to lead them. He had compassion on those people. He said, “The harvest is plentiful.” There are multitudes of people who need the Gospel. Jesus then said, “Pray the

Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into His harvest.” It is hard to pray that the lost will be saved without getting out and actually doing something about it. We definitely need to pray for those who are lost.

We also ought to pray that God will help us overcome sin and Satan. In Luke 18:1 Jesus said, “Men always ought to pray and not lose heart.” Do you ever get down and discouraged? Does sin ever seem to put you “at rock bottom”? Jesus said that we ought to “pray always, and never lose heart.” Prayer picks us up when we are down. In Matthew 26:41 we see Jesus teaching people to “pray, lest you enter into temptation, for the spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak.” We need to ask God to deliver us from temptation (Mt. 6:13) so that we can overcome sin and Satan.

We also can pray for the forgiveness of sin. Here is a truly important aspect of prayer. When we sin, we need to pray to ask God to forgive us. Yes, we must repent. There is no doubt about that. In Luke 13:3 Jesus said, “Unless you repent, you will all likewise perish.” We do have to change our mind and our ways, but we also need to pray for forgiveness. How do we know that? Look at the example of Simon in Acts 8. Simon had just obeyed the Gospel. Before doing that, he had been a fake magician (a sorcerer). But in Acts 8 he saw the gift of real, bona fide miracles being imparted to people through the laying on of the apostles’ hands. Because of his background, he wanted to purchase with money the gift of the Holy Spirit. Peter told Simon that he had been “poisoned by bitterness and bound by iniquity,” and said, “Repent therefore of this your wickedness, and pray God if perhaps the thought of your heart may be forgiven you” (vss. 22-23). Notice Simon’s heart. “Then Simon answered and said, ‘Pray to the Lord for me, that none of the things which you have spoken may come upon me’” (vs. 24). Simon sinned, and he realized that. Peter told him that he needed to pray so that “the thought of your heart may be forgiven you.” Simon asked Peter to pray for him so that the evil things Peter had described would not come upon him. When we get involved in sin, and we come to realize our condition, we need to ask God for His help in dealing with that sin.

We also should pray for the sick and the suffering. James 5:13-14 says,

“Is anyone among you suffering? Let him pray. Is anyone cheerful? Let him sing psalms. Is anyone among you sick? Let him call for the elders of the church, and let them pray over him, anointing him with oil in the name of the Lord, and the prayer of faith will save the sick.”

Prayer is what saved the man who was sick. His friends called for the elders, and they anointed him with oil (a symbolic sign of God’s healing power). But notice that it was “the prayer of faith” that saved him. When those in our families or congregations who are sick, one of the first things we ought to do is get down on our hands and knees and ask the Great Healer Himself (God) to heal them. God is able to do that—if it is according to His will.

We also ought to pray for those who are erring and living in sin. In 1 John 5:16 we are told, “If anyone sees his brother sinning a sin which does not lead to death, and he asks, He will give him life for those who commit sin not leading to death.” We also are to pray for such people so that might come out of sin and live a life that is acceptable to the will of God.

We also ought to pray regularly for wisdom. In James 1:5-6 we are told, “If any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask of God, who gives to all liberally and without reproach, and it will be given to him. But let him ask in faith, with no doubting, for he who doubts is like a wave of the sea driven and tossed by the wind.” Wisdom is the ability to apply God’s Word. It is “practical Christianity”—which is what the Book of James is all about. Wisdom is taking scriptural principles and putting them to work in a daily, practical effort. We ought to be praying that God will give us the wisdom in a way that will help us. We can hide God’s Word

in our hearts in order to help keep us from sinning (Ps. 119:10-12), but putting the Scriptures to use every day is what we need to be doing. We need to ask God for wisdom regarding how to deal with various situations in a godly way.

Another thing for which Christians can pray regularly is the necessities of life. Philippians 4:6 instructs us, "Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known to God." We must not get anxious and start worrying, thinking to ourselves, "Where will our next meal come from?!" These kinds of things can mount up in our minds and cause us to become constant worrywarts. God does not want us to do that. Rather, He wants us to let our requests be made known to Him. If we do, "the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard our hearts and minds through Christ Jesus" (vs. 7). In Matthew 6:33 we are told that if we will seek the kingdom of God first, then "all these things shall be added unto you." James 1:17 tells us that God is the Giver of "every good and perfect gift." God is the One of Whom it is said, "Cast all your care upon Him, for He cares for you" (1 Pet. 5:7). God is the Great Giver. He cares deeply for us. He has already told us to pray "in His name" (Mt. 21:22) and we will receive what we need. So, we need to be praying daily for the necessities of life. The psalmist said in Psalm 37:25, "I have been young, and now am old; yet I have not seen the righteous forsaken, nor his descendants begging bread." God **will** provide for us. He **will** take care of us. We must never allow a lack of faith to cause us not to trust in Him.

Christians ought to also pray before their meals. We are taught this in 1 Timothy 4:4-5. There was a false doctrine making the rounds which suggested that certain meats were ungodly, that men should not marry, etc. Paul said, "Every creature of God is good, and nothing is to be refused if it is received with thanksgiving; for it is sanctified by the word of God and prayer." This teaches us that our foods are set apart for our use as we strive to be holy and serve God, and that we should pray about such things.

In the times in which we live today, we also need to pray for our world leaders. In 1 Timothy 2:1-3 Paul said, "

"Therefore I exhort first of all that supplications, prayers, intercessions, and giving of thanks be made for all men, for kings and all who are in authority, that we may lead a quiet and peaceable life in all godliness and reverence. For this is good and acceptable in the sight of God our Savior."

In a world where there is so much evil, and where so many are looking to philosophy and post-modernism for their salvation, we need to realize that the world will be what God wants it to be only if we pray for our world leaders. We ought to pray that they will lead in a godly way so that we can continue to worship God reverently and without fear. We especially ought to pray that our world leaders will hear the Gospel and be saved. The one thing that world leaders need the most in our prayers is that somehow the Gospel can be taken to them so that they can obey it and truly lead according to the will of God.

Our prayer for you, if you are not a child of God, is that you will obey the Gospel. We want you to know that God loves you deeply. He loves you more than you could ever imagine. He loves you so much that He sent His Son to die for your sins. How can you become a Christian? If you are willing to hear the Word of God, then you are on the right path. You then need to believe that Jesus is God's Son, be willing to repent of your past sins in your life, confess Christ's name before men, and then be baptized for the remission of your sins (Mk. 16:16). Have you obeyed the Gospel? Are you a New Testament Christian? Our prayer for you is that you will obey the Gospel, and that today's lesson will encourage you to then become a man or woman of prayer.

Narrator accompanied by a cappella singing:

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STUDY QUESTIONS FOR “PRAYER”

1. According to 1 Thessalonians 5:17, how are Christians to pray?
2. According to Mark 1:35, how did Jesus use prayer?
3. What did Jesus' disciples request in Luke 11:1, and what impact should their request have on us today?
4. What is the message of Matthew 21:22 for us today in regard to prayer?
5. There are two extremely important lessons taught about prayer in 1 John 5:14-15. What are those two lessons?
6. When Jesus prayed in the Garden of Gethsemane (Matthew 26) and asked that God remove the cup of suffering from Him that He was about to have to endure, why did God answer His Son's prayer with a “No”?
7. When Jesus spoke of people who did things “just for show,” He said, “Assuredly, I say to you, they have their reward” (Mt. 6:5). What did He mean by that?
8. What point was Jesus trying to get across in Matthew 6:6 when He remarked, “But you, when you pray, go into your room, and when you have shut your door, pray to your Father”?
9. What attitude is found in John 12:43 that we should **not** imitate in our prayer lives?
10. According to 1 Timothy 2:5-6, what part does Jesus play in our prayers?
11. According to 1 Corinthians 14:15, how should we pray?
12. According to Hebrews 4:16, how may faithful Christians approach God in prayer?
13. According to Hebrews 4:16, what may faithful Christians expect to receive from God as a result of their prayers?
14. According to 1 Timothy 2:1-2, for whom is it our duty to pray?
15. In Luke 18:1, what did Jesus say was one of the benefits of prayer?
16. In Mark 11:24 Jesus taught His disciples to do something when they prayed. What was it?
17. In Luke 18:10-14 we find examples of two men praying. What was the basic difference in the prayers offered by those two individuals?
18. According to John 14:13-14 how are we to pray?
19. What does Psalm 66:18 teach us about prayer?