

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, Timothy Sparks and Ben Bailey.

Ben Bailey:

"Pray without ceasing" (1 Thess. 5:17). I'm Ben Bailey.

Timothy Sparks:

And I'm Timothy Sparks. Welcome to our study of prayer. This message is being brought to you by individual members and congregations of the churches of Christ. We invite you to visit the church of Christ near you. These lessons are available on CD or DVD. If you would like to have a copy of this lesson, or copies of any of our other lessons, we will be happy to provide those to you free of charge. We will not even charge you for the postage. You can log onto our website at www.thegospelofchrist.com, fill out the request form you will find there, and we will send you whatever you need. We also have streaming video and audio lessons on our website. Plus, written transcripts of these lessons are available as well (accompanied by study questions). These can be obtained either online from our website or as bound volumes (which are available from our offices). If there is any way we can help you in your study of the Word and will of God, we want to do so.

Ben Bailey:

We now enter into our study of prayer. As Paul said, we should be people who "pray without ceasing." We see from Mark 1:35 that Jesus began His day with prayer. It was one of the first things He did. Prayer also is a very important form of worship to God. Prayer, by its very nature, ought to glorify and lift up the name of God. While at times we can use prayer to ask for God's help, our prayers ought not to routinely be "give me" sessions where we tell God what we want Him to do for us. Instead, our prayers ought to glorify and lift up the name of God. If we are going to pray so as to bring glory to God, we need to understand some prerequisites to prayer. There are some things we need to understand about prayer before we can pray properly. We need to understand the prescription for prayer, just as we need to understand the power of prayer. And, we also need to understand some of the things that prayer will **not** do. Surely, the first thing we need to do is to learn **how** to pray, just as the disciples did in Luke 11:1 when they said, "Lord, teach us to pray, as John also taught his disciples."

Timothy Sparks:

As we improve our prayer life, we will in turn improve other aspects of our lives. If we want to be better servants of God, we need to begin by spending more time on our knees, kneeling before and talking to God. Jesus Himself spent much time in prayer, communicating with His heavenly Father. If we want to improve our prayer lives so that we can pray more effectively and more fervently, how can we do that?

Ben Bailey:

The first thing we need to do is to learn **how** to pray. The Bible contains God's will for our lives, so it is only natural that we should turn to His inspired Word for help in learning how to pray. We need to allow God's Word to teach us how to pray, the things for which we are to pray, the nature of prayer, and so on. One thing is certain. Whenever we pray, we must do so with a firm belief in Almighty God. Jesus said in Matthew 21:22 that if we ask according to God's will, we will receive what we request. We do not need to pray, doubting whether God will respond to our prayers. James addressed this point when he wrote,

"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. For let not that man suppose that he will receive anything from the Lord; he is a double-minded man, unstable in all his ways" (Jas. 1:5-8).

In learning how to pray, we must recognize that we must pray with great faith, in full confidence that if we pray according to God's will, He **will** answer our prayer. In addition to having faith that God will answer our prayers, however, we also need to learn how God wants us to pray.

Timothy Sparks:

God's desire is that we come to the Scriptures to see what He has said on the matter of prayer. Jesus instructed us, when we pray, to believe that we will receive that for which we pray. John wrote, "Now this is the confidence that we have in Him, that if we ask anything according to His will, He hears us. And if we know that He hears us, whatever we ask, we know that we have the petitions that we have asked of Him" (1 Jn. 5:14-15). We either need to ask according to God's will, or we must not ask at all. Jesus prayed in the Garden of Gethsemane on the night before His crucifixion that, if possible, the cup of suffering that He was about to endure might pass from Him. But He continued that prayer with, "Your will be done." We must follow Christ's example and always pray with the idea that God's will, not our will, be done. If we do not do that, then our prayers are in vain.

Ben Bailey:

We also need to have a humble attitude. In Luke 18, we see two men going up to the temple to pray. One, a Pharisee, was a religious fellow; the other was a sinner—a tax collector. The Pharisee prayed, "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; I give tithes of all that I possess." The tax collector, on the other hand, would not even so much as cast his eyes toward Heaven. He simply beat his breast and said, "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 tax collector had his prayer accepted because he was humble and meek before God. Jesus said in Luke 14:11, "Whoever exalts himself will be humbled, and he who humbles himself will be exalted." When we approach God in prayer, we should realize that we are talking to the Creator of the Universe. That should cause us to be humble, and should make us come before God in great reverence and with an attitude of holiness toward God.

Timothy Sparks:

Jesus said, “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.” These people were praying “for show.” Jesus went on to say, “Assuredly, I say to you, they have their reward” (Mt. 6:5). Jesus’ point was that they wanted people to see them—and people saw them. But that was all the reward they were going to get. Their prayers were not acceptable to God. In the next verse, Jesus said, “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.” In John 12:43, Jesus pointed out that some “loved the praise of men more than the praise of God.” We must not pray just to be heard and seen by others, or just for show. If we do that, then our prayer will not be acceptable to God.

Ben Bailey:

We certainly should not pray just to appear smart or religious before others. It is not important what **others** think about our prayers. It is important what **God** thinks. We need to pray in such a way as to glorify and honor Almighty God. If we are going to pray to God and expect Him to answer our prayers, then we need to know the will of God and be trying to follow that will in our daily lives to the very best of our ability. We need to do those things that God’s Word teaches us are right and wholesome, and not become involved in a life of sin. We need to humbly follow Jesus and the teaching that He sets before us. We cannot afford—if we want to be pleasing to God—to come before Him with an irreverent attitude and a selfish spirit.

Timothy Sparks:

We need to realize that God is not interested in outward show. We do not have to necessarily use perfect grammar when we approach God in prayer. God is interested in the content of our hearts. God knows us, and He is able to listen to and understand us. He does not see as man sees. Man frequently looks at the outward appearance, but God looks upon the heart (1 Sam. 16:7). When we pray, we do not have to use flowery words, any more than when we sing we have to have a beautiful voice. God is concerned with the fact that we pray and sing from our hearts—and that our hearts are pure and right before Him.

Ben Bailey:

Another prerequisite of prayer is that we must offer our prayers to God in Jesus’ name. Jesus taught this in John 14:13-14 when He said, “And 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.” We know from 1 Timothy 2:5-6 that Jesus is the Mediator between humans and God. Christ helps us with our prayers. In order for our prayers to be scriptural and to reach the throne room of God, we must go through Christ as the Mediator. Jesus made it clear that we are to pray through Him and Him alone (Jn. 14:6). We are not to pray through Mary, through the apostles, or through anyone else. Rather, we pray through Christ and follow His teachings on this matter. Another prerequisite of prayer is that we must pray with the spirit and with the understanding. Paul said, “What is the conclusion then? 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” (1 Cor. 14:15). When we pray, we need to pray with spirit and emotion, knowing that we are talking to the God of Heaven. But we also must under-

stand what we are saying. This would eliminate repetitive prayers that we might say over and over again, yet never really understand. It also would eliminate prayers that come from rote memory—prayers that do not actually mean anything, but are simply uttered by habit. True prayer is much more than these kinds of things. It is an actual communication with God about something that is close to our heart.

Timothy Sparks:

So, then, you are saying that we need to avoid phrases and thoughts that we simply repeat over and over again without really thinking about them or understanding what they mean. For example, we frequently hear someone say, “God, please guide, guard, and direct us.” Those words seem to be little more than something we have always heard others say, so we say them, too.

Ben Bailey:

Sometimes in our prayers we seem to get in a rut, and as a result we end up saying things in our prayers that we really do not mean because they do not come from our hearts.

Timothy Sparks:

We need to truly communicate with God, “casting all our cares on Him.” We cannot do that if we are saying the same things over and over.

Ben Bailey:

Our communication with God must come from the heart. We do not need to memorize a few easily remembered statements that we use “just to get us through a prayer.” When we talk to God, we must realize what we are doing, and think about what we are saying (and to Whom we are saying it). Prayer must not be trite or irreverent. Again, we must recognize that prayer is not just a “give-me” type of thing. First and foremost, it ought to glorify God. Look at the prayers recorded in the Books of Daniel and Isaiah. Or, consider the prayers of Ezra 9 and 10 where the people are deeply penitent and are asking God to forgive them of their sins. They laud and magnify the name of God. They acknowledge Him as Creator of the Universe. They spend time talking about how great God is and how thankful they are to be His people. Prayer—just like singing—should uplift and magnify the name of God.

Timothy Sparks:

Hebrews 4:16 teaches us that we are to “come boldly to the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy and find grace to help in time of need.” God is there to help us, of course. But we learn from the prayers of the Bible—especially the prayers recorded in the Book of Psalms—that our prayers must pay homage to God and magnify His name because He, as our Creator, is worthy of our prayer and praise.

Ben Bailey:

Instead of approaching God in prayer with a “grocery-store-type shopping list” of things that we want, we ought to always approach God with a list of things for which we are deeply and genuinely thankful. We need to let Him know how appreciative we are for the

things we do have, before we begin asking Him to intercede on our behalf to give us more. God wants us to pray in the proper way. We need to be taught how to pray. We do not just “wake up one day” knowing how we should pray. Learning how to pray is something we need to do. It is something we need to work hard at doing properly so that we can pray as God wants us to pray. The closer our relationship is to God, the better communication we will have with Him as a loving Father Who cares for us. We ought to be able to approach His magnificent throne and know that He wants to help us. But what are some things for which we can pray as we need God’s help?

Timothy Sparks:

When Jesus taught His disciples to pray, using what we sometimes refer to as “the model prayer” (Mt. 6:9-13), He said that we should pray, “Our Father Who is Heaven, hallowed be Your name.” The word “hallowed” means “set apart.” Thus, we must recognize that God is indeed “set apart” from us. He is holy. Jesus also taught the disciples to pray, “Give us this day our daily bread” (vs. 11). So, we know that it is acceptable to pray for God for physical sustenance. Any time we go the grocery store, we should thank God for the fact that we are privileged to have food to eat.

Ben Bailey:

One thing that seems to be frequently overlooked in prayer is praying for the lost. One of the things for which Jesus prayed was that the lost would be reached with the Gospel. In Matthew 9:36-38, we find the following:

“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.’”

Here, we are taught to pray to God that we might be able to reach the lost with the message of Jesus Christ. When people are physically ill, do we not pray for them to get better? How much more then, should we pray for those who are spiritually ill? Suppose that a Christian is ill and we pray for them, and they eventually die from their illness. While that is a sad thing, is it the worst thing that could happen? No, because if the person is a faithful child of God, he is in a saved condition. But what about those who die in a lost state due to sin? Is that the worst thing that could happen? Indeed it is! Surely, one of the areas in which we could improve our prayer life is to pray for those who are lost.

Timothy Sparks:

While we are praying for the lost, we also need to remember to pray for ourselves. Jesus taught His disciples to pray, “Deliver us from the evil one” (Mt. 6:13). Jesus once told Peter, “I have prayed for you that your faith should not fail” (Lk. 22:32). Jesus knew that Peter would deny Him and that he would be tempted to leave the faith, so Jesus prayed for him in advance. We are always going to be tempted. Jesus Himself was even tempted “in all points tempted as we are, yet without sin” (Heb. 4:15). We need to pray to ask God for help to resist temptation so that we do not fall into Satan’s snares.

Ben Bailey:

Regardless of what our personal temptation might be—whether smoking or alcohol or sexual immorality—the first thing we should do when we are tempted is to get down on our knees and ask God to help us. The writer of Hebrews said, “Let us therefore come boldly to the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy and find grace to help in time of need” (Heb. 4:16).

Timothy Sparks:

In the Book of Nehemiah, we find the account of how Nehemiah was downtrodden. When the earthly king for whom he served as cupbearer asked him what was wrong, before Nehemiah answered the king’s question he prayed to God (Neh. 2:4). Nehemiah approached God’s throne of grace to ask for the help that he needed. God granted him his request, and so did the earthly king he served.

Ben Bailey:

What a powerful thing prayer is. One of the purposes of prayer, as we learn from Luke 18:1, is to help us so that we do not become discouraged. Jesus said, “Men ought to pray always, and never lose heart.” Do you ever get discouraged in life? Do things sometimes come at you that you simply feel you cannot handle? Maybe you have job-related problems, health problems, or problems with your spouse or children. Such things can cause us great discouragement. But Jesus told us to “pray always, and never lose heart.” Any time that we are facing discouragement, the very first thing we should do is to get down on our knees and ask God for His help. It is encouraging to know that God knows us, understands our needs and wants to help us in our time of trouble. If we ask according to His will, He has promised us that He **will** help us. When we tend to get discouraged, we must not simply give up! Rather, we should go to God in prayer and ask for His aid and assistance. Think about Jesus in the Garden of Gethsemane on the night before His crucifixion. He was suffering great mental anguish because He knew that His death was imminent. So He prayed, “Father, if it is Your will, let this cup pass from me” (Mt. 26:39). In His time of discouragement and trial, Jesus went to His Father in prayer. If we are going to imitate Jesus and follow the biblical pattern for prayer, then we need to do the same thing.

Timothy Sparks:

We also are told to pray for kings and all those in authority (1 Tim. 2:1-2). We need to pray that world leaders will seek to follow the principles found within God’s Word. We need to pray that God will install leaders who are godly and who have proper morals and values. The writer of Proverbs said, “Righteousness exalts a nation, but sin is a reproach to any people” (Prov. 14:34). We need to pray fervently for leaders, and for all those who are lost. But we must do our part to put our prayers into action. How is your prayer life? Are your prayers effective? Does your prayer life measure up to the standards set forth in God’s Word? Are you praying as you ought? Are you praying as often as you should? Are you praying for the things for which you are told in Scripture to pray? Are you asking God to “just give you things,” or are you saying to God, “Lord, here am I; send me. Help me to do the things I need to do in this life. Help me with the struggles I face in this life”? We need to approach God in prayer with the attitude that we want to be the very best servant to Him that we can be. If we come to God with such an attitude, and if we are seeking His will for our life first and foremost, then not only can our own prayers be effective, but we also can help others have a more effective prayer life as well.

Ben Bailey:

One thing that we must realize, however, is that prayer alone is not necessarily a cure-all, especially in regard to salvation. So many people today believe that if they simply pray to God, He will save them. We certainly believe in the power of prayer. But prayer, by itself, is never seen in the Bible as saving anyone. The Bible makes it clear that we must do more than just pray in order to be saved. We must hear the Word of God. We must believe in Jesus as God's Son. We must repent and change those things in our lives that are not right. We must confess Christ as our Lord and Savior. And we must be immersed in water for the forgiveness of our sins.

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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. In regard to the name of God, what ought our prayers to do?
4. What did Jesus' disciples request in Luke 11:1, and what impact should their request have on us today?
5. If we improve our prayer lives, what effect will that have on other segments of our lives?
6. What is the message of Matthew 21:22 for us today in regard to prayer?
7. There are two extremely important lessons taught about prayer in 1 John 5:14-15. What are those two lessons?
8. 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”?
9. When Jesus spoke of people who did things “just for show,” He commented, “Assuredly, I say to you, they have their reward” (Mt. 6:5). What did He mean by that?
10. What point was Jesus trying to get across in Matthew 6:6 when He said, “But you, when you pray, go into your room, and when you have shut your door, pray to your Father”?
11. What attitude is discussed in John 12:43 that we should **not** imitate in our lives?
12. What is the important point for us today from the text of 1 Samuel 16:7?
13. According to 1 Timothy 2:5-6, what part does Jesus play in our prayers?
14. According to 1 Corinthians 14:15, how should we pray?
15. According to Hebrews 4:16, how may faithful Christians approach God in prayer?
16. According to Hebrews 4:16, what may faithful Christians expect to receive from God as a result of their prayers?
17. Instead of approaching God in prayer with a “grocery-store-type shopping list” of things that we want, how should we approach God?
18. According to 1 Timothy 2:1-2, for whom is it our duty to pray?
19. In Luke 18:1, what did Jesus say was one of the benefits of prayer?