

PRAYER LIFE

FIRST THINGS FIRST

Take a minute to pray for God to guide you as you study...

The practice that we will be studying today is **THE MOST** commonly seen practice found in the life of Jesus. Jesus was a man of prayer. He would spend countless hours communing with His Father in prayer, often on a hillside or secluded place. Seeing Jesus commit so much of His time to prayer leads to the questions: what is so important about prayer, and why and how do we pray? And my prayer is that as we dive into answering those questions that you will be inspired to spend more time in prayer with your Heavenly Father.

WHAT IS SO IMPORTANT ABOUT PRAYER?

In order to answer the question about why prayer is so important, you have to build a foundation of prayer, and to that, you'll want to read the story in **Acts 9:1-19**. Go ahead and read it now, and then you can discuss/answer the questions below.

Many of us have heard this story taught in Sabbath school or VBS and it is a powerful testimony that God can change hearts, but very rarely do we connect it with prayer. However it actually teaches us the very foundation of prayer; HOW and WHY it works.

In the story of Saul's conversion where is prayer mentioned? You can read it again in this next verse.

Acts 9:11: "The Lord told him, 'Go to the house of Judas on Straight Street and ask for a man from Tarsus named Saul, for he is _____.'"

Who is speaking to Ananias in verse 11?

How would you feel if Jesus came and told you to go and heal a terrorist who was trying to kill or lock you in prison?

Why would Jesus tell Ananias that Saul is praying? To understand this we must see what else Jesus says about prayer.

Read **Luke 11:1-13**. If you were to write an outline of Luke chapter 11, it might look like this:

The Model Prayer

Story of a man going to a friend's house for bread

The gifts of a father to his son

And notice how Jesus starts His Model Prayer...

Luke 11:2: "Our _____ in Heaven..." (NKJV)

And notice how Jesus ends his teaching on prayer...

Luke 11:13: "...How much more will your _____ give the Holy Spirit to those who ask Him!" (NKJV)

Jesus starts and ends His teaching on prayer with God being a Father! This is a very important lesson. It's kind of like a sandwich. Everybody has made a sandwich before. Some like PB&J, while others like grilled cheese. Every sandwich has one thing in common, and that is the two pieces of bread that are on the outside. Without those two slices, your sandwich will fall apart. Jesus is showing us that prayer begins with God as a Father and ends with God as a Father.

Now, let's go back to the story of Saul in Acts 9. We know that Saul is praying, and as he is praying, Jesus is revealing himself to Saul. It's during these special moments of communication between God and humans that Saul has a conversion experience. In fact, he's experiencing something that is often referred to as being, "Born Again."

John 3:3: "Jesus replied, 'Very truly I tell you, no one can see the kingdom of God unless they are _____.'"

It's almost like Saul is re-created as a new person as he understands his calling in life as a disciple of Christ. But as he is born again, he also realizes the most critical piece of prayer, and that is the relationship with the Father.

As humans are born again, we become adopted into a heavenly family. Romans tells us about our place in the family, too!

Romans 8:15: "The Spirit you received (*when being born again*) does not make you slaves, so that you live in fear again; rather, the Spirit you received brought about your adoption to sonship. And by him we cry, "'Abba, _____.'"

As Ananias was praying his heart out to God and having a conversion experience, Jesus was telling him that Saul now knew that God was his heavenly Father and that he was God's child. And this concept of having a Father to pray to is the most basic foundation of prayer.

BASIC POINT

Prayer is communicating with a loving God that wants to talk to us!

So now that we have the foundation of prayer established and know that we can communicate with God as a loving God that wants to talk with us like a daddy and his child, we have to ask the question, *Why Pray?*

WHY PRAY?

There's a classic story that gives a beautiful illustration about why prayer is such a blessing to us. It's the story about a man that lived in the country. One morning, as he was walking across his property, he heard the sound of hound dogs chasing a deer across an open field. He could tell that the fawn was very tired of being chased and was close to giving up. Reaching the fence near the man, the fawn leaped over and crouched on the ground just ten feet from the man. A moment later, two of the dogs leaped over the fence, and instantly, the fawn scampered over to the man and pushed its way in between his legs. He lifted the fawn to his chest and spun round and round to fend off the dogs. The man said, "I felt, just then, that all the dogs in the West could not, and should not capture that fawn after its weakness had appealed to my strength."

It's the same way when our human weakness appeals to Almighty God. He responds in the same way, protecting the ones He loves so much!

Jesus knew this point very well, and I think that's why He appealed to the strength of His Father so often. And it's often encouraged through the Bible.

I Chronicles 16:11: “Look to the Lord and his _____; seek his face always.”

James 5:13: “Is anyone among you in _____? Let them _____.”

Our Father **WANTS** us to talk with Him to ask for help! He is ecstatic to give us His strength and support.

But that leaves us with a last question...

HOW TO PRAY?

In “The Lord’s Prayer” found in Matthew 6:9-13 and Luke 11:2-4, Jesus outlines several things to pray for.

- God’s kingdom to flourish
- Our daily needs
- Forgiveness of ourselves as well as others
- Guidance

But Jesus also modeled his prayer life off of the scripture that he had studied in his life. In fact a lot of the scriptures that Jesus quotes are found in the Psalms. One early church leader spoke this way about the Psalms,

“Most of Scripture shows us how God relates and speaks to us, but the psalter shows us how we can speak and relate to God.”

-Athanasius

The Psalms is the prayer book of the Bible, and one of the best ways to cultivate a strong prayer life is to daily pray the Psalms.

The Psalms were written by individuals who often knew less about God than we do now, yet in reading them, you can see that they had tremendous trust in God. It is through praying the Psalms that we get to see how others trusted in God, and also acted on that trust by praying their trust to God. So how does one pray the Psalms?

1. First you read the Psalm to understand the situation the psalmist finds themselves in.
2. You look at some of the key phrases the psalmist uses.
3. You allow the psalm to direct your words as you pray to God.

Here’s an example from Psalm 3.

1. David is fleeing his son Absalom
2. “How my adversaries have increased!” “But you O Lord, are a shield about me”
3. Prayer: “God, how many are my troubles, I cannot escape all of my worries. Lord, even those close to me are saying that you have become distant. Yet You are my shield and I will wait and trust in You. I slept last night and you protected me. Allowing me to see a new day. So I will not be afraid of any of my troubles for I know that you will deliver me. Salvation belongs to You and so I trust in You.

While there is no right way to pray, endeavoring to talk to God like He is a friend and a Father will richly bless your connection with Him. You will develop a relationship that helps you naturally go to Him for strength and support. He’s always ready to answer you and help you. May your prayer life grow and develop as you put effort into connecting with God your Father.

FUNDAMENTAL QUESTIONS

1. What is the hardest part about prayer?
 2. What are the easiest ways you have found to connect with your Heavenly Father through prayer?
 3. Do you have a special place that you enjoy spending time in prayer?
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LESSON 3: PRAYER LIFE

