

## The Essentials Of Effective Prayer

### Week Three

This week we'll continue to study the first element of prayer by looking specifically at the role of thanksgiving in our worship.

As you draw near to God, as you cry out to Him, as you pray...do you ever find yourself simply thanking Him for what He has done in your life? And then, does God's grace and mercy move you beyond thanksgiving to swearing allegiance to Him? It certainly should, dear friend. And that's where our study this week will take us. We'll discover how our worship of God logically leads to undying loyalty to His Kingdom.

You have an awesome study before you. Enjoy your time in God's Word.

**Observe:** As a young man, the prophet Daniel was taken captive during a Babylonian siege of Jerusalem and assigned to be trained for service in the court of King Nebuchadnezzar. When the king dreamed a dream that no one could interpret, Daniel sought God for an answer. Let's look at what happened next. **Daniel 2:19-23.**

#### **Discuss:**

- What characteristics of God did Daniel highlight in these verses?
  - God controls times and seasons (epochs); He removes and establishes kings; He gives wisdom to the wise men and knowledge to men of understanding.
  - He reveals profound and hidden things; He knows what is in the darkness, and the light dwells with Him.
- Worship is being manifested in this passage as Daniel describes God's characteristics. God is being magnified and it brings about a praise for God and thanksgiving to Him. In v. 23, Daniel makes it personal both for himself and for others.
- Some of the feelings that we associate with answered prayers are excitement, surprise and even a sense of being relieved.
- Daniel's prayer can relate to our personal life in that before we go rushing in to share the news of an answered prayer, we need to take the time to thank God. It is not about us—God needs to get the Glory! We need to match gratitude with our persistence in prayer.

**Observe:** Let's look at three passages of scripture together: **Philippians 4:4-6, Psalm 100:1-4, and Psalm 118:1-9.**

#### **Discuss:**

From these verses, we learn:

- Concerning the Lord and our relationship to Him:
  - He is near us, He made us, we are His people and the sheep of His pasture, and He is for us.

- And what we are to do:
  - Rejoice in the Lord always, let our self-control be known (gentle spirit), let our request be known, shout joyfully to God, serve the Lord with gladness, enter into His gate with thanksgiving, and praise His name.
- We also learn from these verses that we should pray about everything with thanksgiving. Also, we learn that our prayers should include thanks and thanksgiving.
- We can call on Him in distress and He will answer.
- Thanksgiving is a part of worship and prayer. Even with our petitions, there is still room for giving God thanks.
- According to **Philippians 4:6**, thanksgiving should accompany our prayers and request. For the believer, we should always have a grateful heart.

**Observe:** We've seen that worship is the first and the last element of the model prayer, and thanksgiving is a natural part of worship. As we pray, we're to enter His gates with thanksgiving and His courts with praise.

The second element of prayer—our declaration of allegiance to the kingdom of God—is a natural result of worship and especially of thanksgiving. When we think about what He has done in our lives, the only reasonable response is to pledge our undying loyalty to Him: “Your kingdom come. Your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven” (**Matthew 6:10**). Now let's look at **Philippians 3:20** and **Matthew 6:33**.

**Discuss:**

- As believers, our citizenship is in heaven. This world is not our home, we are on our way home.
- According to **Matthew 6:33** our responsibility as citizens of heaven is to seek His (God's) kingdom first and His righteousness.
- Our character, conduct, and conversation (walk) should give evidence that we are fulfilling the responsibility of seeking the kingdom. Also, **Matt. 6:33** comes with the promise of “these things,” which is a reference to food, clothing, and provisions mentioned in the verse prior to verse 33.
- How much time in a typical day do we spend pursuing God's kingdom? What does this reveal about our real loyalties?
- What earthly elements tend to interfere with our loyalty to God, and how can we deal with them?

**Observe:** Now we will turn to **2 Timothy 2:15** and **Matthew 4:4** and note the references to the Word of God.

**Discuss:**

- These references to the Word of God show that we need to handle the word accurately and we are to live by the word. The Word of God is very important, in fact, essential in the life of a believer.
- As citizens of heaven, our spiritual food should be the Word of God. The amount of time we spend with God's Word reveals how important it is to us and can be

an indication of our allegiance to it. The things that are important to us, we take the time for.

- Jesus could resist the Devil's temptations because, not only did he know the Word of God, but he also obeyed it.

**Observe:** In **Mark 8:34**, we read what Jesus said to those who would follow Him.

**Discuss:**

- Jesus required total loyalty of those that followed Him. He didn't require perfection.
- Within the Roman culture the cross represented total submission. Criminals that were to be executed were called upon to carry their own cross to the place of their execution.
- Ultimate submission, or loyalty to Christ does not mean the forsaking of pleasure, nor the seeking of pain, but obedience to Christ.
- The test of loyalty is that we stay with the Lord even if the work is difficult and the future seems bleak.

You may be wondering at this point what these passages have to do with your prayer life. Stay with us through one more passage, and then we'll tie it together. As you read, keep in mind the second part of the Lord's Prayer: "Your kingdom come. Your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven."

**Observe:** In **Matthew 7:18-27**, Jesus described to His disciples what it meant to be part of His kingdom. Pay attention to the word **fruit** and the phrases: **does the will of My Father** and **hears these words of Mine**.

**Discuss:**

- We can learn who is part of the kingdom by the fruit one bears. "A good tree cannot produce bad fruit, nor can a bad tree produce good fruit." Jesus also said, "Every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire." Verse 20 reads, "So then, you will know them by their fruits."
- Good and bad fruit distinguishes real believers from imitators. In verses 21-23 Jesus exposes those people who sounded religious but had no personal relationship with Christ. Our acceptance of him as Savior and our obedience to him is what really matters. Jesus knows real believers from imitators.
- Being in a relationship with God requires that we not only hear His Words but obey them.
- Something to think about: Is there any point in praying if you are unwilling to be loyal to God's kingdom by doing your part to accomplish His will?

**Observe:** What if you've done things that violate the will of God? What if you've been disloyal to the kingdom? Let's turn to **1 John 1:9**.

**Insight:** Sin is a violation of God’s law. *To confess* is to say the same thing about your sin that God says. In other words, it means to agree with God that what you have done is wrong.

*To forgive* means “*to send away or dismiss.*” When we admit our sins, God dismisses them from us. He makes us clean.

**Discuss:**

- When we have sinned against God, we should confess the sin. This means that we should agree with God that what we’ve done is wrong.
- God will do two things if we confess our sins, He will forgive us and cleanse us. “He’ll dismiss the sin from us and remove the stain.”
- We can be certain He will do this because 1) God is faithful—you can depend on Him, and 2) He is just—he is righteous and honest.

**Wrap It Up**

This week we saw that thanksgiving is a vital element of worship, the first element of the model prayer given to us by Jesus. Paul even commanded that we pray with thanksgiving. To be honest, being thankful in every circumstance requires faith. Sometimes life hurts, but faith says, “God is still on His throne.” Faith believes God remains in control even when everything around us seems wrong. By contrast, if we question the authority and power of God, our prayer life will never be what it should be.

The second element of the Lord’s Prayer is a declaration of allegiance, or loyalty, to God. As believers, we are citizens of heaven. Loyalty to the kingdom, submission to God’s will, means we must die to ourselves and surrender completely to Him.

Have you ever heard someone say—or perhaps said yourself—“I know I should pray more, but ...” or “I know I should study my Bible, but...” or I know I should witness, but...” But what? The honest way to finish such sentences would be “but my first allegiance is not to God.” When our first loyalty is to God’s kingdom, we will invest our time in ways that reflect that loyalty.

Are you still holding out on God? Are you giving Him only part of your life while trying to retain control of the rest? Friend, your prayer life will never be effective, it will never be vibrant, and it will never be alive until you swear unconditional allegiance to the kingdom of God.

**Homework:** Read **Luke 11:1, 5-10, 1 John 5:14-15, John 15:7, Philippians 4:6, Romans 12:1-2, and Micah 6:8.**