

The Essentials Of Effective Prayer

Week Four

During our last three Bible Studies, we've been looking at what the Bible says about prayer and how we're to approach God. We've been using as our outline the Lord's Prayer, the model Jesus provided when the disciples asked Him to teach them how to pray.

As we've considered the first two elements in the Lord's Prayer—*worship* and *declaration of allegiance*—you may have been wondering, *When do we get to the part where we tell God what we need?* That's exactly what we'll be covering this week: petition and intercession.

But, before we begin, have you ever wondered if God still answers prayer? Secretly, deep in your soul, have you been afraid to ask Him for what you really need? Afraid he won't or can't come through? Let me tell you He can, He does. And we pray that our study this week will be an eye-opening experience, enabling you to see the *God who provides* in a fresh way.

Observe: In **Matthew 6:11** Jesus prayed, "Give us this day our daily bread." This simple sentence demonstrates that prayer can and should involve presenting our requests to God.

We have already discussed **Luke 11:1**, as one of the disciples asked Jesus to teach them how to pray as John taught his disciples. Let's look at verses **5-10**.

Discuss:

- We learn from these verses that we need to be persistent in our prayers. *Persistent* means continuing firmly or obstinately in a course of action in spite of difficulty or opposition. We should be persistent enough to keep asking, seeking and knocking.
- The promise in this passage is in **verse 10**, "For everyone who asks, receives; and he who seeks, finds; and to him who knocks, it will be opened.
- This passage also supports intercession. The person seeking, in this case three loaves, was asking on behalf of somebody else. Our prayers should not always be about us, but we should consider others.
- We can't just give up after a few halfhearted efforts and conclude that God cannot be found. But knowing God takes faith, focus, and follow-through, and Jesus assures us that we will be rewarded. Persistence, or boldness, in prayer overcomes our insensitivity, not God's. To practice persistence does more to change our hearts and minds than His, and it helps us to understand and express the intensity of our need.
- Are we sitting and hoping or are we asking, seeking, and knocking?

Observe: Let's turn now to **John 15:7** and **1 John 5:14-15**.

Discuss:

- The connection with these two passages is that they both state that we will have or receive what we ask for.
- According to these passages the requirements for a prayer to be heard and answered are asking according to the will of God and abiding in Christ and His words abiding in us. The expectation is that if we meet these requirements, God will give us what we ask for.

- There are, though, restrictions on what we can ask for. We can't ask for things we know are against God's desire for us, things that would bring God dishonor, things that are for our evil works, or things against His word and will.

Observe: Philippians 4:6

Insight: By way of reminder, *supplication* means "to ask for favor, or mercy, or grace."

Discuss:

- According to this passage, we are to be anxious (worried) for nothing. That doesn't mean that we are to live a concern free life. We need to make plans and be concerned about important things.
- The alternative to being anxious is making our request known unto God through prayer and supplication with thanksgiving. I read just recently we should make our "worry" list our prayer list. Also, keeping a journal can help us look back and see God's faithfulness. This builds our faith in God.
- The Word here is plain: make your requests known unto God. Are we worrying, nervous, anxious? Or, are we asking? What difference will your answer make in your life and in your prayers?

Observe: By now, hopefully you've got the idea: *ask!* But how do you know the will of God? How can you know for certain that what you are asking is in line with His will? Let's read **Romans 12:1-2**.

Discuss:

- In the New American Standard Bible (NASB), **verse 1** reads, "which is your spiritual service of worship." The King James Version reads, "your reasonable service." And the Amplified Bible (AMP), defines this service as a logical, reasonable, intelligent act of service.
- To present our bodies as living sacrifices means to give ourselves totally to God as our Lord and Master. It means to surrender our agenda to Him.
 - During the days of the offerings in the Old Testament, some offerings of animals were completely offered up to God—a total sacrifice. Now, these animals were killed and once burned, that was it. They couldn't be offered again.
 - But, we are to be living sacrifices, and because we are alive, we can sacrifice ourselves to the Lord continually.
- **Verse 2** challenges us not to be conformed (the same shape, or same values and customs) to the world. We are to be transformed (moved to another set of values) by the renewing of our minds. As we study and learn God's words, we need to practice it and let it change our behavior and thinking.
 - We need to focus on godly values and ethical attitudes.
 - A metamorphosis, an outward permanent change, needs to take place.
 - It takes time. It is a progressive change, not overnight.
- Our responsibilities in this passage are to yield ourselves to God and to learn and obey His Word. The Word becoming a part of us is how we know God's will.
- There are some things the Bible doesn't speak specifically to. We need to seek direction from the Holy Spirit and also look in the word for guiding principles.

Observe: In **Micah 6:8**, the Lord lists three things that He requires of us:

- To do justice—doing what is right or fair.
- To love kindness—showing love and mercy to others.
- To walk humbly with God—to have reverent fellowship with God.

Discuss:

- God is the one who has inspired the writing of the Scriptures. He is the one who is telling us what we need to do.
- The three things mentioned are part of God's will for our lives, to do what is right, to love others, and to walk humbly with Him.
- Humility requires setting aside any overblown sense of importance or self-righteousness. It also requires us recognizing that our worth comes from God.
- Knowing God's will can help us to intercede for others. It can help us to pray effectively according to God's will.

Observe: In Psalm **119:1-8** there is a description of those who are blessed.

Discuss:

- **Psalm 119** is both the longest psalm and the longest chapter in the Bible. In it, several words are used to refer to the Word of God: laws, commandments, testimonies, precepts, ordinances, statutes, judgments, and ways.
- These verses describes those who are blessed (happy) as blameless (not faultless, but walking in integrity), walking in the law, observing God's testimonies, seeking God, keeping God's precepts, learning God's judgments, and not practicing sin. They are blessed because they obey God. The *blessing* is in obeying God's Word.
- In relation to **Romans 12:1-2**, the Word of God, knowing it and obeying it, is how we surrender to God. We are not only informed by the Word but transformed.

Observe: Our study has shown that God urges us to present our request to Him and that He has promised to hear us when we ask anything according to His will. We've learned that we can know His will by knowing His Word. As we study His Word, His Word abides in us and we begin to really know how to pray.

But what about those times when you prayed but things didn't turn out like you asked? What about those times when someone was not healed, when a child continued to walk in rebellion, when you've prayed, yet a loved one died?

Let's look at several possible reasons your prayers weren't answered as you expected. We will cover three passages of Scripture for this section: **2 Corinthians 12:7-9**; **James 4:1-4**; and **1 Peter 3:7**.

Discuss:

- In **2 Corinthians 12:7-9**, Paul had what he called "a thorn in the flesh" that he asked God to remove three times. To implore means to beg earnestly. God didn't remove it, but He told Paul, "My grace is sufficient for you, for power is perfected in weakness."
 - God can use whatever means necessary to demonstrate His power. Also, Paul believed that God left it there to keep him from getting lifted up in pride, exalting himself.
 - Paul viewed it as a messenger of Satan.

Observe: James, the brother of Jesus, wrote a letter to the extended church in which he addressed several problems regarding their behavior .

Discuss:

- The people James was correcting had quarreling and conflicts among them, war among their members because of the source of their pleasures. There was lust, murder, fights and there was envy.
- Their prayers were not being answered because they had the wrong motives or because they simply did not ask. They also were praying just to fulfill their own pleasures, not seeking God's will.
- James called them adulteresses because they were "flirting with the world" and its ways instead of being true to God. By being friends with the world, they had become enemies to God.

Observe: The following verse is directed to husbands, but it further illustrates the connection between our behavior and the effectiveness of our prayers (**1 Peter 3:7**).

Discuss:

- Husbands not respecting, understanding, and honoring their wives can prevent a husband's prayers from being answered. Wives are to be treated with gentleness and tact. Husbands are to show regards for the marriage relationship.

Wrap It Up

How do I pray? This has been man's question for at least two thousand years, as we know from the disciples' request of Jesus. This week we looked at the elements of intercession and petition. We read Jesus' promise that if we asked anything in accordance with His will, we would receive it. Does this statement make you nervous? Whatever we ask? Have you ever been afraid to ask aloud, afraid to put God on the spot? Have you worried that if he doesn't come through, He might look bad and it will be your fault? Don't worry. Ask.

The closer you grow to your heavenly Father, the more intimately you will know His will, His ways, and His love for you. God is waiting to spend time with you. Talk to Him.

Homework: Read **Matthew 6:12, 14-15, 5:23-24; Romans 12:10, 14-19, 21; Isaiah 59:1-2; Psalm 66:18; and 1 John 1:9.**