

Introduction

Our new Bible Study is entitled, *The Essentials of Effective Prayer*. This is a part of the 40-Minute Bible Studies by Kay Arthur of Precept Ministries International. The 40-Minute Bible Studies series is a collection of Bible Studies of various subject matters designed to help people discover for themselves what God says and how it applies to their lives. Although the series is designed for small group settings and those with limited time to meet together, they can also be used for Bible Study, group meetings, as well as Sunday School Class studies. We will be using this for Bible study for the next several weeks.

The objective is to cover the material for each lesson and point out key learnings from the Word of God that can help us as we “... grow in grace and in the knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ” (2 Peter 3:18). Another objective is that we don’t just accumulate knowledge of the Word just for the sake of knowing it but that we, according to James 1:22, “**But be ye doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving your own selves.**” It is my prayer that we “sharpen our swords” as we continue to fight on the battlefield for the Lord.

Let’s get started!

The Essentials Of Effective Prayer

Week One

Let’s begin with a few questions. Do you pray? Really, do you pray? How Often? How effective do your prayers seem to be?

Do you question whether your prayer life is all it should be? Do you ever wonder if God still answers when people pray? Do you worry that you don’t truly understand what prayer really is?

If you’ve asked yourselves these questions, you are not alone. Almost all of us have questioned at some time what prayer really is and how—or if—it really works.

In this study we will discover the answers to these questions as we examine what Scripture teaches about prayer and consider how to apply those truths to our own lives. We will also explore the connection between prayer and pleasing God. A.W. Tozer, author of *The Price of Neglect* and a man known for the vitality of his prayer life, once wrote, “What the praying man (woman) does is to bring his will into line with the will of God so God can do what He has all along been willing to do.”

For the next few weeks we will learn how to bring our will in line with the will of God. It is my prayer that by the end of this study, your prayer life will be more exciting and vibrant than ever before.

We know prayer has to do with communication with God, but what exactly does that look like? What’s the point of praying? Does a sovereign God really care about our concerns? And if He does, how should we approach Him? What sort of things do we ask for or talk to Him about?

This week we’ll try to understand the nature and purpose of prayer by examining some people of prayer and references to prayer in the Bible.

Observe: We will begin our study by looking at **James 5:16b-18**. Let's look at references to the words *prayer* and *prayed*. James the brother of Jesus, in his New Testament letter mentioned one of the great men of prayer from the Old Testament: Elijah.

Discuss:

- From the references about the words *prayer* and *prayed*, we learn:
 - The effective prayer of the righteous accomplish much.
 - Elijah prayed earnestly.
 - God listened to and acted upon Elijah's prayers.
- Have you ever had an experience like Elijah in that you prayed specifically for something and it happened? Do you feel that your prayers accomplish much?

Elijah was a man like us, but his prayer life was unlike most of ours. It is a little intimidating, isn't it? Over the next few weeks we will see what it takes to transform our prayer life into one like Elijah's.

Observe. Take a look at a prayer offered by King Solomon, the third king of ancient Israel, at the dedication of the first temple of God in Jerusalem. We will turn to **1 Kings 8:27-30, 38-39**.

Insight: *Supplication* in this passage refers to a request for favor or grace.

Discuss:

- Solomon kept referring to himself as God's servant, even as king. This was a sign of humility.
- Solomon wanted God to a) have regards to his prayer, b) to listen to his prayers, and c) to hear his prayer and those of God's people.
- Prayer is referred to as cry, supplication and the spreading of one's hands.
- Solomon described God's relationship to his people as knowing the hearts of all the people.
- Solomon was asking God to hear and forgive the people and to render to each according to his ways.

Observe. The book of Psalms is a collection of songs and prayers for the people of God. We will look at three psalms of David. The first was written when he fled from Absalom, his son who led a conspiracy to take not only David's throne but also his life (**2 Samuel 15**). First let's look at **Psalms 3:1-5**.

Insight: The word *selah* appears frequently in the psalms. Its meaning is unclear, but many scholars believe *selah* is a musical term indicating a pause in the music. It is usually not pronounced when reading scripture.

Discuss:

- We learn from verses 1 and 2 that David had an increasing number of adversaries and many were rising up against him. Many were saying of David's soul that there was no deliverance for him in God. David was perhaps sad, worried, anxious, or in a low place emotionally.
- The word *But* in verse 3 signals a contrast, a change in direction.
 - David begins to look toward God and acknowledge Him as a shield about him. He also says that God is his glory and the lifter of his head. He begins to magnify God.
- In verses 4 and 5, David cries to God with his voice and he says that God answered him from His holy mountain. He was then able to lay down and sleep, and awake, because the LORD sustains him.

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- David made a shift from focus on his adversaries and focused on the Lord. He moved from petitions to praising God.
- We can also call on God and cry unto Him and He can lift us up.

Turn to **Psalm 4:1-5**.

Discuss:

- Once again David was clearly in a stressful situation. How did he respond? He prayed for God to answer him when he called. He rehearsed some things that God had done for him in the past. He also asked God to be gracious unto him and to hear his prayer.
- He, David, had an expectation for God to hear and answer him and to relieve him in his distress.
- We can learn from this passage that God has set apart the godly for Himself and David says he will hear when they call.
- David also reminds us to tremble and not to sin. Tremble means to stand in awe or amazement before God, but also trembling should be a reaction to our sins. Also, he encourages us to meditate our heart upon your bed and to be still.
- Instead of denying our emotions or giving in to them we can offer the sacrifices of righteousness, trust God and call upon Him.

Observe. We've seen that when David encountered stressful situations, rather than giving in to his fears or focusing on his circumstances, he called out to God and trusted in Him. The result was peace in the midst of the difficulty as David offered up a sacrifice of righteousness. Now let's look at one more example from this man of prayer, **Psalm 5:1-3**.

Discuss:

- From this passage we learn that David had faith in God and regularly called on Him. He said that God would hear his voice in the morning. Do we have a regular time to call upon God?
- "Give ear to my words," "groaning," "heed the sound of my cry," and "you will hear my voice," are all references to prayer.

Observe. So far we've seen prayer described as crying out to God. Crying out in pain, in fear, in desperation. Most of us can identify with that kind of prayer. But prayer isn't limited to crying out for help in times of trouble; it can serve an even greater purpose, as we'll see in the next few passages.

First, let's look at some verses from Isaiah, in which God describes what's wrong with prayers of the people of Jerusalem. Although this is a negative example, it serves to teach us another way to describe what prayer is really about. Let's look at **Isaiah 29:13-14**

Discuss:

- The people were offering lip service to God and their hearts were far removed from Him. Drawing near means to have a close sincere relationship with God. The people were drawing near with their words but not with their actions. Even their reverence for God was a tradition that was learned by rote (without any regard for its meaning).
- God said that He was going to do marvelous and amazing works among this people, but He was going to take away the wisdom of the wise.
- As it relates to our worship services and prayer life today, God is looking at our hearts. We need to draw close to God with clean and pure hearts (**Psalm 24:4; James 4:8**).

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 Our last passages of Scripture that we will observe are Hebrews 4:14-16, 7:25, 10:19-22.

Discuss:

- As believers:
 - We have a great high priest passed through the heavens.
 - We can hold tightly to our confession (belief, trust).
 - Jesus knows and can sympathize with our weakness.
 - He has been tempted just like us yet without sin.
 - We can draw near with confidence.
 - We can find mercy and grace to help in the time of need.
 - He can save us forever.
 - We can enter the Holy Place by the blood of Jesus.
 - He has given us a new and living way through the veil.
 - We can pray with confidence to God, because Jesus has given us access to God.

Wrap It Up

Have you listened to others pray and felt intimidated because their words sounded so well composed? Relax. Prayer doesn't require an appointment, it doesn't require proper attire, and it doesn't even require proper grammar. As David's example shows, prayer is as natural as crying out: crying out and telling God what is on your heart; crying out and telling God what you need; crying out and making supplication.

What is prayer? Prayer is simply drawing near to God and talking with Him. As we read in Hebrews 4, we have access to Him through our high priest, Jesus Christ. Because of Him, we can enter the throne room of heaven and draw near to God. There, we can cry out, we can ask for help, we can lay our troubles at His feet. Then, as David demonstrated in Psalm 3 and 4, we can rest because we know the Lord sustains us.

This week set aside some time to cry out to God about the concerns of your heart. Draw near to Him and enjoy His presence.

Homework: Read Luke 11:1; Matthew 6:5-8, 9-13; 2 Chronicles 20:1-4, 5-12; Psalm 23:1-6.