

HOW TO PRAY



"Teach us to pray."

If you could ask Jesus one question, what would it be?

Twelve disciples walked closely with Jesus. They saw His miracles. They heard His teaching. They observed how He interacted with people. Yet the one thing we know the disciples asked Jesus to specifically teach them about was prayer. It appears that, in all they observed in Jesus, it was His prayer life that seemed to be the "secret."

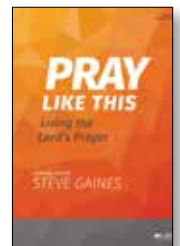
Thankfully for all of us, Jesus taught His disciples how to pray. He gave them, and ultimately us, a model as a part of His Sermon on the Mount. (See Matt. 5–7.) This prayer has inspired Christians for over two thousand years. It is both striking in its simplicity and breathtaking in its scope. It is certainly worth our study, and as we look at the different parts of this prayer, we will draw from other passages that will help illustrate truths from Jesus' Model Prayer also.

Prayer changes us as we pray. Isn't it time we joined the original disciples and ask Jesus to teach us how to pray? After all, prayer moves the Hand that moves the world.



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Session 1 ***The Object of Our Prayer*** *Matthew 6:9a; Psalm 103:1-5,11-13,19-22*

Session 2 ***A Prayer of Praise*** *Matthew 6:9b; Psalm 96:1-9*

Session 3 ***A Prayer of Surrender*** *Matthew 6:10; James 4:6-10,13-17*

Session 4 ***Praying for Ourselves*** *Matthew 6:11; Isaiah 38:1-6,15-17*

Session 5 ***Praying for Others*** *Matthew 6:11; John 17:11-23*

Session 6 ***A Prayer of Confession*** *Matthew 6:12-13; Psalm 51:1-7,10-12*

Session 7 ***A Prayer of Thanksgiving*** *Psalm 138:1-8*

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THE OBJECT OF OUR PRAYER



*What's something you'd like to have
a birds-eye view of?*

QUESTION #1

BIBLE STUDIES FOR LIFE **69**

A right view of God fuels how we pray.

THE BIBLE MEETS LIFE

My parents lived in Alaska for fifty-five years before retiring and moving away, but my dad dreamed every day of going back. So when I visited Anchorage on a mission trip, I called my father to describe how the air felt and how the snow-covered mountains looked that spring morning. I also had seen some of his friends, and hearing about our conversation made his day. I promised to tell him more about the “great land” he loved when I returned from the mission trip, but two days after I arrived home, my dad suddenly died.

I had hundreds of conversations with my parents telling them about my latest accomplishments and challenges, but I’m thankful my last conversation with my dad was about him. I was reminded that joy comes from focusing attention on those we love.

Prayer—talking to our heavenly Father—is the same. When we focus only on ourselves, we can miss the joy of seeing the Lord as He is: our Father who deserves love and praise from His children. Jesus taught us to begin our prayers as a family reunion with a loving, heavenly Father.



WHAT DOES THE BIBLE SAY?

Matthew 6:9a; Psalm 103:1-5

Matt. 6:9a Pray then like this: “Our Father in heaven, ... Ps. 103:1 Bless the LORD, O my soul, and all that is within me, bless his holy name! ² Bless the LORD, O my soul, and forget not all his benefits, ³ who forgives all your iniquity, who heals all your diseases, ⁴ who redeems your life from the pit, who crowns you with steadfast love and mercy, ⁵ who satisfies you with good so that your youth is renewed like the eagle’s.

The most famous prayer in history is often referred to as the Lord’s Prayer, but it’s worth noting that nowhere in the New Testament does the Lord ever actually pray this prayer. And, neither does anyone else. In fact, Jesus didn’t say, “Pray this.” He said, “Pray then *like* this” (emphasis added). It’s far better to call this the Model Prayer and see it as an example of *how* to pray rather than as a script of *what* to pray. That’s one of the principles of prayer we’re going to grasp through this study.

The Model Prayer begins with an appeal to “Our Father.” No one ever taught people to pray to God as *our Father* until Jesus gave us His Model Prayer. Of course, we view God as a Father, but we do so through the lens of two thousand years of Christian teaching. In that sense, we may be in some danger of taking this great truth for granted. By contrast, praying to God as our Father was a refreshing—and perhaps surprising—idea when Jesus mentioned it the first time.

Approaching God as a Father in prayer is a spiritual invitation, but it has an emotional appeal as well. We almost intuitively understand what Jesus meant when He said God is our Father. We know what a good father is. Unfortunately, not everyone has a good earthly father, but almost everyone instinctively knows what a good father should be. God is the ideal, perfect Father—strong, kind, loving, supportive, and helpful—and He wants to hear from us when we pray. That’s powerful!

How did you learn to pray?

QUESTION #2

The words of Jesus regarding the fatherhood of God are strikingly unique, yet they trace their roots back to the Old Testament. We find similarities woven throughout both Testaments. For instance, in Psalm 103, David stirred himself to pray by reflecting on God's beautiful attributes, similar to the ones found in Christ's teaching.

Scripture consistently guides us to view God as good, and as a result, to know He wants what is best and good for His children. When God's people pray, therefore, we don't cower in fear from a distant, angry judge. Instead, we come to a good Father who has the wisdom to know what's best for us in every circumstance and the power to get it done! You can trust a God like that!

I hope it gives you greater confidence in prayer to know God hears and responds to your prayers as your good Father. The fact He is "in heaven" reminds you He is all-powerful and can do what is best. Isn't this a great place to begin in prayer?

Psalm 103:11-13

¹¹ For as high as the heavens are above the earth, so great is his steadfast love toward those who fear him; ¹² as far as the east is from the west, so far does he remove our transgressions from us. ¹³ As a father shows compassion to his children, so the LORD shows compassion to those who fear him.

When we walk with God, we should avoid two wrong extremes. One sees God as so strict in His demands for holiness that it is almost impossible to relate to Him on a personal basis. This view sees His holiness as utterly devoid of love. The other extreme, as flawed as the first, views God's love as so indulgent that He simply ignores our sins. Balance is crucial because God is both holy and loving. God calls us to live holy lives, but He is also loving and merciful to sinners. In prayer, we encounter both aspects of God's nature.

How would you describe prayer to someone who is unfamiliar with the practice?

QUESTION #3

BLESS THE LORD

Think of specific ways God has blessed you. Following David's example in Psalm 103, choose two to three of these words and write brief prayers acknowledging God for who He is and what He has done.

Benefits:

Forgiveness:

Healing:

Salvation:

Compassion:

"Prayer is the greatest of all forces, because it honors God and brings Him into active aid."

—E.M. BOUNDS

David penned this psalm out of his own experience. He knew firsthand how merciful God could be toward us when we fail. So, it's little wonder King David praised God for His mercy and faithful love.

This passage also reminds us how accessible God is when we call upon Him. We've already noted His love and compassion, but He is also tender in His approach to sinners. God is willing to forgive our sins, casting them "as far as the east is from the west."

Do you see how this knowledge of God impacts our prayer lives? Prayer is grounded in a relationship, and how we view the character of God impacts how we approach that relationship. Psalm 103 illustrates His character—traits like love, compassion, and forgiveness—with extravagant examples of access to God.

In verse 13, the psalmist brought us from the heavens back to earth and centered his vision of God much closer to home. He described God as a compassionate Father. He's not far off. He's near to us like a father to his children. Therefore, when we pray, we have immediate access. The Lord wants us to come to Him. He enjoys our fellowship.

I love it when my grown children come home. It means the world to me to spend time with them. Still, even the best human parents are only imperfect examples of how much God loves us. He is delighted when we pray, because prayer makes it possible for us to linger in His love and His presence—and for Him to linger in ours!

How has God expressed His compassion in your life?

QUESTION #4

Psalm 103:19-22

¹⁹ The LORD has established his throne in the heavens, and his kingdom rules over all. ²⁰ Bless the LORD, O you his angels, you mighty ones who do his word, obeying the voice of his word! ²¹ Bless the LORD, all his hosts, his ministers, who do his will! ²² Bless the LORD, all his works, in all places of his dominion. Bless the LORD, O my soul!

We pray to God our Father, which speaks to His loving closeness, but let's not forget that our Father is still "the LORD" who hears our prayer from "his throne in the heavens." That's an incredibly appropriate place to begin in prayer. We can go right to the top!

David himself was a powerful king who enjoyed the privileges of royalty. In Israel, the king was the final human authority when it came to matters of national concern. Yet in his prayers and in his psalms, David recognized a King superior to himself, not seated on a throne in Jerusalem but seated on the throne of heaven. That same God hears our prayers too!

Chairs are sparsely mentioned in the Bible; we see more references to thrones. Thrones were the symbols of power in the near east. In some cultures, the throne was the king's claim to a heavenly power. David knew from experience what it meant for a king to be seated while his subjects stood or bowed in his presence. Israel's king had military, financial, and judicial authority, and just about every other kind of power over the lives in his nation. Clearly the one seated on a throne held the power.

So when King David described God as "the LORD" who "has established his throne in the heavens," he was portraying a powerful image. God's powerful authority is clear from the fact He has a throne. This royal portrait of God builds faith for our daily prayer life. Our lives are often filled with difficulties beyond our ability to repair. But when we pray to our Father in heaven, the impossible becomes possible, because God has the authority to do something on our behalf. He is, after all, the King of heaven.

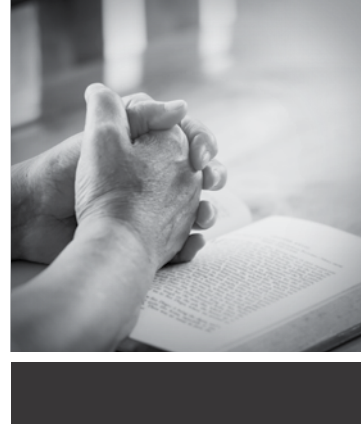
How can we improve our prayer life as a group?

QUESTION #5

LIVE IT OUT

Since powerful and consistent prayer life has to begin somewhere, shouldn't we begin where Jesus began? Use one or more of these applications to deepen your prayer life this week.

- ▶ **Focus on the Father.** Consider the traits of God as our perfect Father. As you begin each day with prayer, focus on those traits and thank God for being your heavenly Father.
- ▶ **Humble yourself.** Reflect on the holiness and greatness of God. Humble yourself before Him and acknowledge that He is the Lord who is all-powerful and capable of handling what you bring to Him.
- ▶ **Pray together.** Tell another Christian what you've learned or are practicing in your prayer life as a result of this study. Challenge that person to do the same. Commit yourselves to prayer.



Each day indeed brings multiple opportunities for a family reunion. Through prayer, our heavenly Father speaks to us. And as we grow close to Him and listen, we will long to respond in prayer.

My thoughts