

# 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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## How to Pray

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*

***Find additional tools and resources to support this study, all available online at [BibleStudiesForLife.com/AdultExtra](http://BibleStudiesForLife.com/AdultExtra).***



## SESSION 1

# THE OBJECT OF OUR PRAYER

### ► ***The Point***

A right view of God fuels how we pray.

### ► ***The Passage***

Matthew 6:9a; Psalm 103:1-5,11-13,19-22

### ► ***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.

### ► ***The Setting***

Jesus gathered with His disciples on a mountain so He could teach them about living as citizens of God’s kingdom. A multitude listened as Jesus taught His disciples. As He turned their attention to the discipline of prayer, He warned them about what they should avoid when they prayed. Then He gave the disciples a model for prayer. Using the model, He presented the appropriate picture of the Lord with whom they talked when they prayed.

# What does the Bible say?

**Bless** (Ps. 103:1)—The Hebrew word means to adore, to praise, or to bend the knee in worship.

**Benefits** (Ps. 103:2)—Literally, deeds or dealings or acts, whether of good- or ill-will. It has come to mean the good things God has done for His people.

## **Matthew 6:9a; Psalm 103:1-5,11-13,19-22**

**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! <sup>2</sup> Bless the LORD, O my soul, and forget not all his benefits, <sup>3</sup> who forgives all your iniquity, who heals all your diseases, <sup>4</sup> who redeems your life from the pit, who crowns you with steadfast love and mercy, <sup>5</sup> who satisfies you with good so that your youth is renewed like the eagle’s.**

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**Ps. 103:11** **For as high as the heavens are above the earth, so great is his steadfast love toward those who fear him; <sup>12</sup> as far as the east is from the west, so far does he remove our transgressions from us. <sup>13</sup> As a father shows compassion to his children, so the LORD shows compassion to those who fear him.**

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**Ps. 103:19** **The LORD has established his throne in the heavens, and his kingdom rules over all. <sup>20</sup> Bless the LORD, O you his angels, you mighty ones who do his word, obeying the voice of his word! <sup>21</sup> Bless the LORD, all his hosts, his ministers, who do his will! <sup>22</sup> Bless the LORD, all his works, in all places of his dominion. Bless the LORD, O my soul!**

# GET INTO THE STUDY



5 minutes

Notes



**ACTIVITY (OPTIONAL):** In advance, write each of the following descriptions on separate index cards: The Force (as in *Star Wars*); an elderly grandfather; a judge with a gavel; Santa Claus; a best friend with his or her arm around your shoulders; a vending machine; and a royal king on his throne. Call for seven volunteers to lead the class in a game. Each volunteer will pick one card and then describe what is on his or her card without using any of the words on the

card in an attempt to get the rest of the class to guess what is written. After all seven cards have been read and guessed, **ask:** “What do these seven descriptions have in common?” Explain that all are ways that people tend to view the nature of God. Introduce this lesson.

**LEADER PACK:** Display **Pack Item 6**, the “How to Pray” poster, to introduce the major theme of this study, along with the specific focus of each session.

**DISCUSS:** **Question #1** on page 69 of the Personal Study Guide (PSG): “**What’s something you’d like to have a birds-eye view of?**” Allow time for each person to respond.

**GUIDE:** Direct group members to “**The Bible Meets Life**” on page 70 of the PSG. Introduce the importance of focusing on God as the object of our prayer by reading or summarizing the text—or by encouraging group members to read it on their own.

**GUIDE:** Call attention to “**The Point**” on page 70 of the PSG: “**A right view of God fuels how we pray.**”

**PRAY:** Transition into the study by simply asking the Lord to teach us to pray.

## BIBLICAL ILLUSTRATOR

Want to know about biblical culture, people, archaeology, and history? *Biblical Illustrator* has articles that tie to each session in this study at [lifeway.com/BI](http://lifeway.com/BI).

## HOW TO PRAY

- ▶ **THE OBJECT OF OUR PRAYER**  
Matthew 6:9a; Psalm 103:1-5, 11-13, 19-22
- ▶ **A PRAYER OF PRAISE**  
Matthew 6:9b; Psalm 96:1-9
- ▶ **A PRAYER OF SURRENDER**  
Matthew 6:10-11a; James 4:6-10, 13-17
- ▶ **PRAYING FOR OURSELVES**  
Matthew 6:11b; Isaiah 38:1-6, 15-17
- ▶ **PRAYING FOR OTHERS**  
Matthew 6:11b; John 17:11-23
- ▶ **A PRAYER OF CONFESSION**  
Matthew 6:12-13; Psalm 51:1-2, 10-12
- ▶ **A PRAYER OF THANKSGIVING**  
Psalm 138:1-8

**TIP:** When helpful, use this “Notes” column to record additional discussion questions, concepts, and activities that connect the study content with your specific group.



# STUDY THE BIBLE

## Notes

### 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! <sup>2</sup> Bless the LORD, O my soul, and forget not all his benefits, <sup>3</sup> who forgives all your iniquity, who heals all your diseases, <sup>4</sup> who redeems your life from the pit, who crowns you with steadfast love and mercy, <sup>5</sup> who satisfies you with good so that your youth is renewed like the eagle's.*

**READ:** Ask a group member to read aloud Matthew 6:9a and Psalm 103:1-5 on page 71 of the PSG.

**GUIDE:** Use the Commentary for these verses on the next page of this Leader Guide to help group members understand the nature of God the Father and His goodness to us.

**RECAP:** 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.

**DISCUSS:** **Question #2** on page 71 of the PSG: **"How did you learn to pray?"**

**RECAP:** 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!

**DISCUSS:** **Question #3** on page 72 of the PSG: **"How would you describe prayer to someone who is unfamiliar with the practice?"**

**TRANSITION:** The next verses demonstrate that not only does the One we pray to desire only good for us, He is also our compassionate Father.

#### ALTERNATE QUESTION:

***What are some of the good things our Father does for His children?***



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## **Matthew 6:9a; Psalm 103:1-5 Commentary**

**[Matthew 6:9a]** Our Father wants only good for us. That's what Jesus wants us to grasp first as He teaches us how to pray. Notice Jesus taught that we should refer to God as **Our Father in heaven**. When we talk with our Father "in heaven" in prayer, we're spending time with the Creator of the universe and the Commander of the heavenly host. Because of His majesty, approaching Him in prayer can be a daunting experience. But He's also the perfect "Father" who wants to enjoy an intimate relationship with His children. By instructing His followers to refer to God as "Our Father," Jesus prompted them to approach God with healthy respect nourished by love. While God has complete authority over us, He longs for us to experience the joy and peace that only a relationship with Him can render.

**[Psalm 103:1]** This psalm adds enriching colors to the portrait of our Father that Jesus provided. We learn more about our Father and His goodness to us. At the outset, the psalm brings to mind our need to take a long look in the mirror. By talking to our souls and looking deep within ourselves, we have a chance to see what's really going on inside us. From there, we have the opportunity to make lasting changes in our lives that will please the Lord. One of the chief ways to make such important spiritual adjustments involves praising the Lord. That's the idea implied from the call in this verse to **bless** Him. By fixing our minds and hearts on the **holy name** of the Lord through praising Him, we're taking the right path toward renewed spiritual vitality.

**[Verses 2-3]** Praise flows easily from our hearts when we consider the monumental ways in which the Lord has been good to us. However, when we forget about blessing Him and focus on being blessed ourselves, we lose sight of what He has for us. By the same token, recalling His remarkable care sets the stage for praising Him. The psalmist pointed to the invaluable actions God has taken for us, referring to them as **benefits**. Reflecting on them prompts our praise to Him. One of the greatest benefits we enjoy results from what God has done about our greatest problem. Our sin serves as a wall that separates us from our Father. We're responsible for the wall and the separation. However, we can't do anything about removing our sin. But God doesn't allow the wall to remain. Instead of allowing us to languish in our sinful condition, He **forgives** us by taking our sin away. Furthermore, **diseases** of the soul will not have the last word over us.

**[Verses 4-5]** But that's not all He has done for us. He's paid the price necessary to set us free from death. **The pit** symbolizes the abode of the dead and the adversity that goes along with death. From our side of the cross, we know that Jesus paid the price at Calvary. The Lord not only **redeems** us, He also treats us like royalty by crowning us with the honor of being His children. He's faithful to us, and He feels our pain and joy with us.





# STUDY THE BIBLE

## Notes



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## ***Psalm 103:11-13 Commentary***

**[Verse 11]** We can be certain of our Father's compassion for us. David underscored that certainty by elaborating on the reach of our Father's faithful love. When God's people in Old Testament days would look across the landscape, they could see where the sky met the earth. But when they looked up into the sky, they could see no boundaries. Instead, they beheld a remarkably vast display of God's limitless reach. The psalmist used the image of the limitless stretch of God's reign to describe the reach of His love for His people. In the Old Testament language, the term for God's faithful love incorporated two important certainties. First, His love or mercy prompted His faithfulness. He would never be fickle in His relationship with the people who followed Him. Second, His love nourished His kindness. He never showed that He lacked kindness when He dealt with His people. On the contrary, He consistently reached down to help them, pick them up, and carry them. Because of our Father's faithful love, we **fear him**. In other words, we recognize His authority over us, and we submit ourselves to Him. But at the same time, we also rejoice over His abiding love for us.

**[Verse 12]** When we think about east meeting west, we arrive at only one possible conclusion—it's something that will never happen. If we travel west in search of an ending point in the east, the journey will never end. The same outcome awaits us if we try to make the journey toward the east in search of the west. In this verse, the endless dimension suggested by the unlimited distance between east and west has to do with our sin. Because we have sinned against God, we have to be accountable for what we have done. But instead of punishing us or making us suffer, He showed His love for us by taking a completely different approach. He removed our sin and sent it away with no intention of bringing it back into our relationship with Him ever again.

Notice that the psalmist referred to our sins as **transgressions**. The term brings to mind a boundary that we have stepped across illegally. God could have punished us for eternity. Instead, He took our transgressions and sent them on a journey from which they will never return. What He did for us at Calvary moves us to adore Him even more. It also urges us to come closer to Him and learn more about living in the light of His love.

**[Verse 13]** The psalmist brought into view the clear image of a father and his children. The image helps us to embrace another dimension of God's compassion for us. Jesus taught us to approach God as our Father when we talk with Him in prayer. The psalm helps us to grasp Jesus' instruction by comparing God to a father who loves his children compassionately. When we think about God being compassionate, the wonder of His affection for us comes to mind. His heart remains tender toward us, and His attention to us flows from His abiding compassion for us.



10 minutes

# STUDY THE BIBLE

## Notes

## Psalm 103:19-22

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

**READ:** Ask a group member to read aloud Psalm 103:19-22 on page 75 of the PSG.

**GUIDE:** Use the Commentary for these verses on the next page of this Leader Guide to help group members understand the far-reaching implications of God's sovereignty.

**RECAP:** 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!

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.

### ALTERNATE QUESTION:

**How does our view of God's sovereignty influence the way we pray?**

**DISCUSS: Question #5** on page 75 of the PSG: **"How can we improve our prayer life as a group?"**

**LEADER PACK: In advance,** make copies of **Pack Item 7**, the "Psalms" handout, and distribute them to your group members. Use the handout to give background information on the Book of Psalms. More than any other book of the Bible, the Psalms provide us a glimpse into personal prayers and hymns offered to God.

**GUIDE:** Refer back to **"The Point"** for this session: **"A right view of God fuels how we pray."**

### PSALMS

- ▶ The Hebrew title of the Book of Psalms means "songs."
- ▶ The Book of Psalms includes hymns of praise and a collection of prayers to God that were composed by individuals but used in the context of Israel's worship.
- ▶ David, the psalmist of David (see 1 Samuel 23:1), wrote approximately half of the psalms collected in this book. Other writers include Asaph, the Sons of Korah, Solomon, Moses, Heman, and Ethan. The authorship of some of the psalms remains unknown.
- ▶ Most of the psalms were written in the time of David and Solomon (1010-930 BC).
- ▶ The final editor of the Book of Psalms was most likely Ezra, a 5th-century BC priest and scribe.
- ▶ The Book of Psalms is organized into five sections, called books. According to Jewish tradition, this division was based on the arrangement of the Torah (Genesis through Deuteronomy). Each section ends with a note of praise to God.

Book One	mainly by David	Psalms 1-41
Book Two	mainly by David	Psalms 42-72
Book Three	mainly by Asaph	Psalms 73-89
Book Four	mainly anonymous	Psalms 90-106
Book Five	Davidic and anonymous	Psalms 107-150

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## Psalm 103:19-22 Commentary

**[Verse 19]** Our Father will always be Almighty God. We do well to remember God's majesty as well as His intimacy. In order for us to have a firm grip on God's reign, David reminded us of the location of His throne. We won't find it in the temple in Jerusalem or any other place on earth. On the earth, even powerful rulers have no choice but to live with the fixed reality of death. They will die one day, and their kingdoms will end. In stark contrast, God is not bound by time or any other feature that controls us. His throne exists in heaven, above all limitations. Therefore, He rules without any constraints ever being imposed upon Him. His kingdom isn't threatened by life and death. It will last forever because it's established in heaven.

**[Verse 20]** After such a proclamation of God's sovereignty and the limitless reach of His kingdom, the psalmist returned to his call to praise the Lord. Earlier he challenged his soul to praise the Lord. This time, however, he calls on God's angels to bless Him. Although the sheer power they can exert strikes us as remarkable, their absolute willingness to follow the Lord's leadership stands out as even more striking. They obey Him without fail. For them, His word becomes their command. Accordingly, they welcome the opportunity to praise the Lord.

**[Verse 21]** When the psalmist turned his attention to the Lord's **hosts**, he had in mind a group of heavenly messengers. The term translated "hosts" has also been translated "armies" and is used to describe this apparently large gathering of angelic servants. Indeed, the sheer number of them obviously made them appear to be like an army. The Scriptures provide us with a few vivid examples of the Lord's armies. The prophet Micaiah described a vision in which he saw the Lord seated on His throne and surrounded by His heavenly host. (See 2 Chron. 18:18.) The most well-known New Testament example can be found in the account of Jesus' birth. (See Luke 2:13.) Like God's angels, His heavenly armies devote themselves to doing whatever the Lord wants. In keeping with their role in God's eternal kingdom, the psalmist called on them to bless Him.

**[Verse 22]** The clearest testimonies of Almighty God's sovereign reign come from what He has already done. His **works** among His people send a distinct signal to the entire world about His overwhelming and fearsome power. Old Testament accounts of creation, the flood, miracles in Egypt, parting of the Red Sea, fall of Jericho, rise of the kingdom of Israel, exile to Babylon, and return of God's people to Jerusalem only scratch the surface of the works that bear witness to His boundless authority. Of course, the New Testament accounts of the birth, life, death, and resurrection of Jesus speak volumes about the ceaseless and infinite power of God. In response to the psalmist's reflection on God's angels, armies, and works, he stepped back and took another long look into his soul. Then he uttered the same command that he gave himself at the outset of this psalm. Bless the Lord! We join him by praising God because He's our Father.

Read the article "God's Throne: A Biblical Overview" in the Fall 2018 issue of *Biblical Illustrator*.



5 minutes

# LIVE IT OUT

**GUIDE:** Direct group members to page 76 of the PSG. Encourage them to use one or more of these applications to deepen their prayer life this week.



Notes

- ▶ **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.

## Wrap It Up

**TRANSITION:** Read or restate the final paragraph from page 76 of the PSG:

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.

**PRAY:** Conclude by thanking the Lord for the gift of prayer and for teaching us how to pray effectively. Ask Him to guide our prayer life this week, making it especially meaningful as we focus on Him.



**EXTRA!**

Free additional ideas for your group are available at  
[BibleStudiesforLife.com/AdultExtra](http://BibleStudiesforLife.com/AdultExtra)