

# The Holy Spirit, The Word & Prayer

**Memory Text:** “Likewise the Spirit also helps in our weaknesses. For we do not know what we should pray for as we ought, but the Spirit Himself makes intercession for us with groanings which cannot be uttered. Now He who searches the hearts knows what the mind of the Spirit is, because He makes intercession for the saints according to the will of God.” (Romans 8:26, 27)

**Setting The Stage:** The most basic definition of prayer is “talking to God.” The book *Steps to Christ* widens the definition to include, “the opening of the heart to God as to a friend.” (p. 93) Prayer is not meditation or passive reflection; it is direct address to God. Prayer is the primary way for the Christian to communicate his/her thoughts and desires with God and to fellowship with God.

*“Christian prayer in its full New Testament meaning is prayer addressed to God as Father, in the name of Christ as Mediator, and through the enabling grace of the indwelling Spirit”* (“Prayer” by J. C. Lambert).

Prayer is described in the Bible as seeking God’s favor (Exodus 32:11 - Moses), pouring out one’s soul to the Lord (1 Samuel 1:15 - Hannah), crying out to heaven (2 Chronicles 32:20 – Hezekiah), drawing near to God (Psalm 73:28), and kneeling before the Father (Ephesians 3:14).

Paul wrote, “Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known to God; and the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus.” (Philippians 4:6, 7)

Worry about nothing; pray about everything! Everything? Yes, God wants us to talk with Him about everything. How often should we pray? The biblical answer is “pray without ceasing.” (1 Thessalonians 5:17) We should be in an attitude of prayer with God all day long. We can pray under any and all circumstances. Prayer develops our relationship with God and demonstrates our trust and utter dependence upon Him.

Prayer is the Christian’s way of communicating with God. We pray to praise God and thank Him, and tell Him how much we love Him. We pray to enjoy His presence and tell Him what is going on in our lives. We pray to make requests and seek guidance and ask for wisdom. God loves this exchange with His children, just as we love the exchange we have with our children. Fellowship with God is the heart of prayer. Too often we lose sight of how simple prayer is really supposed to be.

The Bible contains many examples of prayer and plenty of exhortations to pray:

**Luke 18:1:** “Then He spoke a parable to them, that men always ought to pray and not lose heart.”

**Romans 12:12:** “Rejoicing in hope, patient in tribulation, continuing steadfastly in prayer.”

**Ephesians 6:18:** “Praying always with all prayer and supplication in the Spirit, being watchful to this end with all perseverance and supplication for all the saints.”

To pray in the Spirit is to pray in accordance with the Spirit’s will and purposes. And now more than ever do we need to pray. Prayer is more than a duty; it’s a necessity. As breath is to the body, so is prayer to spiritual life. We must pray “always,” day by day and hour by hour to remain in constant touch with God. But remember, engaging in prayer to the exclusion of practical effort or personal responsibility is not true prayer.

### **Sunday / Prayer That Is Pleasing To God**

Hebrews 11:6; John 16:23; Romans 8:26

Prayer can be audible or silent, private or public, formal or informal. When we make petitions to God, we let God know exactly where we stand and what we would like to see happen.

For prayer to be pleasing to God it must be offered in faith:

**Hebrews 11:6:** “But without faith it is impossible to please Him, for he who comes to God must believe that He is, and that He is a rewarder of those who diligently seek Him.” (cp. James 1:6)

*“When we pray, faith remembers the love of God that wants the best for us, the wisdom of God that knows what is best for us, and the power of God that can accomplish it.” - William Barclay*

Among those in the court of Alexander the Great was a philosopher of outstanding ability but little money. He asked Alexander for financial help and was told to draw whatever he needed from the imperial treasury. But when the man requested an amount equal to \$50,000, he was refused--the treasurer needing to verify that such a large sum was authorized. When he asked Alexander, the ruler replied, "Pay the money at once. The philosopher has done me a singular honor. By the largeness of his request he shows that he has understood both my wealth and generosity."

For prayer to be pleasing to God it must be offered in the name of the Lord Jesus:

**John 16:23:** ““And in that day you will ask Me nothing. Most assuredly, I say to you, whatever you ask the Father in My name He will give you.” (cp. John 14:13; 15:16)

*“He explained that the secret of their success would be in asking for strength and grace in His name. He would be present before the Father to make request for them. The prayer of the humble suppliant He presents as His own desire in that soul’s behalf. Every sincere prayer is heard in heaven. It may not be fluently expressed; but if the heart is in it, it will ascend to the sanctuary where Jesus ministers, and He will present it to the Father without one awkward, stammering word, beautiful and fragrant with the incense of His own perfection.*

*“In My name,” Christ bade His disciples pray. In Christ’s name His followers are to stand before God. Through the value of the sacrifice made for them, they are of value in the Lord’s sight...But to pray in Christ’s name means much. It means that we are to accept His character, manifest His spirit, and work His works.”* (The Desire Of Ages, pp. 667, 668)

For prayer to be pleasing to God it must be offered in dependence on the Holy Spirit:

**Romans 8:26:** “Likewise the Spirit also helps in our weaknesses. For we do not know what we should pray for as we ought, but the Spirit Himself makes intercession for us with groanings which cannot be uttered.”

God can pick sense out of a confused prayer. In our prayers, we must admit that God is greater than we are and ultimately knows what is best in any given situation. God is good and asks us to trust Him. In prayer, we say, essentially, “Not my will, but your will be done.” The key to answered prayer is praying according to the will of God and in accordance with His Word. Prayer is not seeking our own will but seeking to align ourselves with the will of God more fully.

## **Monday / The Foundation Of Biblical Prayer: Ask God**

Luke 11:5, 6

Jesus told His disciples a story that outlines the ABC’s of prayer.

**Luke 11:5, 6:** “ And He said to them, “Which of you shall have a friend, and go to him at midnight and say to him, ‘Friend, lend me three loaves; for a friend of mine has come to me on his journey, and I have nothing to set before him’”

Before we receive anything from God, we have to ask for it. And to ask for something presupposes that we don’t have the thing we are asking for. It also presupposes that there is a desire for the thing being asked for.

Like the man in the story, we are to ask to give. When we ask for blessings (or whatever it is) from the Lord, we are to ask, not that we might enjoy everything for ourselves, but that we might be able to share it with others.

God is often treated like some great big cosmic Santa Claus or a genie in a bottle. We want stuff for stuff’s sake. I’m not going to say that God isn’t interested in providing

for your needs, (the rest of the parable speaks to that) but it's a whole different thing to ask the Lord for something you need or want for selfish reasons than to ask the Lord for something you need or want that will benefit someone else. It might even benefit God's work.

You might ask for a raise at work because that would raise your status in people's eyes. But that wouldn't be asking to give. If you asked for a raise at work because you wanted to benefit certain individuals who have a need (homeless, sponsor child, foster care, etc.) or to give more to God's work, now that would be asking to give, wouldn't it?

Our capacity for receiving is only preserved by our giving. In other words, we cannot receive more of what God wants to give us unless we communicate it to those around us. Could this be one of the reasons we don't see spiritual growth in the life - why we don't experience a greater understanding of the things of God and His word? If I keep eating and don't exercise, what's going to happen to me? I'll end up suffering from spiritual obesity.

**James 4:2, 3:** "Yet you do not have because you do not ask. You ask and do not receive, because you ask amiss, that you may spend it on your pleasures."

## **Tuesday / The Foundation Of Biblical Prayer: Believe**

Luke 11:7, 7; Mark 11:24

Jesus teaches us the second foundation of biblical prayer - believe.

**Luke 11:7, 8:** "And he will answer from within and say, 'Do not trouble me; the door is now shut, and my children are with me in bed; I cannot rise and give to you'? I say to you, though he will not rise and give to him because he is his friend, yet because of his persistence he will rise and give him as many as he needs."

Jesus is not suggesting that the selfish neighbor represents God. Jesus isn't teaching by comparison but by contrast. A selfish man will grant someone an urgent request in order to get rid of him because his sleep is being disturbed, but our Heavenly Father delights to give. He's full of compassion and longs to grant the requests of those who come to Him by faith. We must believe.

Therefore don't cease to pray when there appears to be no answer. I believe God always answers the sincere prayer of faith, how about you? It may not always be a yes, it may be a not yet/wait or no, but God will always answer the prayer of faith! And that faith is manifested in asking, seeking and knocking.

It's an obvious question and one that has been asked often. If God knows and cares, why pray? Does God need persuading to our will? Of course not. While prayer doesn't change God's mind it does change ours. And while prayer doesn't persuade God to do our will it does help us understand God's will concerning the things we

are praying for. Like someone said, "Prayer is heavens means to educate our desires."

**Mark 11:24:** "Therefore I say to you, whatever things you ask when you pray, believe that you receive them, and you will have them."

## **Wednesday / The Foundation Of Biblical Prayer: Claim God's Promises**

Luke 11:9-13; 1 John 5:14, 15

Jesus teaches us the third foundation of biblical prayer - claim.

**Luke 11:9-13:** "So I say to you, ask, and it will be given to you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you. For everyone who asks receives, and he who seeks finds, and to him who knocks it will be opened. If a son asks for bread from any father among you, will he give him a stone? Or if he asks for a fish, will he give him a serpent instead of a fish? Or if he asks for an egg, will he offer him a scorpion? If you then, being evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to those who ask Him!"

Jesus is here appealing from the lesser (the love of a human parent) to the greater (the infinitely greater love of the heavenly Parent). Jesus takes human nature at his best, and then points men to the incomparably greater character of God.

God does not lie. What He says He means. And as children generally have no inhibitions when it comes to asking for things from their parents or grandparents, we shouldn't have any hesitancy in coming to the Giver of every good and perfect gift either. We can expect He will fulfill His promises to us. And we can claim them as our very own.

**1 John 5:14, 15:** "Now this is the confidence that we have in Him, that if we ask anything according to His will, He hears us. And if we know that He hears us, whatever we ask, we know that we have the petitions that we have asked of Him."  
*"Prayer and faith are closely allied, and they need to be studied together. In the prayer of faith there is a divine science; it is a science that everyone who would make his lifework a success must understand.*

*"Christ says, 'What things soever ye desire, when ye pray, believe that ye receive them, and ye shall have them.' Mark 11:24. He makes it plain that our asking must be according to God's will; we must ask for the things that He has promised, and whatever we receive must be used in doing His will. The conditions met, the promise is unequivocal.*

*"For the pardon of sin, for the Holy Spirit, for a Christlike temper, for wisdom and strength to do His work, for any gift He has promised, we may ask; then we are to*

*believe that we receive, and return thanks to God that we have received.*

*“We need look for no outward evidence of the blessing. The gift is in the promise, and we may go about our work assured that what God has promised He is able to perform, and that the gift, which we already possess, will be realized when we need it most.”*  
(Education pp. 257, 258)

Friend, if God is our caring and strong Father, why don't we come to Him more often? What hinders us from approaching Him freely, happily, earnestly, and perseveringly? And when we do come, why are we so fickle, so changing, so unsure, lacking faith? We must and can have firm confidence in our heavenly Father!

### **Thursday / Praying For The Holy Spirit**

Ephesians 3:16; Acts 2:38

At the close of Jesus' instruction regarding prayer, He highlights the greatest gift we should be in earnest about receiving – the Holy Spirit.

**Luke 11:13:** “If you then, being evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to those who ask Him!”

E. M. Bounds wrote, *“What the Church needs today is not more machinery, not new organizations or more novel methods, but men whom the Holy Ghost can use--men of prayer, men mighty in prayer.”*

**Ephesians 3:16:** “That He would grant you, according to the riches of His glory, to be strengthened with might through His Spirit in the inner man.”

**Acts 2:38:** “Then Peter said to them, “Repent, and let every one of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins; and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.”

**Zechariah 10:1:** “Ask the Lord for the rain in the time of the latter rain.”

We need to pray as earnestly for the descent of the Spirit as the disciples prayed in the day of Pentecost. Luke records the earnestness of the disciples' prayers. “These all continued with one accord in prayer and supplication, with the woman and Mary the mother of Jesus, and with His brothers” (Acts 1:14).

**Appeal:** God longs to fill our lives with the Holy Spirit. As we spend time with Jesus in prayer, Bible study, with humble hearts and submissive attitudes, He will fill us with His Spirit. Ask, believe, and claim God's promise and the Spirit will be poured out in abundant measure. Are you seeking daily for the baptism of the Holy Spirit? Are you praying for the outpouring of the Holy Spirit in your own life?