



LESSON 1 // HOW TO PRAY JESUS' WAY

Prayer is a central theme in Scripture. From Genesis to Revelation we find the practice of prayer woven into the fabric of the lives and character of God's people. This includes the apostles and the early church who learned from the example of Jesus' prayer life and His teaching on prayer.

Luke 11:1, 2 (NLT) *Once when Jesus had been out praying, one of His disciples came to Him as he finished and said, "Lord, teach us to pray, just as John taught his disciples." ² He said, "This is how you should pray."*

Before Jesus taught His disciples how to pray, He gave them important guiding principles in prayer—steps they needed to take to get ready to pray. Before we consider Jesus' teaching in "The Lord's Prayer" (Matthew 6:9-13; Luke 11:1-4), it's important for us to understand what He said in Matthew 6:5-9 about getting ready to pray.

Jesus taught us that the effectiveness of our prayers starts with being properly prepared to pray. Let's look at how He taught us to get ready for a meaningful, powerful and productive prayer life.

1. Make prayer a personal practice.

Jesus taught us that prayer is personal. He expects each of His followers to pray. Notice the first thing Jesus said when talking about preparations for prayer:

Matthew 6:5-7 (NLT) *And now about prayer. When you pray... ⁶ But when you pray... ⁷ When you pray...*

Three times in three verses Jesus used an important phrase: "when you pray." He did not say, "if you pray." He said, "when you pray"! While people can pray for us, no one else can *do* our praying for us. There are certain things in your life that will only come to fullness, fruition and fruitfulness when you pray.

To make prayer a personal practice, we have to adjust some of our thinking about it. All too often we consider prayer an emergency reaction, a last resort, an event for special occasions, a "magic wand" of some kind or something to do on the run.

For prayer to become meaningful to us, we must let go of these notions and begin to practice prayer in a new way. A great prayer life involves sincere communication with God that is regular and scheduled (Psalm 5:3; Roman 12:12), private and intimate (Matthew 6:6; Mark 1:35), as well as spontaneous and Holy Spirit inspired (1 Samuel 3:10; Nehemiah 2:4).

To become a person of prayer you must make the "big decision" to pray, commit to it, resist discouragement and expect answers.

2. Adjust your attitudes about prayer.

While prayer is an activity, it's also an attitude. Effective prayer requires the right attitudes. Jesus targeted attitude issues when He taught us how to prepare for prayer.

Matthew 6:5-8 (NLT) *And now about prayer. When you pray, don't be like the hypocrites who love to pray publicly on street corners and in the synagogues where everyone can see them. I assure you, that is all the reward they will ever get. ⁶ But when you pray, go away by yourself, shut the door behind you, and pray to your Father secretly. Then your Father, who knows all secrets, will reward you. ⁷ When you pray, don't babble on and on as people of other religions do. They think their prayers are answered only by repeating their words again and again. ⁸ Don't be like them, because your Father knows exactly what you need even before you ask him.*

In this passage, Jesus teaches us to check our prayer motives, be real with God and pray with certainty and confidence (see also Psalm 37:4; Matthew 15:8; John 14:13, 14; James 4:1-3; 1 John 5:14, 15).

God wants you to be absolutely sure—completely certain—that when you pray He is listening. He wants you to have total confidence in the outcome of your prayers. He wants you to know that He will answer you. He wants you to bring the attitude of faith into your prayer closet.

3. Focus on building a prayer relationship, not just voicing your prayer requests.

Jesus made it clear that prayer is all about relationship. He reminded us about the difference between people who pray religiously and those who pray from a rich and real relationship with God.

Matthew 6:7, 8 (NLT) *When you pray, don't babble on and on as people of other religions do. They think their prayers are answered only by repeating their words again and again. ⁸ Don't be like them, because your Father knows exactly what you need even before you ask him.*

When we are in right relationship with our Heavenly Father, He is so attentive to our needs that He knows what we need even before we ask! In Isaiah 65:24 God assures us: "I will answer them before they even call to me. While they are still talking to me about their needs, I will go ahead and answer their prayers."

You should pray to nurture and build your relationship with your Heavenly Father, synchronize your heart with His, ask Him for what you need, experience the confirmation of His love as He responds, and rest and refresh your heart in His presence—the One we trust to care for us!

Discussion questions

1. Why is it so important to make prayer a personal practice? What should this look like in your daily life?
2. Read Psalm 37:4, Matthew 5:6-8, James 4:1-3, 1 John 5:14, 15. Based on these verses what are the right attitudes and motives for effective prayer?
3. How can you build a richer relationship with God through prayer? What is one way you can take a step toward growing stronger in this aspect of your prayer life?