



Lord, teach us to pray!

Enhancing Prayer through Bible Study
Mark Roberts



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teach us
to pray!*

The Prayer of Abraham - Gen. 18:16-33

Background to the prayer:

Learning from this prayer:

Major applications of this prayer in my life:

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.
- 4.
- 5.

In what ways can we follow Abraham's example today?

List some thing about which you will pray specifically in an intercessory way this week:



The Prayers of Moses at Sinai - Exodus 32-33

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Background to the prayers:

Learning from these prayer:

Prayer of Intercession -

Prayer for Forgiveness -

Prayer for God -

Does prayer really change God's mind (see Exo. 32:14)? In other words, does prayer "work?"

Who is lost in sin that you will hold up in prayer this week?

Have you prayed to know God, not just get stuff and favors?



The Prayer of Joshua in Defeat - Joshua 7:7-9

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Background to the prayer - *Jericho and Ai*:

Learning from this prayer:

What can we learn about humility from Joshua?

Verse 7 speaks of God's sovereignty. Why does Joshua appeal to this?

From verse 10 do we learn there is a time to stop praying?

Why was Israel defeated at Ai? What can we learn from this as we face defeats in life?

Are you defeated recently? What would self-examination reveal about those defeats?

Do you seek God's counsel first or only after defeat?

Are you relying on your own power or the power of God?



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Hannah's Prayers - 1 Samuel 1 & 2

Background to the prayer - *Hannah's barrenness*

Learning from this prayer:

Is there a reason why Hannah's is the first woman's prayer recorded in Scripture?

Does Hannah bargain with God? Can we?

Other ideas from this prayer:

Why does God say "No" to our prayers?

Hannah's second prayer, 1 Samuel 2:

What do we learn from this prayer of thanksgiving?

How does Hannah view the Lord in this prayer?

Application:

Think of one time in your life in which God answered your prayer and write down statements of praise and thanksgiving for that blessing. Center your prayer this week on those statements so that this will be a week of praying praise and thanksgiving.



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David's Prayer of Praise - 2 Samuel 7

Background to the prayer:

Key application of the promises God makes:

Learning from this prayer:

What is the overall mood and tone of David's prayer?

What is the main theme of this prayer?

Do some of God's promises today seem almost too good to be true?

Application:

“Count your many blessings, name them one by one.” Look over your blessings, choose one or two that demonstrate the magnificence of God's care for you. Read over David's prayer again and then praise God for His goodness to you in the language of praise that David uses.



Solomon's Prayers

1 Kings 3 & 8

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Background to the first prayer:

Key lessons from Solomon praying for wisdom:

Why did God let Solomon have such "carte blanche" in his request?

Why did Solomon ask for wisdom?

*If God gave you whatever you requested would you ask for wisdom?
Why or why not?*

Background to the Temple's dedication:

Learning from Solomon's dedicatory prayer:

What is the main theme of Solomon's prayer?

What does Solomon's prayer show a clear understanding of?

Does posture play a part in good praying?

Application:

- * Can you see an area of your life where you need wisdom and so can give that special prominence in your praying?
- * What does the temple's name "House of Prayer" mean about the importance of prayer in worship today?



Ezra's Prayer of Confession - Ezra 9

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Background to the prayer:

Make certain you understand what "these things were done" refers to in 9:1.

What was the law on Israel intermarrying (see Exo. 34:16; Deut. 7:1)?

Key lessons from Ezra's prayer of confession:

What does verse 5 say about taking sin seriously?

Ezra's prayer lays the blame for this sin squarely on who?

What themes do you note in Ezra's prayer?

What does chapter 10 show us must happen to make a prayer of confession meaningful?

Would it ever be appropriate to pray like Ezra did in the assembly of the church today?

How can you show God you are serious about sin in your prayers of confession?



The church's prayer for boldness - Acts 4:23-31

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Background to the prayer:

Why is the church praying for boldness here?

Who had already set the tone of boldness for this prayer?

Learning to pray for boldness

What other options did the church have here other than prayer?

How does this prayer begin?

What is the point of weaving in the reference to Psalm 2 into the prayer?

Ultimately, what is the church asking for here?

How does fear keep you from speaking of Jesus?

Will you make a special effort this week to incorporate the prayer of Acts 4 into your prayer life so you can ask God for boldness?



The church's prayer for Peter - Acts 12:1-17

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Background to the prayer:

What is the time frame for chapter twelve's events? Which Herod is this?

Where does the story of praying for Peter really begin (see 12:1-2)?

Learning from the prayer:

How would we expect James' death to effect the church's prayers?

How long did the church pray for Peter (see verse 5)?

Why does Luke report the somewhat humorous details of Peter finally be recognized and allowed in the house (verses 14-17)?

What does this prayer teach you about the value of Christians praying together?

Key verses on praying together:



Praying with Paul - Col. 1:9-14 & Eph. 1:15-23

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Paul's Prayer for the Colossian brethren:

What kind of petitions do you regularly make in prayer? Compare those concerns to Paul's petitions. Is there a difference? How?

List what Paul prays for the Colossian brethren:

What does this prayer say about the balance in God's actions and our own?

Paul's Prayer for Ephesus:

What is the dominant theme of this prayer?

How does this prayer relate to the material about God's scheme of redemption that precedes it?

Paul prays they will know God (vv. 17-18). Is there a difference in knowing about God and knowing God?

What does studying Paul's prayers teach you about the prayer?

Bonus note: study more prayers of Paul in Eph. 3:14-21; Romans 15:30-33; Phil. 1:9-11; 1 Thess. 3:9-13; 2 Thess. 1:1-12.



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He the Great Example is: Jesus Praying

Can Jesus even be our example or does His deity "exempt" Him from being like us, needing to pray?

Jesus' prayer life: CONSTANT

Jesus' prayer life: ADDRESSED GOD AS FATHER

Matthew 11: _____; 26: _____

What is the significance of Jesus calling God "Father?"



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He the Great Example is: **Jesus teaches on Prayer**

Jesus' teachings in Matthew:

Jesus' teachings in Luke - A Parable about Prayer in Luke 18

Jesus' teachings in John



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***He the Great Example is:* Jesus Tells Us How to Pray**

Read Matthew 6:9-13 several times and write down your initial observations and ideas:

How is this prayer different from the prayers you usually pray?

What are the priorities and the order of those priorities in this prayer? What do we learn from this?

Two keys to remember from the Lord's prayer:

What does God want to do?

What do we really need?



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TEACHING NOTES

On the following pages are the notes that I used when teaching this class. Let me make some observations that will help you as you teach this material. **First, watch for material in *italics*.** I have purposely italicized questions you as the teacher need to ask the class. Primarily this class succeeded for me because it was a discussion class. Everyone prays and knows something about it. If the teacher sets himself up as an expert and lectures the class will flop. If everyone contributes it can be a dynamic experience where everyone, including the teacher, learn a great deal. **Second, you will note that I have way too much material here.** If you are teaching this in a “one class per session for thirteen weeks” format you’ll have to make some hard decisions about what to leave in and take out. Others may have more latitude and get to use more of the material. I decided that it would better to give teachers too much than not enough - so cut, adjust, fix, edit and make this your own so that it fits your class and your situation.

This was, without doubt, one of the best classes I have ever taught. It was amazing to simply study prayer and praying. I’m glad you’re going to try it and pray the blessings of the Lord upon you! May we all learn to seek Him in prayer more effectively.

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Lesson 1

The Prayer of Abraham - Genesis 18

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INTRODUCTION:

A. *Introduction:* Luke 11:1

1. That's a great request, isn't it?
2. The more the disciples were with Jesus the more they realized that He valued prayer and that He knew something about it they didn't.
3. They wanted that. They wanted to have part of that. They wanted to pray like Jesus prayed. *Shouldn't we all feel the same way?*

B. Jesus isn't here to personally teach us praying, or better, model praying before us.

1. But His word is here, and it can give us great guidance and help.
2. Ever notice how much praying is going on in the Bible? It's everywhere!
3. Yet too often when we study the text we move past the great prayers in the Bible without ever looking at them for help in better praying.
4. The prayers get woven into all the action and doctrine around them and don't get a chance to just stand out on their own and teach about prayer.
5. That's our purpose in this class. We're going to examine praying in the Bible just to learn about praying.
 - a. Studying Moses' prayer in Exo 32 won't be a time to talk about idolatry and golden calves - just prayer.
 - b. Studying Jesus' prayer in the Garden won't lead to a discussion of why Judas betrayed Him - just prayer.
6. Get the idea? If you were to bow your head in prayer, say Luke 11:1, and receive the official "booming Voice" that we expect God to have wouldn't He say "Read My Book?"
7. That's what we plan to do. We'll read God's Book to learn how people have prayed and communicated with God.
8. Am sure this will work richly - Romans 15:4; 2 Timothy 3:16-17

C. Today's goal, focus and objective: Abraham's prayer in Genesis 18

1. Want to learn what prayer is.
2. Want to learn about praying for others . . . *and I'm sure, much more!*

I. BACKGROUND TO THE PRAYER - ABRAHAM VISITED BY THREE ANGELS, CH. 18

A. Hospitality Extended, vv. 1-8

1. Apparently one of the angels was Jehovah God.
2. It is a special revelation of God, a way for God to manifest

B. The Angels Speak of a Son, vv. 9-15

1. v. 12 - just not possible
2. This reinforces the idea that Isaac is a child of promise. It is too late for them to have



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- children naturally, it must be a miracle.
3. This must be the reason for the wait - to show Isaac is from God. Abram came to the land when he was 75, now 100!

C. The Destruction of Sodom and Abraham's concerns, vv. 16-33

1. Why does God tell Abraham His plans?
2. v. 18 - intimate relationship with God, "friend of God"
3. v. 19 - Abram could use this as a teaching tool for his family.
4. Abram does see it (19:27-28) and will be able to positively state that it is no natural disaster.

D. Question: *How is this background like our times today?*

1. We certainly see much wickedness today!
2. *Do you ever feel called to pray for some place because you believe the judgment of God is going to fall upon it?*

II. THE PRAYER AND APPLICATION OF IT

A. *Without getting too deeply into the prayer and its application, let's think in a broad general way what strikes you first about this prayer of Abraham's?*

1. My answer: it's persistence and that God allows Abraham's impertinence.
2. Other possibilities:
 - a. V. 27 - Abraham's clear understanding that we don't even have the right to speak to the Lord (think of kings and emperors - no one just barges in and starts demanding things of them)
 - b. God's patience in putting up with Abraham

B. *Is this prayer in the "pure" sense?*

1. No. Abraham is talking to God directly.
2. Why then am I including this in the lessons on prayer? Because prayer is talking to God!
3. *What about Abraham's speech reflects "real praying" like in our assembly?*
 - a. Answers: careful petition, Abraham believes prayer changes things.
4. *What doesn't sound so much like prayer here?*
 - a. Answers: it's very direct speech and conversation

C. Tough questions from Abraham's prayer:

1. *Why didn't Abraham just ask God directly to save the city if ten could be found?*
2. *Why did he quit at ten, and not go for five?*

D. Important key in this prayer: the value of intercessory prayer.

1. *What is intercessory prayer?*
2. It is purely an act of grace, we pray for another with no expectation of anything in return.



3. Intercessory prayer reinforces the importance of good people in this world, that we can be “salt” and preserve the world a little longer.
4. Facing God’s wrath and judgment intercessory prayer may be the only answer.
5. Passages on the value of intercession: Job 42:7-10; Gen. 32 (to be studied later)
6. Can we really pray for non-Christians, especially for their salvation?
 - a. Matt. 21:22 - anything
 - b. Phil. 4:6 - if it causes you anxiety pry about it!
 - c. Matthew 15:32 - Jesus had compassion on lost people
 - d. Matthew 5:44 - to pray for our enemies
 - e. 1 Timothy 2:1 - pray for rulers
 - f. We pray for sick friends and neighbors. Why wouldn’t we pray for their soul?
7. *Who could you pray for this week in an intercessory way?*

III. MAJOR LESSONS:

- A. What is prayer? Talking to God
- B. Major encouragement: man can come before God and God will hear him.
- C. The appropriate attitude in prayer: humility (1 Peter 5:6)
- D. God does change things due to prayer.
- E. The value of intercessory prayer

Lesson 2

The Prayers of Moses at Sinai - Exodus 32

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INTRODUCTION:

- A. *Introduction: what's the hardest praying to do?*
1. A case has to be made for praying for those who don't deserve it.
 2. That's the praying Moses does at Mount Sinai – intercessory prayer on behalf of people who had abundantly proved they weren't worthy of anyone interceding for them.
 3. Moses was so frustrated he smashed the Commandments, but in the midst of crisis it is his prayer that makes the difference.
- B. There are three prayers at Sinai.
1. They are amazing each in their own right and bear our study.
 2. The first is a prayer of intercession, 32:11-14
 3. The second is a prayer for forgiveness, 32: 30-34
 4. The last is a prayer for God's presence, 33:12-19
 5. *Let's learn from each of them!*
- C. Today's goal, focus and objective:
1. Keys in intercessory prayer
 2. Seeing how prayer leads to a greater understanding of God Himself

I. BACKGROUND TO THE PRAYERS:

- A. Notes on the Golden Calf incident
1. Worshiping an idol, vv. 1-10
 - a. Factors in breaking the covenant, v. 1
 - (1) People were idle - been sitting still for over a month
 - (2) They had to wait - people do not want to wait, demand immediate gratification.
 - (3) Mob action - people all got carried away together
 - (4) No strong leadership - Aaron refused to say "no," caved in under pressure.
 - (5) Lack of gratitude for all they had received - "who cares about Moses any more?" A very clear "what have you done for me lately" attitude. Teaching note: this may bear mentioning because ingratitude affects prayer.
 2. v. 5 - claimed this was all dedicated to Jehovah. But you cannot make false worship right by using God's name.
 3. They did not abandon God but wanted a visible representation, something to see.
 4. v. 6 - "play" has a strongly sexual connotation, as with Isaac in Gen. 26:8.
- B. God's anger, vv. 7-10
1. What an offer! No more Israelites, but now Moses-ites.



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2. Would God have done this? We don't know. Could be a test.
- C. Intercession of Moses, vv. 11-14
1. Notice how much his character has developed; in chapter 3 he didn't even want to go.
 2. Now he makes intercession for the people.
- D. Moses' anger and discipline of Israel, vv. 15-29
- E. Moses atones for Israel, vv. 30-35
1. We are left wondering where God and Israel stand.
 2. Will He still be there God? Will they go forward? The whole project is at a crisis point!
- F. Israel weeps and repents, 33:1-11
1. There seems to be a change of plan in 33:2. An angel instead of God Himself will go with the people.
 2. Note vv. 8-11
- G. Moses' prayer for God's presence, vv. 12-17
1. vv. 12-14 - show me thy ways - what are you going to do, God?
 2. vv. 15-17 - plea for divine presence
 3. Ultimately, this leads to Moses' being shown the glory of God - 34:5-9
 4. Much learned here about God's very nature but let's stay on course and consider prayer, not the nature and attributes of God.

II. DISCUSSING AND LEARNING FROM THE PRAYERS OF MOSES

A. *First prayer: the prayer of intercession, 32:11-14*

1. Moses makes three points:
 - a. These are Your people (contrast v. 7 - God has disowned them!), v. 11
 - b. The Egyptians will think He is an evil God, v. 12
 - c. Promises to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, v. 13
2. God could have rebutted all of these points with ease.¹
3. But He does not. God has the kind of relationship with Moses that causes Him to value what Moses wants.
4. *Think about that! Am I close enough to God that cares about what I care about? We saw this with Abraham's prayer too. What a challenge and call and motivation to relationship!*
5. "One of the most remarkable features in the O.T. is that people can argue with God and win."²
6. Notice how bold Moses is. *Are you that bold in your praying to God? How does boldness relate to relationship and confidence God will change His mind if we ask?*
7. *Is it easier to pray for God to give people what they deserve or asks that God relent from punishing?*



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8. Special applications:
 - a. *How can we use Moses' concerns for God's name and God's promises to ask God?*
 - b. *Who can you pray for this week? Who is deeply involved in sin that you can pray for?*

B. Second prayer: the prayer for forgiveness, 32:30-35

1. Note the parallel to Romans 9:3.
2. God seems to deny Moses' appeal for forgiveness, v. 35.
3. *Can we pray for others to be forgiven?*
 - a. I hope so – we do all the time after the invitation song!
 - b. Acts 8:24; James 5:16
 - c. But see 1 John 5:17-18
4. *How does understanding the gravity of sin play into asking for forgiveness?*
 - a. There can be no such prayer if we don't care about sin!

C. Third prayer: prayer for God's presence, 33:12-17

1. In response to the people's repentance God is willing to go with them again.
2. V. 13 - Moses seems to be asking to know God, to know what He will and will not do.
3. *What does the pitching of the tent outside the camp (33:7) say about God's attitudes toward sin?*
4. *What creates distance between us and God?*
 - a. My thought: we need to get more than just "sin." What about being too busy to read the Bible, or failure to worship?
 - b. Emphasize relationship.
5. *What does verse 11 say about prayer for us?*
6. *Read Hebrews 11:6. Is Moses seeking God in 33:13? Is this the greatest prayer of all, not for stuff or blessings but for God?*
7. *Have you prayed to know God?*

III. SPECIAL FOCUS: DOES PRAYER REALLY CHANGE ANYTHING?

- A. One of the questions this text raises is "Can God change His mind?"
1. v. 14 - what does "repent" or "relent" mean here?
 2. The standard answer, popularized by Calvin and others is absolutely not. God does not change His mind ever, He cannot, it is impossible.
 - a. This makes this text difficult and prone to creative interpretation: *"The meaning is not that God changed His mind; still less that He regretted something that He intended to do. It means, in biblical language, that He now embarked on a different course of action from that already suggested as a possibility.... God's promises and warnings are always conditional on man's response (see Jeremiah 18:7-10).... We are not to think of Moses as altering God's purpose toward Israel by this prayer, but carrying it out: Moses was never more like God in these moments...."*³



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3. I disagree strongly. I believe Moses did alter God's intentions, that Moses' prayers made the difference here.
 4. Yet some passages are offered to say God will not change: 1 Sam. 15:29
 5. Other approach is to say this is anthropomorphic language, just God accommodating Himself to us.
- B. Believe prayer does change things and God can change His mind.
1. Response to above:
 - a. 1 Sam. 15:29 must be kept in context - God not changing His mind about Saul losing the kingdom.
 - b. Anthropomorphic language still must mean something! Can't just dismiss biblical teaching by saying "it's anthropomorphic!"
 2. Best answer: we may not ever understand about the sovereignty of God and His immutability but the Bible pounds home the point that prayer matters to God, that it does affect Him, that He will change based on our prayers.
 3. Perhaps these ideas of "repent" are metaphor and no one metaphor can completely describe God ("God is love" or "God is light").
- C. But the Bible affirms that God can change His mind, take a new course:⁴
1. Making man - Genesis 6:6
 2. Making Saul king - 1 Sam. 15:11
 3. God won't change sometimes - Jer. 15:6
 4. Punishing Nineveh - Jonah
 5. Death of Hezekiah - 1 Kings 20
 6. Relenting is part of His character - Joel 2:13
 7. It is a terrible mistake to not see the value of praying because we decide God won't change based on our prayers!

IV. FINAL APPLICATIONS AND ASSIGNMENTS

- A. God's people easily forget God – and so need the godly to pray for them!
- B. In prayer we can ask God for almost anything. He listens and acts based on what we say!



Lesson 3

The Prayer of Joshua in Defeat - Joshua 7

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INTRODUCTION:

- A. *Introduction:* How do we pray when we are disappointed in God?
1. We thought things would go great, were sure this was the path to take, then we are crushed in defeat.
 2. Even if we are not brave enough to say it in prayer we are disappointed with the Lord. He failed us, or so it seems.
 3. Prayers of thanksgiving for victory are easy. What do you do when you've been defeated
 4. Our text today is Joshua 7 and his prayer after Israel's defeat at Ai.
- B. Today's goal: Learn from Joshua's prayer of defeat how to approach God when we feel let down by the Lord.

I. SETTING AND BACKGROUND TO THE PRAYER

- A. Setup:
1. This chapter shows clearly that Hebrew history is not just a chronicle of events, but shows the way God acts, what is important to Him, and what is necessary to remain in favor with Him.
 2. Our primary goal here is not to discuss the terribly destructive power of sin in the camp but it will be evident as we study.
 3. Try to understand the situation carefully: Israel crushed Jericho (actually God did) and must have felt invincible. Their confidence (actually over-confidence) just oozes through these verses....
- B. Defeat at Ai, vv. 1-5
1. v. 1 - the chief point of the story is made right away. Word for trespass is a word that means "to act under cover, treacherously, secretly."
 2. v. 3 - Very confident, but the account is strangely lacking in any reference to God commanding, directing, or ordering this attack. Joshua is preceding alone and disaster strikes.
- C. Entreating the Lord, vv. 6-15
1. v. 6 - why so sad? not so much due to the losses but because of failure, the first failure in their attempt to conquer a Canaanite city.
 2. v. 8 - God had promised that Israel's enemies would be His enemies (Exo. 23:22). But if victory comes from faithfulness, defeat must come from sin.
 3. v. 10 - sin in the camp is a time for action!



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- D. How is this background like our times today? *What would parallel this today?*
1. My thought: perhaps if our new building program collapsed, or a loved one past away after surgery promised to fix a problem.
 2. *Teaching note: it is very important to identify times we feel let down or are disappointed with God.*

II. ANALYSIS OF THE PRAYER AND RESPONSE, 7:6-10

- A. Verse 6
1. *What does this verse say about Joshua's attitude toward God?*
 2. *What role does humility play when we have a "difficult subject" to discuss with God? Is there a way to do that, and a way not to do that?*
- B. Verse 7
1. v. 7 - Joshua addresses God as "Sovereign Lord" - showing His perplexity over the whole situation.
 2. *How does God's sovereignty complicate the praying process?*
 - a. My answer: because we know nothing is too hard for Him we have high expectations!
 3. *Can we complain to God?*
 - a. The words resemble the murmuring of Numbers 14:23, but in his context probably just show his honesty.
- C. Verse 8
1. *What does Joshua understand to be the reason they lost? Military problems, and more, God not with them.*
- D. Verse 9
1. Great praying here, as Joshua shows concern for God's name, God's reputation.
 2. *How can we express concern for God's name today in our prayers?*
 3. Note the similarity to Exodus 32:11-13; Num. 14:15-16
 4. *What is the one thing most "right" about Joshua's prayer?*
- E. Verse 10
1. *What does this say about praying too much? Can we do that today?*
 2. *Why did God not allow His people to go forward with sin in the camp?*
- F. Joshua was told the problem was Israel's not God's. *How often is that the case today?*
1. The defeat came about because Achan's sin
 2. But it came from direct presumption by Joshua and the people
 - a. Where is the word that God ordered this attack?
 - b. Where is seeking God and His will in prayer?
 3. There is a huge difference in God saying "No" to something and not even being asked!



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4. Joshua and the people do not show any reliance on God. There is nothing but naked arrogance and assumption that God did it once and so has to keep doing it.
5. They have run ahead of God, assumed what God wanted, underestimated their enemy, then are mad at God when He doesn't back up!

III. APPLICATIONS

- A. *Are you being defeated recently? What would self-examination reveal about those defeats?*
- B. *Do you seek God before you start or only after a disaster has occurred? Do you consult the Lord first?*
- C. *Are you relying on your own power or God's?*



Lesson 4

The Prayers of Hannah - 1 Sam. 1 and 2

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INTRODUCTION:

A. *Introduction:*

1. Prayers by men in the Bible run the gamut of just about everything you can think of or imagine.
2. Prayers by women are dominantly for one thing: a baby.
3. It truly is amazing the number of women in the Bible who want a baby and for whatever reason can't have one. From Sarai to Rachel to Elizabeth (NT) there are women who are praying for a Bible.
4. That's what Hannah is doing in our text today, 1 Samuel 1.

B. We're going to learn a lot from Hannah's prayer.

1. Going to address the issue of asking for God to give us something. That's not everything that prayer is about, but it is part of it. How do we do that best?
2. Want to focus on Hannah's prayer of thanksgiving because that's a very important part of prayer.
3. Also want to use Hannah's prayer as an opportunity to talk about one of our big questions about prayer: why not? Why doesn't God always give us what we want?
4. We could wait and discuss that with Job's prayer, but not going to spend a lesson on Job - his prayers far too long for a class like this.
5. Know that this is the underlying question many have. We're all celebrating the greatness of prayer, how great it is, but some of you are thinking "Sure, just you wait till God says 'No.'" Why does God do that?

C. *Let's dive in to Hannah's prayers and learn from them!*

I. **BACKGROUND TO THE FIRST PRAYER, 1 SAMUEL 1**

A. Hannah's Barrenness, 1:1-18

1. v. 1 - this description is very much like the one of Samson's father, Manoah, given in Judges 13:2. Both say, "there was a certain man." This is probably intentional as both Samuel and Samson are Nazirites from birth.
2. v. 1c - Elkanah obviously was a man of some wealth to have 2 wives.
3. v. 2b - barrenness was the worst thing that could happen to a woman, as her husband's hopes of an heir depended upon her. Often it was interpreted as sign of divine disfavor.
4. v. 6 - provoked is literally "thundered." This is significant in Hannah's song (chapter 2).
5. vv. 9-10 - Hannah's prayer is important. She prays for a son, offering him back in return for just having him. Shows how we can pour out our deepest needs and wants before God, in real fervor and emotion.
6. v. 11 - it is clear that this is the Nazirite vow. A Dead Sea Scrolls fragment adds to verse 22 "*I gave him to be a Nazirite forever all the days of his life.*"



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to pray!*

- B. Birth of Samuel, 1:19-28
1. vv. 21-23 - children were not weaned until they were about two or three years old (cf. 2 Macc. 7:27).
 2. Notice verse 27 and her frank confession of faith. *Was it hard to do this with Eli's wicked sons at the Tabernacle?*

II. APPLICATION AND DISCUSSION OF HANNAH'S PRAYER

- A. *Hannah's prayer is the first prayer of a woman recorded in Scripture. Is there a reason for that?*
1. My answer: may show God's concern for women and their problems and concerns in the very most real setting possible.
 2. It also helps us understand the great beginnings for a great man, Samuel.
- B. *Does Hannah bargain with God? Can we?*
1. Such does happen in Scripture - cf. Psalm 65:1; 22:25; 56:12; 61:8; 66:13; 76:11; 116:14, 18
 2. My answer: it seems to me we do well to stay away from bargaining. If we do we must remember:
 - a. We cannot hold God to a unilaterally imposed deal: "Okay, God I'll go to church Sunday if You'll heal mother." Then we go to church but mother doesn't get better and we're angry. Yet God didn't agree to our deal!
 - b. Also, Ecclesiastes 5:4-5 cautions against lying to God and failing to do as we say we will.
 - c. If we are going to offer God special service let it be from a heart that flows freely with thankfulness and a desire to serve the Lord. That may be the key here: Samuel is offered to be part of God's service, not just be a son to Hannah.
- C. *What can we learn from vv. 13-14 about emotions and praying?*
- D. *Why did God make Hannah wait so long for her prayer to be answered?*
- E. *What does 1:18 teach us about casting our cares upon God and not taking them back?*
1. My note: she seems to have real trust here.
- F. *What does verse 19 mean for us as we contemplate how God answers prayers?*
1. vv. 19-20 - God works through natural means to answer this prayer. There is no miracle here.
 - a. Jesus is born w/o a father - that is a miracle.
 - b. Hannah's child is entirely natural.
 2. Some ask, "If you don't believe in miracles, why pray?" Because God can work through Creation, through natural means to bring His will about.



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- G. Samuel becomes a great man of God (cf. Psalm 99:6; Jer. 15:1; Acts 13:20). *What does Hannah's prayer teach us about being able to affect the future in a great and mighty way through prayer?*

III. WHY DOES GOD SAY 'NO' TO OUR PRAYERS?⁵

A. Setup:

1. This is an opportune time to talk about this because we have to know Hannah had prayed before for a child for a long time.
2. Why didn't God answer her prayer affirmatively sooner?
3. We quickly say that God answers "Yes," "No" or "Later" and act as if that solved the problem.
4. But what if God says "No" to you? Why would He do that? Why did He do that to Hannah, Job, Paul and even Jesus Christ? Cf. Job 30:20
5. Why does God say "No?"

B. *Get class responses here first.*

C. God may want to give us something better.

1. 1 Samuel 8:6 - Saul was a disaster, would've been better off if God had said "No!"
2. John 11:14 - Lazarus did die
3. God knows best and often wants to give us something better.
4. This is particularly true if our prayers aren't even in our best interest
 - a. Some of our prayers are selfish
 - b. Usually we pray for easing of our situation and struggles – but often those are the most important times in our lives.
5. As parents we don't give our kids everything they want. We give what they truly need. Should God allow us to become spoiled brats?

D. Prayers conflict and contradict each other.

1. Different people may ask for entirely different answers:
 - a. Some may pray for a pretty day for a picnic while the farmer prays for rain.
 - b. What of sports? Both sides pray for a win, someone is going to be disappointed.
 - c. What of a mother praying for a heart transplant for her teen-age son while another mother 1000 miles away prays for her teen-age son to survive a terrible motorcycle accident?⁶
2. We need to be open to the possibility (the reality!) that God knows better than we do what is best.
3. Praying for healing may not be best:
 - a. If a person survives sickness to become unfaithful - thus the prayer for kid to be a Christian and live can't both be answered
 - b. If death advances medicine and saves many lives - prayer of many may be answered over your prayer



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4. We don't want to underestimate God but there are some situations that cannot be resolved for both parties. God will do what is right and best.
- E. We may not be praying at all.
1. James 4:3
 2. "God may have said nothing because He heard nothing."⁷
 3. Prayer is communication. Screaming at a passing celebrity "Give me a million dollars" isn't communication and hardly deserves a response.
 4. Lots of praying may just not be praying at all. God didn't say no because it wasn't a prayer at all.
 5. Motives matter to God. "Praying for selfish gain turns God against our requests."⁸
 6. Proverbs 16:14 may be a good starting point for pray, as God knows our motives even when we do not. Cf. 1 Thess. 2:3-4.
- F. Relationships may not be right
1. 1 Peter 3:7; Jeremiah 7:16
 2. Our relationship with God needs to be right
 - a. We need to believe in Him - Heb. 11:6
 - b. We need to be in relationship with Him, not just using Him - Jesus prayed "our Father" - is He our Father?
 3. Our relationship with others needs to be right - Matt. 5:23-24
- G. God's will is not the same as our will.
1. 1 John 5:14
 2. What if God's desires didn't enter into answering prayer? God would be a robot, used to help criminals, or sinners break God's law ("God, help me commit adultery with that pretty new co-worker").
 3. "Prayer would couple the worst of human sinfulness with the unlimited power of God."⁹
 4. God is not always interested in our luxury, pleasure or even happiness.
 - a. See Deuteronomy 1:45
 - b. The people repented but God did not go with them into Canaan. They were terribly defeated.
 - c. These people just got desperate and prayed but that didn't mean God had to give up His agenda, His will: teaching them a lesson in faithfulness.
 - d. Remember that God said "No" to Paul - 2 Cor. 12:7-10
 5. Some keys to remember:
 - a. Our personal desires That are contrary to God's will are not necessarily wrong - Jesus prayed to avoid the cross.
 - b. Repeated requests can be appropriate - much about persisting in prayer is said in scripture (see Luke 18:1ff).
 - c. Our final purpose must be to know and to submit to God's will.
 - (1) Ask God to know His will - James 1:5
 - (2) Admit you don't know it and pray that



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- (3) Assume God is giving you some freedom to use divine common sense to do what is best.

H. The time is not right

1. John 11:3-6
2. Yet waiting can really test us – and that may be part of the reason for it.
3. We learn patience and trust in God as we wait.
4. Note as well Daniel 10:12-14 - Satan is at work to delay things.

I. Summary:

1. We need to be very careful not to charge God foolishly when He doesn't do to suit us.
2. Let us persist in prayer knowing that God will bless us as we need when it is best for us.
3. That's what Hannah found and she thanked God, as we see in 1 Sam. 2....

IV. **HANNAH'S SECOND PRAYER: Notes and Discussion from 1 SAMUEL 2**

A. Textual notes: Song of Hannah, 2:1-11

1. v. 1 - metaphor may come from the animal world where the triumphant victor lifts his head (and antlers) high. It refers to strength (Deut. 33:17; Psalm 75:5).
2. v. 2 - even we refer to God as a rock - "Rock of Ages," and "The Rock that is Higher than I" are frequent hymns.
3. v. 3ff - watch the contrasts here, strong and weak, full and hungry, barren and fertile, dead and alive, sick and well, poor and rich, humble and exalted.
4. v. 6 - God in sovereignty chooses to do as He pleases.
5. v. 10 - the Lord's thundering answers Peninnah's thundering (1:6).
6. v. 11 - provides the transition to what follows.

B. Discussion:

1. *Hannah recognizes that God had answered her prayer. Do we do that in our lives or do we put everything down to "good luck" or "fate?"*
2. *What are some of the main themes of this prayer?*
 - a. Matthew Henry gives four:
 - (1) God's unspotted purity
 - (2) God's Almighty power
 - (3) God's unsearchable wisdom
 - (4) God's unerring justice
 - b. Luke picks this prayer up in Luke 1:46ff where Mary uses this as a source for her prayer, known now as the Magnificat. One of the key themes here and in Mary's prayer is reversal. *How does seeing God as the Reverser affect our prayers?*



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3. *What do we learn from Hannah's lack of focus on the specific answer to her prayer and instead her focus on God Himself?*

C. Application for this week: think of one time in your life in which God has answered your prayer and make it point to write down several statement of thanksgiving and praise to God for Him blessing you so. Make this a focal point of prayer this week.



Lesson 5

The Prayer of David - 2 Samuel 7

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INTRODUCTION:

A. Introduction:

1. Do you want to know more about praising God in prayer?
2. Our study in Hannah's prayers taught us about disappointment but also taught us about praising God.
3. We want to build on that by examining David's prayer of praise in 2 Sam. 7.

B. 2 Samuel 7 is a cornerstone passage in the Old Testament.

1. It means so much and is developed again and again in the NT.
2. We must try to avoid looking at all of that and chasing all of that around and just stay focused on David's response to God's goodness.

C. Today's goal: *learn to praise God better in our prayers.*

I. BACKGROUND TO THE PRAYER:

A. David's Proposal, vv. 1-3

1. v. 1 - not certain that this is in chronological order, actually seems to come after the all the fighting that will be described in chapters to follow.
2. v. 3 - Nathan just knows that this is a good idea, that God will want him to do it.
 - a. The man of God doesn't consult the Lord and ends up telling David the wrong thing
 - b. This is important to remember as we pray for answers and guidance. Divine revelation must always be used to interpret circumstances. We cannot follow what we think, even if we are "just sure."

B. Revelation from Jehovah, vv. 4-17

1. Two kind of promises made here:
 - a. Promises to be realized during David's lifetime, vv. 8-11a
 - b. Promises to be realized after David's death, vv. 11b-16
2. v. 5 - "my servant David" - a very rare expression. Only Moses is referred to in this way (see Joshua 1:2, 7), Joshua is not called by this term. David stands now beside even Moses.
3. v. 5b - not a sense of rebuke here, but God clearly saying that *if* there is to be a house He must name the builder and the time, and the place.
4. v. 7 - God has not commanded the building of a temple at any time. NKJV difficult here, sense seems to be that "rulers" (NIV) shepherd people, not tribes.
5. vv. 9-11a - three promises:
 - a. Lord will make David name great - a clear echo of the Abrahamic promises of Genesis 12:2.



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- b. Lord will “provide a place” for Israel
 - (1) Again the imagery of the Abrahamic promise of Genesis 12:2
 - (2) Plant imagery very common with David’s dynasty - Psalm 80:15; Isaiah 11:1, 10; Jer. 23:5 and more).
 - c. Lord will give David “rest”
 - (1) The oppression that has been going on since the judges ends
 - (2) Remember, there are some conditions to this
6. vv. 11b-16
- a. A ruling house, like the house of Windsor or Hanover.
 - b. v. 13 - David will not build the house, but Solomon will. The immediate fulfillment is in Solomon, but the ultimate fulfillment is in Christ.
 - c. v. 14 - Father-Son imagery is very strong in the O.T. - Jer. 31:9; Hosea 1:10; 11:1.
 - d. Sense here seems to be that even if he is not righteous the dynasty will not be taken from here, as it was Saul.
 - e. v. 14b - conditions if not faithful - this describes the Babylonian captivity perfectly
 - f. Even the Qumran community thought of this as a Messianic prophecy.
- C. Ultimately this is all fulfilled in Jesus Christ (*note: do not spend much time here*):
- 1. Isaiah 9:6-8; Jer. 33:15, 17, 21; Ezekiel 34:23; 37:24
 - 2. Matthew 1:1; 9:27; Acts 2:25, 29, 34; 2 Timothy 2:8

II. THE PRAYER

- A. The prayer, vv. 18-29
- 1. This material repeated in 1 Chronicles 17:16ff and is virtually identical.
 - 2. First key: *have you ever thanked God for being told “no?”* Remember, David does not get his way here! But he does not pout because he didn’t get his way – what a lesson for us. God may have better things in mind for us so let’s trust Him!
 - 3. Textual analysis:
 - a. v. 18 - just being king would be enough, this is too much! Note humble attitude.
 - b. v. 19 - very humble again. David really shows his heart here as he terms his efforts as “small.”
 - c. v. 21 - watch how many times David says God is great. Get the tie to God’s nature and promises.
 - d. V. 22 - this is the basic proclamation all thanksgiving must make. *Have you ever prayed verse 22 verbatim? Try it!*
 - e. V. 23 - even Israel’s greatness lies with God.
 - f. V. 25 - watch how tied this is to praying God’s will.
 - g. V. 26 - God’s glory is the main focus.
- B. *Let’s begin with a quick list of what we’ve learned about prayer from this situation and David’s response. My answers:*



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1. Check with God first, don't assume we know His will.
2. God does differently than we might expect - I would have thought David would get to build it.
3. God is worthy of praise even when He says "No."

C. Learning to prayer thanksgiving prayers today:

1. *What is the overall mood and tone of David's prayer?*
 - a. My answer: stunned amazement.
 - b. *Have you ever been stunned by God's goodness? Why or why not? What can we do to foster more amazement?*
2. *What is the main theme of David's prayer?*
 - a. My answer: the greatness of God.
 - b. Catch the focus of verse 26 - this speaks to God's overall purposes for Israel: bringing the world knowledge of the One true God.
 - c. Note the key difference in the parallel account in 1 Chron. 17: "So let it be established, that Your name may be magnified forever, **saying, 'The LORD of hosts, the God of Israel, is Israel's God.'** And let the house of Your servant David be established before You. (1 Chronicles 17:24).
 - d. *Can we pray a thanksgiving prayer that this blessing we've received will result in the world knowing God?*
3. *How could we express that theme today? Give examples in tangible real language that we could really pray today:*
 - a. My answer: could we just pray part of verse 26 with minor modification? "So let your name be magnified forever"
4. *How does past history fit into David's prayer?*
5. *David repeatedly calls himself God's "servant." Why? How does this understanding make the prayer "go?"*
6. *How does this prayer change your thanks for blessings?*

III. **FINAL APPLICATION AND FOCUS**

- A. We sing "Count your many blessings, name them one by one."
 1. Look over your blessings, choose one or two that demonstrate the magnificence of God's care for you.
- B. Read over David's prayer again and then praise God for His goodness to you in the language of praise that David uses.



INTRODUCTION:

- A. *Introduction*: beginning text - James 1:5
1. *How much do you value wisdom?*
 2. Wisdom is a huge part of every part of a life lived successfully for God.
 3. When we think of wisdom we immediately think of Solomon.
 4. In our lessons today we will learn about the value of wisdom, and asking for wisdom.
 5. Our study of Solomon's prayers will also take us to one of the longest prayers in the Bible: the dedication of the Temple. Solomon's prayer is also a masterpiece of weaving together the big themes of God's work in prayer.
- B. Studying Solomon's prayers will be a help to our praying - both privately and publicly!

I. BACKGROUND TO THE FIRST PRAYER:

- A. The text, vv. 1-5
1. V. 1 - Egyptian kings did not give their daughters in alliances like this.
 - a. Babylonian records show a rebuff of just such an offer
 - b. Only Solomon's great power can account for this. The absence of Egyptian records show the truth here — they didn't record unsavory details.
 - c. He is given the city of Gezer as a dowry (1 Kings 9:16).
 2. vv. 2-3 - "high places" were the chosen places to worship God since no central sanctuary existed.
- B. The Prayer, vv. 4-15
1. v. 4 - Gibeon was the great high place because the Tabernacle was there.
 2. v. 5 - this is not a guarantee that he will get anything but a test. Tells him to "ask" not demand, or even expect.
 - a. God knew what Solomon needed, but did Solomon?
 - b. Teaching note: asking *is* important in prayer!
 3. v. 8 - shades of the Abrahamic promise here.
 4. God replies by granting wisdom, and adds all else *if* he does right.

II. APPLYING AND LEARNING FROM THIS PRAYER

- A. *Why did Solomon get such "carte blanche" from God?*
1. My answer: could it have been a test?
 2. Discuss: What we ask for in prayer says a lot about our priorities, doesn't it?
Solomon's prayer teaches us something about priorities in praying.
 - a. What was Solomon's concern here?



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- b. Get class participation: what are we often concerned about? What is on our hearts first and foremost?
 - c. Develop ideas about what we should pray for as a church. *How does that show our priorities collectively as God's people?*
 3. *What would we ask for if God came to us like this? Is it fair to say that God in some ways does let us ask like this? Answer to yourself: so, what are you asking for?*
- B. Let's explore why Solomon would ask for wisdom:
1. My answers:
 - a. Kingdom in great shape - don't want to mess it up
 - b. He was young and inexperienced
 - c. Leading Israel is tough - they were very rebellious
 - d. Being king is a huge responsibility, fraught with snares and pitfalls.
 2. *What should we ask for wisdom regarding today?*
- C. *What makes Solomon able to ask for wisdom?*
1. Teaching note: explore the character here that would have missed this opportunity and asked for something else.
 2. *Why can some not ask (or will not ask) for wisdom?*
 3. My answer: his correct perception of self (1 Kings 3:7).
 - a. Note attitudes in prayer:
 - (1) Humility, v. 7
 - (2) Sense of responsibility, v. 8
 - (3) Understanding of right priorities, v. 9
 - (4) Trust in Jehovah, v. 9
- D. *Why does God grant his request?*
1. My answer: Solomon didn't ask for self but for others (1 Kings 3:9).
- E. *What is wisdom? How can we gain it today?*
1. Proverbs 1:1-7
 2. *Other than praying for it, and expecting God to "zap" it into us what could we do to get wisdom?*
 - a. My answer: could we pray that God will help us evaluate what we do and so learn from it?
 - b. Other ideas: pray to be blessed with opportunities to be around godly counselors (Prov. 15:22).
 3. Teaching note: explore how prayer teaches us, even as we ask from the Lord. Solomon learned about himself here, about his needs. *Can prayer do that for us?*



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III. CHAPTER 8 - Dedication of the Temple

A. Bringing of Ark, vv. 1-11

1. Watch how Solomon sees the completion of the Temple as symbolic of all of God's promises coming to pass, not only to bring them to Promised Land but to live among them (cf. Exo. 33:12-16 - possession of land w/o God empty).
2. v. 2b - must be the Feast of Tabernacles. Chronicles shows the feasting lasted seven days (of Tabernacles) plus seven days of Dedication.
 - a. Thus this would be the month of October
 - b. Seventh month was important - first day of month had Feast of Trumpets and Yearly Atonement.
3. David had brought the ark to Jerusalem in 2 Sam. 6 (cf. 1 Chron. 15, 16).
4. vv. 3-5 - word for sacrificing indicates constant, ongoing sacrificing, as when David brought the ark up.
5. v. 7 - Cherubim were side by side, overshadowing the ark.
6. v. 9 - used to have rod of Aaron and pot of manna in it. Did Solomon remove them? No longer needed now that they were permanently in the land? Not mentioned because prominence given to the Covenant? We don't know. Teaching note: don't let the class bog down here!
7. vv. 10-11 - God comes to the Temple as He did to the Tabernacle - Exo. 40:34.

B. Solomon's Address to the People, vv. 12-21

1. v. 12 - a reference to Exo. 19:9, 20-21.
2. v. 13 - Solomon modifies this in verse 27, so we see no superstition.
3. v. 15 - Solomon sees this as the result of prophecy.
4. v. 16 - cf. Psalm 132:13; 78:68.
5. Dominant theme: praise God for keeping promises.
 - a. David's son on the throne
 - b. Son built house for God
 - c. All had been promised, now fulfilled. Thus Israel can expect the fulfillment of all of the promises (i.e., the Messiah).

C. Solomon's Dedicatory Prayer, vv. 22-53

1. Teaching note: this is a long prayer but it is very rich. Work carefully with this material and let your students see how magnificent this prayer is.
2. v. 22 - 2 Chron. 6:12-13 tells of a scaffold built above the people, says he knelt to pray (v. 13). Verse 54 also indicates he knelt. This speaks to POSTURE.
3. vv. 23-24 - PRAISE is an important part of prayer too.
 - a. v. 24 - God's sovereignty emphasized - what He says He can do.
4. vv. 25-26 - PROMISE claiming is a part of prayer.
 - a. People may say, "Shouldn't pray that, God has promised it." Not so!
 - b. God's people need to be in tune with God's will so we will be confident in prayer.
 - c. Prayers can be made weak with uncertainty, so we want do as these men did - pray what God has promised.



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5. v. 27 - God doesn't need the Temple, the Temple needs God! God doesn't need Israel but Israel needs God.
 6. v. 28 - different words used for prayer here:
 - a. supplication - techinna - request for mercy
 - b. cry - rinna - wailing cry of petition.
 - c. prayer - tepilla - intercession
 7. v. 29 - the core verse in the whole prayer: keep letting us use the Temple!
 8. v. 30 - Solomon then develops scenarios in which he hopes God will continue to be gracious. There are seven requests:
 - a. Oaths, fraud, no witnesses, etc. - vv. 31-32
 - b. Defeated by enemies, vv. 33-34
 - c. Drought, vv. 35-36
 - d. Famine, vv. 37-40
 - e. God's purpose with the Gentiles, vv. 41-43
 - f. No access to the Temple due to being away, vv. 44-45
 - g. Sin and calamity, vv. 46-51
 9. vv. 31-32 - this is a case in which there is an oath, but no human witnesses to discern who is telling the truth and who isn't. This would have to do with property damage, fraud, etc. The prayer is that God will judge between the guilty and the innocent, establishing what is right.
 10. vv. 33-34 - note conditions of restoration here:
 - a. Turn back to God (repenting)
 - b. Confessing God's name (acknowledging Him as Lord)
 - c. Prayer in the temple
 11. v. 35 - cf. Lev. 26:19; Deut. 28:53 - Canaanites prayed to Baal for rain, when Israel did this God would withhold the rain to teach them a lesson.
 12. vv. 37-40 - note emphasis on inner man.
 13. v. 41 - laws concerning foreigners are remarkable.
 - a. See Exodus 22:21; Lev. 25:35; Deut. 10:19 - generally
 - b. Num. 15:14-16; Deut. 31:12 - religious matters
 14. vv. 44-45 - this concerns being "out of town" due to warfare, etc.
 15. vv. 46-47 - how prophetic! Notice conditions again:
 - a. Change of heart (repentance)
 - b. Confession
 - c. Praying
- D. Blessing of the Congregation, vv. 54-61
1. vv. 54-56 - keynote here is "rest." Deut. 12:9-10 had promised this, and Solomon sees the completion of the Temple as the crowning achievement.
 - a. Hebrews 3-4 promises us "rest" as well - if we don't turn back as the Israelites did.
 - b. 2 Chron. 7:1-3 adds that fire fell from heaven at the end of the prayer, consuming the offerings.



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2. vv. 57-58. "Inclining heart" is very Davidic - Solomon seems to have much of his father in him (see Psalms 141:4).
3. v. 60 - note the missionary nature of this verse. This is a verse that speaks to overall plans and purposes.
4. v. 61 - Solomon will transgress this in 11:4 (good commentary on this verse).

E. *What can we learn of God's nature from this prayer? All good praying draws us closer to God – what do we learn here?*

1. My answers:
 - a. He dwells in the Temple (v. 13) but not limited to the Temple (v. 27), He dwells in heaven (vv. 32, 34, 36)
 - b. Faithfulness, vv. 22-26, 56-61, 66
 - c. Merciful, vv. 34, 36
 - d. Knows the heart, v. 39
 - e. Concerned for all people, even Gentiles, vv. 41-42
 - f. Anger at sin, v. 46

F. *Solomon knows that God cannot be contained. How do people use prayer to try to put God "in a box" today?*

1. My answer: all success and wealth techniques attempt to contain and manipulate God, make Him our personal genie.

G. *What is the significance of the expression "house of prayer" for worship today?*

1. See Isaiah 56:7; Matthew 21:13; Mark 11:17; Luke 19:46.
2. My answer: prayer must occupy a key place in all worship.
3. *How can we emphasize prayer more in worship?*
 - a. Men can focus their praying – praying for the right item at the right time keeps attention.
 - b. More special prayer services, times devoted wholly to prayer. Note Acts 13:1ff.

IV. CONCLUSIONS

- A. Solomon may not always have lived as well as he prayed but these two prayers are instructive and impressive.
- B. Let's make sure we pray for wisdom and emphasize the praise of God and His promises in our praying this week.



INTRODUCTION:

- A. *Approach: what is one of the most uncommon kinds of prayer?*
- Without doubt, prayers of confession. Some disciples may go their entire lives without ever offering more than “forgive me of my sins” in prayer.
 - Then we wonder why our relationship with God is not richer!
- B. Our focus in this lesson is simple: to learn to confess in prayer.
- We want to make some application to corporate prayer as well.
 - But particularly reading Ezra’s prayer should cause each of us to take sin more seriously and take it before God more effectively!
 - There is more to praying about forgiveness than mumbling “forgive us of our sins as we forgive others their trespasses against us.” Let’s learn about it!

I. THE CONTEXT OF CHAPTER 9

- A. The offense of mixed marriages, vv. 1-6a
- V. 1 - “these things were done” refers to the arrival of Ezra and his greeting by the people (see 8:31-32).
 - V. 1b - these are the groups that originally inhabited Canaan (see Exodus 3:8; Deut. 7:1, etc.). Only the Ammonites, Moabites and Egyptians still exist in Ezra’s time.¹
 - V. 2 - law is Exo. 34:16; Deut. 7:1. Very disturbing that leaders are involved. True religion of God was in danger of losing its pure character and leaders led the way in that rebellion!
 - V. 3 - pulling out your own hair is unique to Ezra here. Nehemiah dealt with the same problem by pulling out the sinners hair (see Nehemiah 13:25)!
 - Notice Ezra solidarity with his people. He becomes like Moses at Sinai in the Golden Calf incident (Exo. 32:33). *This shows a clear sense of community in the covenant with God – do we understand that in these days of individuality?*
 - V. 3b - “astonished” can be appalled.
 - V. 4 - those with the right attitude will always tremble before God. What a great expression for the followers of God!

II. EZRA’S PRAYER, 9:6-15

- A. Ezra’s prayer, vv. 6b-15
- Key here is to see how Ezra dealt with corporate sin.* “Ezra’s prayer is pure confession. It contains no request for forgiveness or other petition.”²
 - Structure:
 - Confession, vv. 6-7
 - Punishment for sin, v. 7
 - God’s favor for them, vv. 8-9
 - More confession, vv. 10-14
 - Glory to God, v. 15



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3. Vv. 6-7 - they had been punished but learned nothing from it. Still sinning.
4. Vv. 8-9 - short period would be the last 80 years or so. That is a short time compared to Israel's long history.³
5. V. 8 - "peg" can be tent stake, the idea of being given a place, a toehold, to hold on to and serve God.
6. V. 8 - "enlighten our eyes" is "fresh courage" in other translations. They were dead when in exile (Ezek. 37:1-14).⁴
7. V. 9b - "wall" here is not the big wall that Nehemiah built, but a stone fence that forms the border between properties. It means a protected area, and is not a city wall.⁵
8. V. 10 - "pollution" refers to the corruption of Canaanite idolatry and the immorality that went with it.⁶
9. V. 12 - this is a conglomeration of many scriptures:
 - a. Deut. 4:5; Lev. 18:25; 20:22; Lam. 1:7; Deut. 18:9; 2 Kings 16:3; 21:16; Deut. 7:3; 23:7; 11:8; Gen. 45:18, etc.
10. V. 13 - there is no hope for a remnant that does evil — they would be destroyed and nothing would be left.
11. V. 13b - while their sin piles up high to heaven God punishes less than the pile deserves.
12. V. 15 - sensing God's holiness always causes us to realize our unworthiness.
13. Ezra portrays the entire history of the nation as being steeped in continual sin. They have not learned anything from the captivity.
14. 10:1 - notice how Ezra's praying goes on.

III. LEARNING FROM EZRA'S PRAYER

- A. *How does Ezra show the proper attitude toward sin before he prays?*
 1. Verses 4-5 are key here.
 2. *Explore with the class the proper sense of brokenness over sin and how that must move us physically and emotionally. Why doesn't it?*
- B. *What are the key themes in this prayer?*
 1. My answers:
 - a. Shame and embarrassment for sin (*explore "embarrassment" for sin*).
 - b. Overwhelming sense of sinfulness and rebelliousness
 - c. Awareness of God's holiness that demands judgment
 - d. Clear confession of sin - no excusing or rationalizing sin at all.
 - e. Understanding of the conditional nature of God's blessing.
- C. *How does Ezra vindicate God here?*
 1. Verse 15 is crucial here. "Its climax is O Lord, ... you are righteous! (15). Even if God should destroy his people, Ezra acknowledged that he would be justified. This may be said to constitute the highest form of worship: God being praised solely for who he is, and not merely for what the worshipper hopes to gain from him."⁷



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D. *Does all confession warrant this kind of discipline and prayer?*

1. No. The Bible does not show everyone who repents carrying on in this kind of way (note Job's confession, Job 42:1-6; Simon in Acts 8:24; cf. 1 Jn. 2:9).
2. This was deep-seated, long-lasting, wilful sin in direct violation of express commandments.
3. NT parallel might be to Paul: Acts 9:9.
4. Ezra's prayer seems to come from a feeling of "Oh, no – we've done it again!" It seems that kind of action warrants more concern than first time sin or sins of sheer ignorance.

E. *Would it ever be appropriate to pray like Ezra did in our assemblies today?*

1. Certainly. If a lesson indicted the whole congregation then congregation prayer might pattern itself closely after Ezra.
2. Men leading in prayer need to be careful, however. This kind of praying says *everyone* is part of the problem, *everyone* is guilty. We want to be very careful about that kind of praying or it could be quite offensive.

F. *How can we show the Lord we are taking sin seriously in our own prayers of confession?*

1. My answers: perhaps a more open emotional display, certainly with repentance.
2. Having trouble praying like this? Read some of the great laments in Psalms: 44, 60, 74, 79, 80, 83, 85, 90, 108, 126, 129, 137.⁸

IV. CONCLUSIONS

- A. Balance is much needed in our praying today. There may be too much asking for material things and not nearly enough confession.
- B. Ezra should help us take our sin more seriously and confess it in prayer!



Lesson 8

The church's prayer for boldness - Acts 4:24ff

*Lord,
teach us
to pray!*

INTRODUCTION:

- A. *Approach*: ever been afraid?
 - 1. More to the point of the praying done here: *ever been afraid because you were going to tell someone the Gospel?*
 - 2. I wonder sometimes if we don't appreciate the sacrifice, suffering and fear that the early church was involved in as it was severely persecuted.
 - 3. Acts 4 shows us that their response to fear and persecution was prayer and God blessed that response!
- B. Class goal: to learn how to pray for boldness in evangelism.

I. THE CONTEXT OF ACTS 4

- A. Quick introduction:
 - 1. This is all set up by what happens in Acts 3:
 - a. Peter and John heal the lame man, vv. 1-11
 - b. A crowd gathers, so Peter preaches, vv. 12-26
 - c. This results in Peter and John being arrested, 4:1-4
 - 2. All of the events of ch. 4 are then the next day, after Peter and John are made to "cool off" in jail for the night. We'll see they don't cool off much!
- B. What happens at the trial?
 - 1. Peter offends everyone in the room (v. 10) and is tremendously bold (v. 12).
 - 2. The Sanhedrin is thrown off balance and wrestles with what to do.
 - 3. The interview ends as a complete victory for the church as Peter and John refuse to knuckle under (vv. 19-20).
- C. The church responds to this in prayer. Let's examine this prayer.

II. THE PRAYER OF CHURCH, 4:23-32

- A. Analysis:
 - 1. This is the fourth reference to Christians praying together (see 1:14, 24; 2:42).
 - 2. V. 24 - the church's response is prayer. Prayer is seen here as more powerful than the Sanhedrin.
 - 3. V. 25 - David spoke by the Spirit when he composed Psalm 2:1-2.
 - a. This is a royal psalm, recited at the coronation of the king.
 - b. Vassal nations try to revolt during the time of transition to a new king, but God laughs at their silly plans.
 - c. Theme of the psalm: opposition to God is futile. You can put us in peril, but we will always escape.
 - d. Jesus is being expressly identified as the royal Son of God in Ps. 2:7.⁹
 - e. This psalm was being used as a Messianic psalm in this time, as evidenced by



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- some writings in the DSS.¹⁰
4. V. 27 - "anointed" and "Servant" go together again (cf. Isa. 53).
 5. V. 28 - crucifixion is again seen as God's plan.
 6. Vv. 29-30 - two requests (no prayer for deliverance):
 - a. Boldness in preaching
 - (1) Boldness becomes a trademark of the church - at the Sanhedrin, in the face of persecution, before kings and governors.
 - b. Ability to do signs and wonders.
 7. V. 31b - already have the Spirit, but are given additional powers and boldness.

III. LEARNING FROM AND APPLYING THE PRAYER

- A. *Is it remarkable that the church is praying here? What other options did the church have?*
 1. It could have fled - something finally made necessary in 8:4.
 2. Could have decided to be silent and give up teaching the Gospel to keep the peace.
- B. *How does this prayer begin?*
 1. Verse 24 - it is a statement that speaks to:
 - a. God's power
 - b. God's role as the Sovereign of the Universe
 2. *Does putting God's majesty at the beginning of a prayer give us more confidence in praying? Why?*
- C. *Why does the prayer include the quotation from Psalm 2?*
 1. My thoughts here (the class will likely recognize this as Messianic but there must be more operating here than that):
 - a. It places them in God's will.
 - (1) If God's people are going to be attacked, are always attacked, then this attack verifies and authenticates them as God's people.
 - b. It means that fighting against them was the same as fighting against God.
 - (1) That's the context of Psalm 2. It is useless to resist or fight against God. He will just laugh at His enemies (Psalm 2:4).
 - (2) It is impossible to fight against God and win, a theme Luke comes back to in 5:39.
 2. *How can we frame our praying like this? Specifically, can we see attacks on us as attacks on God and His Word?*
 3. *What is the significance of vv. 25-27 in this prayer?* It places the congregation in line with the work of God. God's people are always attacked, they even attacked the Messiah, so we are attacked too.
- D. *What is verse 28 all about?*
 1. My answer: it's a reconnecting to the theme of sovereignty.
 2. Nothing is a surprise to God, nothing catches God unawares. God has decided all things and controls all things.
 3. *How does the knowledge that God has ultimate control of all things calm us?*



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to pray!**

E. *What does the church pray for?*

1. The church prays for God's word to go forth, not relief from oppression. What a powerful lesson that is!
2. This prayer does sound like Hezekiah's prayer in Isa. 37:16-20. These Christians pray God will overrule the authorities just as Hezekiah did.
3. *Why didn't the church pray for safety?* Because there is something more important than safety at stake here!
4. *Can verse 29 be read as a threat?* Yes, it is like an imprecatory psalm in some ways (see Psalm 139:19ff).¹¹
5. *Why did God shake the house when the prayer was completed?*

F. Concluding thoughts:

1. *How is fear keeping you from talking of Jesus the Christ?*
2. *Can you pray for boldness in speaking God's word this week?*



Lesson 9

The Prayer of the church in Acts 12

*Lord,
teach us
to pray!*

INTRODUCTION:

A. *Introduction:*

1. Is there any extra power that comes from praying *together*?
2. Thus far in our class we've seen examples of congregational prayer but mostly we've focused on the individual doing the praying, the content of one prayer.
3. In this lesson we'll look at a prayer for which we don't even have a record of its words (the only prayer like that we will use in this course).
4. We'll use that prayer to talk more about what was going on around it: namely, the church gathered to pray.

B. We have seen the church pray in crisis in lesson eight (Acts 4).

1. But why does the church come together to pray?
2. Why not all just pray at home? What happens when we pray with other people?
3. Today's goal, focus and objective: learn more about group praying, including praying with a partner (just one) and praying all together as a group.

I. **BACKGROUND TO THE PRAYER:**

A. Setup:

1. Which Herod is this? This is Herod Agrippa I, the grandson of Herod the Great.
2. "About that time" ties it to the famine relief effort of 11:27ff (AD 43 or 44). We know Herod died in 44.
3. *This is a crucial time in the church's history.*
 - a. Some evangelism with Gentiles is beginning (ch. 10, 11:20ff).
 - b. The church is moving out of Judea and having a broader reach and more global focus.
 - c. But what if its leadership is mowed down at this critical time?

B. Analysis:

1. The story begins in verse 1.
2. V. 2 - so Jesus had said in Matt. 20:23.
3. V. 3 - is this due to tensions caused by Peter going to a Gentile with the Gospel?
4. V. 3b - it is a seven day feast leading up to Passover. A public execution during a feast was an offense (see Mark 14:2).
5. V. 4 - probably the prison here is the Fortress Antonio. Four squads shows how hopeless things are without direct intervention from God.
6. V. 5 - prayer is the response to trouble, something seen very commonly in Acts.
7. V. 7 - reminds us of when Jesus was born and angels appeared.
8. V. 9 - notice the clear distinction in real experiences and visions.
9. V. 12 - time has passed and people of the first generation of Christians are being identified by their relationship to second generation Christians like John Mark.
10. V. 12 - house of Mary could be the scene of the last supper. Mary is the mother of John Mark, a cousin to Barnabas. First time we see John Mark.



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11. V. 13 - Mary's house had a foyer or vestibule area.
12. V. 15 - there is some evidence Jews believed everyone had a guardian angel (see Matt. 18:20) who could appear when a person died.

C. This is one of the most dramatic scenes in the Bible and yet it often overlooked and the role of prayer in it seriously underestimated!

II. THE PRAYER

A. *What do you think the NT church said in this prayer?*

1. Prayed for rescue
2. Prayed Peter wouldn't recant, have strength to die if necessary
3. Pray for themselves that they wouldn't all become cowards

B. *How would the recent death of James affect this prayer and praying? Would there be a "prayer doesn't work?" kind of thinking?*

1. Teaching note: this is an excellent time to discuss how we cannot use our circumstances to decide God's existence or love for us.

C. *What does this chapter teach us about answers to prayer?*

1. My response: **No promise to answer any and all prayer affirmatively or as we wish.**
 - a. Vv. 1-2 - do you think they didn't pray for James?
 - b. We spoke at length about unanswered prayer, or negatively answered prayer, in lesson 4 with Hannah. But we need to be reminded again: God is not obligated to do to suit us.
2. Teaching note: this may be an appropriate place to insert something about not being so hard on ourselves for doubting
 - a. James 1:5
 - b. 1 John 5:14
 - c. When we know it is God's will we don't doubt. But when we don't know what God wants done we may have questions. We don't doubt the power or goodness of God but we don't always know what will happen or what God will do.
 - d. It is fair to note that we don't always know God's will, nor do we always know how the devil's actions interfere with God's will (see 1 Thess. 2:18).

D. *How long did the church pray for Peter (see verses 4-5)?*

1. My response: persistence in prayer matters.
2. Luke 18:2
3. Remember, persistence is not an attempt to compel God to do our will, or to whine so much that God grants our request (a.k.a. "The squeaky wheel gets the oil.").
4. Persisting in prayer is good for us and good for our relationship with God. Teaches dependence and to be passionate about what really matters.



Lord, teach us to pray!

E. *Why does Luke tell us the humorous details of Peter not being recognized?*

1. My response:
 - a. It shows that the quantity of faith doesn't matter, vv. 15-16
 - (1) They didn't really believe!
 - (2) It's not the amount of faith but the power of God that matters!
 - (3) Luke 17:6
 - b. Easy to miss the answer to our prayers, v. 16b
 - (1) We need to do better than these did!

III. DISCUSSION OF PRAYING TOGETHER AND PRAYER PARTNERS

A. *Why did the church come together to pray? Why not stay home and pray individually?*

1. My response: praying together does several things for us:
 - a. **Prioritizes problems**
 - (1) In my private praying I have my areas of personal concern, needs for growth etc. Those are no one else's business.
 - (2) When we pray together we are talking to God about what interests all of us because we want to give extra emphasis to those problems and because they are something of great concern to everyone.
 - (3) Isn't that why they are praying together in Acts 12?
 - b. **Encourages us/encourages others** - we are built up, and we build others up who see our faith and devotion to the Lord. Specifics:
 - (1) We hear a brother pray for help with sin, now we can pray for forgiveness, that he knows that assurance.
 - (2) Jesus asked the apostles to pray with Him in Gethsemane and they failed Him - Luke 22:39ff. Surely comfort was part of the Lord's desire there.
 - c. **Demonstrates our love** - it is amazing to hear someone else put your name in their prayer.
 - (1) Praying for another shows real love at the highest level.
 - (2) It is one thing to say "I am praying for you" and something else entirely to *hear* that pray on your behalf!
 - d. **Joins the power of the righteous together** - Matt. 18:18-20
 - (1) V. 19 - agreement here relates to the matter of church discipline.
 - (2) V. 20 - God answers the prayer of those who fervently want to do His will. "Jesus will be with the judges."
 - (3) Want to be careful here that we don't imagine that if we can only get more to shout at God somehow He hears us better, grants requests sooner.
 - (4) Yet as a human father is more moved when all the children ask for something than just one asks all of us praying together shows our Heavenly Father we share the same request and concern.
 - e. **Gets us to pray** - we may forget on our own but together we pray
 - f. **Proclaims our faith to the world**
 - g. **Introduces accountability** - we can't pray for help with sin and then get involved in that sin!



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to pray!*

h. ***Shows that we all share the same problems,
all in the same boat***

- (1) Illus: farming community needs rain, farmers praying at home every night for rain. When the church comes together for a prayer meeting and the shopkeepers and school-teachers come to pray for rain too that shows the farmers mutual care and concern.
2. When I am at home my praying is more private but it lacks the help that comes from others' praying!

B. What about prayer partners? *My thoughts here:*

1. James 5:16
2. There are no specific prayer partners in Scripture that I know of, with the exception of Jesus asking the apostles to pray with Him.
3. Some have made way too much of this verse:
 - a. Crossroad churches turned this into an FBI passage so they could get details of a person's life and use it against them.
 - b. Catholicism uses this to justify confessing to the priest.
 - c. Some have tried to make this into a passage forcing a sinning brother to "walk the aisle" for every sin.
4. This verse urges, contextually, confessing of sins against a brother to that brother (see Matthew 5:23-24).
5. "The connecting link between all the verses in this section would appear to be the power of prayer. In verse 16 James seems to be insisting that, if the prayer of faith can have such a miraculous result as that mentioned in the previous verse, Christians should always pray for one another, not only in times of illness but in all the vicissitudes of their lives, so that healing, in the fullest and widest sense of that word may be bestowed upon them."¹²
6. Tasker goes on to argue "that you may be healed" is spiritual ("by whose stripes you are healed, Isa. 53:5).¹³
7. *Why don't more Christians regularly pray together like this verse suggests?*
 - a. My responses: Lack of real relationships, pride, fear
8. *What makes a good prayer partner?*
 - a. Someone willing to take the time to build a relationship of trust.
 - b. Someone willing to be honest about their relationship with God:
 - (1) When have you felt the closest to God?
 - (2) Which act of worship is your favorite?
 - (3) How would you like to grow spiritually?
 - (4) When have you felt the farthest from God?
 - c. Don't have a partner? Ask someone! 1 Timothy 5:25; Philemon 1:22

IV. **CONCLUSION**

- A. Consider our praying together in the assembly and your role in that.
- B. Give consideration as well to asking someone to regularly pray with you.



INTRODUCTION:

- A. *Introduction:*
1. In all of scripture, outside of Jesus, who is the greatest man of prayer?
 2. Several might argue for Daniel or Moses but Paul has to figure into that (short) list. Constantly he advises his brethren of his prayer's on their behalf.
 3. Much can be learned from reading Paul's prayers *and then praying like Paul prayed.*¹⁴
- B. Today's goal: *learn the key priorities in Paul's praying so that we be more like this inspired man in our praying.*

I. COLOSSIANS 1:9-14

- A. Setup:
1. This is petitioning kind of prayer, asking God for something.
 2. What kind of petitions do we make (illness, job, safety) compared to Paul's petitions? Such a comparison can be very enlightening.
- B. Lessons from the setting of the prayer:
1. Paul prays for Christians he has never met (v. 9).
 - a. This church was evidently founded by Epaphras and Paul had not met the brethren there. Still he prayed!
 - b. *Do we only pray for our family, our loved ones, those we know?* "Our prayers may be an index of how small and self-centered our world is."¹⁵
 2. Paul prayed ceaselessly.
 - a. This doesn't mean without ever stopping to eat or sleep or teach the Gospel!
 - b. It just means that he regularly, and with purpose, prayed for these people.
 - c. *How ceaseless are we in our prayers?*
 3. Paul is praying for an ongoing project, the church at Colossian.
 - a. Paul doesn't wait for a crisis or a problem to start praying. He prays constantly, even when all is well.
 - b. *Do we pray for ongoing projects, like our own congregation even in good times or are we just "crisis" pray-ers?*
- C. Paul's requests
1. ***They would know God's will.***
 - a. This is not speaking to knowing the will of God concerning job choices, who to marry, where to live, etc.
 - b. Compare Psalm 143:10.
 - c. Paul is praying they will know what God wants them to do and obey God.
 - d. The will of God here is the knowledge of how God wants them to live as Christians, what they should do as God's children.
 - e. Wisdom is the application of this knowledge in the right way, so we can serve



Lord, teach us to pray!

- God sincerely and in a way that pleases God.
2. They would please Jesus Christ.
 - a. We don't live up to human expectations, but to the Lord's standards!
 - b. This petition says we need to be asking "What brings honor to Jesus? What would Jesus want me to do?"
 3. ***They would know what pleasing the Lord looks like:***
 - a. Bear fruit
 - b. Grow in knowledge
 - c. Be strengthened
 - d. Give thanks
- D. Applying this prayer and being more like Paul in prayer:
1. *What are the chief values in this prayer?*
 - a. My response: the prayer is soaked with spiritual concerns, while being noticeably devoid of materialistic interests.
 2. *Which of these verses could be wholesale adopted into our own praying?*
 - a. My response: verse 10 looks tailor made for our praying.
 3. *What does verse 12 teach us we should be primarily thankful for?*
 - a. My response: spiritual blessings in Christ Jesus ought to come ahead of everything and anything else in our hearts.
 4. *Is there a balance in praying between what God does and what we should do?*
 - a. My response: yes, and this prayer well illustrates that. He prays that they should walk worthy (v. 10), but talks of God strengthening them (v. 11). Christianity is a walk *with* God, not a walk *w/o* God or done entirely by God.
 5. *What else do we see in this prayer we can duplicate in our praying today?*

II. EPHESIANS 1:15-23

A. Setting

1. This comes after one of the longest sentences in the NT (vv. 3-12), Paul's great description of the scheme of redemption and God's love in Christ.
2. Paul's prayer then becomes one of the greatest thanksgiving prayers in all of Scripture, as he thanks God for all that He has done to save sinful humans.

B. Learning from the prayer:

1. ***Paul is thankful for God's grace***
 - a. An air of thanksgiving permeates all that Paul says.
 - b. The prayer emphasizes what God has done, what Jesus has done and our need to understand that ever better.
2. ***Paul prays they will know God better.***
 - a. We want to build off of what was said in Paul's Colossian prayer. It is essential to know the will of God, to know what God wants us to do.
 - b. But that should lead us to know the Lord Himself.
 - c. Does anyone really know God enough? The more we know of God the more we want to know!



*Lord,
teach us
to pray!*

- d. *Is there a difference in knowing about God and knowing God?*
 - e. *What does Paul say about God right here that we should know?*
 - (1) Father
 - (2) Sender of Jesus the Christ
 3. ***Paul prays they will have wisdom and understanding***
 - a. *“It is growth in wisdom – probably here referring to how to live in God’s universe so as to please Him – and in revelation.”¹⁶*
 4. ***Paul prays they will have the insight to grasp spiritual truth, v. 18***
 - a. He wants them to understand, grasp:
 - (1) The hope of their calling (goal of salvation)
 - (2) Riches of their inheritance (how great heaven is)
 - (3) God’s great power
- C. Applying this prayer and being more like Paul in prayer:
1. *What is the dominant emphasis of this prayer by Paul?*
 - a. My response: Paul is concerned about their spiritual growth as disciples.
 2. *When is the last time you thanked God for the scheme of redemption, all that God has done to save you?*
 3. *When should we pray for our understanding to be enlightened? Does such necessitate a direct operation of the Spirit?*
 - a. My response: good time to discuss praying before Bible study and that the Spirit does not directly operate on anyone’s heart today. Wisdom and understanding come from the Word and the teaching of it. Others can help us gain insight, and even our own meditation can be profitable, but again, the Spirit’s direct intervention is not taught anywhere in the Bible.
 4. *How do you pray about heaven, or do you ever even pray about it?*
 - a. My response: Paul talks about “the riches of our inheritance.” Do we ask God to help us better understand how great heaven will be?
 - b. *What would be the result of us praying like this about heaven?* My response: stronger desire to go there, more strength to fight off sin.
 5. *What would happen spiritually if we prayed to know God’s power better?*

III. CONCLUSION

- A. Paul prays often, and there are many other prayers we could select from in scripture.
 1. Ephesians 3:14-21
 2. Romans 15:30-33
 3. Philippians 1:9-11
 4. 1 Thess. 3:9-13
 5. 2 Thess. 1:1-12
- B. Let’s make it a habit to regularly read through some of Paul’s prayers, evaluate those priorities versus our own priorities in prayer!



INTRODUCTION:

A. *Introduction: Luke 11:1*

1. No one in all of scripture so focuses our attention on prayer like Jesus.
2. He prayed with a power that made the Pharisees' flowery prayers look as weak as they were.
3. He prayed with an intimacy with His Father that we envy.
4. More, He didn't just pray He challenged His disciples to pray and relentlessly taught on prayer being real and authentic.
5. So we've saved the best for last: learning from Jesus about prayer.

B. The study of Christ and prayer will be broken into three parts (three lessons):

1. Jesus praying
2. Jesus teaching on prayer
3. Jesus' prayers

C. Today's goal:

1. We are going to read a ton of verses that show Jesus in prayer.
2. We are reading them to establish a specific point: Jesus prayed *lots*.
3. By reading overwhelming evidence I hope to establish that as Jesus prayed a great deal so we, His followers who seek to be like Him, must pray regularly and often.
4. *Teacher note: the temptation is to skip this section, assume that everyone read it, or knows it. Don't do it! As the huge volume of passages is read gradually an awareness of how seriously Jesus took prayer and how regularly He practiced prayer will come over the class. Don't miss this teaching moment.*

I. **JESUS PRAYING**

A. We want to just see Jesus in prayer. But before doing that we need to ask, "*Can Jesus even be our example?*"¹

1. Some are sure that Jesus' experience is too different from ours to be useful to us and our praying.
2. This is a mistake, over-emphasizing Jesus' deity to the exclusion of His humanity:
3. Hebrews 2:14-18; 4:14-16
4. There may be much that we don't know about God becoming flesh and we should not speculate this, but it is clear that part of Jesus' purposes for coming here was to provide a model for how we are to live.
5. A huge part of the life of Christ is prayer, and that praying must be a model for us today.



*Lord,
teach us
to pray!*

- B. Two keys to Jesus' prayer life:
 - 1. Constant and regular praying - Jesus actual prayed, instead of just talking about praying.
 - 2. Addressed God as Father

II. JESUS PRAYED CONSTANTLY

- A. *Teaching note: this is the main point we want to make in this class. Give this plenty of time to make sure all the reading can be done.*
- B. Jesus prayed at all the important events in His life.²
 - 1. At baptism - Luke 3:21
 - 2. Before choosing the apostles - Luke 6:12-13
 - 3. Transfiguration - Luke 9:29
 - 4. Before Peter's confession - Luke 9:18
 - 5. Garden before the cross - Luke 22:39-46
 - 6. On the cross - Luke 23:34.
- C. Frequency of prayer
 - 1. He prayed in the morning - Mark 1:35-38; Luke 4:42.
 - 2. He prayed at night - Luke 6:12; Matt. 26:36ff.
- D. He prayed in a huge variety of postures:
 - 1. Looking up - Jn. 11:41
 - 2. Kneeling - Luke 22:41
 - 3. Prostrate - Matt. 26:39
- E. He prayed every kind of prayer *except confession*.
 - 1. Praise - Luke 10:21
 - 2. Thanksgiving - John 6:11; 11:41
 - 3. Petition - Luke 22:42
 - 4. Intercession - John 17:6-26
- F. He prayed constantly and on every possible theme:
 - 1. When happy (Luke 10:21) and when sad (John 12:27).
 - 2. When in control (John 11:40-43) when being controlled (the cross, Mk. 15:34).
 - 3. Prayed alone - Luke 5:15; 6:12
 - 4. Prayed with others - Matthew 26:38
 - 5. Prayed before eating - Mark 8:6
 - 6. He prayed before miracles - John 6.11
 - 7. He even prayed for kids - Matt. 19:13
- G. Discussion:
 - 1. *Is there anyone in all of Scripture that better personifies the idea of praying without*



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ceasing?

2. *How does reading all of this impress you?*

III. HE PRAYED TO GOD AS FATHER.

A. Jesus called God "Father"

1. Matthew 11:25-27; 26:39
2. Jesus even used the tender term: "Abba" - Mark 14:36
 - a. It is an Aramaic word. Aramaic was the common language of common people.
 - b. This may have even been offensive to people: "In so doing He applies to God a term which must have sounded familiar and disrespectful to His contemporaries because used in the everyday life of the family. In other words, He uses the simple "speech of the child to its father."³
 - c. Note carefully: it is not disrespectful and is not well translated by our term "daddy." From the New Bible Dictionary: "ABBA: An Aramaic word, in the emphatic state, meaning 'father'. The word passed into Hebrew, and occurs frequently in TB, where it is used by a child to its father and also as a style of address to rabbis. The term conveyed both a sense of warm intimacy **and also filial respect**; but in Jewish circles it has never been a form of address to the Almighty."⁴
 - d. Jesus probably used it more than the one time it is recorded: "As concerns the usage of Jesus, the probability is that He employed the word not merely where it is expressly attested (Mk. 14:36) *but in all cases*, and particularly in address to God...."⁵
3. Amazingly, not only does Jesus address God as "Father" but He demands we do the same: Matthew 6:6; 6:9; John 15:16

B. Let's explore the importance of calling God "Father."

1. Remember, Jews of Jesus' time did not address God in this fashion.
2. The term "Father" is one of relationship, a closeness to God Judaism could not offer.
3. Jesus comes, as God's own Son, to advance the scheme of redemption to where we could be adopted into the family of God and call Him Father.
4. *Think: how different would be your conception of God if Jesus had not come and addressed God as Father? How does this make a difference in our praying?*
 - a. My response: It is one thing to address the King as "Lord" or "Mighty King" but it is something else entirely to call Him "Father."
 - b. Romans 8:15; Galatians 4:6

IV. CONCLUSION

- A. With this much experience *in* prayer Jesus is certainly qualified to teach *about* prayer.
- B. That will be our focus in the next lesson. We will examine what Jesus directly tells us about how to pray and how not to pray.



INTRODUCTION:

A. *Introduction: John 1:18*

1. Who could better instruct in prayer than Jesus the Christ?
2. Jesus has seen and talked with the Father *personally*.
3. That is the very essence of prayer: a conversation with the Father.
4. Jesus has had personal conversations with the Father and when He came here continued to converse with the Father and then invites us to do the same!

B. In this lesson we want to hear Jesus' teaching on prayer.

1. Can't look at everything (too much!) and we'll save what may be Jesus' ultimate teaching, the model prayer or Lord's Prayer for the next lesson.
2. Today we want to just listen to what Jesus says *about* praying and learn to fit that into our praying.

I. **JESUS TEACHES ON PRAYER IN THE SERMON ON THE MOUNT**

A. **Matthew 5:44**

1. This is radical teaching! *How often do you pray for your enemies?*
2. *What would be the effect on many bad relationships if we practiced what Jesus says here?*
3. *What application can we make of this to our praying (other than the obvious "we ought to pray for our enemies")?*
 - a. Prayer needs to have a larger focus than just me and my loved ones.
 - b. Vengeance is completely out. Instead of seeking revenge I will pray!

B. **Matthew 6:5-8** - many key applications to prayer

1. Catch the sense of verse 5: "when you pray" assumes regular praying.
2. There is no special language of prayer that we must learn so that our prayers will be long and sound impressive.
3. God doesn't appreciate being used. Praying to impress others does just that – it uses the Lord and talking to Him for our own ends.
4. *Verse 8 is very challenging. Why do we pray if God knows what we already need?*
 - a. This ought to be reassuring in some ways.
 - (1) We don't have to get God's attention through showiness or repetition, and now Jesus encourages us more by saying we can't surprise God.
 - (2) Further, it is clear we cannot surprise God by what we say to Him.
 - b. More than that, however, it seems that this "Why pray if He knows what I need?" reduces prayer to a mechanism to get. That's not the right motivation to pray. We pray because we want to know God, be in relationship with Him and because He commands it!



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- C. **Matt 7:7-11** - key application here is the need to be unafraid to talk to God like a child to his/her father. If you need something, ask!
- D. **Matthew 21:21-22** - faith to move mountains, ask and receive
1. The setting here is the withering of the fig tree, vv. 18-20.
 - a. This makes the context the power of prayer
 - b. Also it needs to be connected to the judgment of the Jewish nation (the fig tree promised figs but had none, as the Jews had showed signs they would be God's people but failed).
 2. Yet we wonder about all of this (and who has pitched a mountain in the ocean recently?).
 3. Best answer: it means what it says but it should be taken as large language in which Jesus is just dramatically saying "Prayer has great power, and through it, one can do the difficult if one has faith."
 - a. Matthew 5:29 is language like this. It has a point but shouldn't be pressed too far. Likewise here.
 - b. Note Paul's use of the expression: 1 Corinthians 13:2
 - c. It is clearly a figure of speech. It is not to be taken as a literal statement, any more than when you say "I'm so hungry I could eat a horse" you really could, or "I'm so mad I could spit nails" — do you?
 4. We also don't want to make this into a verse about the quantity of faith. See Matthew 17:20. It's not about how much faith we have, but the quality of our faith and the greatness of the God we believe in.
 5. *Now, what applications can we make to our prayer life of this verse?*
 - a. My response: ***Am I willing to take my problems and difficulties to God in prayer?***
 - b. We are so self-sufficient and self-reliant that soon our religion can become self-centered.
 - c. We see that all the time — Christianity reduced to little more than a self-help program.
 - d. That's what the apostles had in Matt. 17: "Why can't we cast him out."
 - e. We are doing this, on our own, on our own strength, in our power — and we're failing miserably.
 - f. That's humbling. It's hard to say what the apostles had to admit: we failed. Am I willing to do that in prayer? To say to God "I can't do this on my own I need your help?"

II. TEACHING IN LUKE - A PARABLE ON PRAYER

- A. **The Parable of the Pharisee and publican, 18:9-14**
1. The story is a massive story of reversal. The story would be very shocking to the audience.
 2. V. 11 - this prayer is not unnatural at this time in Jewish-Gentile relations:



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- a. Morris records this prayer from Rabbi Nehunia: "I give thanks to Thee, O Lord my God, that Thou hast set my portion with those who sit in the Beth ha-Midrash (house of learning) and Thou has not set my portion with those who sit in (street) corners, for I rise early and they rise early, but I rise early for words of Torah and they rise early for frivolous talk; I labor and they labor, but I labor and receive a reward and they labor and do not receive a reward; I run and they run, but I run to the life of the future world and they run to the pit of destruction."¹
- b. There is a standard prayer in which pious Jews thank God for not being a slave, a Gentile or a woman.²
- c. Notice his absolute lack of notice of God, understanding of sin, or need of anything from anyone.
- d. His righteousness drives him away from others, not to have a heart of compassion for them. "If grace does not lead to grace, it turns out not to have been grace at all."³
3. V. 13 - "be merciful" is "be propitiated" or "let thine anger be removed."⁴
4. Have to be very careful that we don't vilify the Pharisee to the point where he is the villain and the tax collector the hero. Then everyone gets what they deserve, ruins the story. Let us not leave this story saying "God, I thank Thee that I am not like the Pharisee."⁵
5. *What does this story say to our praying?*
 - a. *Can the expression "bless those who have never heard Thy Gospel" become self-righteous?*
 - b. *Do we confess enough in prayer?*
 - c. *Is prayer dangerous?* My response: yes, if done wrong it can wreck their than build your relationship with the Lord. Like taking a fake cure for a sickness one assumes all is well when the reality is that one is farther from God than ever.
6. Giant key here: with God the attitude of heart matters when we come to talk to Him in prayer!

III. TEACHING IN JOHN:

A. John 14:12-14

1. Phrase "in my name" should not be seen as a magical charm.
2. It is both a "guarantee and a limitation for He would grant only such petitions as could be presented consistently with His character and purpose."⁶
3. This needs to be connected to v. 12 - praying to do God's work, not our own whims and fancies.
4. Notice also the connection to v. 15 - asking and keeping commandments appear together here.



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B. John 15:1-16 - the vine and the branches

1. Setup
 - a. Key here is the idea of remaining or abide. Word "abide" is used ten times!
 - b. Two things changed here:
 - (1) Israel isn't the vine any more — Jesus is.
 - (2) Not servants any more — now friends (see v. 15).
 - c. Vv. 9-16 serve as commentary on the entire text. With only those verses our relationship with Jesus might be very mechanical (all obedience). The vine image fills in with the ideas of fruitfulness, dependence, pruning.⁷
2. The metaphor, v. 1-8
 - a. V. 1c - as in Psalm 80 God is the vineyard owner/keeper.
 - b. V. 2a - "in Me" - to be part of God's people you must be rightly related to Jesus. The image suggests incorporation, mutual indwelling.⁸ The branches derive their life through the vine, the vine uses them to produce fruit.
 - c. V. 2b God's role is twofold:
 - (1) Prunes branches to make them more fruitful
 - (a) What a challenge this is to us!
 - (b) *Could we lose things providentially and not recognize God's pruning hand?*
 - (c) Application to prayer: ever pray for pruning?
 - (2) Cuts off deadwood - those who are faithless are cut off. Speaks clearly to the possibility of apostasy.
 - d. V. 3 - they have heard the word and it cleanses them. See the emphasis again on the Word, the commandments of Jesus. "The means by which pruning or cleaning is done is the Word of God. It condemns sin; it inspired holiness; it promotes growth."⁹
 - e. V. 4 - this can be "If you remain in me, I will remain in you" (NIV) or as the NKJV has it. The conditional may have a slight edge.
 - f. V. 5 - what kind of fruit is envisaged here?
 - (1) Most make it new converts (but if branches are to duplicate in evangelism it would say make more branches).
 - (2) Fruit here is the consequence of praying in Jesus' name and to God's glory (vv. 7,8, 16).
 - (3) Fruit here is just the life of a Christian, produce in result from being in Jesus.
 - g. V. 7 - fruit is mentioned again in v. 8 so the image goes on.
 - (1) Here prayer is conditioned upon abiding, and the word being in us.
 - (2) The word will shape our desires. "If you remain in me" is explained in vv. 9ff as obeying.
 - h. V. 8 - a failure to honor Christ fails to honor God.
 - i. Summary on discipleship and fruit bearing. It involves:
 - (1) Have to abide in Christ, v. 5.
 - (2) Abiding in His Word, v. 7.



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- (3) Prayer, v. 7b
 - (4) Abiding in His love - loving obedience, vv. 9-10
3. Unpacking the metaphor, vv. 9-16
- a. Watch for more “remain” and “abide” language.
 - b. V. 9 - the cross completes Jesus’ love.
 - c. V. 10 - the way we remain in Jesus’ love is the same as the way He remains in the Father’s love: obedience (8:29). Over and over Jesus has said: 4:34; 5:19; 6:38; 8:29, 55; 10:17-18; 12:27-28; 14:31.¹⁰
 - d. V. 11 - obedience brings joy.
 - e. V. 12 - love for God and Jesus is presupposed here.
 - f. V. 13 - Note 1 Jn. 3:16. Jesus dies for all, but in a sense, He dies only for His friends.
 - g. V. 14 - God nor Jesus are ever referred to in scripture as being the friend of anyone. Abraham and Moses are called the friend of God (2 Chr. 20:7; Ex. 33:11) and Lazarus is Jesus’ friend (Jn. 11:11).
 - h. In the O.T. being a friend of God was connected with revelation, knowing God’s plans. So it is here.
 - i. V. 16 - don’t get puffed up here. Here fruit bearing may be evangelism.
4. *Application to prayer from John 15:1-16*
- a. Prayer is about friendship with the Lord Jesus, a relationship Jesus calls “abiding.”
 - (1) Abide in Jesus, He abides in us, vv. 4, 5
 - (2) Abide in Jesus and have Word in us, then ask, v. 7
 - (3) Abide in love is the same as abide in commandments, v. 9
 - (4) Keeping commandments equals friendship, v. 14
 - b. If Jesus’ words abide in us then what we pray for is shaped by the Word.
 - (1) This may be the most important verse on prayer because it does away with the idea that asking “in Jesus’ name” gives us carte blanche.
 - (2) When we ask of God we must check if the Word is abiding in us.
 - (3) So many times we pray whatever we want to and then toss in that caveat “if it be Thy will” to give God an out if what we ask for isn’t given. Someone presses us about our praying we say “Wasn’t God’s will.”
 - (4) But has anyone stopped to think about “why are we asking for things that aren’t God’s will? Why is God having to say no so much?” Is the Word abiding in my heart changing how I pray?
 - (5) If I am an instrument in God’s hands, my purpose is to glorify God and to do His will then I need to be looking for these passages that I might find out what is God’s will so I can then pray “God use me to do your will.” That’s a powerful prayer, isn’t it? It is not self-centered, or self-interested. It isn’t the kind of prayer God will say “No” to.
 - (6) Praying in the will of God is the best praying you can do.



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C. **John 16:23-27**

1. vv. 23ff - taught to pray through Christ (cf. 1 John 5).
2. V. 26 - praying through Jesus doesn't mean they are dis- tanced from the Father, but that this is the way to the Father.

IV. **CONCLUSION:**

- A. Jesus' teaching on prayer alone challenges us.
- B. In our next lesson we will get Jesus' greatest teaching on prayer: the Lord's Prayer!



Lesson 13

Jesus Tells us How to Pray - the Lord's Prayer

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INTRODUCTION:

- A. *Introduction*: what would we pay for a class with Jesus in which He directly instructed us in how to pray?
- B. You don't have to pay - the Bible records that class for us.
 - 1. We call it the Lord's Prayer but really it is the Disciple's Prayer because He gives it to us.
 - 2. It a masterpiece of praying and a fitting ending to our class and study on prayer.

II. THE LORD'S PRAYER

- A. Beginning observations to guide us as we study the prayer:
 - 1. It was not meant to be recited mechanically and mindlessly.
 - a. Jesus opposes all such prayer - in this very passage (6:1ff)
 - b. "There is no magic in repeating it, but there is power in understanding it."¹
 - 2. Here is how to pray, with an emphasis more on *how* to say things than *what* to say.
 - 3. Notice that prayer can be learned, not just spontaneous pouring out of feeling.
 - 4. Prayer as given by and practiced by Jesus is very simple and direct.
- B. Textual analysis: Matthew 6:9-13
 - 1. V. 9b - *Our Father* - begins with personal address, and it is the tender role of Father, not dictator, or even king.
 - 2. Note on Jesus saying Father:
 - a. The Fatherhood of God does not dominate O.T. theology or thinking.
 - b. Usually done as an analogy - Psalm 103:13 but see Isa. 63:16.
 - c. But Jesus characteristically addresses God as Father, w/o hesitation or pause, and taught His disciples to do the same. It would be incredible to opponents, delightful to disciples.
 - d. Interestingly, when Jesus talks of sins being forgiven it is *your* Father, but when He speaks of son ship and authority it is *My* Father.
 - 3. V. 9c - *In the heavens* - says something about power.
 - a. We might do well to think of this more as truth about God rather than protocol on addressing God.
 - b. We'd do well to think about what prayer is before we just start praying.
 - 4. V. 9d - *name* - God's name is a reflection of all He is. The prayer is not that God would become holy (hallowed) but that He may be treated as holy.
 - a. Name stands for character, who a person is.
 - b. Request for people to honor God in action and word.²
 - c. "It is a prayer that God shall be God, that man shall not whittle God down to a manageable size and shape."³
 - 5. V. 10 - "your kingdom come" - in a sense God has always been king, but now in a special way, God's rule in men's hearts was breaking in.
 - a. Can we pray this today?



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- b. Certainly. Kingdom just doesn't always mean the church, and that may be a very limiting way of viewing church (see Luke 17:21).
 - c. Wouldn't want to mislead anyone, it could cause problems, but I can pray that more people will submit to God's rule.
 - d. Note the parallelism - that's what "your kingdom means," i.e., "your will be done."
 6. This prayer is busting us out of self-centeredness (my name), self-promotion (my kingdom), selfishness (my will).
 7. V. 11 - now time to express dependence.
 - a. Sadly many have tried to spiritualize this bread - no need for that.
 - b. This is the necessities of life, enough for today, right now.
 - c. "Daily" is tough to translate but is best rendered as "enough for today" with an emphasis on immediately.⁴
 - d. Remember, God giving food doesn't diminish my responsibility (see the birds in 6:25ff).
 8. V. 12 - these are all linked by "ands."
 9. V. 12a - sin is a debt because it deserves to be punished.
 10. V. 13 - *do not lead* - this is difficult. God is never tempted of evil, would never do so.
 - a. It may mean be related to the testing and chastening God does, or it may just mean "don't let us be led into a temptation that would overwhelm us."
 - b. Carson has "let us not be brought into temptation by the devil."⁵
 - c. Have to be careful about testing because the result of testing might be strengthening or sin!
 11. V. 13b - doxology is not in the better MSS, though it is beautiful.
 12. Summary on prayer:
 - a. The error of the hypocrite is selfishness - thinking of what he can get.
 - b. The error of the heathen is mindlessness - vain repetition.
 - c. This prayer defeats both!
- C. Thoughts on prayer from the Lord's Prayer:
1. Interesting to note what is *not* in this set of instructions about prayer:
 - a. Nothing about using a certain kind of flowery, religious sounding language or voice.
 - b. Nothing that demands we pray out loud.
 - c. Nothing about posture, position.
 - d. Nothing that says you have to prepare to pray by doing certain things (fasting, confessing, etc.).
 2. Breakdown of the Prayer:
 - a. Father - spiritual relationship
 - b. Hallowed . . . name - spiritual need: people treat God as God.
 - c. Kingdom come - spiritual need: rule and reign of God established.
 - d. Daily bread - physical need.
 - e. Forgiveness - spiritual need.
 - f. Deliver us - spiritual need.
 3. *What does that tell us about where our emphasis should be in praying?*
 - a. My response: see the emphasis on God's priorities first - Your name, Your kingdom, Your will; then comes us - give us, forgive us, deliver us.



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4. *Look at how Jesus begins and ends in praise. Do we pray like that?*
5. *How does this prayer change our lives?*
 - a. We must ask "Am I hallowing God's name?"
 - b. We are confronted with questions about our level of contentment and whether we enjoy or turn from temptation.
 - c. *If we prayed for God's priorities more and our own priorities less how would that change us?*
6. *How would our lives be different if we truly just had enough for the day, as the Israelites in the wilderness with manna had?*
7. *Why is our forgiveness contingent on being willing to forgive others?*
8. Two keys to remember from the Lord's prayer:
 - a. **What does God want to do?** God does not want to do everything I want to do, or think He should do.
 - b. **What do we really need?**

III. CONCLUSION

- A. This class in prayer has been a blessing to me.
- B. Hope you will continue to watch people pray in the Scripture and learn from them. May all our praying be more acceptable to the Lord as a result!



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teach us
to pray!*

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pray!**

Enhancing Prayer through Bible Study
Mark Roberts

