

## **The Fellowship Files (11) – Prayer & the Christian**

The subject of prayer is so vast that much of what we could discuss is beyond the scope of this chapter. Prayer is vital, and it can yield a rich dimension to our spirituality and daily lives in a way nothing else can. Don't be overwhelmed by the subject of prayer, rather, consider it an inexhaustible treasure.

**What is prayer?** Prayer is the pouring out of our heart to God. Prayers should be sincere and fervent, regular and reverent. Prayers are to be made through Christ, in the strength and assistance of the Holy Spirit, for things that God has promised according to the Word, for salvation, deliverance, strengthening, comfort and success, for the good of our souls, our families, the church, and for others, in the will of the Lord, with submission, and in faith.

**What is the correct posture for prayer?** Bodily posture is secondary to the attitude of the heart. That being said, the Scriptures teach an attitude of worshipful reverence for God, and your position and posture may be evidence of that. People prayed on their knees (2 Chronicles 6:13 / Daniel 6:10 / Acts 9:40, 21:5), bowing (Exodus 4:31 / Psalm 95:6 / Ephesians 3:14-19), on their faces before God (2 Chronicles 20:18 / Matthew 26:39), and standing (1 Kings 8:22 / Mark 11:25). You may pray with your eyes opened (Psalm 123:1 / John 11:41) or closed (Psalm 35:13 / Luke 18:13), alone (1 Samuel 8:6 / Mark 1:34), or in a group (Nehemiah 4:8-9 / Acts 13:3, 20:36), silently (1 Samuel 1:12-16 / Luke 9:18) or out loud (2 Chronicles 20:5-12 / John 17:1), in private (2 Kings 4:33 / Matthew 14:23), and in public (1 Kings 8:22-61 / Ezra 9:5-10:1 / Acts 1:24-25, 4:24-31). It depends on the situation (Jonah 2:1).

**How often and when should we pray?** 1 Thessalonians 5:17 – it is God's will for us to be consistent in prayer, setting up various times and seasons for diligent prayer, and constantly in an atmosphere of prayer. This does not mean praying every moment, but having a prayerful attitude. It is to pray earnestly and to be ready at any moment to launch into prayer (Nehemiah 2:4 / Luke 18:1 / Romans 12:12 / Colossians 4:2-5 / James 5:17 / 1 Peter 4:7).

**The "A-C-T-S" of prayer** – Many have found this acronym helpful in understanding prayer. These letters stand for Adoration, Confession, Thanksgiving, and Supplication.

Adoration is prayer as an expression of praise; we adore God for who He is (Psalm 104:1-2 / Acts 4:24 / Revelation 6:10).

Confession is prayer as an expression of agreement; we agree with God as it concerns sin, personally, and corporately, against God, and against people (Ezra 9:5-6 / Nehemiah 1:4-11 / Psalm 51:4 / Daniel 9:4 / Luke 18:13 / 1 John 1:8-9).

Thanksgiving is prayer as an expression of gratitude; we thank God for what He has done and will do for us and others (2 Chronicles 7:3 / Psalm 118:21 / John 11:41 / 1 Corinthians 1:4).

Supplication is prayer as an expression of need; we ask God to meet our need, and sometimes our felt need is an indication of what God wants to do (Psalm 55:1 / Philippians 4:6).

The sovereignty of God and prayer – we covered this in chapter 10. Prayer is God’s decreed means to accomplish His purposes. God is sovereign, yet we are responsible. The Bible urges us to pray; by doing what He has prescribed, we demonstrate our love and trust in Him. Just as we must go and preach the Gospel because God has a plan, that plan also includes our praying.

Praying “in Jesus name” – we covered this in chapter 8. We are to pray to the Father in the name of the Son (John 16:23 / Colossians 3:17 / Hebrews 4:14-16). This is not some magical incantation; it is representative of our being under His authority. We must pray consistent with His character and His will, which is what “in His name” means.

**We all need to pray for others, and to have others pray for us** – Romans 1:9-10, 10:1, 15:30-33 / 2 Corinthians 1:11, 13:7 / Ephesians 6:18-20 / Colossians 4:2-4, 12 / 1 Thessalonians 5:25 / Hebrews 13:18-21 / James 5:13-20.

Consider the prayers that Paul prayed for other believers (Ephesians 1:16-19, 3:14-19 / Philippians 1:9-11 / Colossians 1:9-12 / 1 Thessalonians 3:9-13 / 2 Thessalonians 1:11-12). Paul wouldn’t pray for change if it wasn’t possible. True Christian fellowship includes mercy and grace and a forgiving spirit to those who are struggling, spiritually, mentally, physically, emotionally, or financially, whatever. We know God is on the move in our lives. Just because you haven’t changed all the way doesn’t mean that you aren’t changed and that doesn’t mean you aren’t changing. God grants us the privilege and joy of being the instrument of His power in prayer. God has appointed prayer as the means by which we all have a role in His saving purposes, which is greater than any greatness the earth has to offer. You just have to see things the way God does. He allows us to pray in and through to the victory He assures.

- Intercessory prayer – Exodus 32:11-13 / 1 Samuel 7:8-9 / Daniel 9:4-17
- Jesus is our intercessor – John 17 / Romans 8:34 / Hebrews 7:25
- 1 Samuel 12:23 – we are still to pray for those who disappoint us
- 2 Samuel 7:27 – knowing God’s will is an encouragement to prayer
- Psalm 10:17 – humility is essential to prayer
- Jeremiah 29:7-14 – we pray with our whole heart when our heart has been crushed
- Acts 6:4 – one of the minister’s main duties
- 1 Timothy 5:5 – the praying widow is a real asset to the church

**What is the correct procedure for prayer?** Matthew 6:5-15 – Jesus addresses two of the great problems we encounter in prayer. In vs.5-6, He speaks about being hypocritical and in vs.7-8, about being superstitious. Then He gives us a pattern for prayer, and we must avoid taking this pattern and using it in a hypocritical or superstitious way. The verses point to the frame, not that we should repeat the verses. Jesus is providing us with a framework for prayer with an understanding of Providence.

We are to (1) thank Him for what we have before you ask Him for what we need (vs.9-11), (2) tell Him what we have done wrong before we ask Him to make it right (vs.12-13), and (3) praise Him for who He is no matter what He does (vs.13 (KJV), vs.9-10).

God already knows what you need; what He wants is to hear how much you appreciate what He has already done. God wants you to live in view of the fact that He does know all about you, more than we know about ourselves. Realizing we are open to God helps us to live a more holy life. Our prayers should have praise in them. We cannot glorify God in the world until we have first glorified Him in our hearts.

In vs.14-15 we see that unforgiveness messes up your prayer life (recall chapter 6). Yet we must also realize that this is a generic statement; it is about holding something against someone right now or just being a generally unforgiving person, this is what causes us to be hypocritical. It would be superstitious to think we need to search out all of our past unforgiveness or God won't answer our prayers. That would go against what we know about God's forgiveness. We should not be hypocritical or superstitious. We are not trying to find prayers that "work" we are praying to God because He IS God and through Christ He has done the most important work.

**What is the proper perspective for prayer?** Luke 11:5-13 – Jesus teaches about being passionate in prayer. We are to plead in prayer (vs.5-7), persist in prayer (vs.8-10), and prevail in prayer (vs.11-13). God isn't like the sleeping man, that is the point Jesus is making, if the man who slept would act, how much more so will God be stirred by our prayers. We are to keep on asking, seeking, knocking, in a sense it is a progression, don't just ask, but seek and knock, keep bringing it up, keep looking for it to happen, keep causing a stir. We can prevail in prayer because the Father will indeed answer all our prayers, not according to our desires but according to His goodness. He gives us not what we want, but what we need. He will answer our prayer as if we prayed it knowing what He knows. His goodness gives us a "no" sometimes. He knows better than us and helps us out by giving us what we really need even if we don't think so.

God always answers our prayers, and that doesn't mean we will have it easy, but it does mean that God will pour out the promised blessing of Abraham to us, the Holy Spirit. Galatians 3:14 tells us that through Christ the blessing promised to Abraham would come to us, which was and is justification and now also the Holy Spirit, who gives us grace and peace. The Spirit will be with us in prayer, the presence of God abiding in us, with us, and to us, and upon us, and through us, we are in communion with God Almighty.

Isn't that marvelous, and when we are practicing prayer, being consistent in it and expecting Him to be with us, we will learn to pray and stop the cliché. We won't have to be superstitious or hypocritical. We won't have to learn the language of others in prayer we will have a conversation with God ourselves. This is the priesthood of all believers, according to the pattern of the Bible but in personal practice with the presence of God. Through the ups and downs and everything in between He is the one thing that makes everything worth it in the end, and prayer is our window into that reality in an everyday type of practice. We stop praying because we don't think it is working, but it is working, it is working on us.

**Fruitfulness in prayer** John 15:7-8, 16:23-24, 14:13-14 – The prayer God always answers is the prayer for fruitfulness. Fruitfulness is what gives Him glory. We don't always know the specifics of it, how it will happen, only that it will indeed happen. We don't know the substance of it beyond that it will be fruitful, but we do see some of what fruitfulness looks like in these verses and in the New Testament prayers of Paul for fruitfulness.

1 John 5:14-15 defines this even more for us, this asking anything in His name. Here we see that in His name means in His will and He gives us some specifics that are His will, and these are the things He is saying we can pray for and He will give us. It involves such intimate union and harmony with Christ that nothing will be asked out of accord with His will. 1 John also gives us more details about fruitfulness, the true tests of faith, and we can pray to God to make us more fruitful in these areas. It is His will that we have an assurance of our faith (1 John 5:13) so we pray for subjective assurance, the Holy Spirit bearing witness to our souls, but it also works itself out as John describes in this epistle, make no mistake about that.

If we are abiding in His word – obedience is what Jesus is speaking of when He says if my words abide in you. If you are doing His will, then you are going to be asking His will. If you are bearing fruit it means your prayers will be fruitful. This isn't prayer for blessing in the sense most think about it, it is indeed a blessing to be fruitful but it isn't some cafeteria plan. We don't get to define that, the time, the place, the type, or the person.

When we are asking for fruitfulness we are telling Him we trust Him, to prune us, to use us, and we are asking Him to take over and do what He will for His glory. We may be surprised at what true fruitfulness entails. Fruitfulness is what gives God glory and giving God glory is our first priority (1 Corinthians 10:31). Fruitfulness may be in that area you are hiding or hindering, and sometimes before you will see fruit in your other prayers you will have to yield in that area.

Habakkuk 3:17-19 – Fruitful prayer doesn't mean everything goes the way you want it to; it is all about perspective. Even when our normal measures tell us we are failing, we still have reason to rejoice, and joy is a fruit of the Spirit (Galatians 5:22).

### **What can hinder our prayers?**

- Deuteronomy 1:42-45 – disobedience
- Zechariah 7:13 – stubbornness
- Psalm 66:18 – we are cherishing sin in our hearts
- Proverbs 1:28 – indifference to wise counsel
- Proverbs 21:13 – neglect of the needy
- Proverbs 28:9 – we are not abiding in the Word
- Isaiah 1:15 – going through the motions, but not doing righteousness
- Isaiah 59:1-2 – we do not confess our sin
- Micah 3:4 – we are committing sin against God's people
- Matthew 6:14-15 – known unforgiveness (recall chapter 6)
- Matthew 7:7-11 – we give up (cf. Mark 4:26-29)
- James 1:5-8 – we don't trust God
- James 4:2-3 – we don't ask, or we ask selfishly
- 1 Peter 3:7 – we fail to be unified with our wife
- 1 Peter 3:9-12 – we are seeking revenge

**Corporate prayer** – two or more children of God in prayer at the same time. When one person is verbalizing the prayer we call it “leading in prayer.” If more than one person is verbalizing the prayer, we call it “praying in unison.” If all are praying the same prayer in mind and spirit then we are experiencing true “corporate prayer.” Corporate prayer is not just several people in the

same room taking turns praying, but each one experiencing union of soul with the one leading and all becoming one in communion with God, the result of the work of the Spirit.

Acts 1:14, 2:42, 14:21-23 – prayer is a fundamental part of a believer’s life, and the life of the church. The church is to be a house of prayer (Mark 11:17 – Isaiah 56:7 / Jeremiah 7:11). It is very useful for Christians to pray with each other. It generates devotion, and in united prayer God may manifest Himself in extraordinary ways and with and peculiar blessings (Acts 12:5-17).

Our local church sets aside a special time for prayer each week, during the Sunday morning service. While some people continue to sing worship songs to the Lord, others will come to be prayed for and also to pray with people for other needs. There are other times when we will pray as a church together. We also participate in what we call the “Pool of Prayer”, where people fill out a very small prayer form (three requests). Those requests are put into a “pool” and people take another person’s prayer form, one in and one out. What happens is that we have people praying specifically for each other, without an overwhelming number of people or requests to take care of. The requests and the people praying for them can change every week without having to try and maintain some big list. And over the course of time, everyone winds up praying for everyone else. It is an excellent way to stoke interest and involvement in prayer.

1 Timothy 2:1-8 – corporate prayer is to include saints and sinners alike. “Supplications” expresses inadequacy, an inability to meet one’s own needs, and total dependence on another. Some have no hope, we pray for them to find it in God. “Prayers” are for general needs; we pray that it will go well for the government that it may go well for us. “Intercessions” means we identify with the needs of the one for whom we pray. “Thanksgivings” are prayers to God thanking Him that others’ success has been helpful to us. All types of people are to be prayed for; even kings are included because some of them will be saved also.

Imprecatory prayers – we covered this in chapter 8. In the Bible an imprecatory prayer is the prayer of a righteous man petitioning God to carry out justice by bringing punishment or destruction upon evildoers, and to let God’s righteousness prevail in a situation, especially upon governments gone bad, totalitarian regimes, human rights violators, etc.

**The pastor, the people, and prayer (2 Thessalonians 3:1-5)** – Paul had a burning desire for people to become all God wanted them to be. He told them to pray for the success of the message, for open doors and open hearts (vs.1). He wanted others to grow in the Word as they had (vs.3-5). He believed in them because they believed in God. He also told them to pray for the safety of the messengers (vs.2). We are to pray for the Word of God to be spreading rapidly and triumphing in peoples’ lives (cf. Matthew 9:35-38). Prayer is the pipeline for God’s power.

Paul was Paul, but Paul needed prayer, asked for it constantly, and consistently. Even a new Christian can do much to advance the kingdom of God by praying for the word of God to be spreading fast and to be glorified everywhere, with the preachers, ministries and peoples of this church, within this community, and with the missionaries we support. Paul wanted them to be used by God (vs.1-2), be deepened in God (vs.3), delivered by God (vs.3), devoted to God (vs.4), and directed to God – both knowing the love of God and the steadfastness of Christ, and also

becoming a reflection of them back to God and to others (vs.5). This is the vision for the local church and its members, and prayer can accomplish all this.

**Praying in the Spirit** – Some say that Romans 8:26 is referring to our “private prayer language” of tongues. However, this is something the Holy Spirit does for us that is inexpressible, but supposed “prayer tongues” are uttered. Let’s look at the context.

Vs.19-22 – creation “groans”: The Fall of Man affected everything; the cosmos has also suffered the calamity of corruption (cf. Genesis 3:17-18 / Isaiah 24:5-6, 34:4). Creation is personified as waiting for a future time of fulfillment (cf. Isaiah 35:1, 65:17 / Acts 3:21 / Revelation 21:1).

Vs.23-25 – believers “groan”: We are disturbed by the effects of sin on ourselves, on others, and on the world itself. Our hearts long for the coming Kingdom, and our glorified bodies (cf. 2 Peter 3:13 / 1 Corinthians 15:54 / 2 Corinthians 5:4 / Philippians 3:20-21).

Vs.26-27 – the Spirit “groans”: Creation is not audibly groaning and neither are we. Our prayers are limited by our sin, weakness, lack of knowledge, and suffering (vs.14-18). But the Spirit makes intercession for us towards God’s will (cf. Luke 11:13 / Hebrews 7:25).

Romans 8:26 isn’t referring to tongues; what is praying in the Spirit (Ephesians 6:18 / Jude 20)?

The proper way to understand this phrase is: “pray in the Spirit” as opposed to “pray in the flesh”, akin to being “led by the Spirit” or “walking in the Spirit” instead of in the flesh, etc. In other words, what is really behind our prayers? The Greek translated “pray in” can have several different meanings. It can mean “by means of,” “with the help of,” “in the sphere of,” and “in connection to.” Praying in the Spirit means praying in accordance with God’s will as the Holy Spirit reveals it to us through Scripture (1 John 5:14-15).

Ephesians 6:18 says we are to pray at all times (seasons) in the Spirit with all our prayers. Obviously this cannot refer to tongues only; otherwise we are being told that all our prayers should be in tongues. At most, praying in tongues could only be one manifestation of praying “in the Spirit”. We also see that “mysteries” are things revealed (Ephesians 3:3-6, 6:19 / 1 Corinthians 15:51 / Colossians 4:3).

As for Jude 20, a look at the context shows us that Jude is making a contrast between people who are not saved (vs.19 – without the Spirit) and those who are (vs. 20 – with the Spirit). The main clause in vs.20-21, “*keep yourselves in the love of God*”, is modified by the participles “building”, “praying”, and “waiting”. It is three things to do, not that we build specifically by praying. Also, even if it were building yourselves up in your most holy faith “by” praying in the Spirit, it cannot mean tongues, because it is not about mysteries (1 Corinthians 14:2) but about what Jude has already described, the faith once for all delivered to the saints (vs.3), not some new revelation (vs.8-10, cf. Colossians 2:18).

Christians keep themselves with God’s love by knowledge (*building yourselves up in your most holy faith*), prayer (**and praying in the Holy Spirit**), and anticipation (*waiting for the mercy of our*

*Lord Jesus Christ that leads to eternal life*). We are to be actively persevering, while God is actively preserving (vs.1-2, 24-25). We keep with it and He is keeping us (cf. 1 Peter 1:3-5).

**Profound Prayer Made Simple (Proverbs 30:7-9)** – here we have the template for a prayer that can be prayed by you for you, prayed by you for others, and taught by you to others. First we will look at the context of the prayer (vs.1-6), and then the content of the prayer (vs.7-9). Finally we will crystallize the prayer, taking these simple truths and making them profound tools.

**Worshipful Approach (vs.1-6)** –

- He shows **humility** by using hyperbole. His outward posture reflects an inner attitude, a high view of God and a humbling opinion of self.
- His **reverence** demonstrates the fear of God. It is not so much terror as it is wonder and awe. Humility focuses inward on our finiteness and sinfulness in the light of His infinity and perfection. Reverence focuses outward upon the awesome majesty of God.
- He gives an experiential **proclamation**. We are not just spectators watching what God has done and what He is doing; we are participants in the divine drama. Vs.5-6 – He trusts the sincerity of God, the security of God, and the sufficiency of God.

**Wise Appeal (vs.7-9)** – He prays – although God already knows what we need (Matthew 6:8, 32-33) He does want us to ask Him for our needs (James 4:2). Two things I ask before I die; this is what I want for the rest of my life. This petition seems to be so simple, but so much is wrapped up in this, because the two main areas of all our needs are covered in this model prayer.

**Spiritual needs (vs.8a)** – Purify my passions. Falsehood, vanity, not real, a bursting bubble, idolatry (1 John 2:15-17); an empty lifestyle and an attitude that thinks we are wiser than God. Between now and when I die, remove from me this vanity, the things I put before God, the idols, the lies of the world, the flesh, and the devil. This would include the lies that come to us that we are tempted to believe, and the lies that come from us when we attempt to deceive. Don't let me be deceived or deceive others. He is asking for **grace** – keep me true and keep my tongue.

**Physical needs (vs.8b-9)** – Portion my provisions. Maturity understands moderation. God knows better than we do. The wise man knows that overabundance can lead to overindulgence. We can't handle it all at once (the prodigal son, lottery winners), that is why we have to ask for our daily bread. But we also have a hard time handling it when we are desperate. He knows that a lack of money can lead to a lack of morals. He is not trying to justify bad behavior or make excuses. He is asking for **mercy** – not so much stuff it spoils me, and not so little it starves me.

This is not a formula but a framework. We can apply this simple yet profound petition, for grace and mercy, with its two areas of spiritual and physical needs, with its worshipful approach and wise appeal, to any and every personal prayer request we ever utter. Even children can simply pray, “**Father give me grace and mercy for my spiritual and physical needs**” and pray this prayer for others as well. Then as you grow in the knowledge of God, and encounter new situations, you can still use this framework but build an increasingly and incredibly focused, fruitful, and faithful prayer life. You can get specific but still stay simple. God will answer this prayer because it is His will (1 John 5:14-15), and because every word of God proves true. That is the simple yet profound truth about prayer.