



PRAYER BASICS

Discover what Scripture reveals about God's desire for prayer and why prayer matters. Learn practical strategies for how to pray and identify some action steps for practicing them.

James Banks, DMin



Artos Academy is a division of Our Daily Bread Ministries
Grand Rapids, Michigan.

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WELCOME TO PRAYER BASICS

In this course you will discover what Scripture reveals about God's desire for prayer and why prayer matters. You will learn practical strategies for how to pray and identify some action steps for practicing them.

Learning outcomes

By completing this course, you will be able to:

1. **Develop** a scriptural and personal understanding of prayer and explain it to others.
2. **Identify** multiple ways to pray and select the ones that are most meaningful for you.
3. **Recognise** obstacles to prayer and identify effective ways to address them.

LESSON OUTCOMES

Lesson One: Why Pray?

In this lesson you will learn reasons why you pray, reflect on what Scripture says about prayer and on your own attitudes toward prayer.

Lesson Two: Why Not Ask?

In this lesson you will learn why and how God wants you to pray. You will examine Jesus' model for prayer and what that means for your own prayer life.

Lesson Three: When You Don't Know What to Say

In this lesson you will learn that true prayer is about more than simply the words you use. It will equip you to talk to God in ways that are natural and unforced and to go deeper in learning how to pray according to God's Word.

WHAT ACTIVITIES TO EXPECT

Overview and Objectives

This activity offers a brief introduction to the lesson and informs you of the lesson's objectives.

Lecture

This activity provides the main teaching content for the lesson.

Check Your Understanding

This quiz activity checks your understanding of the concepts learnt so far. Answer keys are provided in the Appendix.

Scripture Meditation

This activity allows you to spend time in Scripture and connect it to the topic of each lesson. Spend some time carefully reading the passage provided in the activity, utilising the simple three-step method of Receive, Reflect, and Respond.

For these activities you will need a Bible and either a journal, notebook, or a printed copy of this course for recording your responses.

Respond and Apply

These activities are designed to help you react and respond to the teaching, then consider how to put your learning to use in your own context. When you finish this course, you will have an action plan that will help you deepen and improve your prayer life! Record your answers in the space provided or in a separate journal or notebook.

Lesson Summary

This activity sums up the concepts learnt in each lesson and looks ahead to what comes next.

Summative Activity

This activity at the end of the course allows you to review what you have learnt and identify actions you can take to implement the course concepts and strategies.



MEET THE INSTRUCTOR

James Banks, DMin

Education

- Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary, DMin
- Princeton Theological Seminary, MDiv
- Westmont College, BA

Other Career Highlights

- Founding Pastor, Peace Church
- Writer, Artos Academy
- Host, *Encouraging Prayer Radio Broadcast and Podcast*
- Author of several books, primarily on prayer
- Recipient, *Servant of the Kingdom Award*, Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary (Charlotte) for “real world” work encouraging others in prayer

Publications

Author of several popular articles and books on prayer, including *Prayers for Prodigals*, *Praying the Prayers of the Bible*, *Prayers for Your Children*, *Praying with Jesus* (DVD), *Praying the Prayers of the Bible for Everyday Needs*, *Praying Together*, *Praying the Prayers of the Bible for Kids*, and *Hope Lies Ahead*



LESSON ONE: WHY PRAY?

OVERVIEW AND OBJECTIVES

Lesson Overview

In this lesson you will learn reasons why you pray, reflect on what Scripture says about prayer and on your own attitudes toward prayer.

Lesson Objective

When you complete this lesson, you should be able to:

1. **Identify** three main reasons why we should pray.
2. **Recognise** in Scripture God's desire for, and response to, prayer.
3. **Articulate** your own motivations and goals for prayer.

LECTURE

What happens when we pray? Is it just empty words, spoken into the air? Or is there someone listening? Someone who love us and weighs each request with perfect wisdom, who dearly wants us to draw near and to reach for what He alone can do?

Sometimes, after a tragedy, you may hear someone say that they are 'sending their thoughts and prayers.' And just as often you'll hear others respond critically that 'thoughts and prayers are not enough'—and by that they mean that action is needed. But what if prayer is action? Action that is greater and deeper and more powerful than we could possibly realise?

I'm James Banks, the author of several books about prayer, a pastor, and a writer for *Artos Academy*. I'm looking forward to talking to you about prayer, because I believe that prayer, the way God intends it to be, is an adventure. Just imagine: the God of the universe, who spoke the stars into existence, wants *us* to talk to *Him*. He wants us to get to know Him and to have a relationship with Him. He wants us to see things that will only happen if we pray.

'Why pray?' is the title for our lesson today because sometimes we really can wonder if prayer makes any difference. And we're going to talk candidly about that today and in the lessons that follow. In these ten, brief lessons we'll be exploring prayer from a number of angles. We'll look at why it's so

important, and how to pray when you don't know what to say. We'll discover what it is God really wants us to ask for, and also consider things that can hurt our praying. We'll explore how we can love others through our prayers and how to listen to God when we pray. We'll dive into how to pray when it seems like no one is listening, and how to keep praying when we feel like giving up. And we'll look at how to live day by day, moment by moment with God through prayer. We'll build all of this on the foundation of His Word and what it has to say about communicating with Him.

That's a lot to cover! So let's get started. But before we do anything else, let's pray:

Father, we ask for what only You can do. Bless this time, use it, empower it, that we may be Your servants and live for the praise of Your glory. In Jesus' name, amen.

Today we're going to look at three brief answers to the question, 'Why pray?' And the first and best is one we've already touched on: God really wants us to—better yet, He invites us to—He invites His people through His Word, 'Call to me and I will answer you and tell you great and unsearchable things you do not know' (Jeremiah 33:3). I love that invitation, but it's not the only one. David wrote this in Psalm 27:8: 'My heart has heard you say, "Come and talk with me." And my heart responds, "LORD, I am coming."' First Chronicles 16:11 also encourages us, 'Look to the LORD and his strength; seek his face always.' That phrase 'seek his face' describes what it means to really pray. We're not just seeking His hand—the things He can do for us—we're seeking His face, and that means so much more.

Prayer is not something we have to do; it's something we get to do. Prayer is the greatest privilege of our lives—that's not overstating it. And it's not something that only super-spiritual people can do. All believers in the Lord Jesus Christ have access to this privilege in a beautiful way through Him. Because of Jesus, God's Word tells us, 'Let us then approach God's throne of grace with confidence, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help us in our time of need.'

And that brings us to the second reason why we should pray, and that is simply: Jesus modelled it, setting the example for us. The Bible tells us that 'Jesus often withdrew to lonely places to pray' (Luke 5:16) and shows Him praying multiple times. When He taught about prayer in the Sermon on the Mount in Matthew 6, He began with the words 'When you pray'—so it's clear that He expected prayer to be a regular part, a consistent part of our lives. Now sometimes we might mistakenly think that prayer has something to do with skill. Sometimes you hear someone who is very well meaning say 'I don't have the spiritual gift of prayer.' But did you know that of all the spiritual gifts listed in Scripture, prayer is not among them? And there's an excellent reason for that. Prayer is meant for all of us.

Now we've all had those moments where we prayed and prayed about something and nothing seems to change. But the Word of God encourages us to keep coming back. It tells us, 'Devote yourselves to prayer, being watchful and thankful' in Colossians 4:2. We're also encouraged to 'pray continually' in 1 Thessalonians 5:17. God wouldn't want us to devote ourselves to something that's a waste of time. He has discoveries for us along this road; and a deeper relationship that results from spending time with Him is the greatest discovery of all. That's why David prayed in Psalm 116:1–2 (NLT), 'I love the LORD because he hears my voice and my prayer for mercy. Because he bends down

to listen, I will pray as long as I have breath!

I love that imagery: God bending down to listen to you and me. Someone who bends down to listen wants to hear us. He cares about us and what we have to say—like a good Father. That's why Jesus modelled such tender prayer, even calling God 'Abba, Father,' an affectionate term that's used in families. It's because God is so good that we *can* pray; and [when we discover that,] we'll *want* to talk to Him. That's why David says, 'Because He bends down to listen, I *will* pray *as long as I have breath*.' If you'd like to be inspired and encouraged to pray more, begin by thinking about how good God is. Think about His kindness to us in Jesus, who loves us so much that He went to the cross for us. Think about how He's with us now, because He's given us His Spirit to help us and He will never leave us.

We really can talk to someone like that. We can pour out our hearts to Him. And here's something beautiful—we can also trust that He has good things in store for us when we pray with faith. And that's the third reason why prayer matters so much: God's Word promises that 'He rewards those who earnestly seek Him' (Hebrews 11:6). Think for a moment about what that means. It means that we will miss out on genuine blessings that God has for us if we do not pray. Imagine a surprise party where God has everything planned if we will just show up. But if we choose to run our lives in our own strength and go our own way, we miss the party. We miss the good He wants to do in and through and for us. Of course that analogy is imperfect because prayer is about so much more than a party for us. God wants to catch us up in the wonder of who He is so that we delight in Him. God even allows for the interaction of our wills with His own when we pray—that's an amazing thing—so that we can sometimes have a powerful say in things that happen in this world.

There's a great illustration about this found in Isaiah 36 and 37. Jerusalem is under siege from the Assyrian army, and their brutal king Sennacherib writes a letter threatening to destroy them. Hezekiah, the king of Judah, takes the scroll the letter is on—the scroll that has all of these things that Sennacherib is going to do to destroy them—and spreads it out before the Lord in the temple and prays—and, by the way, in that prayer he says, 'Bend down, O LORD, and listen!' Then the prophet Isaiah sends a message to Hezekiah with an answer from the Lord promising help, and it begins with these words: 'Because you prayed.'

'Because you prayed!' Those three words indicate that his situation would not have changed if he had not come to God about it. That doesn't mean things will go our direction every time we pray, but if we learn to pray proactively—making prayer our 'first resort' and not a 'last resort'—we will may see God do breathtaking things. He wants to help us lift our eyes above our circumstances so that we can catch a glimpse of His goodness and love. He wants us to pray so that we will get to know Him—and that really is the best part about prayer. True prayer is about so much more than just requests or answers—it's about a relationship with the One who will love and sustain us even when the answers don't seem to come.

I learnt that in a challenging time in my own life when my son was struggling with heroin addiction. We did everything in our power to help him, but we came to realise that try as hard as we may, only God could change his heart. We prayed for him for years, and eventually God did a beautiful thing—he set him free. My son is a youth pastor today in the same city where he once abused, and even sold heroin. But all along the way, the entire time my wife and I were praying, God was teaching us,

drawing us near, doing something in our hearts and lives as we prayed. Often our circumstances didn't change from day to day, but somehow just being in His presence made the difference we needed day by day. We found peace and comfort and strength—and we would eventually see powerful answers to prayer—but what we learnt is that God Himself is the best answer to prayer, just being in a relationship with Him that lasts for all eternity matters more than anything else. That's the greatest blessing of all when we pray. God wants to show us more and more of His goodness and mercy and love. He wants to give us Himself.

William Cowper was a British poet, a gifted genius who suffered from chronic depression. But he found hope in God and wrote brilliant hymns and poetry, some of which were about prayer. We'll wrap up with one today. Cowper begins this one by talking about the 'mercy seat,' which is the throne of grace described in Hebrews 4:16—the throne that God wants us to approach boldly.

What various hindrances we meet
In coming to the mercy seat!
Yet who that knows the worth of prayer
But wishes to be often there!

Prayer makes the darkened clouds withdraw;
Prayer climbs the ladder Jacob saw;
Gives exercise to faith and love;
Brings every blessing from above.

Restraining prayer, we cease to fight;
Prayer makes the Christian's armor bright;
And Satan trembles when he sees
The weakest saint upon his knees.

You know, you may feel sometimes like the weakest saint, but oh, the beautiful thing about our God, is that He will meet us and lift us and help us.

I don't think it would be appropriate to wrap up this introductory lesson on prayer without praying again. I know that I'm on video, and it may seem a little funny praying along. But here's the thing—God exists outside of time, and He will hear your prayers as you pray with me in this moment. So you know what we get to do now? We get to pray. Let's do it.

Father we ask that You will help us to apply everything that we've learnt in this lesson and more as You lead us through your spirit, and Your word, and Your strength. Help us to pray, help us to love to spend time in prayer with You. In Jesus' name, amen.

In the next lesson, we're going to talk about asking why it matters so much to God, and what Jesus shows us about how to do it. You won't want to miss it.

CHECK YOUR UNDERSTANDING

Answer the ten multiple-choice questions that follow to check your understanding of some concepts learnt from the lecture. These questions are provided so you can check your understanding and review the key points the instructor makes.

01. What does Scripture tell us about why we should pray?

- a. God invites us into a relationship with Him.
- b. Jesus modelled it.
- c. God rewards those who earnestly seek Him.
- d. All of the above.

02. First Chronicles 16:11 encourages us, 'Look to the Lord and his strength; seek his _____ always.'

- a. mercy
- b. face
- c. hand
- d. goodness

03. Why isn't prayer listed as a spiritual gift in Scripture?

- a. It's meant for everyone.
- b. It's only meant for the most holy people.
- c. It's a fruit of the Spirit.
- d. It has to be taught.

04. How did Jesus teach His disciples about prayer?

- a. He often withdrew to pray.
- b. He taught them how to pray.
- c. He referred to God as 'Abba, Father.'
- d. All of the above.

05. What imagery does Psalm 116:2 show us for the way God listens to prayer?

- a. God bends down to listen.
- b. God keeps our prayers in golden bowls.
- c. God turns His head away.
- d. God lifts His hand to His ear.

06. Because of the way God responds to prayer, what does David say he'll do (in Psalm 116:2)?

- a. 'I will pray whenever I like.'
- b. 'I will pray when I'm in trouble.'
- c. 'I will pray for forty days.'
- d. 'I will pray as long as I have breath!'

07. What do we miss out on when we do not pray?

- a. Genuine blessings that God has for us.
- b. The chance to influence the outcome of events.
- c. Peace of mind.
- d. All of the above.

08. What reason does the Lord give Hezekiah for rescuing him from Sennacherib and the invading Assyrian army?

- a. 'Because you are a righteous man.'
- b. 'Because the people have repented.'
- c. 'Because you prayed.'
- d. 'Because of my mercy.'

09. What is the best answer to prayer?

- a. Material blessings
- b. God Himself
- c. A secure future
- d. A clear conscience

10. Which of the following words best describes prayer?

- a. Intimidating
- b. Intimate
- c. Formal
- d. Joy

SCRIPTURE MEDITATION

Spend some time carefully reading the Scripture passage below, utilizing the simple three-step method of Receive, Reflect, and Respond. Record your responses in your journal, notebook, or course workbook.

Read Psalm 116. Then read it again.

Receive | Retell in your own words what is happening in this text.

What is being described? Who are the characters and what are they saying or doing? Does the text tell us why they are doing or saying these things?

Read the passage again.

Reflect | Consider how this text contributes to your understanding of prayer.

What can we learn about God and His relationship to humans from this text? Does this text bring to mind other passages of Scripture?

Read the passage one last time.

Respond | Connect this text to your own experience.

What does this psalm teach you about why and how to pray?

RESPOND AND APPLY

Write your responses to the following questions and application exercise.

Respond

What new insights about the importance of prayer did you gather from this lesson?

Apply

Identify three prayer goals you would like to work on during this course. Then write a prayer asking God for what you need to achieve those goals.

LESSON SUMMARY

'Prayer is not something we have to do; it's something we get to do. Prayer is the greatest privilege of our lives – that's not overstating it. And it's not something that only super-spiritual people can do. All believers in the Lord Jesus Christ have access to this privilege in a beautiful way through Him.'
- James Banks

In this lesson, you learnt how to:

1. **Identify** three main reasons why we should pray.
2. **Recognise** in Scripture God's desire for, and response to, prayer.
3. **Articulate** your own motivations and goals for prayer.

Continue to **Lesson 2: Why Not Ask?** to learn about asking: why it matters so much to God, and what Jesus shows us about how to do it.



LESSON TWO: WHY NOT ASK?

OVERVIEW AND OBJECTIVES

Lesson Overview

In this lesson you will learn why and how God wants you to pray. You will examine Jesus' model for prayer and what that means for your own prayer life.

Lesson Objective

When you complete this lesson, you should be able to:

1. **Explain** why it's God's desire that we ask for what we want and need.
2. **Identify** the six requests that Jesus taught us to use as a model for our own prayers.
3. **Examine** your own attitude toward how you pray and what you pray for.

LECTURE

In this lesson, we're going to talk about asking. Asking is a vital part of praying, and Jesus had a lot to say about it. He made some bold promises about asking, like this one in John 15:7: 'If you remain in me and my words remain in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be done for you.' Jesus used that phrase 'whatever you ask' at least six times, and it's clear that our asking is important to Him. One of my favourite promises from Jesus about asking is from the Sermon on the Mount in Matthew 7:9–11, when He said, 'Which of you, if your son asks for bread, will give him a stone? Or if he asks for a fish, will give him a snake? If you, then, though you are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father in heaven give good gifts to those who ask him!' I love that because it shows us God's heart. Even though we're corrupted by sin, if our child came to us and said, 'May I please have a fish?' we wouldn't respond by saying 'Take this snake instead!' If we know how to do good things for our children when they ask, we can be assured that God wants to do us good.

I've experienced that in my own life many, many times, more times than I can remember—but one particular incident comes to mind. When I was in college, I wrestled against God's calling me into the ministry for some time. But after a few years I finally gave in, and once I did, things suddenly began to get much more difficult than I expected. Have you ever had that happen, where you choose to do the right thing and life just gets harder? I was holding down two jobs on top of a full class schedule, and I didn't know how I was going to make ends meet for my last year. I began to wonder if I had heard God's calling correctly and started to question my faith. I was a philosophy major, so

I questioned a lot of things. One night I was outside of my apartment sitting in my old car trying to figure it all out, when I prayed, 'God, I just don't know what I'm doing anymore. I thought You were calling me into the ministry. But please, if You really want me to do this, You've got to do something! Do something so that I know it's you, the God of Jesus Christ!' That prayer was a cry from the heart, and I resolved to wait and look for an answer.

Two days later I received a phone call from the college. There was a new scholarship that was being offered by someone in the community, and they thought I should know about it. 'All you have to do,' they told me, was 'go to this church on a weekday afternoon and talk with the pastor.' The next week I did that, and the pastor told me, 'There are two things you need to know about this scholarship. First, it was given by a family that became Christians through the ministry of this church. Second, you don't even have to be a believer to receive it, but it's given for one reason only, and that is to show the love of Jesus Christ.' I left not knowing whether I would receive anything, and doubting that it would be much if I did. But a week later a cheque arrived made out to the college in my name that made up the difference for what I needed to finish my last year. And it wasn't cheap. And I immediately thought about how I had prayed, 'God, do something!' Not only were my needs for my final year in college taken care of, but it was done in a way that specifically answered my prayer: it showed the love and power of Jesus Christ.

Now, as I share this, it's important to emphasise that God's Word is very clear on the point that our faith is not a means to financial gain. But the real point of that story isn't about money. It's about God's kindness and His ability to help us in unexpected ways. And that happens when we pray. And that brings us to our first point about prayer and asking: One, God is good and wants us to come to Him with our needs. He wants us to live lives that are dependent on Him in prayer, lifting our hearts to Him through the day. Ole Hallesby put it this way: 'Prayer and helplessness are inseparable. Only those who are helpless can truly pray.' God wants us to come to Him in the raw and everyday moments of life when our asking is anything but perfect.

When I prayed that prayer in college, my prayer was certainly imperfect, but God met me where I was. And I believe that's why Jesus talked about asking with such large terms, even using the phrase, 'Whatever you ask.' He knows about our natural tendency to want to do things in our own strength, and He wants to show us something more. He wants us to get to the end of ourselves so that He can pry our fingers loose from the world and turn our hearts and minds to Him. He wants to set us free to live expectantly as children of God, looking forward to Him most of all. That's why Jesus encouraged us to pray with these words in Matthew 7:7-8, 'Ask and it will be given to you; seek and you will find; knock and the door will be opened to you. For everyone who asks receives; the one who seeks finds; and to the one who knocks, the door will be opened.' Do you see how broad that is, and how reassuring? It's as if He is saying, 'Just ask!' God is saying, 'Come and talk with Me! Get to know Me!' It's a very open invitation!

But if you're like me, sometimes when you think about asking God, you remember that time you prayed about something and you didn't get what you asked for. Maybe you had to wait awhile, or it didn't happen at all. That can be so difficult, especially when you're asking for something good. We'll devote a whole lesson to unanswered prayer a little later, but for now it's important to emphasise that Jesus means what He says when He talks about asking in such bold terms. Remember that He

does this a number of times in the New Testament. We tend to put a lot of qualifiers and disclaimers on the way we pray: Are we asking with enough faith? Are we asking according to the will of God? Are we asking with the right motives? Those are important things, and Jesus teaches us about that. But we can't forget that His starting point is that we serve a generous and loving God who really wants us to ask! After all, why would Jesus talk about asking in such lavish terms if He put all kinds of qualifiers on it and didn't really mean it? Jesus wants to open our minds to living in relationship with God every day. He doesn't want us to have a law of averages mentality about prayer: Sometimes it works, and sometimes it doesn't. Or, to see it as a quid pro quo legalistic thing where we have to do things just so or He won't answer. He wants us to "Come and ask!" And that brings us to our second point.

Jesus shows us *how to ask* especially when He teaches us the Lord's Prayer. Remember that when Jesus taught us the Lord's Prayer in Matthew 6:9–13, He began with these words: 'This, then, is how you should pray.' And then, by showing us three requests, Jesus teaches us how to go deeper in our asking. He begins with, 'Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name, your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven.' There are six requests in all in the Lord's Prayer, and the way Jesus organises it shows us the ultimate example for our own praying. Notice that the first three requests are about God most of all. The very first, 'Hallowed be your name' is actually saying, 'May Your name be acknowledged and honoured as holy.' Of course God is always holy, but this is a request that all will recognise His holiness.

Then comes the second request: 'Your kingdom come.' We need to be reminded to pray for God's kingdom because we get so tied down to this earth. This is a way of helping us look forward to Him and make sure we're living for Him in everything we do, with our eyes on the prize. The third request is similar: 'Your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven.' It's a way of saying, 'Your way, Lord, in all things. Help me to want what you want most of all.' This can be a real challenge for us, because our natural tendency is to want to simply ask God to bless us as we go about our lives. But this prayer puts us before Him as His servants, so that we say, 'Your way, Lord, most of all.'

These are powerful things to pray if we really mean them. But how easy it is to say the Lord's Prayer on autopilot, without thinking about what we're really saying! You might find it helpful to break it down phrase by phrase like a template for prayer, as we're doing now, and pray the meaning of each of those requests.

The last three requests of the Lord's Prayer are focused on us: 'Give us today our daily bread.' That's a prayer about our everyday needs; and it's so important for us to realise that there is no request that is too small for God because He is that large, He is large enough, great enough, infinite in His power, so that He is able to care about the most intimate details in our lives. Then in the prayer comes, 'And forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors.' We have to slam on the brakes here for a moment. That's like saying, 'Lord, I want You to forgive me just like I've forgiven others.' Think about Whom we're talking to when we say that. As soon as we say that we should begin to think of people we need to forgive, shouldn't we? Jesus wants us to have that kind of generous spirit because we have been forgiven so much. And the truth is, we can't do it in our own strength—God has to help us, so this brings us back to that. We need to ask!

Then comes the last request: 'And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from the evil one.' Of course God never tempts anyone, but the devil is real; and this is a request for God to help us want to do what is right. I love what the German pastor and theologian Helmut Thielicke said. He stood against the Nazi regime during World War II, and he said about this request, 'Jesus is Victor! He has already won, and all our struggles are only rear-guard battles and mop-up actions' (*Our Heavenly Father*, p. 135). It's amazing the difference calling on God can make when you're in the middle of temptation. It's like turning on the light outside on a hot night, and seeing the roaches run for cover. The devil simply cannot stand against Jesus; and Jesus wants us to ask Him to help us whenever we struggle.

The six requests of the Lord's Prayer show us our priorities for living in God's presence and our deep dependence on Him, and we can be assured that when we use them as the model for our own prayers, we are asking in ways that He loves to answer.

And so we come to a third and final insight about asking and prayer, and here it is in just two words: Pray big! We need to ask God to do big things, believing with faith that He will. No request—just like no request is too little for God—no request is too big for Him either. So what if we ask? I think this is one of the reasons why Jesus said in Matthew 18:3 that we have to change and become like little children to enter the kingdom of God. Children are dependent, and they know it. Children also have imagination, and oh, how we need to pray like that! There is no one more creative than God, and we should ask Him to help us ask for the things He wants us to ask for. That's really praying big. We can put so many limitations on prayer and on God; and I think one of the reasons for that is we've made it all about ourselves. But James, the brother of Jesus, wrote, 'When you ask, you do not receive, because you ask with the wrong motives, that you may spend what you get on your pleasures' (James 4:2–3). The order of the Lord's Prayer shows us that God wants us to start with a kingdom-focus for our hearts and lives. As we do, we will see Him do beautiful things.

If we have received Jesus, He has already given us salvation. That's the biggest gift of all, and everything else must be considered in light of that. Second Corinthians 1:20 reminds us, 'For no matter how many promises God has made, they are 'Yes' in Christ. And so through him the 'Amen' is spoken by us to the glory of God.' Jesus continues to pray for us and will help us as we pray. God has given us so many promises in His Word, and waits for us to pray! So don't hold back. Never let it be said of you that you do not receive because you do not ask. Pray big, with visions and requests as big as the kingdom of God. Call on Him and what only He can do; and we will see heaven touch earth until His kingdom comes. Let's wrap up with this prayer:

Lord, bless us as we pray. And, oh, come soon, Lord Jesus. Help us to look forward to You most of all. Be our vision as we live, Lord. And help us to live closer and closer to You. In Your name we pray, amen.

CHECK YOUR UNDERSTANDING

Answer the ten multiple-choice questions that follow to check your understanding of some concepts learnt from the lecture. These questions are provided so you can check your understanding and review the key points the instructor makes.

01. How often did Jesus use the phrase ‘whatever you ask’?

- a. Only once
- b. At least six times
- c. Three times
- d. Only when He spoke with the disciples

02. What was the point of Dr. Banks’ story about how God met his need unexpectedly when he was in college?

- a. God wants us to ask for material things.
- b. God will only answer our prayers if we ‘have our act together.’
- c. God is kind and wants us to come to Him just as we are.
- d. We should only pray when we’re in trouble.

03. Ole Hallesby said that ‘only those who _____ can truly pray.’

- a. Are filled with faith
- b. Know God’s Word
- c. Are strong in the Lord
- d. Are helpless

04. How many requests are in the Lord’s Prayer?

- a. Six
- b. Three
- c. Five
- d. Four

05. On whom are the first requests of the Lord’s Prayer focused?

- a. Us
- b. God
- c. Others
- d. The church

06. What do the order of the requests in the Lord’s Prayer show us?

- a. God really doesn’t care what we ask about.
- b. We have to pray a certain way or God won’t answer us
- c. God wants us to pray with a kingdom-focus for our lives.
- d. God wants our praying to be all about us.

07. Jesus speaks in such broad terms about asking because He wants us to learn what?

- a. How to live dependently and expectantly with God every day.
- b. Sometimes prayer works, and sometimes it doesn't.
- c. God doesn't want us to be too specific when we ask.
- d. We need to pray three times a day.

08. What is Jesus' starting point for us in prayer?

- a. We have to have our words just right so that God will listen.
- b. We have to pray aloud in church so that others will hear us.
- c. We serve a generous and loving God who really wants us to ask.
- d. We serve a God who is only sometimes interested in our prayers.

09. 'Praying when we're in the middle of temptation is like turning on the light outside on a hot night, and seeing the roaches run for cover,' because:

- a. The devil simply cannot stand against Jesus.
- b. It changes our outlook on what we're facing.
- c. It helps us forget what we're thinking about.
- d. Prayer causes other people to help us.

10. James 4:3 tells us that when we ask, we 'do not receive, because' we ask:

- a. With loud voices.
- b. Too infrequently.
- c. With wrong motives.
- d. At the wrong time.

SCRIPTURE MEDITATION

Spend some time carefully reading the Scripture passage below, utilising the simple three-step method of Receive, Reflect, and Respond. Record your responses in your journal, notebook, or course workbook.

Read Matthew 6:5–13 slowly. Then read it again.

Receive | Retell in your own words what is happening in this text.

What is being described? Who are the characters and what are they saying or doing? Does the text tell us why they are doing or saying these things?

Read the passage again.

Reflect | Consider how this text contributes to your understanding of prayer.

What can we learn about God and His relationship to humans from this text? Does this text bring to mind other passages of Scripture?

Read the passage one last time.

Respond | Connect this text to your own experience.

What does the Lord's Prayer mean to you?

RESPOND AND APPLY

Write your responses to the following questions and application exercise.

Respond

How does Jesus teach us to go deeper in our asking when we pray?

Apply

How is asking for what God wants part of your praying? How will you follow the model of the Lord's Prayer in your prayer life?


LESSON SUMMARY

Asking is a vital part of praying, and Jesus had a lot to say about it. He made some bold promises about asking, like this one in John 15:7: “If you remain in me and my words remain in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be done for you.” Jesus used that phrase “whatever you ask” at least six times, and it’s clear that our asking is important to Him.
- James Banks

In this lesson, you learnt how to:

1. **Explain** why it’s God’s desire that we ask for what we want and need.
2. **Identify** the six requests that Jesus taught us to use as a model for our own prayers.
3. **Examine** your own attitude toward how you pray and what you pray for.

Continue to **Lesson 3: When You Don’t Know What to Say** to learn about how you can go deeper than words in your prayers.



LESSON THREE: WHEN YOU DON'T KNOW WHAT TO SAY

OVERVIEW AND OBJECTIVES

Lesson Overview

In this lesson you will learn that true prayer is about more than simply the words you use. It will equip you to talk to God in ways that are natural and unforced and to go deeper in learning how to pray according to God's Word.

Lesson Objective

When you complete this lesson, you should be able to:

1. **Pray** confidently and authentically even when you don't know the right words to say.
2. **Identify** ways to turn Scripture into prayer.
3. **Practice** prayer that is natural and relational.

LECTURE

Sometimes we can struggle with not knowing what to say when we pray. Maybe you've prayed in a group of people, and the person beside you just finished, and they sounded so good. As you were listening, you could almost hear the heavenly choirs and see angels descending—such beautiful thoughts and words. Ah, but then it's your turn, and the words just won't come.

Ever been there? I know I have. And if you've struggled with knowing what to say, I'd love to encourage you. Real prayer, prayer that moves the heart of God and heaven and earth along with it, has nothing to do with our ability to string words together. Our Father in heaven is so loving and kind—and what kind of a father would say, 'You have to get your words just right before you can talk to me?' He's not like that, not at all.

Let's go one step further. He knows us better than we know ourselves. David wrote about Him in Psalm 139:4, 'Before a word is on my tongue, you, LORD, know it completely.' God knows what we are going to say before the words ever come out. Jesus said, 'Your Father knows what you need before you ask him' (Matthew 6:8). And He still wants us to pray. Why? Because prayer isn't about words, not at the deepest level. It's about relationship, as we discussed in our previous lessons. And in that relationship God cares about what we think and feel and wants us to express that to Him. Not only that, He has chosen to use our prayers as the means through which He changes history and

accomplishes great things! He wants us to interact with Him. He welcomes us to do it, not because He needs us to do it, but simply because He is that good.

God has given us so much encouragement and so many great examples in His Word for how to communicate with Him, and today we're going to consider three very practical biblical insights for how to talk with God.

Here's the first: When you struggle with what to say when you pray, just be yourself. Real prayer is authentic and from the heart—we can't be anything other than what we really are before Him, because He knows everything. God wants us to bring to Him the real circumstances of our everyday lives. If we try to be something other than what we are, we're not really praying. Jesus explained it this way. He talked about those who like to be seen by others when they pray, and He said, 'But when you pray, go into your room, close the door and pray to your Father, who is unseen. Then your Father, who sees what is done in secret, will reward you' (Matthew 6:6). Jesus wasn't against praying with others or in front of them—He did that Himself on several occasions and taught that we should. What He's really after here is preventing us from making our prayers into some kind of show. And by telling us to go to God in private, He's saying, 'Be real. Just talk to Him, and then, when you do, you will be blessed for it.'

Philip Yancey in his book *Prayer: Does It Make Any Difference?* wrote that Jesus' teaching on prayer 'reduces to three general principles: keep it honest, keep it simple, and keep it up' (Yancey, *Prayer*, 191). I like that. When you and I are real with God, He makes Himself real to us. When we place the nitty-gritty, everyday situations of our lives before Him with expectant and faithful prayer, we deal with God on a level where we can see Him intervene. I think this is part of the reward that Jesus is talking about when He says 'Your Father, who sees what's done in secret, will reward you.' It's not that our prayers are always answered the way we want. But because we have moved closer to God, it's as if we get a front row seat to the things that He's doing; and He increases our strength and hope even if our situation doesn't change.

A few years ago I wrote a book called *Praying the Prayers of the Bible*, where I categorised as many prayers from God's Word as I could. There are several different categories of prayer in the Bible: prayers of praise, prayers of thanks, prayers to strengthen faith, prayers about everyday needs, prayers to confess sin, prayers for help and protection, and blessing prayers. But there was another category which really surprised me, because it's not the first thing you think about, and those are what you might call 'wrestling prayers'. Prayers like that of the father who came to Jesus with a demon-possessed son and asked for his help, saying, 'Lord, I believe. Help me overcome my unbelief!' We can all relate to a request like that—that's a very real prayer. Some of the prayers of the Bible are so down-to-earth that they don't sound like prayers at all. Think about Moses' prayer when God called him to free His people in Exodus 4:13, 'O LORD, please send someone else to do it.' Or Elijah's prayer in 1 Kings 19:4: 'I have had enough, LORD,' he said. 'Take my life.' Or here's another from David in Psalm 13:1: 'How long, LORD? Will you forget me forever?'

I believe that God allowed these prayers to be included in His Word for a reason. They show us what a real relationship with God looks like—nothing is put on here. And in each of those situations God provided help for the one who was being so real with Him.

We want to get as close to Him as we can when we pray, and that brings us to our second practical biblical insight: When you struggle with what to say when you pray, let God's Word help you.

R. Murray M'Cheyne, a Scottish pastor from nearly two hundred years ago, encouraged his congregation to 'turn the Scriptures into prayer.' He was a deeply humble man who had an exemplary faith and once said that 'a calm hour with God is worth a whole lifetime with man.'

You know, God can pack so much into just a moment with Him. Time spent with Him is always worth it; and His Word shows us how to pray by example. If you're wondering how to praise God, just go to the Psalms and start reading. If you'd like to learn how to pray for others, look at some of Paul's prayers for others in Colossians or Ephesians. When you pray the prayers of the Bible, you learn by example from Jesus and Paul and Moses and David and Jeremiah and many others, and you also catch a glimpse of the amazing things God has done again and again in answer to prayer. The best reason for learning to pray the prayers of the Bible is that Jesus did it on several occasions, including from the cross.

We need to learn the prayers of the Bible, to take them to heart and memorise them. The Holy Spirit moves through God's Word in powerful, inspiring ways, and when we let the prayers of the Bible teach us how to pray and become a starting point for our own prayers, you'll find He gives our own prayers wings. When we struggle with sin, we can pray with David in Psalm 51:10 (KJV): 'Create in me a clean heart, O God; and renew a right spirit within me.' Learning a few key Scripture verses by heart can help us in moments of crisis or in the middle of the night. When I can't get to sleep I love to pray the 23rd Psalm, and work my way through it: I thank the Lord for being my shepherd, and then I remember that He is everything I need. I quiet myself before Him, imagining that I am with Him in green pastures and beside quiet waters. I ask Him to restore my soul, and to guide me in His way. I thank Him that He will be with me no matter what I face, and for how He has blessed me even in difficult circumstances. I think about how His goodness and love will follow me all of the days of my life and I will be with Him forever, and I praise Him and rest in Him. Sometimes when I'm praying that way, I think of John leaning on Jesus as I put my head on my pillow, and I usually don't get through the whole psalm before I've fallen asleep. This is just one example of how helpful and meaningful it can be to pray the prayers of the Bible and turn God's Word into prayer.

And that brings us to the third practical scriptural insight: When you struggle with what to say when you pray, remember that God hears you with love because of Jesus. The epistle to the Hebrews tells us that because of Jesus and what He has done for us, we can 'approach God's throne of grace with confidence, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help us in our time of need.' Not only that, God's Word promises us in Romans 8:34 that if we have received Jesus that *we* are received with love and without condemnation and that Jesus Himself is at the right hand of the Father interceding for us.

But there's even more hope for us in the Word of God. When you and I struggle with how to pray, the Holy Spirit also prays for us. Romans 8:26–27 tells us that 'the Spirit helps us in our weakness. We do not know what we ought to pray for, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us through wordless groans. And he who searches our hearts knows the mind of the Spirit, because the Spirit intercedes for God's people in accordance with the will of God.' So you and I can have every confidence that our

prayers are heard and understood by God and received with love because of our Saviour. Jesus prays for us, the Spirit intercedes for us, and the Word of God tells us in Revelation 5:8 that our prayers are so precious to Him that “He keeps them before Him like incense, in golden bowls.”

Our prayers matter deeply to our heavenly Father. And it’s not just about what we say. Remember that prayer is also listening, and simply keeping company with God. So we can pray without words at all, loving God from the heart, and doing nothing other than just being with Him. We can pray with just a simple gesture, kneeling like Peter or lifting our hands like Moses or Paul or bowing facedown like Abraham or even dancing like David. You see different postures for praying in several places in Scripture; and God will lead us in what works best for us at any time. The main thing is that we just make ourselves available. As we quiet ourselves in His presence, we’ll find that prayer becomes more natural for us over time. And if we’re going to be in God’s presence for all of eternity, we need to learn to be with Him now.

CHECK YOUR UNDERSTANDING

Answer the ten multiple-choice questions that follow to check your understanding of some concepts learnt from the lecture. These questions are provided so you can check your understanding and review the key points the instructor makes.

01. Even though God knows what we're going to say before we even say it (see Psalm 139:4), He still wants us to pray. Why?

- a. He has commanded us to pray.
- b. Prayer is about more than words, it's about our relationship with Him.
- c. The kingdom won't come unless we pray.
- d. He can change our minds and help us to pray differently.

02. When you struggle with what to say when you pray, just:

- a. Be yourself.
- b. Stop praying and try again later.
- c. Memorise a prayer and say it.
- d. Try to sound like the best prayer warrior you've ever heard.

03. If we try to be something other than what we really are when we pray,

- a. We're setting an example for others.
- b. We're aspiring to be better, because 'practice makes perfect.'
- c. We're not really praying.
- d. We're following the example of others in Scripture.

04. Phillip Yancey wrote that Jesus' teaching on prayer 'reduces to three general principles.' What are they?

- a. Keep it real, keep it biblical, and keep it humble.
- b. Keep it honest, keep it simple, and keep it up.
- c. Keep trying, keep listening, keep growing.
- d. Keep it private, keep it regular, keep it quiet.

05. 'I do believe; help me overcome my unbelief' (Mark 9:24) an example of what?

- a. Prayer of confession
- b. Prayer of praise
- c. Wrestling prayer
- d. Prayer of thanks

06. What did Scottish pastor R. Murray M'Cheyne encourage his congregation to do?

- a. Turn the Scriptures into prayer.
- b. Pray without ceasing.
- c. Pray the Lord's Prayer.
- d. Pray with your door closed.

07. What is the best reason for learning to pray the prayers of the Bible?

- a. David did it throughout his life.
- b. It makes it easier for us to pray.
- c. Jesus did it on several occasions.
- d. God will understand us better if we do.

08. Hebrews 4:16 tells us that ‘we can approach God’s throne of grace with_____’:

- a. Strength
- b. Confidence
- c. Silence
- d. Pride

09. Prayers like David’s in Psalm 13:1 (‘How long, LORD? Will you forget me forever?’) are an example of what?

- a. How not to pray
- b. Impatience in prayer
- c. Prophetic prayer
- d. Being honest and ‘real’ with God

10. Prayer is not only about talking. It’s also about listening and:

- a. Kneeling
- b. Holding up our hands
- c. Keeping company with God
- d. Humbling ourselves

SCRIPTURE MEDITATION

Spend some time carefully reading the Scripture passage below, utilising the simple three-step method of Receive, Reflect, and Respond. Record your responses in your journal, notebook, or course workbook.

Read Romans 8:26–27 slowly. Then read it again.

Receive | Retell in your own words what is happening in this text.

What is being described? Who are the characters and what are they saying or doing? Does the text tell us why they are doing or saying these things?

Read the passage again.

Reflect | Consider how this text contributes to your understanding of prayer.

What can we learn about God and His relationship to humans from this text? Does this text bring to mind other passages of Scripture?

Read the passage one last time.

Respond | Connect this text to your own experience.

What does this passage teach you about the true nature of prayer? Was there a time when you prayed without words?

RESPOND AND APPLY

Write your responses to the following questions and application exercises.

Respond

What is your favourite prayer from Scripture? What is the value of praying God's Word?

Respond

How can you 'turn Scripture into prayer' when you spend time with God?

Apply

How do you plan to focus on your relationship with God during your prayer time?

LESSON SUMMARY

'When you struggle with what to say when you pray, just be yourself. Real prayer is authentic and from the heart—we can't be anything other than what we really are before Him, because He knows everything. God wants us to bring to Him the real circumstances of our everyday lives. If we try to be something other than what we are, we're not really praying.'
- James Banks

In this lesson, you learnt how to:

1. **Pray** confidently and authentically even when you don't know the right words to say.
2. **Identify** ways to turn Scripture into prayer.
3. **Practice** prayer that is natural and relational.

SUMMATIVE ACTIVITY

Spend a few minutes thinking back on what you've learnt in this PDF course. Review your thoughts, reflections, and responses in your course workbook or journal. Consider what new knowledge or perspectives you will take with you. Write a few short statements in response to each of these questions:

How have these lessons changed the way you think about communicating with God? What new prayer practices or methods are you eager to try?

Make a commitment to incorporate new prayer practices, methods, or perspectives into your own prayer life.

Thank you for completing the first three lessons of Prayer Basics. To keep learning, simply subscribe or make a one-time purchase to access the complete 10-lesson **Prayer Basics** course in video format. For details, visit:

<https://learn.artosacademy.org/courses/sf120/>

APPENDIX: QUIZ ANSWER KEY

Lesson 1

1.d.2.b.3.a.4.d.5.a.6.d.7.a.8.c.9.b.10.b.

Lesson 2

1.b.2.c.3.d.4.a.5.b.6.c.7.a.8.c.9.a.10.c.

Lesson 3

1.b.2.a.3.c.4.b.5.c.6.a.7.c.8.b.9.d.10.c.