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### Disciplemaking 1 Abiding in His Word

## PRAYER

*"And it came about that while He was praying in a certain place, after He had finished, one of His disciples said to Him, 'Lord, teach us to pray.'" Luke 11:1*

A pattern for prayer is clear in the teaching and examples of the Bible. That pattern includes praise, thanksgiving, confession, and requests. All four of these do not have to be in every prayer ... but they should all be included in our prayer lives.

**PRAISE** ... because of who He is. Praising God exalts, honors, and glorifies Him, Psalm 34:1-3. It is a very important part of what our prayers should be. We are taught to *"continually offer up a sacrifice of praise to God."* Hebrews 13:15. Helpful Biblical examples of praising God are Psalms 144 - 150. Many examples can be found in other Psalms and other books of the Bible.

**THANKSGIVING** ... because of what He has done. God gives much to us to be thankful for in our lives ... based on our requests ... and often just because He loves us. *"It is good to give thanks to the Lord."* Psalm 92:1. *"Devote yourselves to prayer, keeping alert in it with an attitude of thanksgiving."* Colossians 4:2. *"In everything give thanks."* 1 Thessalonians 5:18. Thanklessness is a last days sin, 2 Timothy 3:1-5.

**CONFESSION** ... because of our sin. To confess is to acknowledge our sins to God. When we do that, He has promised to *"forgive us and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness."* 1 John 1:9. David outlined the great blessings of forgiveness in Psalm 32 ... and gave us a great example of confession in Psalm 51:1-13. Unconfessed sin hinders our fellowship with God.

**REQUESTS** ... because He loves us. It is God's desire to meet our needs and give us the desires of our hearts, Psalm 37:4. We are instructed to let our *"requests be made known unto God."* Philippians 4:6. However, sometimes we do not have because we do not ask ... or because we ask with bad motives, James 4:2,3. Spiritual needs are often much more important than physical needs. Examples of both types are found in the Lord's Prayer in Matthew 6:9-13

**THE BIBLICAL EMPHASIS.** The Bible is a record of men and women committed to prayer. The Psalms have example after example of man pouring his heart out to God. The rest of the Bible records over 600 prayers and 400 specific answers. Adam and Eve talked openly with God in the Garden of Eden. In the days of their third son, Seth, "*men began to call upon the name of the Lord.*" Genesis 4:26. Great men and women of the Old and New Testaments were committed to prayer ... Moses, Hannah, Samuel, David, Daniel, and Paul. Even the last few words of the Bible include the prayer, "*Come, Lord Jesus.*" Revelation 22:20.

**THE EXAMPLE OF JESUS.** Jesus demonstrated and taught that prayer should be a high priority. At the beginning of His public ministry, He prayed at His baptism. He also taught His disciples how to pray. He prayed for Himself ... for His disciples ... and for the world. He went out alone early in the morning to talk with His Father. Sometimes He prayed all night. Jesus prayed for the food that He ate and prepared for others. The night before He died, He prayed so fervently in the Garden of Gethsemane that His sweat became like drops of blood. Then as He hung on the cross, He prayed, "*Father, forgive them; for they do not know what they are doing.*" Luke 23:34. As the great intercessor, Jesus is praying for us now, Hebrews 7:25, Romans 8:34. The Holy Spirit also prays for us when we don't know how we should pray, Romans 8:26.

**THE CHALLENGE TO US.** With such an emphasis on prayer throughout the Bible, we should commit ourselves to prayer and to learning how to pray more effectively. It is our special privilege and opportunity to talk with the living God. "*The eyes of the Lord are toward the righteous, and His ears are open to their cry.*" Psalm 34:15. "*Therefore, let everyone who is godly pray.*" Psalm 32:6. "*Is anyone among you suffering? Let him pray. Is anyone cheerful? Let him sing praises.*" James 5:13. The answers to the following five questions help to understand prayer.

**1. WHERE SHOULD I PRAY?** It is normal to think of praying in a religious building. Jesus referred to the temple as a "*house of prayer.*" Matthew 21:13. However, prayers are not limited to religious buildings and public meetings. In talking with the woman at the well in John 4, Jesus made it very clear that true worship was offered "*in spirit and truth*" and was not dependent on the location of the worshippers. He condemned the hypocrites for their public prayers in synagogues and on street corners to be seen of men ... and suggested that proper prayer may better be offered in the privacy of an inner room away from others, Matthew 6:5-6. It is clear that proper prayer does not depend on where it is offered. It depends on the condition of the heart of the one who prays.

**2. HOW SHOULD I PRAY?** The *how* of prayer is as important as, if not more important than, the *what* of prayer. Jesus taught His disciples the Lord's Prayer, Matthew 6 and Luke 11, as a model to follow. Other Biblical examples include Daniel's prayer for the people, Daniel 9 ... David's prayer for forgiveness, Psalms 51 ... Jesus' own prayer, John 17 ... and the prayers of the Pharisee and the Publican, Luke 18. Biblical prayer is open and honest pouring out of the heart to God.

Scriptural guidelines include praying ...  
Humbly, 2 Chronicles 7:14, 34:27.  
With a thankful heart, 1 Thessalonians 5:18, Philippians 4:6.  
With sincerity, not by rote, Isaiah 29:13.  
Openly and directly, Isaiah 37:14.  
With great devotion, Colossians 4:2.  
Without ceasing, 1 Thessalonians 5:17.  
Persistently, Luke 11:5-10, 18:1-8.  
With great striving, Romans 15:30.  
With simplicity, Matthew 6:7.  
Without wrath or dissension, 1 Timothy 2:8.  
In unity with other believers, Matthew 18:19-20.  
With great faith, James 1:6-7, Hebrews 11:6.  
According to His will, John 15:7, 1 John 5:14-15.

**3. WHOM SHOULD I PRAY TO?** In all aspects of prayer, we should strive to follow the teaching and examples of Scripture. The Bible makes no mention of prayer addressed to anyone but God Himself. We have no examples or teaching that leads us to pray to angels, saints, or any dead Christians. Prayer *requests* should be made to the Father, John 15:16, 16:23. We should pray in the Spirit, Ephesians 6:18, Jude 20 ... under His leading and direction. We are instructed to pray "*in the name of Jesus,*" John 14:13, 15:16 ... that is, in His will and by His power. This Biblical pattern assures us that the full resources of the triune God are with us as we pray.

**4. SHOULD I PRAY ON MY KNEES?** Jesus knelt to pray, Luke 22:41. Daniel knelt and prayed three times a day, Daniel 6:10. Paul, on his departure from Ephesus, knelt and prayed, Acts 20:36. Jehoshaphat bowed his head to pray, 2 Chronicles 20:18. Because of the sins of the people, Ezra tore his clothes and fell to his knees with outstretched hands ... but wouldn't lift his face to God, Ezra 9:5-6. At his martyrdom, Stephen lifted his face and gazed intently into heaven as he prayed, Acts 7:55-60. Bowing down before God in prayer and worship, even to the point of having their faces to the ground, was commonplace in the lives of the men of the Bible. Standing while praying is found in Mark 11:25. Hezekiah turned his face to the wall and prayed, 2 Kings 20:2. The position of the body has no intrinsic value for effective prayer. It is important only as it expresses the posture of the heart.

**5. WHAT SHOULD I PRAY FOR?** It is a privilege to ask God for His involvement in our lives. It should be treated seriously. In the Lord's Prayer, Jesus taught His disciples to pray for their daily physical and spiritual needs. In His prayer in John 17, He prayed for Himself, His disciples, and for the world in very specific requests. Jesus promised that the faithful prayer - fitting into His will, offered to the Father, in His name - would be answered, John 15:7,16, 16:23, 1 John 5:14-15.

Other Biblical suggestions include praying for...  
Wisdom, James 1:5, 2 Chronicles 1:7-12.  
Spiritual prosperity, Colossians 1:9-12.  
Those who mistreat you, Luke 6:28.  
Healing, James 5:14-15, 2 Corinthians 12:7-9.  
Each other, Ephesians 6:18, James 5:16.  
The government, 1 Timothy 2:1-2  
Our food, Mark 6:41, 8:6.  
Those who need Christ, Romans 10:1.  
Laborers to proclaim the Gospel, Matthew 9:37-38.  
Open doors for the Gospel, Colossians 4:3-4.

**DENIALS AND DELAYS.** God hears all our prayers and answers all our prayers. His answer may be yes, no, or wait (no answer yet). Sometimes He goes beyond a yes and gives us more than all that we ask or think, Ephesians 3:20. Often we don't have because we don't ask or because we ask with wrong motives, James 4:2-3. The Bible teaches that a husband's prayers may be hindered if he treats his wife improperly, 1 Peter 3:7. An unforgiving spirit hinders our prayers, and our forgiveness of others demonstrates the forgiveness we should expect from God, Mark 11:25, Matthew 5:23-24, 6:12-15. We are to be clean before Him, and then our prayers accomplish much. *"The prayer of the upright is His delight."* Proverbs 15:8. If one turns away from His law, *"even his prayer is an abomination."* Proverbs 28:9. Denials and delays can be for our protection, preparation, or perfection. Sometimes denials are for our own good ... for our protection because we do not understand what we are asking for. It may be that an apparent denial is not a denial but simply a delay because we need time to be prepared for His answer. Delays give us the opportunity to be perfected through persistence and faithfulness as we wait. However, some denials are final, Deuteronomy 3:26, Jeremiah 7:16 and 2 Corinthians 12:7-10.