

# Study Through the Bible

## Prayer: The Ultimate Lifestyle

### TABLE OF CONTENTS

Click on the study title you'd like to see:

Study 1: **THE FATHER WHO HONORS HIS NAME**

*Leader's Guide – Participant's Guide*

Study 2: **PRAYER AS SURRENDER**

*Leader's Guide – Participant's Guide*

Study 3: **HOW TO DEVELOP A PRAYER LIFESTYLE**

*Leader's Guide – Participant's Guide*

Study 4: **GUIDELINES FOR ANSWERED PRAYER**

*Leader's Guide – Participant's Guide*

Study 5: **HOW TO PRAY FOR YOURSELF**

*Leader's Guide – Participant's Guide*

Study 6: **HOW TO PRAY FOR ANYONE AND EVERYONE**

*Leader's Guide – Participant's Guide*



# Study Through the Bible

## Prayer: The Ultimate Lifestyle - Study 1

LEADER'S GUIDE

### The Father Who Honors His Name

*God gives us himself in prayer.*

To know Jesus better we must get to know his Father better, because Jesus lived oriented toward the Father. At the age of 12 he said to his distraught biological mother and adoptive father, "Did you not know I had to be about my Father's business?" That affirmation would shape the rest of his ministry. To his first disciples by a well in Samaria he said, "My food is to do the will of him who sent me." To the religious leaders and scholars, he said again and again, "I only do what I see my Father do; I only say what I hear my Father say." This study will examine the power such an attitude has on our prayer life.

**Scripture:**

Luke 11:1-13

**Based on:**

The sermon "The Shame-less Father" by Darrell Johnson, PREACHING TODAY SERMONS



**Christian  
BibleStudies**  
.com

**PART 1**

## Identify the Issue

*Note to leader: At the beginning of the class, provide each person with the Participant's Guide included at the end of this study.*

The more we get to know Jesus as Son, the more we discover and enjoy his passion to reveal his Father. Jesus loved and found joy in his Father.

John 5:19–20 (NASB) says, “The Son can do nothing of Himself, unless it is something He sees the Father doing; for whatever the Father does, these things the Son also does in like manner. For the Father loves the Son, and shows Him all things that He Himself is doing.”

The Father loves the Son, and the Son loves the Father. And the Son's greatest desire is to explain the Father to us, so that we too will love, delight in, and trust the Father the way Jesus does.

What does Jesus know about the Father that we apparently do not?

### Discussion starters:

- [Q] What do you like best about prayer? What do you find hardest about prayer?
- [Q] Does what you know about the Father make you want to pray? Why or why not?

**PART 2**

## Discover the Eternal Principles

### Teaching point one: Jesus taught that prayer reveals the Father.

Jesus taught us a parable that reveals one of the most fundamental dimensions of the character of his Father. Read Luke 11:1–13.

“Lord, teach us to pray.” That is the only thing the disciples are recorded to have asked Jesus to teach them. There is no record of “teach us to lead,” “teach us to heal,” “teach us to counsel.” There is not even a record of “Lord, teach us to preach.” Just “Lord, teach us to pray.” Why? Because the disciples could see that Jesus' leading, healing, counseling, and preaching ministry emerged out of his relationship with the Father, and they could see that the key to this relationship was prayer.

“Lord, teach us to pray” meant more than, “Lord, teach us some new techniques.” It meant, “Lord, teach us what you know about the Father that makes you want to pray.” That's the key.

- [Q] What does Luke 11 tell us about who the Father is? Name as many things as you see in this passage.

**Leader's Note:** *Some things are that he deserves to be worshiped; he is a ruler, a provider, a forgiver, and helps us avoid temptation. God values persistence and wants to answer our seeking. He is a giver of good gifts.*



[Q] What do you think motivated Jesus to pray? Is this the same thing that motivates you to pray?

**Leader's Note:** *Jesus loved his Father and wanted to know his heart and simply be in touch with him.*

[Q] What do you think the main purpose of prayer is?

[Q] Do you spend more time asking God for things or listening to him? How can we listen to God?

### Teaching point two: God always honors his name.

In Luke 11, Jesus taught what we call the Lord's Prayer, and then he taught a parable. Clearly, the parable was intended to encourage the disciples (and us) to pray. When you read that parable, does it make you want to pray? It's supposed to.

Traditional western exegesis and preaching has done two things with this parable. First, it has said the parable is about the one who is asking and not about the one who is being asked. That is, this parable is about us who pray, and not about God to whom we pray. Second, traditional western exegesis and preaching has said the parable calls us to persistence in prayer. Verse 8: "because of his persistence."

The traditional western exegesis and preaching of this text is off the mark and misses the truly wonderful thing Jesus revealed in this parable. The parable is not about the one who is asking for bread, and it is not about persistence.

Verses 5–7 in the Greek text are a question: "*Tis ex humon*," meaning "Which of you?" Which of you at midnight receives a guest, needs some food for the guest, goes to a friend, asks for three loaves of bread, and is told to go away? Which of you? This has the nuance of "Can you imagine?" Can you imagine Mr. A receiving a guest, going to Mr. B and asking for three loaves of bread, and Mr. B saying, "No, my kids are in bed; go away"? Can you imagine that?

Culturally the expected answer is: None of us can imagine that. Never could we imagine hearing from another person in the village, "Go away; I cannot get up." In the West we can imagine that, but not in the Middle East. It's impossible. I've tested this out. I spent some time in the Middle East. I tested it out in Jordan. I tested it out in Lebanon and Armenia and Israel. In the Philippines I asked people, "Can you imagine this kind of a scenario?" and the uniform answer was, "No, it's impossible." I checked it out in Beijing, where I taught some students from Africa. In an African setting it's impossible. I tested it out with my Armenian neighbors in Glendale, California. It's culturally impossible.

We need to look at some of the cultural dynamics at work in this story. In the Middle East there are two great cultural values: hospitality and avoidance of shame. These work their way out in the parable in a number of ways. For instance, the host must place before the guests more than the guests can eat. When we lived in the Philippines, our family would go to a home for dinner. We'd arrive, and there was so much food on the table I thought the whole church was invited. I discovered, no, we were the only ones invited. Culturally there's the expectation to place more before the guests than they can possibly eat.

Another part of this observation is that the guest who has come to Mr. A's house is the guest of the entire village and not just of the one house. Everyone in the village is obligated to help Mr. A take care of his guest. In the Philippines I never heard the question, "How do you like my



country?" It was always, "How do you like our country?" Every Filipino recognized they were extending hospitality on behalf of the whole country.

Another factor here is that this man is asking for three loaves of bread, which means he is only asking for the utensils with which to eat the meal. He's not asking for the meal. In the Middle East the meal is in a big, common bowl. You break off a piece of bread, dip it in the stew, and eat the piece of bread with the stew on it. Then you break off another piece of bread and dip it, and you keep eating like that. So he's only asking for the utensils.

This means Mr. A now needs to go to Mr. C, D, E, F, and G to get some more food. He's got to get some carrots, cucumbers, and potatoes. He has a lot more work to do that night. That's why in verse 8 you have the phrase, "He will get up and give him as much as he needs." He needs more than the three loaves of bread.

One other factor in the cultural dynamic is that the man inside the house, Mr. B, knows everything I just told you. Mr. B knows he needs to be part of the village's attempt to bring hospitality to the guest of Mr. A.

The Greek word in verse 8, *anaideian*, which is usually translated *persistence*, did not have that meaning until after the third century A.D. It meant *shamelessness*, in the sense of avoidance of shame. In some Bibles, you'll notice there's a marginal reading that says, "Literally, shamelessness."

In the Middle Eastern culture, shame is a negative quality. Shamelessness in the sense of avoiding shame is a positive quality. In the Middle East there are rules, but culture is governed by this shame. It's not shame in the sense that western psychologists are using it now. It's not shame in the sense of "I feel there's something fundamentally wrong with me." It's shame in the sense of not wanting to lose face; shame in the sense of not wanting to damage one's reputation. It's a central cultural value—you do everything to avoid bringing shame on yourself or on your name.

*Anaideian* means avoidance of shame at all costs. Well, if *anaideian* means avoidance of shame, why do western Bibles translate it *persistence*? Number one, the Greek and Roman mind could not get its mind around this concept of shamelessness. The second reason is that the Greek and Roman mind could not see how the quality of shamelessness applied to the man who's asking for bread. Why do you need to be shameless when you ask for something you need?

That leads us to the observation that *anaideian* does not apply to Mr. A, who is asking for bread; it applies to Mr. B, who is being asked for bread.

Verse 8 has six different clauses in it (identified by Kenneth Bailey):

- Clause 1: Even though he will not get up
- Clause 2: and give him anything
- Clause 3: because he is his friend,
- Clause 4: yet because of his *anaideian*, his avoidance of shame,
- Clause 5: he will get up
- Clause 6: and give him as much as he needs.

In clauses 1, 2, 3, 5, and 6, the subject is the guy inside. So why do we assume that in clause 4 it's a different subject? The quality of *anaideian*, or shamelessness, applies to the one who is being asked. Even if the guy inside hates the guy outside, he is going to get up and give him as



much as he needs, because he does not want the story to go around the village the next morning that he did not help to extend hospitality.

There is something that goes beyond friendship and love, and it is the avoidance of shame. I'm not going to damage my reputation. I'm not going to lose face. I'm not going to hear the villagers say in the morning, "Why did you fail to help? Shame on you." Mr. B will get up even if he hates Mr. A because of his avoidance of shame, because he will honor his name, because he doesn't want anything to damage his reputation.

"Lord, teach us to pray." Jesus taught the Lord's Prayer, and then he taught this parable. The parable is not about us who ask; the parable is about the God and Father of the Lord Jesus Christ. "When you pray, say: 'Father, hallowed be Your name.'" The parable teaches that the Father has *anaideian*. He has avoidance of shame. Or to put it in positively biblical terms, the Father always acts in a way that honors his name. The Father will never shame his name.

The Father has many names, but the name above every name is Yahweh: "I AM WHO I AM." Not "I AM WHO I AM" in a philosophical sense, or "I AM WHO I AM, so don't bother me," but "I AM WHO I AM" in the relational sense; "I AM the one who is there with you and for you." Yahweh is the covenant name, and in every covenant that Yahweh makes, there is this phrase: "I will be your God, and you will be my people." The idea is that I am placed at your disposal; all that makes me God I give to you. Jesus is saying God will always honor that name. The Father will never shame that name—God has gone public with the name. And God has placed this name on his people. God has said, "I AM there with you and for you." And he does not want to have the rumor go around in the morning that someone came asking for help and was told to go away.

This parable answered the disciples' request. It gives us wonderful assurance in prayer. Yes, the Father loves us. But even if he did not, there is something deeper going on—it is that he loves his name. He has avoidance of shame. And Jesus is saying, you can count on that—the Father always hallows his name.

- [Q] Does it make any difference whether *anaideian* means persistence or shamelessness in your attitude toward prayer? Why or why not?
- [Q] What does this passage tell you about God? Does it make you want to communicate with him? Why or why not?
- [Q] What are the greatest barriers for you to prayer?
- Time—too busy
  - Uncertainty in how to pray
  - Fear that God won't listen
  - No desire to know God
  - Other—explain
- [Q] What is your greatest motivation to pray?
- Love for God
  - Curiosity about God
  - Desire for results
  - Fear of God
  - My own great need
  - Other—explain



### Teaching point three: God's commitment to his name translates into a commitment to his people.

Read 1 Samuel 12:22. That's Samuel speaking, when Israel wants to have a king like all the other nations. Samuel doesn't want to do this, but God says to go ahead. Samuel says, "For the sake of his great name, he will not reject you. Even though you are going in a way he doesn't want you to go, he placed his name on you, and he will not dishonor it."

John Piper said, "It was God's good pleasure to join you to himself in such a way that his name is at stake in your destiny. It was God's good pleasure to possess you in such a way that what happens to you affects his name."

The Father's name is "I AM there with you and for you. I give you myself, and I'll never dishonor that."

That helps us understand the rest of Luke 11. In verse 9 Jesus says ask, seek, and knock. Why? Because we have to persist and wear God down? No, it's an assurance: Ask, seek, and knock, because something always happens when you ask, seek, and knock. "Ask," "seek," and "knock" are in the present tense in the Greek, meaning "keep on"—keep on asking, keep on seeking, keep on knocking. Why? Because you have to wear God down? No. Verse 10 says do this because you receive, you find, and the door is opened. "Receive" and "find" are in the present tense—those who keep on asking are receiving; those who keep on seeking are finding. Something always happens when you pray. That's why Jesus says to keep on doing it.

Mother Teresa said, "When we pray we are expanding our capacity to receive."

Receive what? Verse 13 says, "Will not the Father give the Holy Spirit to those who are asking?" It doesn't say, "Will not the Father give the Holy Spirit to those who are asking for the Holy Spirit?" When you ask for anything you receive the Holy Spirit. St. Augustine said the Holy Spirit is the embodiment of the love relationship between the Father and the Son. The Father loves the Son and delights in the Son, and the Son loves the Father and delights in the Father. The Holy Spirit is the embodiment of that love and that delight, and the Father and Son have gone public with the promise to give the Spirit.

- [Q] How does this view of the Luke 11 passage change the way you will approach God?
- [Q] What does it mean to you that no matter what you ask, you will get the Holy Spirit? What are the practical implications of that for your life?
- [Q] What else do you receive when you pray?

#### **Optional Activity**

**Purpose:** To help us define why we pray.

**Activity:** Ask each person to think back to the last time they set aside time to pray. Now ask them to write down a breakdown of how they used that time. Was it mostly in asking for things? Listening to God? Praying Scripture? Just thinking about God? After a few minutes, form a consensus of how most in your group are using their prayer time. Ask them if they would like to change the way they are using their prayer time as a result of this study.



**PART 3**

## Apply Your Findings

Can you imagine Mr. A going to Mr. B and asking for three loaves of bread and being told to go away? No. Can you imagine going to God the Father in the name of God the Son and asking for more of the power or cleansing or joy of the Holy Spirit and being told to go away? No. It's impossible, Jesus says. The Father will get up and give you as much of himself as you need.

What of God do you need today? What of God do you need for yourself, your family, or your ministry? What of God do you need to extend hospitality to your children, your spouse, or the world? He has *anaideian*, and he will get up and give you as much of himself as you need.

**Action Point:** Spend time praying as a group about the concepts covered in this study. Ask God to transform your prayer life into one that is expectant of his presence.

—Study by Darrell Johnson with JoHannah Reardon





# Study Through the Bible

## Prayer: The Ultimate Lifestyle - Study 1

PARTICIPANT'S GUIDE

### The Father Who Honors His Name

*God gives us himself in prayer.*

To know Jesus better we must get to know his Father better, because Jesus lived oriented toward the Father. At the age of 12 he said to his distraught biological mother and adoptive father, "Did you not know I had to be about my Father's business?" That affirmation would shape the rest of his ministry. To his first disciples by a well in Samaria he said, "My food is to do the will of him who sent me." To the religious leaders and scholars, he said again and again, "I only do what I see my Father do; I only say what I hear my Father say." This study will examine the power such an attitude has on our prayer life.

**Scripture:**

Luke 11:1-13

**Based on:**

The sermon "The Shame-less Father" by Darrell Johnson, PREACHING TODAY SERMONS



**Christian  
BibleStudies**  
.com

**PART 1**

## **Identify the Issue**

The more we get to know Jesus as Son, the more we discover and enjoy his passion to reveal his Father. Jesus loved and found joy in his Father.

John 5:19–20 (NASB) says, “The Son can do nothing of Himself, unless it is something He sees the Father doing; for whatever the Father does, these things the Son also does in like manner. For the Father loves the Son, and shows Him all things that He Himself is doing.”

The Father loves the Son, and the Son loves the Father. And the Son’s greatest desire is to explain the Father to us, so that we too will love, delight in, and trust the Father the way Jesus does.

What does Jesus know about the Father that we apparently do not?

**PART 2**

## **Discover the Eternal Principles**

**Teaching point one: Jesus taught that prayer reveals the Father.**

**Teaching point two: God always honors his name.**

**Teaching point three: God’s commitment to his name translates into a commitment to his people.**

**PART 3**

## **Apply Your Findings**

What of God do you need today? What of God do you need for yourself, your family, or your ministry? What of God do you need to extend hospitality to your children, your spouse, or the world? He has *anaideian*, and he will get up and give you as much of himself as you need.

—Study by Darrell Johnson with JoHannah Reardo



# Study Through the Bible

## Prayer: The Ultimate Lifestyle - Study 2

LEADER'S GUIDE

### Prayer as Surrender

*The main condition of successful prayer is seeking God's plans rather than our own.*

They say that every relationship is as good as its communication. That's true in our relationship with God, too. Our relationship with God is about as good as our communication with God, and this communication is called prayer. This study is based on the fact that God hears us and responds to us, but to hear him, we must seek him and surrender our lives to him.

**Scripture:**  
Psalm 62

**Based on:**  
The sermon "Prayer as Surrender" by John Powell, PREACHING TODAY SERMONS

**PART 1**

**Identify the Issue**

*Note to leader: At the beginning of the class, provide each person with the Participant's Guide included at the end of this study.*

I asked a Scripture scholar once, "How is it that people who study Scripture can come up with such different interpretations?"

My friend said, "It all depends on your assumptions."

I think we do that with regard to prayer, too. There's an assumption we theists make that we can interact with God—that God hears us and responds to us—not always the way or on the time schedule we would like, but he does respond.

What's really important at the beginning of prayer is to pray for the grace to pray well, to ask God, "Give me the grace to pray well. Help me to be real with you, God. Enlighten and empower me to know that you are there, and that what I'm saying is important to you." But at the bottom of every religious experience is surrender to God.

Not long ago, Bill Wilson of Alcoholics Anonymous published his correspondence with the great psychiatrist Carl Jung, in which he thanked him for his contribution to Alcoholics Anonymous. He said:

You have no idea the important role you played in the forging of the famous 12 steps of Alcoholics Anonymous. You were treating a man named Roland H., and you said, "Roland, you're a hopeless alcoholic. There's nothing more I can do for you except take your money, and I don't want to do that."

Roland asked you, "Is there anything I can do?" and you said, "Yes, there is something you can do. Have a religious conversion." (Roland H. did have a religious experience and became sober. He's a recovering alcoholic.)

At the same time, my doctor told me I was a hopeless alcoholic, and I said, "Isn't there something I can do?"

At the time I was reading William James's *A Variety of Religious Experience*, and I noticed at the bottom of every religious experience was that turning your life over to God, that surrender to God. So I went home, and I said, "God, I don't know if I even believe in you. But if you're there, God, will you help me please?"

In that moment I knew I was healed. In that moment I knew that the addiction was broken, that I was a free man, maybe for the first time in my whole life.

To experience the reality of God in prayer is that moment of surrender.

I read a story by a woman who said that as a girl she was poor. She said:

I grew up in a flat, but I married a man who had money. And he took me up to a place where I had flowers, and I had gardens, and I had grass. It was wonderful. And we had children.



Then suddenly I became sick. I went to the hospital, and the doctors ran all sorts of tests. One night the doctor came into my room, and with a long look on his face, said, "I'm sorry to tell you this. Your liver has stopped working."

I said, "Doctor, wait a minute. Are you telling me that I am dying?" And he said, "I can't tell you any more than that. Your liver has stopped working. We've done everything we can to start it." And he walked out.

I knew I was dying. I was so weak I had to feel my way along the corridor down to the chapel of the hospital. I wanted to tell God off. I wanted to tell God, "You are a shyster! You've been passing yourself off as a loving God for 2,000 years, but every time anyone begins to get happy you pull the rug out from under them."

And just as I got into the center aisle of the chapel, I tripped, I swooned, I fainted. When I awoke, I looked up, and there stenciled along the step into the sanctuary, where the altar is, I saw these words: "LORD, BE MERCIFUL TO ME, A SINNER."

There with my head down on my folded arms in the center of the chapel, I repeated, "Lord, be merciful to me, a sinner," and I surrendered to God. The next morning, after the doctor ran the blood tests and the urinalysis and so forth, he said, "Your liver has started working again. We don't know why. We don't know why it stopped, and we don't know why it started up again." And I said in my heart, *But I know. God has brought me to the brink of disaster, just to get me to turn my life over to him.*

That's what William James said is at the bottom of every successful conversion: turning your life over to God.

### Discussion starters:

- [Q] What do you think prayer and surrender have in common? Why is surrender necessary for our prayer lives?
- [Q] Can we truly pray without surrendering our lives to God? Why or why not?

### PART 2

## Discover the Eternal Principles

### Teaching point one: Sometimes God lets you love the question until you can live the answer.

When I was going away to seminary, I went across the street to tell the man who had been so good to us growing up. He had bought us roller skates and footballs. When I told him my plans, a stricken look crossed his face.

He said, "Oh, don't! Oh, don't do that."

I was puzzled, "Why not?"

"Because there is no God. There's no God. My son was a medical doctor, and he was drafted into the army in the Second World War. He came back a broken man, and he could no longer practice medicine. No God presides over this world."



And I thought, *How strange that such a good man doesn't believe in God.*

He told me he had been raised in the faith, and he knew the Scriptures better than I did. But he thought faith was a lot of baloney.

When I arrived at the Jesuit novitiate, it was spartan. We knelt on wooden blocks for three hours a day. The doctor who examined us for the military draft said, "Do you guys shoot craps for a living?"

"Uh, no. We pray."

One day I was walking along in my long black skirt, and I thought, *What if there is no God?* I went up to the novice's chapel, a small little chapel on the third floor of our novitiate, and I prayed, "This is mayday. This is mayday. O God, help me, if you're there." And nothing happened.

So I went down to the larger chapel, the community chapel—I thought I'd get better service there—and I said, "O God, please help me!" And nothing happened.

Someone has written that God lets you love the question until you can live the answer. I think that's what God was letting me do, because on a night in the spring of that year God touched me. I was in the corridor of the novitiate, and I felt filled with the presence of God, just before our night prayer. It was like being alone in a room and suddenly feeling a hand against your face. That novitiate became a heaven on earth because God touched me, and suddenly nothing was the same.

But I had to experience four months of hollowing out before the grace of God could repose in its place, in the emptiness that had been created by God's absence and by my doubts. When I read that sometimes doubt eats away old forms of faith so that new and deeper ones can be born in us, I truly believe it. But we have to take the time to let that process happen.

Read Psalm 62.

**[Q]** What sense do you get from this psalm that David was working through his doubts?

**Leader's Note:** *He reassures himself throughout the psalm that God is our only refuge and that people will disappoint.*

**[Q]** How do you think David found rest in God alone (v. 1)? What does that have to do with prayer?

**[Q]** What do you think the statement "Sometimes God lets you love the question until you can live the answer" means? Have you ever experienced that? Explain.

**[Q]** How might David have experienced that, according to Psalm 62?

### **Teaching point two: I have to seek God's plans rather than my own.**

Without a doubt prayer changes things—it changes us! But the main condition is that we have to seek God's plans rather than our own.

I have a sign on the mirror of my room that I see every morning: "What have you got going today, God? I'd like to be a part of it. Thanks for loving me."



I have to find my place in God's plans, rather than make my own little plans and then ask God to support them: "Come on, God, give me an A in this course. Come on, God, do this for me." Instead, I pray, "What have you got going today, God? You love this world. You loved this world into life. You created this world. We're all yours. What's my part in the drama? What part do you want me to play? I will play any part you say. Want me to be a success? I'll be a success for you. Want me to be a failure? I'll fail for you. Whatever you want."

That's the condition of successful prayer.

We have a problem with the prayer of petition. You're not going to like this, and I don't even like to say it, but we can't get things from God because we ask for them. That would imply that we have power over God. If I ask you for something and you give it to me, it means I have power over you. We don't have that power over God.

But Jesus is big on the prayer of petition: Ask and it will be granted to you, knock and it shall be opened to you. Keep asking.

We are to ask, but our prayers do not obligate God. That's because God has already decided to give us certain graces. God has already decided to enter our lives—on the condition that we pray, that we are ready to receive these graces of God. One of the conditions is total surrender to God: "Into your hands, Father, I commend my spirit."

I used to carry my mother up and down the stairs of our home in Chicago. She would grab onto the banister and hold on to it so tightly we couldn't move.

I'd say, "Momma, you have to let go of the banister, or we can't move."

And she looked at me with her plaintive little eyes and said, "I'm afraid you'll drop me."

I said, "Momma, I'm going to drop you right now. When I count to three, I'm going to drop you!" And then she would let go, and we'd go two more steps, when she would grab on again.

That is a microcosm of my interaction with God. I'm hanging on to the banisters of life. I'm hanging on to these little things that make me feel secure. But God loves me more than I love my mother, and God would never let me come to any harm. God knows where we're going.

It's that moment of surrender: "What have you got going today, God? I'd like to be part of it." God has already offered us these graces, but we have to be ready for them, to accept them.

**[Q]** Looking at Psalm 62 again, how does David demonstrate that he's seeking God's plans rather than his own?

**Leader's Note:** *It's clear from verses 3 and 4 that David is struggling with how his life is going, yet he finds his rest in God.*

**[Q]** Which area of your life do you most need to surrender to God?

- a. Time
- b. Occupation
- c. Relationships
- d. Money
- e. Other—explain

Why do you have trouble surrendering this area to God? How might you be like Father Powell's mother in your fears?



### Teaching point three: I have to tell God who I really am.

You can't deal with masks. That's futile with God. It's important to say to God, "Hey, God, this is who I really am." We think we ought to pray only pious words, but sometimes those words don't represent what is really inside of us. We say to God, "O, Holy Father, I am filled with the sweetest sentiments of faith, hope, and charity," and we're really filled with homicidal thoughts.

We have to admit to God: "This is who I really am," and who I am changes every day. It depends on the amount of sleep I've had, the amount of food I've had, on whether things are going my way, but I try to tell God who I really am.

Then I listen to God: God puts new ideas in my mind, new desires in my heart, new peace in my emotions (sometimes he puts affliction into those emotions; God comes to comfort the afflicted and to afflict the comfortable). Sometimes God stirs up memories inside me or puts words in my imagination.

The real difficulty in all this is the power of discernment. I have to know whether God really said this to me, or whether I made it up. There are at least four tests. First, God will never contradict what he has already said in Scripture. Second, when God touches us, it lasts. It endures. If the next morning, I can't even remember what happened, it probably was not God. Third, it immerses me deeper into reality. Instead of putting me off in some ivory tower somewhere, it puts me deeper into contact with reality. The fourth test is the charity test: it makes me a more loving person. If what I sense passes these four tests, then I know that God has spoken to me.

- [Q] How does David reflect honesty with God in Psalm 62?
- [Q] Why is it futile to try to fool God concerning our emotions?
- [Q] Why is it harmful to try to fool others?
- [Q] Give an example of how something God has impressed upon you passed the four-part test that Father Powell mentioned (it agreed with Scripture, it lasted, it led to reality, it made you more loving).

#### **Optional Activity**

**Purpose:** *To help us become more discerning.*

**Activity:** *Read the following case studies. Ask the group whether they think each person is truly hearing from God.*

- *Janice believes God told her to leave her husband. He's boring, doesn't really seek God, and is too moody. She's felt stronger about this every day that she's prayed about it.*
- *Maurice feels God told him to go to Africa to help with the AIDS crisis. He has applied with several mission boards, but they have told him he is too unstable emotionally to go. He has become more determined, and angry with the mission boards.*
- *Misty keeps thinking that now that her own children are grown, she should adopt a child. The more she prays about it, the stronger the feeling grows. Her husband is a bit reluctant but willing to talk and pray about it.*





**Leader's Note:** *Janice is not being obedient to Scripture. Maurice is more focused on what he wants to do than letting God mold his life. Misty may be hearing from God, but should not act unless her husband agrees with her.*

**PART 3**

## **Apply Your Findings**

What do you most need to apply from this discussion? Do you need to surrender your life to God? Seek God's plans rather than your own? Be honest with him?

**Action Point:** Ask the group to pray for you in one of the above areas.

*—Study by John Powell, with JoHannah Reardon*



# Study Through the Bible

## Prayer: The Ultimate Lifestyle - Study 2

PARTICIPANT'S GUIDE

### Prayer as Surrender

*The main condition of successful prayer is seeking God's plans rather than our own.*

They say that every relationship is as good as its communication. That's true in our relationship with God, too. Our relationship with God is about as good as our communication with God, and this communication is called prayer. This study is based on the fact that God hears us and responds to us, but to hear him, we must seek him and surrender our lives to him.

**Scripture:**  
Psalm 62

**Based on:**  
The sermon "Prayer as Surrender" by John Powell, PREACHING TODAY SERMONS



**Christian  
BibleStudies**  
.com

**PART 1**

## **Identify the Issue**

What's important at the beginning of prayer is to pray for the grace to pray well, to ask God, "Give me the grace to pray well. Help me to be real with you, God. Enlighten and empower me to know that you are there, and that what I'm saying is important to you." But at the bottom of every religious experience is surrender to God.

**PART 2**

## **Discover the Eternal Principles**

**Teaching point one: Sometimes God lets you love the question until you can live the answer.**

**Teaching point two: I have to seek God's plans rather than my own.**

**Teaching point three: I have to tell God who I really am.**

**PART 3**

## **Apply Your Findings**

What do you most need to apply from this discussion? Do you need to surrender your life to God? Seek God's plans rather than your own? Be honest with him?

*—Study by John Powell, with JoHannah Reardon*



# Study Through the Bible

## Prayer: The Ultimate Lifestyle - Study 3

LEADER'S GUIDE

### How to Develop a Prayer Lifestyle

*We learn to pray by praying.*

Paul said to the Thessalonians, “Pray without ceasing” (1 Thessalonians 5:17). How do we do that? If prayer were just an exercise that required us to assume a certain posture and recite certain phrases, then following Paul’s commandment would be impossible. But prayer is much more than that. It’s not something you do occasionally, or even for a few minutes every day. Prayer, when applied to your life the way God intended it to be, is a 24-hour-a-day, seven-day-a-week conversation with God. It is a lifestyle.

This study will discuss how to put Paul’s commandment in Thessalonians into practice: how to pray without ceasing and develop a prayer lifestyle.

**Scripture:**

Luke 18:9–14; Jeremiah 20:7; Psalm 73:13–14; Job 6:4; 10:3, 18; 16:7; 19:6; 30:20–23; Nehemiah 2:4–5

**Based on:**

The sermon “How to Develop a Prayer Life-Style” by Steve May, PREACHING TODAY SERMONS



**Christian  
BibleStudies**  
.com

**PART 1**

## Identify the Issue

*Note to leader: At the beginning of the class, provide each person with the Participant's Guide included at the end of this study.*

Richard Foster wrote a book called *Prayer: Finding the Heart's True Home*. In the first chapter of this book, he teaches a powerful principle of prayer: We learn to pray by praying.

You can listen to messages about prayer, read books about prayer, and do Bible studies on prayer, but you'll learn the most about prayer in the privacy of your own heart. You learn to pray by praying.

### Discussion starters:

- [Q] What do you think it means to pray without ceasing?
- [Q] What do you define as prayer? When do your thoughts turn into prayers?

**PART 2**

## Discover the Eternal Principles

### Teaching point one: Begin where you are.

Don't try to clean up your life first. Don't try to make yourself worthy to be heard in prayer. It doesn't work that way. You don't clean yourself up for God; you come to him as you are, and he does the cleaning.

Most of us understand this principle at salvation—that we could never earn or deserve his forgiveness, and it is only through his grace and mercy that we are saved. But after experiencing his grace at salvation, we often try to earn his continued acceptance through our own good works.

There have been times when I've fallen out of fellowship with God and have become too familiar with sin. At those times, when the subject of prayer comes up, my first reaction is, "I can't even think about praying right now ... I've got to get my life straight. I doubt God would even want to listen to me right now, and he's certainly not going to answer any of my prayers."

The part about needing to clean our lives up is correct, but there's a crucial distinction to be made here. We cannot get the cart before the horse. We don't clean ourselves up so that we can come to God; we come to God so that he can clean us up. When your life isn't where it should be, the first step toward getting things back on track is prayer.

There's a great example of this in Luke 18. Read verses 9–14.

The tax collector understood the principle of beginning where you are in prayer. He was a sinner and he knew it, so he came to God confessing it.

Too often we find ourselves in the tax collector's shoes, and instead of turning to God right then, we start thinking of things we can do that will enable us to pray the Pharisee's prayer next Sunday ... or next month ... or next year. That's not the kind of prayer life God wants from us.



He doesn't want (or need) us to recite our spiritual resume. He wants us to begin right where we are, and to be absolutely honest with him and with ourselves.

**[Q]** What was the point Jesus was making in Luke 18:9–14?

**Leader's Note:** *Our prayers should readily admit our weaknesses rather than try to cover them up. He was also knocking holes in our tendency to be confident or superior spiritually.*

**[Q]** How are you tempted to behave like the Pharisee in this parable? Why do you do that?

**[Q]** What did Jesus mean in verse 14: "everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, and he who humbles himself will be exalted"?

**Leader's Note:** *Spiritual pride makes us dependent on ourselves rather than God. We become overconfident, which often leads to disaster. Only as we humble ourselves are we in touch with what God wants to do in and through us.*

### **Optional Activity**

**Purpose:** *To help us recognize spiritual pride.*

**Activity:** *Read the following case studies. Ask the group how each person might be leaning toward spiritual pride. Let them suggest ways to warn that person.*

1. *George: God taught me the hard way to listen to him. I've had a rough life—broken family, tough neighborhood, bad examples. When I landed in jail, God got my attention, and I gave my life to him. Now I've got it together. In fact, I'm having trouble understanding why someone would be so stupid as to ignore God. It's just asking for it.*
2. *Caroline: I was raised in a Christian home, and I've always wanted to do what is right. I never miss church, always pray before meals, give to the poor, and read my Bible.*
3. *Loralei: Since I gave my life to Christ, he has given me a great ministry. I have seen more people come to Christ in one year than most people see in a lifetime. I think God has just gifted me to explain the gospel really well.*
4. *Richard: I know I'm a worm. God could never use me. I'm such a hopeless case that I'll never be able to help anyone else.*

**Leader's Note:** *Possible answers: Advise George to remember where he came from so that he can understand others who are where he was at one time. Advise Caroline to remember that she is still a sinner. Advise Lorelei to find her substance in Christ and not in how many people become Christians through her. Advise Richard to realize that God is bigger than his problems.*

### **Teaching point two: Be absolutely honest with God in your prayers.**

In the movie *Vacation* (starring Chevy Chase), the Griswold's Aunt Edna dies, so the mom, Ellen Griswold (played by Beverly D'Angelo), decides to say a prayer for her. Now, everyone in the Griswold family disliked Aunt Edna because she was harsh and abrasive, and she contributed a great deal to making the Griswold's vacation miserable. However, when Ellen prays, she adopts a voice filled with fabricated emotion and says something along the lines of,



“Dear Lord, Aunt Edna was such a dear, sweet woman, whom we loved with all our hearts, and we will miss her terribly ...” and so on.

It's funny because it's so realistic. That's how we often approach prayer. We say things that we, and God, know aren't true. That's because we think of prayer as a polite ritual in which we whitewash our words to make them socially acceptable to God.

In contrast, the brutal honesty of some of the prayers recorded in the Bible is shocking. Some of the great men of God said things in prayer that most of us would never dream of saying, and yet God responded to their prayers.

Read Jeremiah 20:7; Psalm 73:13–14; Job 6:4; 10:3, 18; 16:7; 19:6; 30:20–23.

When we read these words spoken by a mere mortal to the God of the universe, we can only say: Wow! Do we dare be that honest in our prayers to him?

The answer is yes. You can be absolutely honest with God in your prayers, and for an obvious reason: He already knows what's going through your mind anyway. It's not as if your honesty will take him by surprise, and he'll say, “My goodness! I never knew you felt this way!” He knows. So be honest with him about what you're going through, so he can help you deal with it.

Jeremiah, David, and Job were restored to a right relationship with God, and their situations improved.

The strength of this kind of prayer is not only its honesty but also its tenacity. Even if your prayers are full of misconceptions and self-pity, as long as you're crying out to God he can reach you. It's when you stop crying out to God that the doors of possibility close in your life.

It's not unlike a marriage. As long as a married couple is willing to communicate with one another, talk through their problems, and listen to one another, there is hope for the marriage to survive. But when a couple stops working at the marriage, stops talking to one another, stops living together, the chances for the survival of that marriage become nil.

Ted Turner (the founder of CNN and TBS, among others) is one of the most vocal non-Christians in America. He has made headlines (and drawn criticism) for calling Christians losers, for saying that he doesn't need someone to die on the cross for his sins, for saying the Ten Commandments are obsolete, for making fun of the pope, and for ridiculing some Christians who worked for him as a “bunch of Jesus freaks.” Why is Mr. Turner so adamantly anti-Christian? Because many years ago his sister died. At the time, he considered himself a Christian, but God didn't answer his prayer. So Mr. Turner made a life-altering decision. He turned away from God. Instead of pouring out his heart to God in absolute honesty, he ended the conversation altogether and walked away. When he did, he closed the door of possibility in his life; it will remain closed until the day he decides to open it again.

It is up to you to keep the lines of communication open with God. As long as those lines are open, God can continue to work in your life. If your attitude is wrong, he can help you correct it. If you have sin in your life, he can help you overcome it. If you're feeling sorry for yourself, he can help you develop a more accurate perspective on life. As long as you're willing to communicate with him, he can communicate with you. So don't play games. Be absolutely honest with him about what you're going through, and let him do his work in your life.

It is all right to say, “God, I'm lonely, and I feel like no one cares about me ... God, I'm desperate, and I don't see a light at the end of the tunnel ... God, I want to sin more than I want



to please you ... I want to take a drink more than I want to stay sober ... I want to live by my rules instead of your rules ... I want out of the mess that my life has become!”

Those attitudes may not be right, but if that’s what you’re going through, you’ve got to choose between one of three options. You can be like Ellen Griswold and pray shallow, meaningless prayers that don’t contain a word of truth. Or you can be like Ted Turner and end the conversation completely and live your life without God. Or you can be like David, Jeremiah, and Job, and be absolutely honest in your prayers.

- [Q] Why do you think we have such trouble being honest with God?
- [Q] Do any of Jeremiah, David, or Job’s rantings shock you? If so, which ones? Why?
- [Q] Are you afraid to talk to God the way these men did? Why or why not?

### **Teaching point three: Continue the conversation all day long.**

In the movie and stage play *Fiddler on the Roof*, the main character, Tevye, has an ongoing conversation with God. He doesn’t pray fancy prayers; he just talks to God.

This is a good example for us to follow. We need to develop the habit of talking to God all day long.

I was visiting in a man’s home one evening, and as I was getting ready to leave, I said, “Let’s go to the Lord in prayer.”

He looked a little confused and said (with a straight face), “Where do we need to go? Can’t we just pray right here?” Even though it was just a cliché, he had a point. We don’t have to go anywhere to be in the Lord’s presence. He is already here.

I remind myself of this often. When I am in my office working, or driving in my car, or taking a walk, or talking to a friend on the phone, God is here with me. I don’t have to “enter in” to his presence; he is already present. I just need to remember to acknowledge it all day long.

Nehemiah of ancient Israel needed a big favor from the king. Read about their conversation in Nehemiah 2:4–5.

Nehemiah didn’t have time to put this item on his prayer list and pray about it the next day. And he knew better than to ask a favor of the king without seeking God’s help, so he prayed a quick prayer: “God, help me right now as I talk to the king.”

The more we become aware of God’s presence in our lives throughout the day, the more common these kinds of prayers become, and the more of God’s power we experience.

This is why Paul said, “Pray without ceasing.” You can’t spend the day in ceaseless prayer if your concept of prayer is limited to kneeling with your head bowed and your eyes closed and your hands folded in front of you. But you can carry on an endless conversation with the one who is your constant companion.

- [Q] How can you become more aware of God’s presence so you will keep up a dialogue with him all day?
- [Q] What attitudes about prayer do you need to adjust to talk to him all day?





**Leader's Note:** Answers should include things such as: nothing is off limits, not just bringing requests to him but asking his opinion on everything, learning Scripture so that we know what to talk to him about, sincerely caring what he thinks about all we encounter, no particular position needed.

**[Q]** Mention some ways you might pray in the following situations:

- Something has challenged you morally
- You have a decision to make
- You are facing a crisis
- You need to advise someone else
- You are frightened, depressed, or confused

### PART 3

## Apply Your Findings

There's no trick to developing a prayer life. It simply involves opening your mouth (or mind) and letting the words out. If you want to develop a prayer lifestyle, you simply pray. You learn to pray by praying.

Begin today, right where you are. Be absolutely honest about what's going on in your life, so God can do his work in you—so he can purify your heart, cleanse your motives, remove your sinful attitudes, and direct your path. Keep the conversation going all day long. Pray without ceasing.

**Action Point:** Share what needs to change in your attitudes about prayer to learn to pray without ceasing. Then spend time as a group praying for each person.

—Study by Steve May, with JoHannah Reardon



# Study Through the Bible

## Prayer: The Ultimate Lifestyle - Study 3

PARTICIPANT'S GUIDE

### How to Develop a Prayer Lifestyle

*We learn to pray by praying.*

Paul said to the Thessalonians, “Pray without ceasing” (1 Thessalonians 5:17). How do we do that? If prayer were just an exercise that required us to assume a certain posture and recite certain phrases, then following Paul’s commandment would be impossible. But prayer is much more than that. It’s not something you do occasionally, or even for a few minutes every day. Prayer, when applied to your life the way God intended it to be, is a 24-hour-a-day, seven-day-a-week conversation with God. It is a lifestyle.

This study will discuss how to put Paul’s commandment in Thessalonians into practice: how to pray without ceasing and develop a prayer lifestyle.

**Scripture:**

Luke 18:9–14; Jeremiah 20:7; Psalm 73:13–14; Job 6:4; 10:3, 18; 16:7; 19:6; 30:20–23; Nehemiah 2:4–5

**Based on:**

The sermon “How to Develop a Prayer Life-Style” by Steve May, PREACHING TODAY SERMONS



**Christian  
BibleStudies**  
.com

**PART 1**

## **Identify the Issue**

Richard Foster wrote a book called *Prayer: Finding the Heart's True Home*. In the first chapter of this book, he teaches a powerful principle of prayer: We learn to pray by praying.

You can listen to messages about prayer, read books about prayer, and do Bible studies on prayer, but you'll learn the most about prayer in the privacy of your own heart. You learn to pray by praying.

**PART 2**

## **Discover the Eternal Principles**

**Teaching point one: Begin where you are.**

**Teaching point two: Be absolutely honest with God in your prayers.**

**Teaching point three: Continue the conversation all day long.**

**PART 3**

## **Apply Your Findings**

There's no trick to developing a prayer life. It simply involves opening your mouth (or mind) and letting the words out. If you want to develop a prayer lifestyle, you simply pray. You learn to pray by praying.

Begin today, right where you are. Be absolutely honest about what's going on in your life, so God can do his work in you—so he can purify your heart, cleanse your motives, remove your sinful attitudes, and direct your path. Keep the conversation going all day long. Pray without ceasing.

—Study by Steve May, with JoHannah Reardon



# Study Through the Bible

## Prayer: The Ultimate Lifestyle - Study 4

LEADER'S GUIDE

### Guidelines for Answered Prayer

*God wants to answer our prayers.*

One phenomenon about prayer is that it is answered. Prayer is not just talking things over with God—though that certainly is part of it—but it is also entreating God to act on your behalf. The amazing thing is that he has promised to do so when we bring our requests to him. In other words, he has promised to answer our prayers.

**Scripture:**

James 4:2–10; Matthew 7:9–11; Ephesians 1:15–21

**Based on:**

The sermon "Guidelines for Answered Prayer" by Steve May, PREACHING TODAY SERMONS



## PART 1

**Identify the Issue**

*Note to leader: At the beginning of the class, provide each person with the Participant's Guide included at the end of this study.*

Asking and receiving is a primary part of prayer. As we grow in our faith, our prayers will become deeper and more contemplative, but we will never get to the point where we surpass the asking-and-receiving aspect of prayer. God wants us to be dependent on him. He wants us to ask him for the things we need. Jesus urged his disciples: "Ask and it will be given to you; seek and you will find; knock and the door will be opened to you" (Matthew 7:7).

This can also be seen in the Lord's Prayer—it is essentially a prayer of petition. It begins and ends with adoration, but there are three personal requests in the middle: a request for our material needs to be met, a request for our sins to be forgiven, and a request for deliverance from temptation. Whatever we need, God wants us to ask.

Sometimes our requests are trivial, but don't ever make the mistake of thinking that God is so small that he can't listen to an unlimited number of requests at a time. Praying is not like calling technical support where they put you on hold and tell you that your call will be answered in the order it was received. It's not as if God is prevented from diverting a disaster halfway around the globe because he is distracted by your request to help you find your car keys. God can handle everyone's prayers. In fact, to imply that God is not interested in hearing someone's prayer is to reveal a lack of understanding about who God is and how much he cares for us.

Imagine if one of my children said, "Dad, I have a problem that you could help me with, but I'm not going to bother you with it. You have other children, and you probably care much more about their problems than mine."

If that happened, I would be insulted! I would say to that child (in my best Marlon Brando voice): "What have I done that you should treat me with such disrespect? If you think that I favor one child over the other—that I care about their problems more than yours—then you must not know me very well."

The asking aspect of prayer is not optional for believers; it is the foundation of our prayer life. God wants you to ask, and he's willing to answer—if we follow his instructions. Does God answer every prayer that is submitted to him? On the surface, it appears that the answer is no. It appears that many prayers go up, but only a few answers come down. However, the problem with unanswered prayer is not in prayer itself, but in the way many prayers are offered.

**Discussion starters:**

- [Q] Why do you think God wants us to ask him for things?
- [Q] Name something you prayed for that God answered. What did that answer do for your faith?



PART 2

## Discover the Eternal Principles

### Teaching point one: We must ask with a clean heart.

In the Book of Psalms, David said, “If I had cherished sin in my heart, the Lord would not have listened” (Psalm 66:18).

A while back a man by the name of Kenneth Bruner attempted to put prayer to work. He was preparing to hold up a jewelry store in Des Moines, Iowa, with seven accomplices, and—being the stepson of a minister—he asked God for his protection as they carried off the heist. As it turned out, the robbery wasn’t successful and the would-be thieves were arrested. (*McHenry’s Stories for the Soul*, page 222)

This, of course, is an extreme example, but it illustrates David’s point: if we cherish sin in our hearts, God will not hear us.

If we were honest with ourselves, we would admit that sometimes we ask with less than good intentions. Read James 4:2–10. If you want your prayers to be answered, you have to ask yourself: Why am I asking for this? What is my motive? Is it to become a more effective follower of Christ, or is it just to serve my own agenda? If being a faithful follower of Jesus Christ isn’t your top priority, you will discover there is a barrier between your prayers and heaven’s throne; your prayers will go unanswered.

The reverse is also true. If you are walking in obedience to Christ, then your prayers will have power, and God will answer them in a mighty way. Read 1 John 3:21–23.

If you want the phenomenon of answered prayer to become part of your daily life, then make sure that you ask with a pure heart.

**[Q]** Why do our motives influence the outcome of our prayers? How can we make sure our motives are pure?

**Leader’s Note:** *We find a clue in James 4:3. James follows that verse with a warning of friendship with the world. If we are asking things only for our pleasure, we have probably made the world our friend and God our enemy. If God is our anchor in life, we will ask for those things he wants, rather than simply our own pleasures.*

**[Q]** James 4:7 tells us to submit ourselves to God. What does this have to do with whether or not God answers our prayers? Why?

**[Q]** What does it mean to wash our hands and purify our hearts (v. 8)? What does it mean to grieve, mourn, and wail (v. 9)? Have you ever done this?

**Leader’s Note:** *Both passages refer to sorrow for our sin. We are not to take sin lightly, or expect God to ignore it.*

**[Q]** What pleases God, according to 1 John 3:23? What does this have to do with answered prayer?



### Teaching point two: Ask with faith in God's goodness.

Jesus said, "If you believe, you will receive whatever you ask for in prayer" (Matthew 21:22), and "Therefore I tell you, whatever you ask for in prayer, believe that you have received it, and it will be yours" (Mark 11:24).

What does it mean to ask in faith? There is great power in prayer if our motives for asking are in line with God's good; therefore we can pray with great confidence, expecting God to answer yes. For example, a friend of mine may have cancer. I can (and do) pray that my friend will be healed of the cancer. Am I guaranteed success in this prayer if I ask in faith? Not necessarily, because God's good may be different than the good I perceive (after all, Jesus went to the cross, which wouldn't have seemed good to me at the time). However, I can pray with absolute confidence that God will be present with my friend and his family. I can pray with absolute confidence that my friend will seek God and pass on everything he knows about God to his children. I can ask with absolute confidence that God will give my friend peace that passes all understanding, no matter what the outcome of the cancer.

So we ask for everything. That which we know to be God's will, we can pray for with confident expectation that it will be answered. That which we do not know to be God's will, we ask and leave it in God's hands. If my friend is healed of the cancer, I rejoice and give God the praise. If my friend is not healed, I rejoice and give God the praise.

**[Q]** Read Matthew 7:9–11. Why must we be convinced of the goodness of God to trust that he'll answer our prayer?

**Leader's Note:** *Unless we believe he is good, we question his answers that don't line up with our desires, and we miss what he's trying to accomplish in and through us.*

**[Q]** Which statement lines up best with your idea of God's nature:

- God is all powerful, but stingy with his power.
- God is not all powerful; otherwise there wouldn't be so much evil in the world.
- God is all powerful and delights in using that power on our behalf.
- God is all powerful and doesn't really care what happens to us as long as he accomplishes his purposes.

Why did you pick the statement you chose? What does that tell you about your view of God? Does that view line up with Scripture?

**[Q]** Why did Jesus use an analogy of a parent in Matthew 7? How does that affect your attitude about prayer?

### Teaching point three: Begin to ask for things you know God wants to answer.

There are many things God wants to give us that we don't receive—because we don't ask.

For example, he wants us to experience peace (John 16:33), yet many believers have no peace. He wants us to have joy (John 15:11), yet many have no joy. He wants us to be fulfilled, accomplish great things, and have enough to live on (Ecclesiastes 3:12–13), yet many believers are frustrated in their jobs, wasting their potential, and living in fear of want. Why?

You do not have because you do not ask (James 4:2).



There are so many things that we know are God's will, and yet we miss out on them because we fail to ask him—in spite of the fact that we have his promise that he will give anything we ask for according to his will. His will covers an enormous area—love, joy, peace, holiness, power over sin, fulfillment, strong relationships, discipline, hope, happiness, forgiveness ... and so much more. There are literally hundreds of promises in the Bible of blessings that God wants to give us, if we will only ask.

The phrase about asking “according to his will” is not God's escape clause; it is his seal of guarantee. If something is his will for his children, there is no way he will deprive you of it. So ask for those things that you know he wants you to have. He will not hold back from answering.

Read Ephesians 1:15–21. Notice the things Paul prays for these people.

- [Q] Name everything Paul prays for, according to this passage.
- [Q] Would praying this way for others change the way you pray? How would it change the way you pray for your spouse, children, parents, coworkers, or neighbors?
- [Q] Which of your problems might be solved if you started praying confidently in this manner for all the people we just mentioned?
- [Q] How might you change if you prayed this way for yourself?

### **Optional Activity**

**Purpose:** *To help us learn to pray for others.*

**Activity:** *Read the following case studies. Ask the group to advise each person on how they might change the way they are praying according to how Paul prayed for the Ephesians and the Philippians.*

- *Fred is worried about the kind of friends his son tends to make. He has tried to restrict certain friendships, but his son always finds a way to go behind his back. So far, he has only prayed for different friends for his son. How can he pray for his son the way Paul prayed?*
- *Margaret wants her husband to come to church with her. She prays for that everyday. How else might she pray for him?*
- *Joe has an unreasonable neighbor who argues with him about everything. The worst part about it is his neighbor is a Christian. How can Joe pray for him?*

### **PART 3**

## **Apply Your Findings**

There's one more principle of answered prayer. You might say, “I have a chance to get a job I think I'd really enjoy. Should I ask God for it?” Yes, by all means. Or “I've got some health problems. Should I ask to be healed?” Yes, by all means. Or “I want to get married. Should I ask God for a spouse?” Yes, by all means. Ask for these things, but ask with this understanding: God will give you whatever you ask for—or something better. That better may not be at all what





you had in mind, and it may not be what seems better at first glance to you, but as you trust God and let him work his purposes, you will see that it is best.

You've heard the saying, "It doesn't hurt to ask." When it comes to prayer, that saying is especially true. Don't hesitate to ask God for whatever you need, or even whatever you want. But when you ask, ask with a pure heart. Ask with faith in God's goodness. Ask according to his will. He will give you what you ask for—or he will give you something better. That's his promise.

**Action Point:** In light of this discussion, what most needs to change in the way you pray? Ask the group to pray for that change for you.

*—Study by Steve May, with JoHannah Reardon*



# Study Through the Bible

## Prayer: The Ultimate Lifestyle - Study 4

PARTICIPANT'S GUIDE

### Guidelines for Answered Prayer

*God wants to answer our prayers.*

One phenomenon about prayer is that it is answered. Prayer is not just talking things over with God—though that certainly is part of it—but it is also entreating God to act on your behalf. The amazing thing is that he has promised to do so when we bring our requests to him. In other words, he has promised to answer our prayers.

**Scripture:**

James 4:2–10; Matthew 7:9–11; Ephesians 1:15–21

**Based on:**

The sermon "Guidelines for Answered Prayer" by Steve May, PREACHING TODAY SERMONS



**PART 1**

## **Identify the Issue**

Asking and receiving is a primary part of prayer. As we grow in our faith, our prayers will become deeper and more contemplative, but we will never get to the point where we surpass the asking-and-receiving aspect of prayer. God wants us to be dependent on him. He wants us to ask him for the things we need. Jesus urged his disciples: “Ask and it will be given to you; seek and you will find; knock and the door will be opened to you” (Matthew 7:7).

**PART 2**

## **Discover the Eternal Principles**

**Teaching point one: We must ask with a clean heart.**

**Teaching point two: Ask with faith in God’s goodness.**

**Teaching point three: Begin to ask for things you know God wants to answer.**

**PART 3**

## **Apply Your Findings**

You’ve heard the saying, “It doesn’t hurt to ask.” When it comes to prayer, that saying is especially true. Don’t hesitate to ask God for whatever you need, or even whatever you want. But when you ask, ask with a pure heart. Ask with faith in God’s goodness. Ask according to his will. He will give you what you ask for—or he will give you something better. That’s his promise.

*—Study by Steve May, with JoHannah Reardon*



# Study Through the Bible

## Prayer: The Ultimate Lifestyle - Study 5

LEADER'S GUIDE

### How to Pray for Yourself

*When praying for yourself, you must be willing to take action.*

The overwhelming majority of prayers in the Bible are prayed for the benefit of someone else. When Paul mentions prayer, he nearly always talks about what he's praying for others. There aren't many examples of prayers that people pray for themselves, but there are a few, and they teach us how to pray for ourselves. This study will examine those prayers.

**Scripture:**

Luke 18:9-14; Jonah 2; Psalm 138:1-3; Matthew 5:1-12

**Based on:**

The sermon "How to Pray for Yourself" by Steve May, PREACHING TODAY SERMONS



**Christian  
BibleStudies**  
.com

**PART 1**

## Identify the Issue

*Note to leader: At the beginning of the class, provide each person with the Participant's Guide included at the end of this study.*

When we pray for ourselves, what are we to pray? Is it right to pray for things, such as a new car, house, or diamond ring? Is it right to pray for success, to pray to make a sale? When you pray for yourself, what should you pray? Obviously, we need guidelines.

### Discussion starter:

**[Q]** What do you usually pray for yourself? What's your motivation in these prayers?

**PART 2**

## Discover the Eternal Principles

### Teaching point one: Pray for God's mercy.

This is where prayer begins. Read Luke 18:9–14. Prayer is not a job interview. The purpose of prayer is not to sell God on the idea that, deep down inside, you really are a good person. Neither are you playing the role of an attorney, pleading your case before the judge. God already knows you inside and out. He knows every good and bad thing you've done. You can't play games with God; neither can you negotiate with him. You can only come to him as you are, pleading mercy, and without exception we all need God's mercy.

The good news is that when you come to God for mercy, he gives it to you. What does he expect in return? The same thing: mercy. He expects you to show mercy to others. Jesus said, "Blessed are the merciful, for they will be shown mercy" (Matthew 5:7), and "For if you forgive men when they sin against you, your heavenly father will also forgive you" (Matthew 6:14).

We are all in need of God's mercy. Asking for mercy is where prayer begins. Showing mercy to others is how we ensure our prayers are answered. When you pray for yourself, pray for God's mercy and be prepared to show mercy to others.

**[Q]** Why do we need to pray for mercy?

**Leader's Note:** *We all want our own way rather than God's way. We are all tainted by sin.*

**[Q]** When and how often do you pray for mercy? Why is that a prerequisite to prayer?

**[Q]** What does praying for mercy do for our attitude as we come to God?

### Teaching point two: Pray for God's help.

A man who was facing death once said to me, "I've never been a praying man. I'm not going to be a hypocrite and start praying now just because I'm in trouble."



I told him, “It’s not hypocritical to start doing now what you should have been doing all your life. Neither does it make sense to compound your mistakes by refusing to turn to God at this moment in your life.”

When your life is in a mess—even if it’s your fault—you can still turn to God for help. Don’t let pride or shame prevent you from seeking his help.

You know the story of Jonah. When God told him to go to Nineveh, Jonah refused. He got in a boat and took off in the other direction. A big storm came up, and Jonah was tossed out of the boat and swallowed by a big fish. Through his disobedience, Jonah had made a mess of his life, and at that moment his future didn’t look very bright. So, from the belly of the fish, Jonah began to pray. Read his prayer in Jonah 2.

God is ready to help. You don’t have to wait until you reach rock bottom to receive his help; he will help at any point you ask along the way. But even if you do wait till things are at their worst before you ask for his help, it’s still not too late—he will help you.

I have a friend named Larry who is (was) an alcoholic. For years he lived the party lifestyle, and in the process he ruined his life. Some of the time he had fun; most of the time he was absolutely miserable. Finally, his wife divorced him. His children refused to see him. His employer fired him. The bank took his car and his house—and this was especially difficult for him because at one time he had been on the board of directors of that bank. He ran to Las Vegas with all the money he could scrape together—a few hundred dollars—hoping to win back the fortune he had lost. Needless to say, it wasn’t long before he lost his money at the tables. One night, with only 14 cents in his pocket, Larry crawled into an alley in a run-down part of Vegas, looking for a place to sleep. Someone was waiting in that alley, and he was beaten and robbed—the thief took his last 14 cents.

Larry had half-heartedly asked God for help before, but this time he meant business. In the past his prayers had been along the lines of, “Lord, change my wife’s attitude; Lord, don’t let my bosses find out about my drinking problem; Lord, help me win this roll of the dice.” This time, however, his prayer was much different. He said, “Lord, whatever it takes, whatever I have to do, I need your help.”

God answered his prayer, and he was able to turn his life around. Today he is back on his feet. He said, “For years I resisted turning to God for help, because I was afraid he would take all the fun out of my life. Then I finally realized that the fun I was living for wasn’t much fun. I was miserable. Thank God, now my life is worth living.”

Larry could have asked for help at any other time in his life, and God would have been there for him. He could have asked for help before he ran away to Vegas. He could have asked for help before he got fired, or lost his house, or his wife left, or before he took his first drink. He could have asked for help at any time during this entire process, and God would have helped him. He could have saved himself a lot of misery. He didn’t have to wait until he reached rock bottom to cry out for help—but he did, and God was there to help.

No matter what stage of turmoil your life may be in, ask God for help. The Book of James says, “Is any one of you in trouble? He should pray” (James 5:13).

When you pray to God for help, be ready to do whatever it takes to straighten things out. If your situation is impossible, God will do the impossible part—if you’re willing to do your part. Notice what Jonah said: “But I, with a song of thanksgiving, will sacrifice to you. What I have vowed I will make good. Salvation comes from the Lord.”



Ask God for help now—and mean business. Ask him for help with your little problems before they become big problems. Ask him for help with the big problems before they kill you, and be ready to do whatever it takes.

- [Q] Why are we reluctant to ask God for help?
- [Q] Why do we have to be willing to do whatever it takes?
- [Q] What holds you back from asking for help?
  - a. Time—too busy to stop and ask
  - b. Lack of trust that God knows what's best
  - c. Fear that God will make me change
  - d. Anger at God for past experiences
  - e. Other—explain

### Teaching point three: Pray for God's strength.

Here's a humorous morning prayer:

"Dear God, so far today I've done all right. I haven't lost my temper, I haven't spread any gossip, I haven't been selfish or over-indulgent. But in a few minutes, God, I'm going to get out of bed, and from then on, I'm going to need all the strength I can get!"

That's a good prayer, and it's a good way to start the day: ask God for his strength. The fact is that you don't have enough strength to make it on your own. You need God's strength at work in your life, and he is willing to make it available to you. Read Psalm 138:1–3.

One of my favorite hymns is "I Need Thee Every Hour." My favorite verse goes, "I need thee every hour; stay thou nearby. Temptations lose their power when thou art nigh. I need thee, oh I need thee; every hour I need thee. Oh bless me now my savior, I come to thee."

Pray for God's strength; he'll give it to you.

- [Q] How much strength does God have? How much of that strength is available to us?

**Leader's Note:** *Unlimited. As much as we ask for.*

- [Q] Why do you personally need God's strength? What situations in your life call for it?

### Teaching point four: Pray for God's blessing.

Read Matthew 5:1–12. To ask for God's blessing is to ask to be like the ones Jesus describes in this passage. This description doesn't sound like what we would usually think is a blessing, but that's what it is.

You have to be blessed to bless others. You can't share your joy with others if you have no joy to share. You can't give love to others if you have no love to give. You can't show patience if you don't have patience ... and on and on. For you to be able to minister to others, you need to first experience God's work in your life.

Pray to be blessed. The New Testament word for "blessed" is *makarios* (ma-KAR-ee-os). There isn't a word in the English language that matches this word exactly; it is sometimes translated "happy" in various versions of the Bible, and that's reasonably close to the original meaning.



When you pray to be blessed, you're praying, "Lord, help me be happy." The Greek word *makarios* was also used to describe the idea of contentment, fulfillment, and satisfaction. When you ask to be blessed, you're asking God: "Help me be content; help me be fulfilled; help me be satisfied."

- [Q] Have you ever prayed for God's blessing? What was in your mind when you did so?
- [Q] What do we usually think of when we think of God's blessing? How is his blessing different than that? How is it the same?

**Leader's Note:** *We often think in terms of material blessings. The blessing Jesus talks about in Matthew 5 is a spiritual blessing. It is still a blessing, however, because it has the capacity to make us happy in a way we cannot imagine.*

### Teaching point five: Pray for God's will.

In the Lord's Prayer, Jesus encouraged us to pray, "Your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven" (Matthew 6:10). Later, when Jesus was facing death, he prayed alone in the Garden of Gethsemane, "My Father, if it is possible, may this cup be taken from me. Yet not as I will, but as you will" (Matthew 26:39).

This is the culmination of prayer. We ask for things along the way, but the underlying motive is "Not my will, Lord, but yours be done." You may ask God for a new job, for example, but the underlying motive behind your prayer is "Not my will, Lord, but yours." Pray for what you want, but also pray for God's will to be done in your life, and be willing to be obedient to do his will.

- [Q] Why did even Jesus have to pray for God's will?
- [Q] What does praying for God's will do to our expectations about how he will answer?
- [Q] What does it do for us when God answers in a way differently than we thought he would?

### PART 3

## Apply Your Findings

When you pray for yourself, pray for God's mercy, help, strength, blessing, and will. But there's a fundamental theme to these guidelines: you must be willing to take action.

When you pray for God's mercy, be willing to show mercy. When you pray for God's help, be willing to do whatever it takes to make things right. When you pray for God's strength, be willing to rely on him throughout the day. When you pray for God's blessing, be willing to share his blessings with others. When you pray for God's will, be willing to be obedient to do his will. This is how you pray for yourself.

**Action Point:** Of the five teaching points, which one do you need the most help with? Ask the group to pray for you in that area and to ask you next week how you are doing.

—Study by Steve May, with JoHannah Reardon





# Study Through the Bible

## Prayer: The Ultimate Lifestyle - Study 5

PARTICIPANT'S GUIDE

### How to Pray for Yourself

*When praying for yourself, you must be willing to take action.*

The overwhelming majority of prayers in the Bible are prayed for the benefit of someone else. When Paul mentions prayer, he nearly always talks about what he's praying for others. There aren't many examples of prayers that people pray for themselves, but there are a few, and they teach us how to pray for ourselves. This study will examine those prayers.

**Scripture:**

Luke 18:9–14; Jonah 2; Psalm 138:1–3; Matthew 5:1–12

**Based on:**

The sermon "How to Pray for Yourself" by Steve May, PREACHING TODAY SERMONS



**Christian  
BibleStudies**  
.com

**PART 1**

## **Identify the Issue**

When we pray for ourselves, what are we to pray? Is it right to pray for things, such as a new car, house, or diamond ring? Is it right to pray for success, to pray to make a sale? When you pray for yourself, what should you pray? Obviously, we need guidelines.

**PART 2**

## **Discover the Eternal Principles**

**Teaching point one: Pray for God's mercy.**

**Teaching point two: Pray for God's help.**

**Teaching point three: Pray for God's strength.**

**Teaching point four: Pray for God's blessing.**

**Teaching point five: Pray for God's will.**

**PART 3**

## **Apply Your Findings**

When you pray for yourself, pray for God's mercy, help, strength, blessing, and will. But there's a fundamental theme to these guidelines: you must be willing to take action.

When you pray for God's mercy, be willing to show mercy. When you pray for God's help, be willing to do whatever it takes to make things right. When you pray for God's strength, be willing to rely on him throughout the day. When you pray for God's blessing, be willing to share his blessings with others. When you pray for God's will, be willing to be obedient to do his will. This is how you pray for yourself.

*—Study by Steve May, with JoHannah Reardon*



# Study Through the Bible

## Prayer: The Ultimate Lifestyle - Study 6

LEADER'S GUIDE

### How to Pray for Anyone and Everyone

*Prayer is not just a religious ritual; it is a matter of the heart.*

Many people have said, “When I pray for someone, I don’t know what to say, and I don’t know what to pray.” In the first chapter of Philippians, the apostle Paul offered a blueprint we can use when we pray for people. Whether those people are friends, enemies, relatives, strangers, missionaries, or anything else, Paul showed us how to pray effectively for anyone and everyone.

**Scripture:**

Philippians 1:3–11

**Based on:**

The sermon “How to Pray for Anyone and Everyone” by Steve May, PREACHING TODAY SERMONS



**Christian  
BibleStudies**  
.com

## PART 1

**Identify the Issue**

*Note to leader: At the beginning of the class, provide each person with the Participant's Guide included at the end of this study.*

When I became a Christian I was made aware of my responsibility to pray for people. So I put together a list, starting with everyone in my family—including aunts and uncles I hadn't seen since preschool and cousins so far removed that any genetic link between us was by now untraceable. I also included the names of everyone in my youth group (about 150 students) and all the key people at church—my pastor, youth minister, Sunday school teacher, youth choir director, and so on. I also included my friends at school, the people my mother worked with, my teachers, my coaches, the guys who worked with me at Sonic, the two nuns who lived across the street from me, the paper boy, and a guy named Frank Lewis who was a missionary in Belize. Strategically, I divided my list into seven sections and made a commitment to pray over one section each day.

On day one I ran into a snag. The first name on the list was my cousin Margaret, whom I barely knew. I prayed, "Lord, bless Margaret. She's my cousin. Uh ... I haven't seen her in a few years; please bless her. Also bless her mom and dad, whose names I forgot to put on this list. So ... uh ... please bless her."

Then I went to the next name on my list—a guy at work named Burt. I prayed, "Lord, please bless Burt ... uh ... I work with him ... so ... uh ... please bless him." It soon became obvious that I desperately needed help developing my prayer life. In fact, if the word *bless* could have been surgically removed from my vocabulary, my career as a prayer warrior would have come to an abrupt halt.

I'm not the only one who has experienced this.

**Discussion starters:**

- [Q] Have you struggled with knowing what to pray for people? How do you pray for people? Describe your prayers.
- [Q] Have you ever seen God change someone as a result of your prayers? Tell us about it.

## PART 2

**Discover the Eternal Principles****Teaching point one: Make it a positive prayer.**

Whether or not you have a positive relationship with the person you're praying for, you can still pray a positive prayer. Paul said, "I thank my God every time I remember you. In all my prayers for all of you, I always pray with joy ..." (Philippians 1:3–4a).

As you read the book of Philippians, it becomes evident that Paul was close to the Philippian people. It also becomes evident that although they were a good church, they weren't a perfect church. They had their share of problems and conflicts. Still, Paul's prayers for them were positive—full of thanksgiving and joy.



Whenever you pray for someone, begin by thanking God for them. Thank God for the role they've played in your life, for all that they've done for you, for the good things they've done for others. Even if you're having conflict with this person, thank God that he or she is giving you the opportunity to grow spiritually, learn forgiveness, be more patient, and on and on. If you try, you can find something to be thankful for in just about anyone. Instead of focusing on everything negative about that person, focus on the good things.

Are you familiar with the 80/20 rule? Business consultants say 80 percent of your sales come from 20 percent of your customers; sociologists say that 80 percent of crime is committed by 20 percent of the population, and so on. I once pastored a church where the 80/20 rule was in effect. Eighty percent of the church wanted to fire me, the other 20 percent wanted to kill me. (That's an exaggeration, though at the time I was sure it was the truth.) I knew I should pray for the "opposition"—but it wasn't easy. I saw how Paul prayed for the Philippian church, and I began thanking God for the people in my church—even the ones who were against me.

One person in particular comes to mind. He was a key person in the church, and he despised me. I knew it and he knew that I knew it. What he probably didn't know was that the feeling was mutual. I didn't want to be around him anymore than he wanted to be around me. I wished he would move to another church as much as he wished I would leave.

Every Sunday morning, as I began my message, he would put on his glasses, take out his Sunday school book, lean back comfortably in his pew, and begin to read. When I decided to pray for him, I sincerely looked for things to be thankful for. Although I didn't appreciate his attitude, there were some good things about him. He was in church every Sunday. He gave generously. He was always doing projects around the building. He taught Sunday school. His grown children were an active and vital part of the church. He was a good grandfather. He had a great lawn. He was punctual. The list continued to grow.

After praying for him several times, I discovered it was impossible not to like him a little bit, in spite of how he felt about me. Through prayer, our relationship changed. Did we become best friends? Not exactly. But we didn't feel animosity toward each other.

One Sunday after church my car wouldn't start. He happened to be close by and volunteered to give me a ride home. My immediate thought was, *Oh no. What will we talk about for 10 miles?* On the way home I didn't say anything—I didn't have the chance. He talked the whole time. He said more to me that afternoon than he had said in the previous three years. He told me about his wife's surprise birthday party, about the place where he used to work, about working on cars, and on and on. As I was getting out of the car, he said, "Good sermon, today. I wouldn't mind hearing that one again." I couldn't believe my ears. Prayer made the difference in our relationship.

The great preacher George Buttrick said when you pray for enemies you should begin the prayer this way: "Lord, bless so and so, whom I foolishly regard as an enemy. Keep them in thy favor. Banish my resentment."

Paul said, "I am confident of this, that he who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus" (Philippians 1:6). When you pray, make it a positive prayer—not because you have faith in that person, but because you have faith in God, who never gives up on us.

Read Philippians 1:3–6.



- [Q] How does it change our attitude toward someone to pray positively for him or her? Have you ever experienced that? If so, tell us about it.
- [Q] Why do you think Paul so often started his letters with “I thank God for you”? What does thankfulness do for us in general? What does it do to the person we tell that to?
- [Q] Verse 6 says that God will complete what he started in us. How does that give us perspective on a person who isn't where we think he or she should be?

### Teaching point two: Make it a personal prayer.

Read Philippians 1:7. When you pray for others, take time to reflect on how this person affects you personally, and what the relationship means to you. That's exactly what Paul did.

Prayer is not just a religious ritual. It is a matter of the heart. It touches our emotions. It is so much more than a daily routine where we recite a few words and read some names off of a list. When you pray for people, you pray your heart for them.

You can do this even for strangers. Every week I pray for pastors I do not know—many whose name I can't even pronounce. Yet my prayer for them is personal. How? Because when I pray I think of all the good they are doing. Some of them are serving in third world countries where the people live in extreme poverty—poverty beyond our ability to comprehend. Some are serving parts of Asia or the former Soviet Union, where Christianity is under attack by the government and they have to meet in secret. I think of the emotional toll these hardships must take on the pastors. I think of how their children and wives must suffer as a result of their ministry. My heart goes out to these pastors—they are my heroes and my inspiration. When I pray for these pastors, it is so much more than just reading a name and saying a few words—it's a prayer from my heart.

Richard Foster, author of *Prayer: Finding the Heart's True Home*, tells a story about a holy lady he met when he was teenager. She was sick and spent all of her time in bed. Once during a visit she showed him her “family album,” which contained 200 pictures of missionaries and others she prayed for. Every week, she flipped through the pages of that album, looking at the photographs and lifting each person in prayer. Her prayers were so much more than words. She was sharing her heart. When you pray for others, make it a personal prayer.

- [Q] What makes a personal prayer more difficult than simply listing off our requests? What makes it so much more satisfying?
- [Q] How can we make sure we are praying from the heart? What practical things might we do to see that happen?

### Optional Activity

**Purpose:** To help us learn to pray from the heart for others.

**Activity:** Richard Foster mentioned the woman who kept a photo album of those she prayed for. This obviously helped her pray from the heart. As a group, brainstorm other such practical ideas. List them on a whiteboard or poster board.



**Teaching point three: Make it a purpose-driven prayer.**

At the beginning of this study, we talked about those who didn't know how to pray for others. Paul shows us exactly what to pray. Read Philippians 1:9–11.

Paul prayed three things for the Philippian people: that they would grow in love, wisdom, and holiness. You can pray this for anyone, whether you know them well or not. When you pray for someone to grow in love, wisdom, and holiness, you are giving them a gift.

**[Q]** What are we asking God to do if we pray that someone's "love abounds more and more in knowledge and depth of insight"?

**Leader's Note:** *A person whose "love abounds more and more" is a person who will be happy and have a rich, rewarding life. They will have strong, healthy relationships with others. They will be able to make friends and keep friends. They will be optimistic about the future. They will not find themselves being held back by fear because, as 1 John 4:18 says, "Perfect love casts out fear." When you pray that a person grows in love, you are praying that he or she becomes content, generous, friendly, and well adjusted.*

**[Q]** What are we asking God to do if we pray for someone to grow in "knowledge and depth of insight" and to be "able to discern what is best"?

**Leader's Note:** *A person who is growing in "knowledge and depth of insight" and is "able to discern what is best" is a person who has the wisdom to make clearheaded decisions at crucial points in life. This person isn't paralyzed by doubt and indecision. He or she will win the battle between right and wrong, as well as the battle between good and best. This person will be able make wise choices and act on them. When you pray for a person to grow in wisdom, you are praying for that person to become confident, focused, and able to make tough decisions and stick with them.*

**[Q]** What are we asking God to do if we pray for someone to be "pure and blameless until the day of Christ" and "filled with the righteousness that comes through Christ"?

**Leader's Note:** *A person who is "pure and blameless until the day of Christ" and is "filled with the righteousness that comes through Christ" is a person who is alive spiritually. This person's religion consists of more than just going to church on Sunday morning. They are involved in a dynamic day-to-day relationship with Jesus that permeates every area of life: their job, marriage, friendships, etc. It goes beyond the externals and makes them good from the inside out, enabling them to live their lives with integrity. When you pray that a person grows in holiness, you are praying for that person to become completely good through and through, from the inside out.*

**PART 3****Apply Your Findings**

Prayer is not just a religious ritual; it is a matter of the heart. When you pray for someone, you do much more for them than you could do otherwise. Pray for the people around you—the people you like and the people you have difficulty getting along with. Pray a positive prayer for them. Make it personal. Pray with purpose. Pray God's best for them. You will find you're not just saying words; you're sharing your heart.



**Action Point:** Since this is the final study in this series, ask each person to highlight what he or she has learned about prayer. Pray for each other that you will apply what you've learned.

—Study by Steve May, with JoHannah Reardon





# Study Through the Bible

## Prayer: The Ultimate Lifestyle - Study 6

PARTICIPANT'S GUIDE

### How to Pray for Anyone and Everyone

*Prayer is not just a religious ritual; it is a matter of the heart.*

Many people have said, “When I pray for someone, I don’t know what to say, and I don’t know what to pray.” In the first chapter of Philippians, the apostle Paul offered a blueprint we can use when we pray for people. Whether those people are friends, enemies, relatives, strangers, missionaries, or anything else, Paul showed us how to pray effectively for anyone and everyone.

**Scripture:**

Philippians 1:3–11

**Based on:**

The sermon “How to Pray for Anyone and Everyone” by Steve May, PREACHING TODAY SERMONS



**Christian  
BibleStudies**  
.com

**PART 1**

## **Identify the Issue**

When I became a Christian I was made aware of my responsibility to pray for people. So I put together a list, starting with everyone in my family, youth group, church, friends, etc. I didn't know how to pray for all these people. It soon became obvious that I desperately needed help developing my prayer life. In fact, if the word *bless* could have been surgically removed from my vocabulary, my career as a prayer warrior would have come to an abrupt halt.

I'm not the only one who has experienced this.

**PART 2**

## **Discover the Eternal Principles**

**Teaching point one: Make it a positive prayer.**

**Teaching point two: Make it a personal prayer.**

**Teaching point three: Make it a purpose-driven prayer.**

**PART 3**

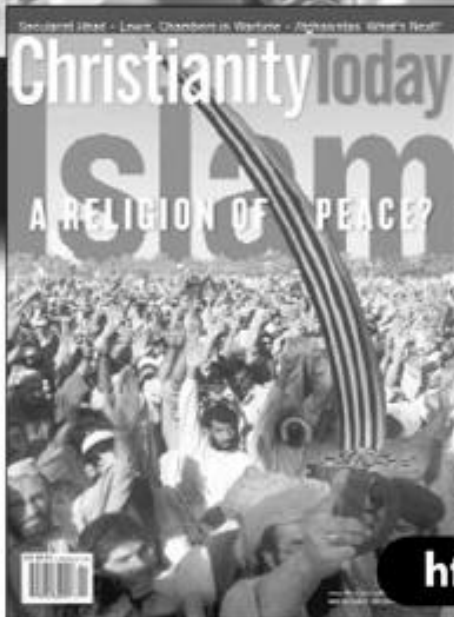
## **Apply Your Findings**

Prayer is not just a religious ritual; it is a matter of the heart. When you pray for someone, you do much more for them than you could do otherwise. Pray for the people around you—the people you like and the people you have difficulty getting along with. Pray a positive prayer for them. Make it personal. Pray with purpose. Pray God's best for them. You will find you're not just saying words; you're sharing your heart.

*—Study by Steve May, with JoHannah Reardon*



# UNDERSTAND THE WORLD



**F**or a trustworthy Christian perspective on current issues, trends, and news, turn to **Christianity Today** magazine. You'll get reliable facts and views to help you make wise decisions in our ever-changing world.

Each issue will inform and challenge you with timely news coverage, compelling articles, and thought-provoking editorials. Subscribe today and SAVE! To get 3 risk-free trial issues, go to:

[http://christianitytoday.com/go/ctmag\\_ad](http://christianitytoday.com/go/ctmag_ad)