

How to pray: 10 principles of a powerful prayer life

Guiding Scripture: "...The earnest prayer of a righteous person has great power and produces wonderful results." James 5:16b (New Living Translation)

"How should I pray?" is a question thousands of people ask every day. Studies show that most people pray, but few judge their prayer life to be powerful or effective. Matthew 5-7 includes one of the great teachings in the Gospels—the Sermon on the Mount. In this discourse, Jesus shares insights on what makes a powerful prayer life so powerful?" This article presents an overview of that important teaching.

Tens of thousands of books have been written to help individuals know how to pray, but one needn't look any further than Matthew 6 to find a great teaching, and great insight, from the greatest teacher, on the important subject of prayer. Matthew 5-7 presents the Sermon on the Mount, which is one of five teaching discourses presented in the Gospel of Matthew. There Jesus shares insights regarding how to live, how to be happy, how to treat others, how to find peace, and how to pray. This article profiles Jesus' teaching on how to pray.

A TRUE STORY ON THE POWER OF FAITH AND PRAYER

About 2700 years ago, a powerful Assyrian king named Sennacherib was determined to expand his kingdom. After many military victories, he set his sights on conquering Israel—the jewel of Israel was the city of Jerusalem. In the city of Jerusalem lived king Hezekiah. Though the city of Jerusalem was well fortified; the citizens were struck with fear when officials reported that Sennacherib had amassed an army of more than 180,000 and had recently overrun 46 walled cities and taken 210,000 captives. It was not long before Sennacherib's troops surrounded Jerusalem. The arrogant Assyrian king sent a letter to Hezekiah. The letter was not a demand to surrender—it was a threat of annihilation. 'Tomorrow,' Sennacherib wrote, 'you and your people will be dead' (my paraphrase). Many began to panic. Hezekiah was outnumbered and outgunned. It was a desperate situation. What does one do in a desperate situation? Pray.

In a brilliant, strategic move, king Hezekiah gathered his people and asked them to pray—not hide, or run, or fight—just pray. And that night, as the people prayed, confessed, and worshiped God, one angel was sent from heaven to take care of the matter. By the morning the enemy army was no more.

This Old Testament story reminds the reader that God is great, there is always hope, and that one of the great (and largely untapped) resources available to God's people is prayer.

Have faith, pray often, pray for others, pray with others, and remember: God is always just one prayer away.

STUDY NOTES FOR THOUGHTS ON 'THE LORD'S PRAYER' IN MATTHEW 6.

"After this manner therefore pray ye: Our Father which art in heaven, Hallowed be thy name. Thy kingdom come. Thy will be done in earth, as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread. And forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors. And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil: For thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory, forever. Amen."
Matthew 6:9 (KJV)

10 COMPONENTS OF A POWERFUL PRAYER

1. Begin with a recognition of who God is (V.9) and who to pray to. "After this manner therefore pray ye..."
 - a. Believers are to pray to "Our Father..."
 - b. Believers are to pray to the God who created and is "in heaven..."
 - c. Believers are to pray to the God who is holy and whose name is "hallowed"
2. Acknowledge God's sovereign will (V.10a) -- "Thy kingdom come. Thy will be done..."
 - a. Believe that God has a plan (Jer. 29:11), that it is a good plan, and that it cannot be thwarted. Pray to be able know God's plan, embrace God's plan, and support God's plan.
 - b. See Proverbs 19:21
3. Yield to/embrace God's sovereign will in your life (V.10b) -- "...Thy will be done in earth, as it is in heaven."
 - a. Recognizing that God's will is best is the first step in being able to surrender to and support it.
 - b. Pray as Jesus prayed: "Father, if you are willing, take this cup from me; yet not my will, but yours be done." Luke 22:4
 - c. Consider the following verses:
 - i. "I desire to do your will, O my God; your law is within my heart." Psalm 40:8
 - ii. "We know that we have come to know him if we obey his commands." 1 John 2:3
 - iii. "Those who obey his commands live in him, and he in them. And this is how we know that he lives in us: We know it by the Spirit he gave us." 1 John 3:24
 - d. "This is love for God: to obey his commands. And his commands are not burdensome..." 1 John 5:3
4. Pray with the right perspective (V.11) -- "Give us this day..."
 - a. Pray to be able to accomplish well the work at hand.
 - b. Recognize that each day, and each opportunity, is a gift from God.
 - c. Do not unduly worry about tomorrow.

5. Pray humbly... (V.11) -- "...our daily bread."
 - a. Pray for your needs (not greeds)
 - b. The word bread and blessing are linked in Hebrew culture. Recognize that every good thing in our lives is a gift (blessing) from God above.
 - c. Be grateful and humble: "God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble." (1 Pet. 5:5b; James 5:6b)

6. Ask for forgiveness (V.12a) -- "And forgive us our debts..."
 - a. Pray that God will forgive you of your sins.
 - b. Pray for sins of omission and commission.
 - c. Confess your sins to God.
 - d. "If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness." 1 John 1:9
 - e. Confess/apologize to others as appropriate (James 5:16).

7. Forgive others (V.12b) -- "...as we forgive our debtors."
 - a. Pray that God will help you forgive others.
 - b. Consider: "For if you forgive men when they sin against you, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. But if you do not forgive men their sins, your Father will not forgive your sins." Matt. 6:14-15

8. Pray that you will not enter into temptation (V.13a) -- "And lead us not into temptation..."
 - a. Pray for wisdom, discernment, and the ability to anticipate (and avoid) situations that will put you in vulnerable situations.
 - b. Consider: "But thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ." (1Cor. 15:57)
 - c. Consider: "If we claim to have fellowship with him yet walk in the darkness, we lie and do not live by the truth." 1 John 1:6

9. Pray that you will be delivered from the evil one -- "...but deliver us from evil..." (V.13b)
 - a. Jesus told Peter that Satan had demanded permission to "sift him like wheat" (Luke 22:31). The enemy desires to discourage, divide, and destroy. Pray that you will not be deceived by his clever schemes.
 - b. Consider Matt. 26:41: "Watch and pray so that you will not fall into temptation. The spirit is willing, but the body is weak."

10. Give God glory (V.13c) -- "...For thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory, forever. Amen."
 - a. This verse is in the King James text but appears as a footnote in most Bible translations. However, it is a great way to end your prayer time—with a recognition that God is Great, His reign is forever and to Him be all the glory.

- b. Pray that you will live in such a way as to fulfill this verse: "So whether you eat or drink or whatever you do, do it all for the glory of God." 1 Cor. 10:31