

Foundations Lesson #2

Prayer, Part 1

Prayer is simply a matter of talking to God and communing with God. It's a mistake to think of prayer primarily as an exercise or an activity. Prayer is, more than anything else, the development of a love relationship. When we pray, the focus shouldn't be on "what" (what we're doing, what we're praying about, etc.) but rather on "who" (who we're talking to and communing with). Some believers, wanting to learn to pray, have studied Scripture, read books, and listened to messages. Even though there can be value in learning this way, the only real way we will ever learn to pray is by praying.

Perhaps when you were younger you learned to ride a bicycle. You may have gotten advice from friends or family, you may have read up on bike riding or watched a video on it, but ultimately, you never learned to ride a bike until you got up on one and started pedaling. Prayer is the same way. We'll never learn to interact with God unless we start to spend time doing it.

Have you ever observed a young couple on a park bench? Maybe they were looking into each others' eyes and not saying anything, or maybe they were talking to each other excitedly, or maybe they were just holding hands and conversing softly. Talking to and communing with **The Almighty** has been designed to be just as natural, just as comfortable as talking to a human you care about and enjoy being with. Like the couple on the park bench, the main focus of our conversation with God is not so much what is being said but the deepening of the relationship. Of course, God already knows each one of us fully and he loves us and cares about us far more than we can imagine, but **we** can and need to know **him** better and better. He is infinite, and we are finite. That means after we've spent thousands of years drawing near to God, we'll barely have scratched the surface of getting to know his rich character or the wisdom, the tenderness, the kindness, the justice, the raw power, and the beauty which are such an important part of who he is.

Some Christians have struggled to understand why they should pray. They reason that if God already knows everything and can do anything, what difference does it make if they pray or don't pray? Roman Numeral number one on our outline addresses that issue. The first reason we need to pray is that God has declared that we need to.

Ro. 12:12 Be joyful in hope, patient in affliction, faithful in prayer.

Col. 4:2 Devote yourselves to prayer, being watchful and thankful.

1Th. 5:17 pray continually;

When God says to do something, it's best to do it. It's impossible for any of us to improve upon the will, the desire, the plan of God. Understandably, some people may not be real motivated to pray just because God said to do it. Although it's **far** better to pray out of duty or faithfulness than not to pray at all, there are other valid reasons for us to draw near to God in prayer.

We also need to pray because God has designed us to be change agents. Over and over again the Bible assures us that prayer is very powerful. When we pray, God is extremely focused and attentive to what we have to say, and he's also very eager to grant every reasonable request. We can rejoice greatly that the God of the universe is also a prayer-answering God who cares deeply about every petition, large or small, that's brought before him by one of his children. So if we correctly understand God's great desire to answer prayer, along with his infinite power to do so, we'll begin to appreciate how powerful God has designed prayer to be. All of us have a great need to **believe**, to have a deep conviction, that the God of the universe is a prayer-answering God! He certainly is.

With that in mind, we have the power – by asking God and believing God – to see circumstances and situations change from what **they are** to what **God wants them to be**. Said another way, we

pray because there's natural law and the will of man, and God will, in answer to our cry, change these factors in order to be better aligned with his plan, his purposes, or the dynamics of his kingdom. That makes you a powerful change agent as you cooperate with God!

Mt. 7:7-8 [Jesus speaking] "Ask and it will be given to you; seek and you will find; knock and the door will be opened to you. For everyone who asks receives; he who seeks finds; and to him who knocks, the door will be opened.

Jas. 5:16b-18 The prayer of a righteous man is powerful and effective.
Elijah was a man just like us. He prayed earnestly that it would not rain, and it did not rain on the land for three and a half years. Again he prayed, and the heavens gave rain, and the earth produced its crops.

One day as Evangelist Charles Finney was riding a train through Houghton, NY, the Holy Spirit fell on the community. Men in bars started falling on their knees in repentance because of the convicting power of the Spirit of God. On the following Sunday, all the churches across the town were full. At the time, Finney wasn't even aware of what was happening. Finney's ministry was marked by thousands of people turning to God in many locations across upstate New York. A news reporter investigated him to find out the source of his spiritual power. The man finally concluded that Finney's ministry had the enormous impact it did because of the many, many hours he spent in prayer.

Ac. 9:40 Peter sent them all out of the room; then he got down on his knees and prayed. Turning toward the dead woman, he said, "Tabitha, get up." She opened her eyes, and seeing Peter she sat up.

2Ki. 20:11 The prophet Isaiah called upon the LORD, and the LORD made the shadow go back the ten steps it had gone down on the stairway of Ahaz.

Pr. 21:1 The king's heart is in the hand of the LORD; he directs it like a watercourse wherever he pleases.

One of my favorite Scriptures on answered prayer comes from II Kings chapter 13. It reads,

2Ki. 13:4-5 Then Jehoahaz sought the LORD's favor, and the LORD listened to him, for he saw how severely the king of Aram was oppressing Israel. The LORD provided a deliverer for Israel, and they escaped from the power of Aram. So the Israelites lived in their own homes as they had before.

What I find so remarkable about these verses is that King Jehoahaz wasn't even a follower of the LORD! Verse two of the same chapter describes him as a man who "did evil in the eyes of the LORD." So here we have a clear example in Scripture of God even listening to someone outside the family of faith and granting their request which had major national significance. I find that amazing. So we have to consider, if God is eager and willing to answer the request of someone **not** in his family, **how much more** eager and willing is he to answer the cry of one of his dearly loved sons or daughters?

As wonderful and powerful as it is to be a change agent in the hands of **The Almighty**, there's still an even more important reason for us to pray, which is listed next on our outline. We serve a God who has an insatiable appetite for intimacy with us, and we pray in order to satisfy His heart. This is the **most important** reason we pray. Prayer, like everything else in life, needs to be all about God first, others second, and self last. One author has written that prayer is the most important discipline of the Christian life, and that nothing you do will benefit you more than prayer. I fully agree, but if we're to become mature in Christ, we have to graduate from the mindset that wants to know all about what's in it for me, me, me, me, me. The more we grow up in Christ, the more we'll only be interested

in how we can please God, how we can satisfy **The Almighty**, regardless of what it may mean for us. **He** has a great yearning, an immense longing, a holy craving, to be close to every human he's created. Your drawing near to him should be **primarily** because it pleases him; it satisfies him; it gives him some of the pleasure he had in mind when he created you.

When one of my children would come home from college or after being away for a while, I'd always be in celebration mode. I'd count the hours in anticipation of their arrival. I'd wear clothing they'd given me as gifts. My looking forward to being able to spend time with one of my children is only a glimpse, a picture, a tiny portion of the desire in the heart of God to spend time with one of his children. We pray to satisfy God's heart.

In answer to the question of, "What's the single most important thing you've learned from church history?", one author has written this:

QUOTE #2 Without question it would be God's relentless pursuit of man and His unimaginable patience and love for man, even though He's constantly rejected or ignored by man. It's the most painful love story ever written, and it's not over. He's in relentless pursuit of a bride, but, to date she seems to have little or no time for Him. So far, it's the greatest of all tragedies, but we know it will have the most wonderful of all endings. He will have the bride that He is so worthy of.

Besides seeing the heart of God longing for closeness with his people in the metaphor of the bride and the bridegroom, we see it revealed in other ways in Scripture as well:

Lk 13:34 [Jesus speaking] "O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, you who kill the prophets and stone those sent to you, how often I have longed to gather your children together, as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, but you were not willing!

The second to last chapter of the Bible also provides us with further revelation of how God, all along, has wanted to be close to his people:

Rev. 21:3 And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, "Now the dwelling of God is with men, and he will live with them. They will be his people, and God himself will be with them and be their God.

Besides these verses, we also see God's desire for intimacy with his people in that he has caused his Holy Spirit to take up residence in our lives.

2Co. 1:21-22 Now it is God who makes both us and you stand firm in Christ. He anointed us, set his seal of ownership on us, and put his Spirit in our hearts as a deposit, guaranteeing what is to come.

Aren't you glad that the Holy Spirit is perfectly comfortable dwelling in fixer-uppers?

Many years ago, a minister of the gospel told me that most prayer meetings are boring. I feel he doesn't understand prayer very well. Here's why: when a believer arrives in heaven and then gets to carry on a face-to-face conversation with the Lord Jesus Christ, I guarantee you that there will be nothing boring about that encounter. Absolutely nothing. Everything that we'll have then face-to-face, we can have now by faith. That means that the conversations we now hold with the Lord can and should be every bit as vibrant, every bit as full of **life**, as what they'll be then. God doesn't change. So if someone's experiencing boredom in a prayer meeting, it must be that he's not really communing with God. As far as I'm concerned, that would be the problem, not what the other people in the room are doing.

If you love someone, you **want** to be close to them. So we each need to ask ourselves the question in all earnestness: "How much do I really love God?" Again, if you love someone, you **want**

to be close to them. The couple on the park bench radiates, for all to see, their desire to live life with each other, to be close to each other. If you feel that way about God, you'll learn to have an intimate prayer life. It's impossible to have a healthy relationship to God without having a healthy prayer life. Let me say that again. It's impossible to have a healthy relationship to God without having a healthy prayer life. Amen.

Foundations Lesson #2

Prayer, Part 2

How the Bible describes something gives us key insight into how God has designed it to function. With that in mind, I'd like for us to go to Roman Numeral number two on our outline. Here we have a list of the main terms Scripture uses to describe prayer. One author has said that the problem with most churches is that they have yet to find God. If that statement is true, then it's only because there's been a lack of seeking God, because God has guaranteed that if we seek him earnestly, we'll find him.

Jer. 29:13 You will seek me and find me when you seek me with all your heart.

Mt. 7:7-8 [Jesus speaking] "Ask and it will be given to you; seek and you will find; knock and the door will be opened to you. For everyone who asks receives; he who seeks finds; and to him who knocks, the door will be opened.

I'd like to point out here that seeking God is **not** like seeking a hidden pirate treasure. When you do that, once you've found it, you're done. No, seeking God is better compared to an Easter egg hunt with billions of hidden eggs: the more you seek Him, the more of Him you'll discover. I'd also like to point out that the secrets of God, the hidden things of the Lord, aren't hidden **from** us, they're hidden **for** us. If you're wondering what the difference is, you'll find that it's in God's purpose. If God were to hide something **from** us, his purpose would be to make sure that we don't find it. But if God hides something **for** us, he makes sure that we're very able to find it. Sure, it'll probably take love for God, hard work, patience, perseverance, and other qualities, but God is delighted to give us of the treasure. We just have to meet the requirements. And let's never forget that there's no greater treasure than God himself.

Is. 55:6 Seek the LORD while he may be found; call on him while he is near.

1Chr. 16:11 Look to the LORD and his strength; seek his face always.

1Chr. 22:19a [King David speaking to the elders of Israel] Now devote your heart and soul to seeking the LORD your God.

Heb. 11:6 ...he [God] rewards those who earnestly seek him.

That means that every time you earnestly seek God, you get rewarded – every time, whether you notice it or not. No one has ever sought God in vain.

Jeremiah cried out that the people of Israel in his day had turned their backs to God and not their faces. That shows us that the opposite of seeking God is ignoring God. I can't think of a greater insult to **The Almighty** than for us to be ignoring him, for us to be declaring by our actions that God

isn't worthy of any of our time, effort, or attention.

The next term on our outline is that of drawing near to God, and it highlights the truth that there's a great distance between us and God, yet his provision allows us to overcome that gap. I may not know how close to God you are right now, but I do know this: you're every bit as close to God as what you really want to be. All of us are. How close we are to God depends on **us**, not **him**.

Jas. 4:8 Come near to God and he will come near to you.

Jas. 4:8(KJV) Draw near to God and he will draw near to you.

I can't think of any greater blessing than to have **The Almighty** draw near to me. The incredible promise of this verse is that you or I can have **The Almighty** drawing near to us at any time. All we have to do is meet the condition, which is to draw near to him! If we meet the condition, he'll always be more than faithful to keep his promise. How simple is that?!

The book of Hebrews talks about drawing near to God.

Heb. 7:19 ...and a better hope is introduced, by which we draw near to God.

Heb. 10:1 ...it [the law] can never, ...make perfect those who draw near to worship.

Heb. 10:22 ...let us draw near to God with a sincere heart in full assurance of faith,

Also,

Zph. 3:2 She [the city of Jerusalem] obeys no one, she accepts no correction. She does not trust in the LORD, she does not draw near to her God.

Jer. 30:21b ...for who is he who will devote himself to be close to me?' declares the LORD.

Then, about 50 times in the New Testament alone, prayer is simply referred to as “asking”. The idea of asking highlights the fact that we're engaging in verbal communication, and that we're making a request. As we've already read,

Mt. 7:7-8 [Jesus speaking] “Ask and it will be given to you; seek and you will find; knock and the door will be opened to you. For everyone who asks receives; he who seeks finds; and to him who knocks, the door will be opened.

Other Scriptures that refer to prayer as “asking” include,

Mt. 9:37-38 Then he [Jesus] said to his disciples, “The harvest is plentiful but the workers are few. Ask the Lord of the harvest, therefore, to send out workers into his harvest field.”

Mt. 18:19 [Jesus speaking] “Again, I tell you that if two of you on earth agree about anything you ask for, it will be done for you by my Father in heaven.

Jn. 14:13-14 [Jesus speaking] And I will do whatever you ask in my name, so that the Son may bring glory to the Father. You may ask me for anything in my name, and I will do it.

Over the years, one of the many mistakes I've made in prayer is that I would be so focused, so passionate about my request that I'd lose sight of **who** I was talking to. I invite you to learn from my mistakes. Prayer is not primarily an activity, it's primarily a relationship. It's not mainly about what we're asking God to change; it's mainly about the One we're talking to.

The last term mentioned on our outline that describes prayer is that of “calling on” the Lord. This term highlights the need for help, and confidence in the One being called upon. The first time that prayer is mentioned in the Bible, this is the term being used.

Gen. 4:26b

At that time men began to call on the name of the LORD.

Mt. 26:53

[Jesus speaking] Do you think I cannot call on my Father, and he will at once put at my disposal more than twelve legions of angels?

Ro. 10:12

For there is no difference between Jew and Gentile – the same Lord is Lord of all and richly blesses all who call on him,

Ac. 2:21

And everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved.'

Jer. 33:3

[God speaking] 'Call to me and I will answer you and tell you great and unsearchable things you do not know.'

Amen.

Foundations Lesson #2

Prayer, Part 3

The next section of our outline, Roman Numeral number three, deals with how Jesus taught his followers to pray. Luke records that when Jesus had finished praying, one of his disciples said to him, "Lord, teach us to pray." Now we don't know what prompted that request. Perhaps the disciple saw something so vibrant, so full of **life** in the way Jesus communicated with his Father that he felt a great need to know the secret to that kind of prayer. Perhaps the disciple felt that his own prayer life was much more dry or routine than what he'd just witnessed. We don't know. But we do know that Jesus wasted no time in granting his disciple's request. I'm extremely grateful that God is still more than willing to teach each one of his followers to pray.

Matthew records the fuller version of the model prayer Jesus taught his disciples. I believe this prayer is not primarily something to be prayed word-for-word, although nothing would be wrong with doing that. But it contains powerful and important truths which we can implement as we endeavor to commune with God in prayer.

Jesus said, "This, then, is how you should pray: 'Our Father in heaven...'" Prayer starts with our knowing who we're talking to, and that he relates to us as **Father**, that we're incredibly blessed to belong to his **family**. Yes, he's the all-knowing, all-powerful, Creator and Sustainer of all things, but he was also pleased to accept us into his family when we asked Christ to be our Lord and Savior. Prayer then, from the outset, needs to be understood as a family talk.

1Jn. 3:1a

How great is the love the Father has lavished on us, that we should be called children of God! And that is what we are!

Jn. 16:26b-27

[Jesus speaking] I am not saying that I will ask the Father on your behalf. No, the Father himself loves you because you have loved me and have believed that I came from God.

Gal 4:6

Because you are sons, God sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, the Spirit who calls out, "**Abba**, Father."

The word “Abba” is an Aramaic word meaning father, and it's a term of familiarity or endearment roughly equivalent to “Daddy” or “Papa” in English. Jesus used it in talking to his Father, and two places in the New Testament tell us that we believers can address the Father as “Abba” because of the Spirit of sonship we've received.

Jesus continued his model prayer by teaching us to pray, “hallowed be your name.” Hallowed simply means honored, revered, or respected. We start off by acknowledging the greatness of God. He is worthy of all praise, adoration, honor, and worship. One of our Bible school professors once challenged us to spend one hour in prayer and not to say anything for the first 59 minutes. I found that it was a whole lot harder than what I had imagined. I'd like to encourage you that if you plan on spending an hour in prayer, spend the first 20 minutes or so just in thanking, praising, adoring, and worshipping God. If we, at the outset of our prayer time do as we should, truly focusing on **him**, gazing upon **his** beauty, losing ourselves in **him**, the rest of our time in his presence will be much more blessed.

Ps. 29:2 Ascribe to the LORD the glory due his name; worship the LORD in the splendor of his holiness.

Rev. 4:11 “You are worthy, our Lord and God, to receive glory and honor and power, for you created all things, and by your will they were created and have their being.”

Ro. 11:33, 36 Oh, the depth of the riches of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable his judgments, and his paths beyond tracing out! For from him and through him and to him are all things. To him be the glory forever! Amen.

Ps. 27:4 One thing I ask of the LORD, this is what I seek: that I may dwell in the house of the LORD all the days of my life, to gaze upon the beauty of the LORD and to seek him in his temple.

Rev. 7:12 Praise and glory and wisdom and thanks and honor and power and strength be to our God for ever and ever. Amen!

After we've focused completely on God, giving him the glory, praise, honor, and worship he's so worthy to receive, Jesus teaches us to pray, “Your kingdom come, your will be done.” The more we mature in Christ the more we'll first be concerned about what's on God's heart, rather than what's on our heart. What about unsaved family members? What about precious unborn children being murdered in the womb? What about believers living in oppressive countries where they don't even know if they'll still be alive by sunset because of persecution? We know that God is very deeply concerned about such things. Jesus' pattern makes it clear that the proper priority is for those things which are dear to **God's** heart to be considered next.

1Ti. 2:1-3 I urge, then, first of all, that requests, prayers, intercession and thanksgiving be made for everyone – for kings and all those in authority, that we may live peaceful and quiet lives in all godliness and holiness. This is good, and pleases God our Savior,

Ro. 10:1 Brothers, my heart's desire and prayer to God for the Israelites is that they may be saved.

Then Jesus continues his teaching on prayer with the phrase, “on earth as it is in heaven.” Heaven is a place that's truly glorious beyond our wildest imagination. But all the glory, all the beauty, all the peace, and all the joy there is simply a by-product of the will of God not being resisted in heaven. Everything in heaven submits to God's will. **That's** why it's so wonderful. It's proper for us to have the longing in **our** hearts that everything on earth, from North Pole to South Pole, also be so

fully submitted to ***The Almighty***, that the Father wouldn't have to be pained or grieved by the massive amounts of resistance he encounters from humans world-wide.

Ps. 33:8 Let all the earth fear the LORD; let all the people of the world revere him.

Ps. 83:18 Let them know that you, whose name is the LORD – that you alone are the Most High over all the earth.

Ps. 100:1 Shout for joy to the LORD, all the earth.

In his model prayer, Jesus then shifts direction so that we now talk to ***The Almighty*** about our needs. He says, "Give us today our daily bread." He doesn't say, "Give us today our daily filet mignon." As one preacher has said, needs not greeds. Our heavenly Father is deeply committed to taking excellent care of us. You can read about that in Matthew 6:25-34. So as we ask the Father for the provision and sustenance of life, we can have full confidence that he'll grant our request.

A man comes home from a 14-day business trip. His wife greets him at the airport, saying, "I'm so glad my repairman is back. The drier is making some strange noises; the carpet has come up in the den; the kitchen sink is leaking, and the light above the living room couch is flickering. I'm so glad that you're back so that all my needs can be met." A woman is on the phone with a friend one morning and she says, "I don't have to talk to my husband today. I don't need any money." Both of these wives have failed to understand some basic concepts involving a love relationship. Unfortunately, many believers have treated God the way these women have treated their husbands. God delights in taking excellent care of each son and daughter he has, but when we draw near to him in prayer, let's do so with the right priority, the right approach, the right heart.

Mt. 6:8 ...for your Father knows what you need before you ask him.

Mt. 6:32-33 For the pagans run after all these things, and your heavenly Father knows that you need them. But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well.

Ps. 86:1 Hear, O LORD, and answer me, for I am poor and needy.

Ps 86:7 In the day of my trouble I will call to you, for you will answer me.

Jesus goes on to say, "Forgive us our debts as we also have forgiven our debtors." Forgiveness is such an important topic in the Kingdom of God that all of Lesson #17 has been devoted to it. For now, I'd just like to point out that we really are required to forgive, and our failure to do so has major consequences.

Mt. 6:14-15 [Jesus speaking] 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.

Jesus concludes his model prayer for us by saying, "And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from the evil one." The power of God is far, far greater than all the power in the kingdom of darkness combined. God is more than able to keep us from falling and to deliver us from any chains of darkness or any bondage of the enemy.

Jde. 24 To him who is able to keep you from falling and to present you before his glorious presence without fault and with great joy –

Jas. 1:13-14

When tempted, no one should say, "God is tempting me." For God cannot be tempted by evil, nor does he tempt anyone; but each one is tempted when, by his own evil desire, he is dragged away and enticed.

Let's trust God for the great victory that's ours in Christ Jesus. Amen.

Foundations Lesson #2

Prayer, Part 4

Anyone who's ever tried to pray knows that there are hindrances to prayer which need to be overcome. Certainly, the devil doesn't want us to pray. Samuel Chadwick has said,

QUOTE

The one concern of the devil is to keep Christians from praying. He fears nothing from prayerless work, prayerless studies or prayerless religion. He laughs at our toil, mocks at our wisdom, but **trembles** when we pray!

Roman Numeral number four on our outline deals with those hindrances that war against our going to God in prayer. In other words, they try to prevent us from praying. Failure for us to delight ourselves in the Lord is at the top of the list. Psalm 37:4 declares,

Ps. 37:4

Delight yourself in the LORD and he will give you the desires of your heart.

A woman once illustrated this truth in a powerful way. She said that when she was a young mother, her husband would often be gone for several weeks at a time. When he came home she would tell their two daughters, "Daddy's home!" The older daughter would say, "OK," finish up what she was doing, and go to meet her father. But the younger daughter would drop everything, excitedly scream out, "Daddy's home!" and run to the door. She'd give him the biggest hug she had, shower him with kisses, and tell him how much she missed him. The woman told us, slowly and seriously, that both girls loved their father, but the younger daughter ***delighted*** in him.

We are to delight ourselves in the Lord. The truth is that there's no experience we can have which is more delightful than meeting with God. No musical masterpiece, no exquisitely prepared delicacy, no breathtaking scenery, no having sex with your spouse (especially for you husbands ☺), no all-expense paid vacation can compare with having intimacy with the Lord of the universe. Life simply doesn't get any better than drawing near to God.

The problem arises that our emotions usually don't testify to us that this is true. I'll be honest, for over 20 years, I spent time in prayer mainly out of faithfulness or duty. Whereas it's ***far*** better to pray because we know we need to pray than not to pray at all, the goal is still for us to pray out of an intense desire, out of an unquenchable longing to be close to our God. We can and we need to delight ourselves in the Lord.

So what do you do when honest self-evaluation tells you that your heart is falling far short of that goal? I'd suggest a simple solution: Ask God to change your heart. He knows every detail of what you're feeling anyway. Sure, you may feel embarrassed or foolish telling ***The Almighty*** that you're not all that thrilled about spending time with him, but he already knew that long before you mentioned it to him. Being honest before God is always the best policy. In every problem, ***he*** is the solution, so running ***to*** him is always the right way to handle it.

When I started asking God to change my heart to ***delight*** in him, I first noticed some changes he was making within a week or two. Two words of caution: 1) Don't spend too much time praying about

yourself. Only 18% of the prayers in the New Testament are for or about self. 2) If you don't see God answering your prayer, don't jump to the wrong conclusion that he hasn't heard or isn't doing anything. He's faithful, whether you recognize it or not. Be humble enough to admit that there are tons of things he's doing that you don't even begin to see, even if some of them are taking place in your own heart!

About a year and a half after I first started asking God to change my heart to **delight** in him, I noticed that God had done a significant work in that area. I'll be honest, there's still a **long** way for me to go. A friend of mine loves to say that the largest room in the world is the room for improvement. Another friend says that anyone who's not growing is either a fool or he's dead. But I have great confidence in the Lord that he is yet able to make me into a man who **delights** in him. You can have that confidence, too.

After all, the truth is that getting to have intimacy with God is the ultimate experience of humanity. It's the crowning glory of all that we've been created to do. If our feelings try to testify to us that this isn't true, we need to tell our feelings to shut up because they're wrong, and that we're not obligated to buy what they're trying to sell us. It's the truth that sets us free, and our responsibility is to **believe** that truth.

Is. 61:10 I delight greatly in the LORD; my soul rejoices in my God...

Ps. 43:4 Then I will go to the altar of God, to God, my joy and my delight. I will praise you with the harp, O God, my God.

The next hindrance on our outline is worldliness. When the Bible uses the term "worldly," it simply refers to a system of mind and heart which leaves God out. In other words, worldliness is a matter of focusing so extensively, so fully, on the **world**, on the physical realm, on the three-dimensional existence we see, feel and hear, that there's no room left for God.

1Jn. 2:15-17 Do not love the world or anything in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him. For everything in the world – the cravings of sinful man, the lust of his eyes and the boasting of what he has and does – comes not from the Father but from the world. The world and its desires pass away, but the man who does the will of God lives forever.

Jas. 4:4 You adulterous people, don't you know that friendship with the world is hatred toward God? Anyone who chooses to be a friend of the world becomes an enemy of God.

1Co. 3:1-3 Brothers, I could not address you as spiritual but as worldly – mere infants in Christ. I gave you milk, not solid food, for you were not yet ready for it. Indeed, you are still not ready. You are still worldly. For since there is jealousy and quarreling among you, are you not worldly? Are you not acting like mere men?

Ro. 12:2 Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is – his good, pleasing and perfect will.

We also need to understand that the priorities of **The Almighty** can be drastically different from our own. Wrong priorities can keep us from praying.

Col. 3:1-2 Since, then, you have been raised with Christ, set your hearts on things above, where Christ is seated at the right hand of God. Set your minds on things above, not on earthly things.

Lk. 16:15b [Jesus speaking] What is highly valued among men is detestable in God's sight.

Mt. 16:23

Jesus turned and said to Peter, "Get behind me, Satan! You are a stumbling block to me; you do not have in mind the things of God, but the things of men."

Our priorities tend to be very temporal. God's priorities are eternal. The truth is that prayer is to the spirit what oxygen is to the body. Probably the most important thing you'll ever do in your Christian life is to seek God and find out from him what he wants your prayer life to look like, and then to change, tenaciously, **whatever you need to change** to conform to what he shows you. God is not a one-size-fits-all God. Everything he does is custom made. He hasn't designed your prayer life to be exactly like anyone else's. By the way, if you've been saved a year or more and you feel that God is showing you to spend 5 minutes a day in prayer, I'll be bold enough to tell you that you've heard from the flesh, not from **The Almighty**. You can and need to do better than that. As Oswald Chambers has said, "Prayer doesn't equip us for some greater work, prayer is the greater work." In much of the church today, concerts, dinners, and times of fellowship are attended far better than prayer meetings. That's a powerful demonstration of horrible priorities.

I'd like to encourage you, don't look for extra time so that you can pray, **make** the time. Place the proper priority on prayer. Move less important things aside. If you love the Lord your God with all your heart, soul, mind, and strength, you'll make the necessary sacrifices to spend time with him, and you'll be glad that you did. Amen.

Foundations Lesson #2

Prayer, Part 5

If we're successful in overcoming those hindrances that would try to prevent us from praying, we then have a new set of obstacles to face. By the way, prayer may not always be easy, but it's always worth it! If it were always easy, everybody would be doing it!

Col. 4:12-13

Epaphras, who is one of you and a servant of Christ Jesus, sends greetings. He is always wrestling in prayer for you, that you may stand firm in all the will of God, mature and fully assured. I vouch for him that he is working hard for you and for those at Laodicea and Hierapolis.

These verses tell us that Epaphras was **wrestling** in prayer, and his doing so was described as **working hard**. Wrestling supposes having an opponent. Was his opponent the flesh? ...the devil? ...godless thoughts? ...sensing in the spirit what was hindering these Christians from standing firm in all the will of God? We don't know. The Bible doesn't tell us. But we do know that it was hard work, and that he was persevering through the difficulties.

The new set of obstacles we have to overcome deal with factors that would try to reduce the **quality** of our talking to God and communing with God. Several of these are listed under Roman Numeral number five. The first hindrance is sin, or iniquity.

Is. 59:1-2

Surely the arm of the LORD is not too short to save, nor his ear too dull to hear. But your iniquities have separated you from your God; your sins have hidden his face from you, so that he will not hear.

1Pt. 3:12

For the eyes of the Lord are on the righteous and his ears are attentive to their prayer, but the face of the Lord is against those who do evil."

Ez. 8:17-18 He [the LORD] said to me, "Have you seen this, son of man? Is it a trivial matter for the house of Judah to do the detestable things they are doing here? Must they also fill the land with violence and continually provoke me to anger? Look at them putting the branch to their nose! Therefore I will deal with them in anger; I will not look on them with pity or spare them. Although they shout in my ears, I will not listen to them."

Also, Jesus was very clear that those who prayed out of a desire to have a good reputation did not please God.

Mt. 6:5-6 [Jesus speaking] "And when you pray, do not be like the hypocrites, for they love to pray standing in the synagogues and on the street corners to be seen by men. I tell you the truth, they have received their reward in full. But when you pray, go into your room, close the door and pray to your Father, who is unseen. Then your Father, who sees what is done in secret, will reward you."

Next, asking God for the sake of personal pleasure doesn't please **The Almighty**.

Jas. 4:2-3 You want something but don't get it. You kill and covet, but you cannot have what you want. You quarrel and fight. You do not have, because you do not ask God. When you ask, you do not receive, because you ask with wrong motives, that you may spend what you get on your pleasures.

Some people who don't actually have a right relationship with God still pray. Not surprisingly, they're capable of doing some bizarre or downright wrong things when they pray. Jesus mentioned that when he said,

Mt. 6:7-8 And when you pray, do not keep on babbling like pagans, for they think they will be heard because of their many words. Do not be like them, for your Father knows what you need before you ask him.

I'd like to point out here that Jesus himself prayed about one topic for a full hour, followed by two more stints of time which we don't know how long they were, perhaps two more hours, all praying "the same thing" (see Matthew 26:36-46). The difference is that Jesus, unlike the pagans, didn't think that he would be heard **because of his many words**. He had full confidence that the Father was hearing him whether he used many words or few. But the situation he was praying about was so incredibly important, and it had such enormous consequences, that devoting that kind of time and energy in prayer to the Father was completely warranted. I imagine the burden on Jesus' heart was intense for the whole three hours or however long it was that he prayed. This is contrasted with the pagans who engage in mental gymnastics, thinking, "*Well, if I use 900 words in prayer rather than 600 words, God will be 50% more likely to hear and answer.*" Let's remember, prayer is relational, not mechanical.

Speaking of matters of relationship, the next hindrance to prayer has to do with the way we treat others.

1Pt. 3:7 Husbands, in the same way be considerate as you live with your wives, and treat them with respect as the weaker partner and as heirs with you of the gracious gift of life, so that nothing will hinder your prayers.

Have you ever had a wandering mind when you were trying to talk to the Father? I imagine that everyone who's prayed for any significant amount of time has experienced the fight with undisciplined thoughts.

2Co. 10:4-5

The weapons we fight with are not the weapons of the world. On the contrary, they have divine power to demolish strongholds. We demolish arguments and every pretension that sets itself up against the knowledge of God, and we take captive every thought to make it obedient to Christ.

I'd like to offer you two concrete suggestions that I've found helpful in combating a wandering mind in prayer. The first has to do with your perception of God when you pray. Is he uninterested in you? ...far away? ...a vague blur? Do you feel that you have to convince him, or trick him into listening to you? None of those pictures are correct. But if you picture God accurately, as being **eager and delighted to hear from you**, you'll find a great change in your attitude, and you'll have an easier time focusing. There's something about gazing upon an individual who's fully attentive and joyfully anticipating every word we speak, that helps us stay focused. The other suggestion is to pray out loud. The prayer can be spoken quietly, and you may have to close the door to your room for privacy's sake, but there's something about hearing the words with our own ears that helps us stay on track.

The last paragraph on our outline says, "Since the matters of knowing God's word and communing with God in prayer are so incredibly important, all believers are encouraged and exhorted to spend at least thirty minutes every day dedicated only to Bible reading and at least thirty minutes additionally every day dedicated only to prayer. The Lord is worthy of our time and our undivided attention!" I believe the number one sin of the church in many parts of the world is simply prayerlessness. In your life, prayer and Bible reading won't just happen, you have to choose to discipline yourself to make them happen. If we love God enough, we'll find a way. If you're a new believer, you may have difficulty praying more than just a few minutes, but please, work at increasing your time talking to God and communing with God until you reach the goal of at least thirty minutes a day.

Before closing this lesson I'd like to mention some items that are available in the **Additional Resources** section of this web page. Since the Foundations Lessons have a time limit of about one hour, which is insufficient to include various Practices and Principles of Prayer in this lesson, these Practices and Principles of Prayer have been covered in an addendum. This addendum is in three parts, consisting of the Addendum Outline where you can follow along, and two Spoken Lesson files where you can listen to the teaching. No teaching on prayer would be complete without at least some mention of Jesus' prayer life. So the next two documents do that, giving the 22 instances recorded in the Bible where Jesus prayed, and the 8 of those occasions where we actually know what he said as he was talking to and communing with the Father. Since this Lesson has dealt almost exclusively with individual prayer, and since praying together with other believers is also vitally important to a healthy prayer life, I've included a document that gives helpful instruction when praying corporately. Leonard Ravenhill has had some very powerful things to say about prayer, and some of them are written out in the document entitled "Prayer Grasps Eternity." Lastly, if you're ever inclined to study the Scriptures further on the subject of prayer, a more scholarly document has been included, in two volumes, which gives all the passages in the New Testament that deal with the subject of prayer. I'd encourage you to check out all of these **Additional Resources**. Amen. God bless you all.

Foundations Lesson #2 - Prayer

Addendum: Practices and Principles of Prayer, Part 1

I'd like to start off by pointing out that not all prayer pleases God. Jesus has given us the Parable of the Pharisee and the Tax Collector as a vivid illustration of that truth.

Lk. 18:9-14 To some who were confident of their own righteousness and looked down on everybody else, Jesus told this parable: "Two men went up to the temple to pray, one a Pharisee and the other a tax collector. The Pharisee stood up and prayed about himself: 'God, I thank you that I am not like other men – robbers, evildoers, adulterers – or even like this tax collector. I fast twice a week and give a tenth of all I get.'

"But the tax collector stood at a distance. He would not even look up to heaven, but beat his breast and said, 'God, have mercy on me, a sinner.'

"I tell you that this man, rather than the other, went home justified before God. For everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, and he who humbles himself will be exalted."

I imagine that most of Jesus' hearers were quite shocked when they heard this story. The Pharisees were highly respected by the common people, and tax collectors were more than just looked down upon, they were outright despised. So hearing a story which concluded that a tax collector had prayed well and a Pharisee hadn't would have astounded and bewildered just about anyone who heard it. Be that as it may, Jesus' parable here lets us know that not all prayer pleases God.

With that in mind, this addendum aims at discovering from the Scripture what **does** please God in prayer. The parable we just read certainly points out that God is repulsed by pride, but he accepts the humble. We'll cover that in greater detail in Lesson #18, but for now, our list starts with thanksgiving, which is a great way to start our approach to **The Almighty**.

Pp. 4:6 Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God.

1Ti. 2:1 I urge, then, first of all, that requests, prayers, intercession and thanksgiving be made for everyone –

With the thousands of things God has done for each one of us – like giving us the capacity to breathe, think, and move – there's always plenty to thank God for. Acknowledging his goodness to us is always appropriate, and it may be more important than what many of us realize. Romans chapter one gives us an account of the downward spiral of humanity apart from God. Interestingly enough, it all begins with failing to glorify God as God nor **giving thanks** to him. It rapidly degrades from there.

Then it's also a great idea to praise the Lord. Psalm 146, 147, 148, 149, and 150 all begin and end with "Praise the LORD."

Ps. 100:4 Enter his gates with thanksgiving and his courts with praise; give thanks to him and praise his name.

Lk. 10:21 At that time Jesus, full of joy through the Holy Spirit, said, "I praise you, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, because you have hidden these things from the wise and learned, and revealed them to little children. Yes, Father, for this was your good pleasure.

Even though there's some overlap, the Bible doesn't use the concepts of praise and worship interchangeably. Praise generally has to do with seeing what God has done and declaring how wonderful he is for having done it. Worship generally has to do with viewing the Lord himself as the all-powerful, awe-inspiring God, and bowing before him in joyful submission to his every desire.

Lk. 2:37 She [Anna] never left the temple but worshiped night and day, fasting and praying.

Jn. 4:21-23 Jesus declared, "Believe me, woman, a time is coming when you will worship

the Father neither on this mountain nor in Jerusalem. You Samaritans worship what you do not know; we worship what we do know, for salvation is from the Jews. Yet a time is coming and has now come when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth, for they are the kind of worshipers the Father seeks.

It can also be quite appropriate for us to confess our sins when we come to the Lord in prayer. Both Nehemiah and Daniel give us examples of this.

Neh. 1:6-7 [Nehemiah is praying] ...let your ear be attentive and your eyes open to hear the prayer your servant is praying before you day and night for your servants, the people of Israel. I confess the sins we Israelites, including myself and my father's house, have committed against you. We have acted very wickedly toward you. We have not obeyed the commands, decrees and laws you gave your servant Moses.

Dan. 9:4-5 I prayed to the LORD my God and confessed: "O Lord, the great and awesome God, who keeps his covenant of love with all who love him and obey his commands, we have sinned and done wrong. We have been wicked and have rebelled; we have turned away from your commands and laws.

Then, one of the most important qualities that all of us need in prayer is that of persistence or perseverance. Jesus told two stories specifically so that we, his followers, would know that it's always a mistake to give up when praying.

Lk. 11:5-13 Then he [Jesus] said to them, "Suppose one of you has a friend, and he goes to him at midnight and says, 'Friend, lend me three loaves of bread, because a friend of mine on a journey has come to me, and I have nothing to set before him.'

"Then the one inside answers, 'Don't bother me. The door is already locked, and my children are with me in bed. I can't get up and give you anything.' I tell you, though he will not get up and give him the bread because he is his friend, yet because of the man's persistence he will get up and give him as much as he needs.

"So I say to you: Ask and it will be given to you; seek and you will find; knock and the door will be opened to you. For everyone who asks receives; he who seeks finds; and to him who knocks, the door will be opened.

"Which of you fathers, if your son asks for a fish, will give him a snake instead? Or if he asks for an egg, will give him a scorpion? If you then, though you are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father in heaven give the Holy Spirit to those who ask him!"

There are three main characters in this story of Jesus. I'll call them the traveler, the host, and the neighbor. Late one night, the traveler arrives at the home of the host, who puts him up for the night, as would have been expected in that culture. But the host is in a crisis because he has no food to put before his friend, the traveler. In the culture of the day, that was much more than just an embarrassment, it would have been a matter of "losing face", which would have been completely unacceptable. So the host goes down the street to his neighbor, who's also a friend of his. It was the relentless persistence of the host which caused the need to be met. This story of Jesus contrasts the nature of the neighbor with the nature of God. If the neighbor, reluctant as he was to meet the need, finally succumbed to the host's request because of his persistence, **how much more** will God, who **loves** to meet the needs of his children, respond to our persistence. Why is persistence needed on our part? There could be a great variety of reasons. But failure to continue praying is always the wrong approach to take.

Jesus then says to ask, seek, and knock. The verb tense in the original Greek here is that of a continuous action in the present. In other words, the idea is to ask and keep on asking, to seek and

keep on seeking, and to knock and keep on knocking. Jesus then makes one more contrast. He says that human fathers know how to give good gifts to their children, even though human fathers are evil, which is totally unlike God who's pure, holy, selfless, and generous. **How much more**, then, will God give good gifts to those who ask him persistently. So let's persevere in prayer!

Lk. 18:1-8

Then Jesus told his disciples a parable to show them that they should always pray and not give up. He said: "In a certain town there was a judge who neither feared God nor cared about men. And there was a widow in that town who kept coming to him with the plea, 'Grant me justice against my adversary.'

"For some time he refused. But finally he said to himself, 'Even though I don't fear God or care about men, yet because this widow keeps bothering me, I will see that she gets justice, so that she won't eventually wear me out with her coming!'"

And the Lord said, "Listen to what the unjust judge says. And will not God bring about justice for his chosen ones, who cry out to him day and night? Will he keep putting them off? I tell you, he will see that they get justice, and quickly. However, when the Son of Man comes, will he find faith on the earth?"

Again, this is a parable of contrast, because the nature of God is so very, very different from the nature of the unjust judge. If even an ungodly man will yield to the persistent request of someone in need of justice, **how much more** will God, who's deeply compassionate and greatly concerned about the needs of his sons and daughters? Jesus points out here that if we're convinced of the nature of God, we'll keep praying until the need is met. Faith strengthens us to persevere, hence his question, "However, when the Son of Man comes, will he find **faith** on the earth?"

George Mueller was a man of great faith and the founder of several orphanages in Bristol, England. George prayed for 60 years for two of his friends to accept Christ. One of them gave his life to the Lord at the last service Mueller preached. The other man was converted at Mueller's funeral. Mueller never gave up praying all those years because he was deeply convinced that God would indeed save them both.

This leads us into the next principle of prayer, that of faith.

Mt. 21:22

[Jesus speaking] If you believe, you will receive whatever you ask for in prayer."

Mk. 11:22-24

"Have faith in God," Jesus answered. "I tell you the truth, if anyone says to this mountain, 'Go, throw yourself into the sea,' and does not doubt in his heart but believes that what he says will happen, it will be done for him. Therefore I tell you, whatever you ask for in prayer, believe that you have received it, and it will be yours.

Jas. 1:6-7

But when he asks, he must believe and not doubt, because he who doubts is like a wave of the sea, blown and tossed by the wind. That man should not think he will receive anything from the Lord;

George Mueller was traveling by boat to a speaking engagement. The boat was unable to move because of a dense fog on the lake, so Mueller asked the captain of the ship if they could pray together. They went below into the captain's quarters, and Mueller prayed, thanking God for his faithfulness in always getting him to his speaking engagements on time, and asking God to lift the fog. Then the captain prayed about how thick the fog was, and how unlikely it would be for it to lift, going on and on. Finally, Mueller had had enough and said, "Stop!" The captain was surprised and said, "Why did you stop me from praying?" to which Mueller replied, "Because you don't even believe that God is going to lift the fog but I believe that he already has." They went up on deck and no fog was to be seen anywhere. Mueller got to his service on time. God loves to be believed, and, just like human fathers, he's grieved when his children don't believe him. If you find your faith is low, remembering God's faithfulness in answering past prayers can help.

Faith is also important on a more basic level. If we have faith, we will pray. If we don't have faith, we won't pray because we won't see it as important. What we see as important and what we believe in, that's what we'll do.

The next principle of prayer has to do with how much we care, how deeply we're concerned about the matter we're asking God to change.

Ps. 63:1 O God, you are my God, earnestly I seek you; my soul thirsts for you, my body longs for you, in a dry and weary land where there is no water.

In the King James translation of the Bible, the last part of James 5:16 says, "The effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man availeth much." Weymouth translates it, "The heartfelt supplication of a righteous man exerts a mighty influence." If what we're asking God to change isn't all that important to us, why should it become important to God?

Then on the addendum outline, we're encouraged to make our requests specific. Prayers like, "O God, bless everyone everywhere" are so vague that even if God granted the request, how would we know? If we're not clear enough in specifying which one of the hundreds of possible blessings recorded in the Bible we're asking for, how is God supposed to answer?

In an oriental nation, a man was ministering to people in a poverty-stricken area. He wanted to be able to get around better, and to have better facilities for his work, so he prayed to God asking for a desk, a chair, and a bicycle. Six months later, none of those items had been provided. Then God impressed upon him the need to be much more specific in his prayers. So he prayed for the desk, giving the dimensions of the desk and asking for one made of Philippine mahogany. He prayed for a chair made from an iron frame with rollers on the bottom of the legs. Then he asked for an American-made bicycle with gears on the side so he could regulate the speed. About two weeks after making his requests specific, all three items arrived. He later testified that until then, he'd always prayed in vague terms, but this experience taught him to be very clear in his requests to God.

Mk. 10:51 "What do you want me to do for you?" Jesus asked him.
The blind man said, "Rabbi, I want to see."

Let's be very clear with our petitions to the Lord. Amen.

Foundations Lesson #2 - Prayer

Addendum: Practices and Principles of Prayer, Part 2

Next on the addendum outline, we read that prayer should be in harmony with the will of God.

1Jn. 5:14-15 This is the confidence we have in approaching God: that if we ask anything according to his will, he hears us. And if we know that he hears us – whatever we ask – we know that we have what we asked of him.

Jn. 15:7 [Jesus speaking] If you remain in me and my words remain in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be given you.

We understand from Scripture that God is perfect in all his ways, therefore there's no possible way to improve on what he does. His will, his desires, his plans for us are also perfect. So it certainly makes sense to pray for things in accordance with God's will. That really is best. But if you or I don't

know what the will of God is in a certain matter, I believe it's best to pray what's on our hearts and let God sort it out. He is, after all, fully capable of doing that.

Here's why I give that advice: Over the years, I've heard many children ask their earthly fathers for things that weren't in accordance with what that father wanted or thought best. But I can't remember a single occasion when a father scolded or corrected his son or daughter for asking something that wasn't in accordance with his will. The father simply didn't grant the request, usually with a short explanation. Our Father in heaven is the perfect father. If we pray for some boneheaded request – I'll admit that I have, over the years, probably lifted many, many such requests up to the Father – God is perfectly comfortable in denying such a request. He does what's best in every situation, even if our request is way off. I say all that for three reasons. First, some believers get really uptight about wanting to make sure that everything they, and others, pray aligns with the will of God. In my opinion, that's not something to get upset about. God is large and he's in charge. He's more than able to handle good requests as well as not-so-good requests. Secondly, there are times, **not always**, that I have heard people pray "...if it be your will" and the main thing it accomplished was to put a damper on their faith, which hindered their prayer more than helped it. Thirdly, it's good for us to have a deep confidence in God that he really will do what's best every time, without fail. God sees and knows what's in our hearts. If we have a great faith, a strong conviction in our hearts that God will never fail to do what's best, he's very pleased with our belief and our confidence in him.

That leads us into the next principle of prayer on the addendum outline: confidence.

Heb. 4:16 Let us then approach the throne of grace with confidence, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help us in our time of need.

We can, and should be, very confident in the great love God has for us and therefore also in our position as a son or daughter before him. Jesus told us that our Father in heaven has been pleased to give us the kingdom (Luke 12:32).

The Bible also instructs us that we should pray in the Holy Spirit.

Jde. 20 But you, dear friends, build yourselves up in your most holy faith and pray in the Holy Spirit.

Eph. 6:18 And pray in the Spirit on all occasions with all kinds of prayers and requests. With this in mind, be alert and always keep on praying for all the saints.

1Co. 14:14-15 For if I pray in a tongue, my spirit prays, but my mind is unfruitful. So what shall I do? I will pray with my spirit, but I will also pray with my mind; I will sing with my spirit, but I will also sing with my mind.

QUOTE In Africa, a minister was preaching in a large crusade. During the night, he woke up in tears. As he began to pray, he heard himself saying a strange name, over and over again. The pain he suffered was intense as he continued his prayer. After several hours the burden lifted, and the intercession was complete. The next day the newspapers told a strange story. During the night, a Christian village had been massacred. The name of the village was the same name that the minister had been weeping over the night before. Christ suffered the pain of his people, but he was able to find someone willing to share in his suffering and intercede in the Spirit.

I believe we do our best praying when we cooperate with the Holy Spirit. This leads us into the next point on the addendum outline, that of being a good listener in prayer. Prayer has never been designed to be only a one-way communication. Think of human conversation for a moment. I imagine we've all witnessed someone talking to a friend and going on and on and on, not being mindful of the friend's body language and facial expressions that were very clearly communicating

either boredom or fatigue in being bombarded with relentless words. In the human realm, we call that kind of talking **insensitive**. The solution to the problem is that as we talk, we can be so attentive to and mindful of the non-verbal communication of those we're speaking to that we know when it's time to quit or to ask a question. Prayer is very similar. It's possible for us to be so passionate, so focused on the request we're bringing before the Lord that we become **insensitive** to the Lord himself.

Ecc. 5:2 Do not be quick with your mouth, do not be hasty in your heart to utter anything before God. God is in heaven and you are on earth, so let your words be few.

Ps. 46:10 "Be still, and know that I am God; I will be exalted among the nations, I will be exalted in the earth."

I've found, over the years, that those believers who are sensitive in their human conversations also tend to exhibit sensitivity in their conversations with **The Almighty**, and those believers who are often insensitive in their human conversations have the capacity to make a real mess out of prayer meetings! ☺ I find that encouraging, because that means that a big part of the solution to the problem of being insensitive to the Lord has to do with learning to be sensitive to people. If we see the people around us as highly valuable and important because, after all, they've been created in the very image and likeness of the Most High God, and if we in humility consider others better than ourselves (Philippians 2:3), we'll have a great start in becoming more sensitive in conversation, both with humans and with God!

Rev. 2:29 He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches.

Then our outline gives the next principle of prayer as praying in secret. Leonard Ravenhill has said that the secret of praying is praying in secret. Although it's not wrong to let someone know that we're praying for them, if that information will encourage or strengthen them, we should have an attitude that's so selfless that it doesn't matter to us if anyone knows that we're praying for them or not. Many years ago I spent a summer working with six musicians. God gave me one specific burden to pray about for each of them. I prayed for those six situations daily, without telling the musicians what I was doing. The following summer when I returned to that area, four of the six requests had been powerfully answered by the Lord. I'm fully convinced that the Lord eventually answered the other two requests also, in his time. To my surprise, I found great joy in learning the specifics of what God had done. I can testify that it really is wonderfully delicious to see what God accomplishes in answer to our prayers in secret. It truly is more blessed to give than to receive, even in prayer.

Mt. 6:6 [Jesus speaking] But when you pray, go into your room, close the door and pray to your father, who is unseen. Then your Father, who sees what is done in secret, will reward you.

When Jesus tells us to close the door, I believe that can also refer to our need to block out distractions. Before you go to prayer, you might want to turn off your phone, set yourself to focus only on the Lord, and deal with whatever other matters might tempt you to take your mind or heart off **The Almighty**. I've heard one preacher say that when it comes to our time with the Lord in prayer, God detests multi-tasking! God is worthy of our **undivided** attention.

We also see in Scripture that it's best to spend at least some time in prayer early in the day.

Mk. 1:35 Very early in the morning, while it was still dark, Jesus got up, left the house and went off to a solitary place, where he prayed.

Mt. 6:9-11 [Jesus speaking] "This, then, is how you should pray: 'Our Father in heaven,

hallowed be your name, your kingdom come, your will be done on earth as it is in heaven. Give us today our daily bread.

So here we have both the example and the teaching of our Lord Jesus Christ, exhorting us to pray early. After all, it makes no sense to pray, "Give us today our daily bread" at bedtime after we've had our meals. Such a prayer must be prayed in the morning in order to have effect. Now I realize some people are much more alert at night than they are in the morning. The general rule is to give God your **best** time. However, I'd also add that spending at least some time with God first thing in the morning is the best way to start off the day. As one preacher has said, "You'll never put God first in your **life** until you put him first in your **day**." There's a poem that's meant a lot to me over the years. It goes like this:

POEM

I got up early one morning
and rushed right into the day,
I had so much to accomplish
that I didn't have time to pray.

Problems just tumbled about me
and heavier came each task.
"Why doesn't God help me?" I wondered.
He answered, "You didn't ask."

I wanted to see joy and beauty,
but the day toiled on, gray and bleak.
I wondered why God didn't show me.
He said, "But you didn't seek."

I tried to come into God's presence
I used all my keys at the lock.
God gently and lovingly chided,
"My child, you didn't knock."

I woke up early this morning
and paused before entering the day.
I had so much to accomplish
that I had to take time to pray.

Then, Luke 5:16 says,

Lk. 5:16

But Jesus often withdrew to lonely places and prayed.

If the very Son of God needed to pray **often**, how much more do we? Time spent seeking God and communing with God is never wasted. Again, no one has ever sought God in vain!

Then, First Thessalonians 5:17 says,

1Th. 5:17

pray continually;

For us to engage in any activity continually, we'd have to be doing it while eating, holding conversations, doing work, etc. In light of that necessity, praying continually seems to emphasize being aware of God's presence and somehow from the heart reaching out to Him and interacting with Him, or, simply put, communing with Him. Doing that is possible while we're performing all kinds of other necessary tasks. So we have two distinct types of prayer. We can pray when that's **the only**

activity we're involved in, or we could pray secondarily, **while doing something else**. Both kinds of prayer are valid. While we're working, driving, playing, talking, or doing anything else, it's also possible to be praying, or communing with God. However, we have to be careful to be spending enough time focusing exclusively upon the Lord.

Some time ago there was a man I was trying to help prepare for ministry. I'd challenged him to be spending at least 30 minutes a day in Bible reading and 30 minutes a day in prayer. I asked him how his prayer life was going. He told me that he was indeed spending 30 minutes every day in prayer, but when I asked for specifics, he said that the 30 minutes were in his car while he was driving to work. So I told him that his actions were communicating powerfully to the Lord. What they were telling God was that he wasn't all that significant, that he was OK as a life-enhancement tool, but that he wasn't worthy, he wasn't important enough to be focusing on exclusively. The man got my point. The next time we met, he told me that he was spending 30 minutes a day in prayer only. Let's remember, God is a great king. He's worthy of being treated in accordance with his greatness. That includes our undivided attention. So if you want to spend time seeking God while you're driving to work, I think that's wonderful, so long as you do that in addition to your time seeking God exclusively. Amen. God bless you all.