



Effectual
PRAYER
THROUGH PERILOUS TIMES

David W. Cloud

Effectual Prayer for Perilous Times

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Sample

Way of Life Bible Institute

Way of Life Literature publishes a full range of Bible courses on practically every subject touching on the Bible and Christian life and ministry.

“[The Way of Life Bible courses] are extremely helpful for any Christian, no matter where they are spiritually; the practical application is extremely helpful and edifying.”

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We believe that every member of a Bible-believing church should aim to be a skillful, obedient Bible student and every church should aim to educate each member toward this end. That is the teaching of Matthew 28:20, Colossians 1:28, and Hebrews 5:12-14. This should start with the training of children in the homes, which requires that the fathers and mothers be skillful students. It is the church's job to build up the homes in God's Word so they can raise a godly seed for the glory of Jesus Christ

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Introduction

“Prayer is asking the God who sees all to look, the God who knows all to take note, the God who forgets nothing to remember, the God who works all things after the counsel of His own will to do this thing I am asking, the God who cannot lie to fulfill His promises.”

Memory Verses and Student Projects

Memory Verses: Eph. 6:18; Php. 4:6; Col. 4:2; 1 Th. 5:17; 1 Ti. 2:1; Jas. 5:16; 1 Pe. 4:7

Student Projects:

Estimate how much time you spend daily in intercessory prayer.

Make a list of ways that you can add more prayer to your daily life and ministry.

List the answers you have received to prayer in the last year.

Using This Course

This Bible course has two major divisions. The first division consists of the Introduction, Keys to Effectual Prayer, and The Practicality of Prayer. The second division consists of the expository studies on major passages on prayer in the Old and New Testaments.

Depending on the objective and the time available to the teacher (or the student, if the course is taken as self-study), the course can be limited to the material in the first division or it can be extended to include all of the studies.

What Is Prayer?

Prayer is communion with God, talking with God, praising God, asking things from God, interceding for others with God. It is “supplications, prayers, intercessions, *and* giving of thanks” (1 Ti. 2:1).

Prayer is spiritual warfare (“praying always with all prayer and supplication in the Spirit, and watching thereunto with all perseverance and supplication for all saints,” Eph. 6:18).

Prayer is the provenience of man. Animals don’t pray. And as far as we know, angels don’t pray.

The Bible’s Strong Emphasis on Prayer

Nothing is more important in the Christian life and ministry than effectual prayer.

In light of the following Bible facts about prayer, it has rightly been said, “No prayer, no power; little prayer, little power; much prayer, much power.”

Prayer is mentioned at least 550 times in the Bible, 174 times in the New Testament, 35 times in Acts, 48 times in Paul’s epistles. Paul taught something about prayer in practically every one of his epistles.

James, Peter, John, and Jude mention prayer 11 times.

Prayer is a major emphasis of Christ’s teaching (Mt. 5:44; 6:5-15; 9:38; 17:21; 21:22; 26:41; Mr. 13:33; Lu. 11:5-13; 18:1-6).

The prominent saints in the Bible were praying people (e.g., Enoch, Abraham, Hannah, Deborah, Samuel, David, Jehoshaphat, Hezekiah, Jeremiah, Daniel, Nehemiah, Paul, Lydia).

Prayer is one of the four foundational characteristics of the first church in Jerusalem (“they continued steadfastly in the apostles doctrine and fellowship, and breaking of bread and prayers,” Acts 2:42).

Prayer is to be “first of all” in the churches (1 Ti. 2:1-2).

God’s people are to pray without ceasing (1 Th. 5:17), to continue instant or steadfast in prayer (Ro. 12:12), to pray always (Eph. 6:18), to continue in prayer (Col. 4:2).

The prayers of the saints are kept before the throne of God as sweet odors before Him and are effectual in producing His great works on earth. Prayers are mentioned at the opening of the seven-sealed book which contains God’s plan for overthrowing the rebellion on earth and establishing Christ’s eternal kingdom (Re. 5:8; 8:3-4). These are not the selfish prayers of nominal believers; these are not the prayers of those who pray for comfort and help while they live lukewarm, worldly lives; these are the prayers of the saints who are living according to God’s will and praying according to God’s will, like the saints recorded in Scripture.

Prayer is a major part of spiritual warfare in the battle for truth and righteousness in this present world. Paul mentioned prayer prominently in his description of the whole armor of God. “Praying always with all prayer and supplication in the Spirit, and watching thereunto with all perseverance and supplication for all saints” (Eph. 6:18). The devil does everything he can to stop or hinder effectual prayer. He tries to make the saint think that his prayers won’t change anything, that it doesn’t matter whether or not he prays, or how much he prays. He tries to focus the saint’s attention on his sin and failings and cause him to become too discouraged to pray.

The Wonder of Prayer

God knows all things and is in control of all things. God knows all His works from the beginning of the world (Ac. 15:18). He declares the end from the beginning (Isa. 46:10). In Him we live, and move, and have our being (Ac. 17:28). He knows when a sparrow falls (Mt. 10:29). He changes the times and the seasons and removes kings and sets up kings (Da. 2:21). The believer is foreknown by God (Ro. 8:29). The plan for my body is written in God's book before I am formed in the womb (Ps. 139:16). God knows my downsitting and my uprising (Ps. 139:2). He besets me behind and before (Ps. 139:5). God works all things together for good to those who love Him and are the called according to His purpose (Ro. 8:28). God has an eternal plan and he is working all things after the counsel of his own will (Eph. 1:9-11).

But prayer is necessary for God's will to be done in this world. Jesus taught us to ask (Lu. 11:9, 13).

We see this in the Psalms. Consider Ps. 71:3-9. The Psalmist knows that God is his fortress, but he asks God to be his fortress. He knows that God has been his strength and help from birth, but he asks God to not forsake him in old age.

We see this in God's commands to pray for the peace of Jerusalem (Isa. 62:6-7).

The Power of Prayer

“What wonders prayer has wrought! The Word of God teems with its marvelous deeds. Believer, thou hast a mighty engine in thy hand, use it well, use it constantly, use it with faith, and thou shalt surely be a benefactor to thy brethren” (C. H. Spurgeon).

“There is nothing like that of prevailing prayer--of Abraham pleading for Sodom, Jacob wrestling in the

stillness of the night, Moses standing in the breach, Hannah intoxicated with sorrow, David heart-broken with remorse and grief, Jesus in sweat of blood. Always there is cost of passion unto blood. Such prayer prevails. It turns ordinary mortals into men of power. It brings fire. It brings rain. It brings life. It brings God” (Samuel Chadwick, *Prevailing Prayer*).

“Prayer is the key that unlocks all the storehouses of God’s infinite grace and power. All that God is, and all that God has, is at the disposal of prayer. But we must use the key. Prayer can do anything that God can do, and as God can do anything, prayer is omnipotent” (R.A. Torrey, *Power of Prayer*).

Moses’ intercessory prayer for Israel changed the course of history (Ex. 32:7-14).

Hannah’s prayer opened her womb and gave her a baby boy who was destined to be a mighty judge and prophet in Israel (1 Sa. 1:9-18).

Elijah’s prayer stopped the rain for three years (Jas. 5:17) and then brought the rain again (1 Ki. 18:42-45).

Hezekiah’s prayer added 15 years to his life (Isa. 38:1-5).

The Jerusalem church’s prayer brought the filling of the Holy Spirit and boldness in speaking God’s Word (Ac. 4:31) and the miraculous release of Peter from prison (Ac. 12:5-19).

Prayer can bring spiritual revival to God’s people.

Prayer can awaken lost souls.

Prayer can convert lost souls.

Prayer can empower the preaching of God’s Word.

Prayer can encourage disheartened saints.

Prayer can protect endangered saints.

Prayer can bring renewed and increased vision for God's work.

Prayer can bring conviction and disciplinary power to bear upon backsliders' hearts.

Prayer can convert youth and make disciples of them.

Prayer can call workers for the harvest.

Prayer can help keep peace in a nation.

Prayer can heal the sick in accordance with James 5.

Prayer can bring God's infinite resources to bear upon any situation.

Prayer can get things from God! He says, "... ye have not because ye ask not." If Bill Gates or some other rich man said that to us, we would probably waste no time asking for all sorts of things. We would prepare our list. But God is the richest Man, yet we don't ask. We fret and worry and depend on our own small resources instead of asking for things from the hand of Almighty God. When we do ask, we tend to ask for little things instead of great things, thus limiting God by our lack of faith. "But let him ask in faith, nothing wavering. For he that wavereth is like a wave of the sea driven with the wind and tossed. For let not that man think that he shall receive any thing of the Lord" (Jas. 1:6-7).

Prayer is the first cure for every problem in the Christian life and ministry, whether it be spiritual deadness and backsliding, lack of wisdom, fruitlessness, powerless preaching, dullness of hearing, worldliness, losing the youth.

Consider some statements about the importance of prayer:

"No prayer, no power; little prayer, little power; much prayer much power."

"Prayer moves the Hand that moves the universe."

"The man who kneels to God can stand up to anything."

“Prayer is the greatest weapon against the enemy of our souls.”

“The neglect of prayer precedes all backsliding from the grace of God” (W.G. Ketcheson, *Prayer the Golden Key*).

“No Christian is greater than his prayer life. The church has many organizers, but few agonizers; many who pay, but few who pray; many resters, but few wrestlers; many who are enterprising, but few who are interceding. People who are not praying are playing.”

“Every great movement of God can be traced to a kneeling figure” (D.L. Moody).

“A prayerful life is always a powerful life; and a prayerless life is always a powerless life.”

“Prayer is not everything, but everything is done by prayer.”

“You can do more than pray after you have prayed, but you cannot do more than pray until you have prayed” (A.J. Gordon).

“The history of missions is the history of answered prayer” (Samuel Zwemer).

“I have found in ‘the Morning Watch’ my strength and my stay. The problems are solved before I meet them. God hears and answers. Instead of letting my circumstances get on top of me and sending me to a sanitarium with a nervous breakdown, I am able to keep on top of my circumstances. I know of no greater thrill than the thrill of my ‘Morning Watch’” (Oswald J. Smith, *The Morning Watch*).

Through prayer we have seen God do great things, such as enabling us to publish a monthly magazine for 38 years and build Way of Life Literature from nothing. I believe in asking God for things, and He has given me most of what I have

asked for. He wants us to ask, so long as we are not asking amiss to consume it upon our lusts (Jas. 4:3). God wants to give. I have asked for trips around the world and expensive camera equipment and automobiles and houses and all sorts of things in God's will.

Through prayer, we have often seen people healed of sicknesses. When I was in intensive care with acute pancreatitis in 2014, my vital signs and organs were deteriorating quickly. The first four days was a fog of pain and misery. I was taken off of all food and liquids and fed only through an IV. I could only breathe with the assistance of supplementary oxygen. The doctors said they had done all they could, but I wasn't improving. But as soon as we sent out a notice and began receiving word that people were praying, I began to heal. We received calls and emails from 1,000 people in 37 countries. When I was still on oxygen, some men in the church gathered around my bed and prayed, and within 15 minutes my oximeter reading went from 60 to above 90 and I could breathe normally without supplementary oxygen. I never put that oxygen mask back on, and the next day I walked out of the hospital.

Through prayer we have seen many people delivered from demons. One young man was learning about the gospel when he decided to attend a charismatic church. When the people laid hands on him, he became demon possessed! On a bus ride afterwards, he forced the passengers to shout praises to Jesus, warning that if they didn't participate, he would kill them. Through prayer he was delivered of the demons and called on the Lord to save him. He attended Bible school and became a preacher.

Through prayer, the Maoist insurgency in Nepal was turned back. The insurgency gained strength year by year, from 1996-2006, and the Maoists vowed to turn Nepal into a communist state. More than 19,000 people died in the

fighting and terrorism. They vowed to close the churches and turn the public schools into a Maoist indoctrination system. There was nothing to stop them. The king was overthrown; the army was powerless to stop the Maoist advance; the political parties were inapt and hopelessly divided in the face of the threat. Nothing but earnest, believing prayer can explain the fact that the Maoists gave up their goal and joined the political process within a democratic system.

The Physical Position of Prayer

There is no one right way of praying in regard to the physical position.

Kneeling is an honorable way to pray (2 Ch. 6:13; Ps. 96:6; Da. 6:10; Lu. 22:41; Ac. 9:40; 20:36; 21:5; Eph. 3:14).

David prayed sitting down (2 Sa. 7:18).

Hannah prayed standing (1 Sa. 1:26).

We are taught to pray without ceasing, which would encompass all physical positions (1 Th. 5:17).

The Neglect of Prayer

In spite of the emphasis on prayer in Scripture, prayer is neglected in most Baptist churches.

Many churches have no regular prayer meetings in which the people actually spend time in prayer. Recently I attended a mid-week prayer meeting of a fundamental Baptist church, and the prayer time consisted of four minutes of silent prayer.

And if a church does have any sort of real prayer meetings, they are poorly attended, typically.

Thank the Lord there are exceptions to this, but prayerlessness is all too typical.

It is frightful. No wonder there is such a widespread lack of spiritual zeal and power in churches. No wonder the homes are so weak, the youth so worldly, and so few souls are being converted.

We must “double down” on prayer. The two most fundamental things that a church can do to increase its power and fruitfulness are to maintain a regenerate membership (being exceedingly careful about baptism and receiving members) and to greatly advance the church’s prayer life.

Sample

Keys to Effectual Prayer

This is a summary of the Bible's most important lessons on prayer.

My maternal grandmother was a prayer warrior, and her prayers were doubtless instrumental in my dramatic conversion at age 23. She was the first person who taught me some practical “secrets” of answered prayer. Since then I have learned many other “keys” to effectual prayer, particularly the following:

Outline

Praying

Praying on praying ground

Praying in God's will

Praying in faith

Praying with confidence that prayer changes things

Praying with boldness

Praying with fervency

Praying with persistence

Praying for specific things

Praying with fasting

Praying with prayer partners

Praying for wisdom

Praying in everything

Praying without anxiety

Praying as partnership with God

Praying

The first key to effectual prayer is to pray. To have answered prayer and power, we must simply pray. Pray, pray, pray!

We must pray in a private prayer closet, pray with the wife, pray with the husband, pray with the family, pray with friends, pray with the church, pray in prayer meetings, pray while driving, pray while walking, pray while running, pray while shopping, pray when you feel like praying and pray when you don't, when you are healthy and when you are sick, when you are happy and when you are sad, when it seems like your prayers are zooming into the very presence of God and when it seems like they aren't reaching the ceiling.

The first key to effectual prayer is not to study prayer or to talk about prayer or to take prayer requests or to think about prayer. The first key is simply to pray!

Praying on Praying Ground

Praying ground is to have a right standing before God in Christ and to approach God on the basis of that standing.

“If we would pray aright, the first thing we should do is to see to it that we really get an audience with God, that we really get into His very presence. Before a word of petition is offered, we should have the definite consciousness that we are talking to God, and should believe that He is listening and is going to grant the thing that we ask of Him” (R.A. Torrey).

This is accomplished in the following ways:

Praying ground is to be saved and know it; it is to be confident of Christ and His perfect atonement.

“Let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled from an evil conscience, and our bodies washed with pure water” (Heb. 10:22).

A true heart is a heart that has genuine faith as opposed to the hypocrite.

A true heart is to have full assurance of faith in Christ, as Peter had: “We believe and are sure that thou art that Christ, the Son of the living God (Joh. 6:69).

A true heart is to have a heart that is sprinkled from an evil conscience. An evil conscience refers to being unsure of the sufficiency of Christ’s blood. It is to trust to some extent in dead works (self-righteousness, religion, sacraments, etc.) rather than 100% in Christ (Heb. 9:14).

To be sprinkled from an evil conscience is to have confidence in the sufficiency of the blood of Christ to save me completely and forever. To have one’s body washed with pure water refers to believer’s baptism which is a picture of the believer dying with Christ, being buried with Christ, and being raised up with Christ. The washing of the body with water typifies the washing of the soul through regeneration. Baptism is merely a figure. It is not the putting away of the filth of the flesh (through immersion in water) that saves, it is faith in the resurrection of Christ that saves (1 Pe. 3:21).

I remember praying to God as a child. I attended church with my parents from my earliest years, and it always came naturally to me to talk to God, but I didn’t know God personally in redemption. I was like Samuel who “did not yet know the LORD” (1 Sa. 3:7). When I was 23, I repented before God and put my faith 100% in Jesus Christ as Lord and Saviour (Ac. 20:21), and it was then that I began to learn to pray effectually as a child of God. Only then could I say with Paul, “For God is my witness whom I serve with my spirit in the gospel of his Son...”

Praying ground is to be confident of my standing in Christ.

I must know what I am in Christ and what I have in Christ.

The Practicality of Prayer

To increase a church's prayer life is one of the most fundamental things that can be done to increase spiritual life, power, growth, and fruit.

There are many ways that individuals, homes, and churches can increase in prayer.

A private prayer closet. I am convinced that the reason why it is so difficult to get the Lord's people to attend real prayer meetings is that so few of them have an effectual private prayer life. Christ mentioned a prayer closet in Matthew 6:6. This simply refers to a quiet, private place where the individual meets with God. Effectual congregational prayer begins with effectual private prayer. God's people must be prayer warriors in their private lives. They must engage in intercessory prayer for their families, their church leaders, their friends in Christ, their nation, the unsaved. The churches must teach and exhort the people to have private prayer closets. Mothers with young children can find it difficult to have a private time, but it can be done when the children are sleeping, either before they wake in the morning or during a nap time. And the mother must discipline the children to be quiet at times. This is for their good and for her mental well-being.

Prayer by husbands and wives. The husband's first prayer partner should be his own wife. We see husbands and wives praying together in 1 Corinthians 7:5 and 1 Peter 3:7. In the latter verse, the husband is warned that mistreatment of the wife can result in his prayers being hindered. Pray together for each of your children from conception.

Prayer at family devotions. The family's prayer should not be routine and ritual. The parents need to lead the children in

how to pray and what to pray for. Praying for specific things and seeing God answer is a powerful witness to and spiritual education for the children.

Prayer partners. Paul believed in prayer partners. See Ro. 15:30-32; 2 Co. 1:11; Eph. 6:19; Php. 1:19; Col. 4:3-4; 1 Th. 5:25; 2 Th. 3:1; Phm. 22; Heb. 13:18-19. Paul sought prayer partners, and he showed us that the requests should be specific. There is great power when God's people agree together in prayer for specific things. I could write a large book filled with the answers to prayer we have experienced through prayer partners. I'm not talking about a prayer letter to a group of people, such as a missionary prayer letter, though that certainly has its place. Here I'm talking about a select number of men and women who are known to be true and active prayer partners for me and my situation in particular and whom I can depend on for prayer support. I learned the importance of prayer partners early on in my Christian life. My maternal grandmother taught me this. After an unsuccessful battle to quit smoking that lasted several weeks, I was able to quit after asking for prayer from the church. I have seen a steady stream of miracles in answer to prayer for 48 years, such as starting Way of Life Literature and *O Timothy* magazine and new churches and full-time Bible schools. Every time I have started a new ministry, I did not have the resources to do it, and I had to proceed by earnest prayer, and prayer partners were always an important part of the process.

Corporate prayer. Prayer offered as a church during the services is important. We have seen great answers to prayer by this means. These days we have some of our young men with good testimonies lead the church in praying for the following: prayer for the nation according to 1 Timothy 2:1-5, prayer that God will send forth laborers into His harvest according to Luke 10:2, prayer for our children according to 2

Prayer in the New Testament

In this section of the course, we intend to look at every major passage on prayer in the New Testament.

Instead of starting in Matthew, we will begin with two passages on prayer in 1 John, because these passages give foundational truths about prayer that must be kept in mind when studying other passages.

1 John 3:18-22

“My little children, let us not love in word, neither in tongue; but in deed and in truth. And hereby we know that we are of the truth, and shall assure our hearts before him. For if our heart condemn us, God is greater than our heart, and knoweth all things. Beloved, if our heart condemn us not, then have we confidence toward God. And whatsoever we ask, we receive of him, because we keep his commandments, and do those things that are pleasing in his sight.”

Answered prayer requires walking in obedience to God. An obedient Christian walk has been called “praying ground.” “And whatsoever we ask, we receive of him, because we keep his commandments, and do those things that are pleasing in his sight” (1 Jo. 3:22). “The greatest secret of prevailing prayer is what John records from his own joyous experience in 1 Jo. 3:22 ... Notice those wonderful words: ‘Whatsoever we ask, we receive of him.’ Think of it! Not one prayer, great or small, goes unanswered. Then notice the reason: ‘Because we keep his commandments, and do those things that are pleasing in his sight’ (1 Jo. 3:22). A life entirely surrendered to doing God’s will as revealed in His Word and to doing the things that are pleasing in His sight--a life completely at God’s disposal--is the secret of prevailing prayer. Do you wonder

why you do not get what you ask for, why you cannot say, like John, ‘Whatever I ask I get’? It is not because he was an apostle and you are just an ordinary Christian. It is because he could say, ‘I keep His commandments and do those things (and only those things) that are pleasing in His sight,’ while you cannot. It is because his life was entirely surrendered to God, while yours is not” (R.A. Torrey, *God’s Power in Your Life*).

John explained the obedience walk in chapter one of his epistle. It means to walk in the light with God and to confess your sins (1 Jo. 1:5-9).

1 John 3:18-22 is a foundational passage on prayer. The rule of comparing Scripture with Scripture requires that we always keep this truth in mind when interpreting passages on prayer. For example, John 14:13 says, “And whatsoever ye shall ask in my name, that will I do, that the Father may be glorified in the Son.” This promise cannot be interpreted properly except by comparing it with 1 John 3:22. To pray in Christ’s name means to walk in obedience to His will.

Obedience produces the right thinking so that the believer has a spiritual mind and prays according to God’s will. Compare Psalm 37:4. If I delight in the Lord, He gives me the right desires and then He fulfills those desires. This is in contrast to praying according to one’s carnal lusts (Jas. 4:3).

This truth is emphasized throughout Scripture. Compare Ps. 66:18; Pr. 15:8; 28:9; Isa. 1:15-17; Jas. 4:3; 1 Pe. 3:12; 1 Jo. 5:14-15

1 John 5:14-15

“And this is the confidence that we have in him, that, if we ask any thing according to his will, he heareth us: And if we know that he hear us, whatsoever we ask,

we know that we have the petitions that we desired of him.”

1. Prayer must be according to God’s will.

This is what it means to pray in Jesus’ name. It is like using someone else’s checkbook or credit card (“buy a bag of rice and get yourself a candy bar”).

This is why we must always pray, “Thy will be done.” Prayer is not demanding; it is asking. This is the example that Christ gave in the Garden of Gethsemane (“nevertheless not as I will, but as thou wilt,” Mt. 26:39). The child of God must always be ready to accept a red light from God.

2. We learn to know God’s will through God’s Word (1 Co. 2:15-16). We don’t depend on our intuition and feelings. To know God’s will we must study the Bible and learn to rightly interpret it. The prayer of faith is prayer based on God’s Word (“faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the word of God,” Ro. 10:17).

3. We can have confidence in prayer as we know God and His will (“confidence ... we know,” 1 Jo. 5:14-15).

Whatever God has revealed in Scripture as His will can be prayed with confidence. When God has revealed that He wants to do a particular thing, and when I pray for that thing, I can have complete confidence that it will be done. For example, praying for salvation (Ro. 10:11-13), praying for laborers for God’s harvest (Lu. 10:2), praying for government leaders that we might lead a quiet and peaceable life in all godliness and honesty (1 Ti. 2:1-4), praying for the strengthening of churches (1 Ti. 3:15), praying for spiritual wisdom (Col. 1:9), praying to walk worthy of God’s will (Col. 1:10), praying for spiritual fruit (Col. 1:10), praying to know God (Col. 1:10), praying for strength for the Christian life

(Col. 1:11), praying for God's Word to have free course and to be glorified (2 Th. 3:1).

Matthew 6:5-18

“And when thou prayest, thou shalt not be as the hypocrites *are*: for they love to pray standing in the synagogues and in the corners of the streets, that they may be seen of men. Verily I say unto you, They have their reward. But thou, when thou prayest, enter into thy closet, and when thou hast shut thy door, pray to thy Father which is in secret; and thy Father which seeth in secret shall reward thee openly. But when ye pray, use not vain repetitions, as the heathen *do*: for they think that they shall be heard for their much speaking. Be not ye therefore like unto them: for your Father knoweth what things ye have need of, before ye ask him. 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, for ever. Amen. For if ye forgive men their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you: But if ye forgive not men their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses. Moreover when ye fast, be not, as the hypocrites, of a sad countenance: for they disfigure their faces, that they may appear unto men to fast. Verily I say unto you, They have their reward. But thou, when thou fastest, anoint thine head, and wash thy face; That thou appear not unto men to fast, but unto thy Father which is in secret: and thy Father, which seeth in secret, shall reward thee openly.”

The Son of God on earth was a Man of prayer, and in this marvelous passage He teaches His people how to pray.

1. Effectual prayer is not for show after the fashion of the Pharisees (Mt. 6:5).

If prayer is for man's sake, it is hypocrisy. I think of some church members who have a very poor testimony, but when they pray in church they sound so spiritual! Only the Lord knows man's heart, but oftentimes this is doubtless just a show. God hates hypocrisy. What we are in church on Sunday, we must be on Monday in the home, at the school, on the job, and around our friends.

2. Effectual prayer flows from an intimate relationship with God ("pray to thy Father," Mt. 6:6).

Effectual prayer is not a religious ritual; it is communicating with God as Abba Father. It requires that the supplicant know God as Father through repentance and faith in Christ. Christ is describing an intimate, private walk with God. The secret of answered prayer is the supplicant's day-by-day walk with God in the most secret and intimate part of his life.

3. Prayer should first be a private matter between me and God (Mt. 6:6).

This does not mean that public prayer is not important; it means that prayer *starts* in my private life and flows from my private life, and if I don't have an effective private prayer life I should not pray in public.

There are at least four kinds of prayer: private closet prayer (Mt. 6:6), continual prayer (1 Th. 5:17), corporate prayer or praying with others (Mt. 18:19-20; Ac. 4:24, 31; 12:5, 12; 2 Co. 1:11), desperate prayer (Mt. 14:30).

4. Effectual private prayer requires a shut closet ("enter into thy closet, and when thou hast shut thy door," Mt. 6:6).

You need to find a private, quiet place, and you need to find the right time when you will not be distracted. If there is any opinion, it is not honoring to God to have one's devotions in a place and time where there are distractions. I am convinced that when you are supposed to be having a conversation with one person, it is rude to talk on the phone with or text someone else. How much more is it rude and dishonoring to God to fail to give Him your full attention when you are reading His Word and praying? Seek wisdom from God in this matter. Mothers with young children can find it difficult to have a private time with the Lord, but it can be done when the children are sleeping, either before they wake in the morning or during a nap time. And the mother must discipline the children to be quiet at times. This is for their good and for her mental well-being. "Some are hindered in prayer *by selecting an unfit time and place*. There are times when you may expect a knock at your own door, do not just then knock at God's door. There are hours when your letters arrive, when customers call in, when trades-people need attention, when workmen want orders, and it would be foolish to be going into your closet just then. ... I am alluding now to times specially devoted to supplication, and I say choose a season and a place where you can be free from interruption. A pious lad who had no place at home to pray in, went to the stable and climbed up into the hay-loft; but very soon some one came up the ladder and interrupted him: the next time he took care to pull the ladder up after him, a very useful hint for us" (Charles Spurgeon).

Notice the wonderful promise that Christ gives to those who pray privately before the Lord (Mt. 6:6). God has taught us to pray, and He has given us great promises to encourage us.

5. Effectual prayer is not vain repetition (Mt. 6:7-8).

This is not a warning against repetition in the sense of praying for the same things persistently. The Bible encourages that (e.g., Lu. 18:1).

It is a warning against *vain* repetition.

- Hindu mantras and Buddhist prayer wheels are examples. At the Boudha stupa in Kathmandu, Nepal, Buddhists circumnavigate the stupa clockwise a prescribed number of times while whirling their prayer wheels. The prayers which are written on the wheel and on paper inside the wheel are supposed to be activated by the repetitious rituals. The heathen think that mere repetition brings some sort of blessing (i.e., Hare Hare Hare, Hare Ram Hare Ram). The heathen think that they can arouse God by making noises and repeating religious incantations.

- Nominal Christians engage in vain repetition when they use rote prayers and ritualistic liturgy. For example, the Lord's Prayer itself has been made into a rote ritual. Catholic prayer beads are an example of ritualistic, repetitious prayers. The practitioner prays the Lord's Prayer six times and the Hail Mary 50 times! Consider the Scala Sancta in Rome. These are supposed to be the 28 steps that Christ ascended to appear before Pilate. Supplicants climb the stairs on their knees while repeating at each step, "My Jesus, through the sorrow you suffered in being separated from your dear Mother and your beloved disciples, have mercy on me. Holy Mother, pierce me through in my heart each wound renew of my Savior crucified."

- Contemplative prayer, which comes from the Catholic monastic movement and has swept through evangelicalism in the 21st century, also uses vain repetition. For example, the "Jesus Prayer" consists of repeating the name "Jesus" with every breath. In another form, the Jesus Prayer consists of repeating, "Lord Jesus Christ, have mercy upon me," or, "Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God, have mercy on me a sinner." This is to be repeated throughout the day. J.P. Moreland and Klaus