



9

Pray without Ceasing

Key Theme

- God works in believers to accomplish His purposes.

Key Passages

- Philippians 4:6–7; 1 Thessalonians 5:16–18

Objectives

Students will be able to:

- Describe what the Bible teaches about prayer.
- Describe the types of prayer using the ACTS model.



Lesson Overview



Come On In

Write on the board, “Does God hear everyone’s prayers?”

Students will complete the Memory Verse Review Sheet. If time allows, have them recite the verse together.



Studying God’s Word

When we become children of God, we gain access to God through prayer. God desires us to bring all our requests to Him—our good Father—instead of worrying about them. What a privilege it is to be able to come to God in prayer with adoration and praise, confession of sin, thanksgiving, and supplication!

☐ Study the Prepare to Share section.

☐ Go Before the Throne.



Activity: A Posture of Prayer

Students will examine various passages that describe postures of body and heart when praying.

☐ Student Guides

☐ A Posture of Prayer Answer Key from the Resource DVD-ROM

☐ Pencils



Prepare to Share

SCRIPTURAL BACKGROUND

Prepare to teach by preparing your heart. Read the key passages listed above with this background.

We are all sinners and fall short of the glory of God (Romans 3:23). As believers we are saved by grace through faith—not by our own works so that we could never boast (Ephesians 2:8–9).

As sinners saved through grace, we know that we have received the Spirit of adoption and can now call God, “Abba, Father” (Romans 8:15–16).

Because of these wonderful truths, we know, as believers, that we can come boldly and confidently to the throne of grace where we find God’s mercy to help in our times of need (Hebrews 4:16). This is both a privilege and a command given to us by God, our Father. The Apostle Paul told the Thessalonians to pray without ceasing (1 Thessalonians 5:17). Jesus commanded in His Word to ask, and it will be given; to seek, and it will be found; and to knock, and it will be opened (Matthew 7:7). Jesus assured His disciples (and all believers) that whatever we would ask in His name He would do in order that the Father may be glorified in the Son (John 14:13–14). We see this principle repeated in 1 John 5:14–15 where we read that if we ask anything according to God’s will, He hears us!

The prayers of believers that Jesus is referring to must be presented in Jesus’s name and according to His will. These prayers would be prayers directed, not toward selfish gain, but the furthering of the kingdom so that the Father will be glorified and honored.

But what is the proper way to pray? Most people are familiar with the Lord’s Prayer in Matthew 6:9–13. This is an example set before us by Jesus Himself of how to pray. This prayer includes worship of God, trust in God, supplication to God for daily needs, confession of sins before God, and a humble submission to God as we wait and trust that He will answer our prayers according to His perfect will.

We find more direction from the Apostle Paul in his writings to the Philippians (and to us through the inspired Word of God). Here we are told to be anxious for nothing and in ALL things by prayer, with thanksgiving, to present our requests to God. Only confidence and complete dependence on God will allow us to pray in this way. And it will result in the peace of God guarding our hearts and minds through Christ Jesus (Philippians 4:6–7).

The Bible gives other examples of various types of prayers that we can learn from. You may have seen the acronym ACTS used to illustrate some of these prayers.

A – Adoration is to worship and adore God—to sing praises to Him while we have our being (Psalm 146:1–2).

C – Confession is to come before God in humility and ask for His forgiveness for the times we sin against Him (1 John 1:9).

T – Thanksgiving is to continually be aware of and thank God for the many blessings He allows in our lives every day! The psalmist said it well: “Let us come before His presence with thanksgiving; Let us shout joyfully to Him with psalms” (Psalm 95:2).

S – Supplication is to come to God, our heavenly Father, with our daily needs and the needs of others. The Lord’s Prayer includes praying for our daily bread (Matthew 6:11). We know that God cares for us and will supply all our needs according to His riches in Christ Jesus (Philippians 4:19).

It is truly a privilege as a child of God to approach His throne of grace with our requests. God expects and desires us to come to Him honestly. Praying in all things reveals a dependence on His sovereignty and will for our lives. We can trust that as our “Abba, Father,” He knows all things. He knows our hearts better than we know them ourselves, and He will always answer our prayers in ways that are best for us—according to His perfect will.

HISTORICAL/APOLOGETICS BACKGROUND

As believers, we have access to God’s throne of grace through Jesus Christ, our great High Priest (Hebrews 4:14–16). We can present our prayers before Him and have confidence that He hears us (1 John 5:14–15). But we may have heard people ask or may have asked ourselves whether or not God hears and answers the prayers of unbelievers. How many times have we heard non-Christians say they’ll pray for us? Or how many times have we seen prayers offered by those who are from a non-Christian religion? Does God hear or answer these prayers? To answer this question, we’ll need to look at our source for truth, the Word of God.

Of course, God can do whatever He wants that is in accord with His will and His nature. So, He could answer any prayer if He so chooses. But Scripture clearly indicates that God does not listen to or answer every prayer. Here are a number of verses from both the Old and New Testaments that would indicate that God does not attend to the prayers of unbelievers.

Isaiah 1:15 – When you spread out your hands, I will hide My eyes from you; even though you

make many prayers, I will not hear. Your hands are full of blood.

Isaiah 59:2 – But your iniquities have separated you from your God; and your sins have hidden His face from you, so that He will not hear.

Psalms 24:3–4 – Who may ascend into the hill of the Lord? Or who may stand in His holy place? He who has clean hands and a pure heart, who has not lifted up his soul to an idol, nor sworn deceitfully.

Psalms 34:15–16 – The eyes of the Lord are on the righteous, and His ears are open to their cry. The face of the Lord is against those who do evil, to cut off the remembrance of them from the earth.

Psalms 66:18 – If I regard iniquity in my heart, the Lord will not hear.

Proverbs 15:8 – The sacrifice of the wicked is an abomination to the Lord, but the prayer of the upright is His delight.

Proverbs 28:9 – One who turns away his ear from hearing the law, even his prayer is an abomination.

James 1:5–7 – If any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask of God, who gives to all liberally and without reproach, and it will be given to him. But let him ask in faith, with no doubting, for he who doubts is like a wave of the sea driven and tossed by the wind. For let not that man suppose that he will receive anything from the Lord.

James 4:3–4 – You ask and do not receive, because you ask amiss, that you may spend it on your pleasures. Adulterers and adulteresses! Do you not know that friendship with the world is enmity with God? Whoever therefore wants to be a friend of the world makes himself an enemy of God.

According to these verses, there are several reasons why God may not listen to or answer prayer. He will not answer the prayers of those who are idolaters, who swear falsely, who do evil, who regard iniquity in their hearts, who are wicked, who turn away from His Law, who don't ask in faith, who ask for their own pleasures, and who are friends of the world.

Scripture tells us that all who have not humbly repented of their sin and submitted to the Lordship of Christ are enemies of God (Romans 5:10). They are dead in trespasses and sins and are slaves to sin

(Ephesians 2:1; Romans 6:17). They do not have faith, and thus are unable to please God (Hebrews 11:6). They are idolaters and have substituted the worship of the one true God with the worship of created things (Romans 1:22–23). And because they do not worship the true God, His ears are closed to their prayers.

In our pluralistic society today, such a view would be greeted with cries of intolerance. Who are Christians to say that God doesn't hear the prayers of sincere non-Christians? Don't all religions have access to God? But these complaints are directed at God Himself who has clearly spoken to this in His Word.

The enemy, Satan, loves "religion" and false hope in prayer. He wants people to think that being "spiritual" by praying and being religious are good things in themselves. He is happy with people who think that because they meditate or pray or go to religious services, they are on the right side with God. Satan does not want people to rightly understand the love of God as seen in Scripture through Jesus Christ, the only Savior. Nor does he want them to contemplate and fear the wrath of God promised at the last judgment when God will surely condemn all who have rejected Jesus Christ, God's only begotten Son.

The truth is, the only prayer of a non-believer that God will hear and answer with all surety is the prayer of humble repentance for sins followed by the declaration of sincere faith in Jesus Christ, the Savior. This is the prayer of submission to God's will that will bring salvation to the lost soul through the gospel.

And for believers, we can be confident in the one true God and know that the only Mediator between God and man, Jesus Christ, is at the right hand of God the Father making intercession for us (1 Timothy 2:5; Romans 8:34).



BEFORE THE THRONE

Father God, you are a loving provider of all things good. You want your children to come to you in faith believing that you want the best for us, and you will answer. Help us, Lord to trust you in all things—and to bring all things before you in prayer. Show my students the importance of using prayer to adore you, confess sin, thank you, and ask you to meet their needs. May they learn the wonderful privilege it is to pray. Help them to trust your promise to hear and answer the prayers of your children.



Review

In our last two lessons we have looked at some of the instructions found in the epistles for living the Christian life. We looked at the important aspects of faith and works and saw that our salvation is demonstrated by our works rather than being earned by our works. And we studied the many benefits of our adoption as sons and daughters of God.

- ? Who would like to share how they have been able to put these truths to work in their own walk or in sharing with someone else? *Discuss various answers.*

Today we are going to continue looking at the instructions from the epistles, focusing on prayer. If you are like most Christians, your prayer life is probably one

of the aspects of your walk that you are least satisfied with. Prayer can be hard to understand. Why should we pray? How should we pray? When should we pray? These are all questions that we can look to the Bible to answer for us.

God has called us to pray to Him, but He has not left us without loving guidance on how to do so. In short, prayer is simply communion with God—relating to Him as we would to another person. By one accounting there are over 600 prayers present in the Bible. While the Bible has much more to say about prayer than we could cover in a single lesson, we are going to get a big-picture view of what is revealed to us and for us.



- Write on the board, “Does God hear everyone’s prayers?”



Studying God’s Word

READ THE WORD

Let’s read Philippians 4:6–7 together as we try to understand a bit more about prayer as it is described in Scripture. *Have someone read the passage aloud.*

EXAMINE THE WORD

Observe the Text

- ? What is the context of this passage? *Paul and Timothy are writing to the church in Philippi, offering them instruction and guidance on various topics. This closing section of the letter has several short passages on various topics.*
- ? What commands are present in this short passage? *Do not be anxious; pray to God.*
- ? Why is the command to not be anxious attached to prayer? *Our attitude as we come to prayer should be one where our minds are aware of God’s ability to provide what we need and not an attitude of worry.*
- ? What does anxiety reveal about our view of God? *If we are anxious or worried, it reveals that we are not trusting God in our circumstances.*

- ? **What two words are used to describe our communication?** *Prayer and supplication.*
- ? **What is the difference between these two words?** *Prayer is a general word for petitions to God while a supplication has the meaning of making specific requests where there is a need. These words are found together in passages like Acts 1:14, Ephesians 6:18, and 1 Timothy 2:1.*
- ? **What attitude should accompany this communication?** *An attitude of thanksgiving.*
- ? **Who are these requests made to?** *God is to be addressed in prayer, which is God the Father in this instance.*
- ? **What is the result of offering these prayers to God?** *As we pray to God trusting in His character, we should find the peace of God in our hearts.*
- ? **How does Paul describe this peace?** *It is a peace that is beyond understanding.*
- ? **What is the effect of this peace on our hearts and minds?** *Our hearts and minds, our total being, will be guarded through Christ Jesus. Here “guard” is drawn from a military term used to describe keeping watch over something.*
- ? **Who is standing guard over believers?** *The guard is Jesus Himself.*
- ? **What is the relationship between anxiety/worry in verse 6 and peace in verse 7?** *When we go to God in prayer, trusting in His perfect character, the anxiety and worry we have for our circumstances can be replaced by the peace of knowing that He is guarding our lives.*
- ? **What does 1 Thessalonians 5:16–18 add to our understanding of prayer in this passage?** *We are to pray without ceasing and with an attitude of thanksgiving in all things.*
- ? **What incentive is there to rejoice and pray?** *These are God’s will for us in Jesus.*
- ? **How is the command to “rejoice always” related to the Philippians passage?** *In Philippians 4:4, Paul had given a similar command to always rejoice in the Lord.*
- ? **In what sense should we understand “always” and “without ceasing” in these commands?** *They cannot mean to be in silent, devoted prayer all of the time, or else we would not be able to fulfill other commands nor sleep. They have the sense of having a constant attitude of joy in the Lord and prayerful communion with our Father. Also, we are to do so in all circumstances, not just in the good times or the bad times when we feel like it.*

1 Thessalonians
5:16–18

Discover the Truth

As Christians, God calls us to constant communion with Him through prayer. Prayer should be a constant part of our lives. That does not mean that we have to stop and bow our heads and fold our hands each time we pray, but that we can offer silent prayers to God as we go about the other business He has called us to. We don’t have to stop at specified times, but we are to offer Him praise or ask for wisdom at any time.

- ? **What attributes of God are we trusting in as we offer our prayers to Him?** *Discuss various answers here, asking the students to attach other passages to their explanations. For example, God’s graciousness is demonstrated in giving us good gifts; as a good Father, He will*

sovereign

gracious

not give us a stone when we ask for bread (Luke 11:11–13). He is sovereign, so we can trust Him in whatever circumstances we may find ourselves.

- ? **How does our ability to approach God in prayer relate to our adoption as children of God?** *As children of God, we can approach Him as our Father and ask for Him to act on our behalf. As we come, we make requests of Him and not demands. Since we are united with Jesus, we have communion with God, and offering prayer to Him is one benefit of our adoption. (See Hebrews 4:16 and Ephesians 3:12.)*

Further, we can think of prayer in a Trinitarian formula—we pray to the Father in the name of the Son by the power and guidance of the Spirit.



A Posture of Prayer

MATERIALS

- ☐ Student Guides
- ☐ Pencils
- ☐ A Posture of Prayer Answer Key

INSTRUCTIONS

When we think about prayer, the first thing that comes to our mind is some formal time we devote to communion with God. But that is only one aspect of our prayer life since we have just seen that we are to be in a continual state of prayer and communion with God. However, we should set apart times of prayer focused on relating to God. But unlike many religious traditions, there is no specific formula that we have to follow. There are no commands in the Bible to wash our feet, face a certain direction, or wear certain clothing.

In your Student Guides you will find the A Posture of Prayer activity. In small groups, take a few minutes to look through the passages referenced there, and we will discuss how Scripture talks about our posture in prayer.

CONNECT TO THE TRUTH

Use the Posture of Prayer Answer Key to discuss what the students found in the Scripture passages.

As we consider what the Bible has to say about our physical and spiritual posture in prayer, we have to remember that there is nothing wrong with bowing our heads in reverence or closing our eyes to limit distractions, but that those are probably not appropriate if we pray as we are driving. As we go about our day in an attitude of prayer, we will find ourselves praying in many postures.

It may be appropriate in a specific moment of sincere repentance to lie on the floor with our faces buried as we cry out to God, but we should soon move to a posture of praise with hands lifted to God who is gracious and merciful to forgive us our sins in Christ.

But regardless, we must approach God in prayer with a sincere heart, seeking to pray for what we know is consistent with His will. As Jesus demonstrated for us, we bring our prayers to the Father so that His will would be done and not our own. We can trust in God to bless those kinds of prayers.



READ THE WORD

As we mentioned earlier, many Christians struggle to have a satisfying prayer life. It seems that we pray the same old things in the same old ways. But the types of prayers in the Bible are quite diverse, and we can use them as a framework to go to God in prayer. There are many helpful models of prayer, but we are going to look at one specific model called the ACTS model. *Ask if anyone is familiar with this model.*

As an acronym, the A stands for Adoration, C for Confession, T for Thanksgiving, and S for Supplication. So we are going to look at examples of prayers that fit into each of these categories.

Let's look at each of those categories using various passages of Scripture and talk briefly about how those can be turned into prayer. *Have someone read each of the passages aloud.*

EXAMINE THE WORD

Observe the Text

Adoration is to offer worship to God for who He is in all of His character, glory, holiness, and beauty. If we begin a time of prayer by acknowledging the amazing attributes of God and praising Him for those things, it sets our mind in the right frame for communion with Him. The psalms are full of these types of blessings of God for His works and character. In fact Psalms 144–150 are all psalms of praise.

? **How does this passage reflect the adoration of God?** *This passage speaks of the blessing of God for the things He has done (4–5), His righteousness (7), His grace, mercy, and compassion (8), and His kindness to all (9).*

? **How can this be turned into a prayer?** *Discuss various answers including reading each phrase of this psalm as a prayer of praise for God's attributes and works.*

Confession is another important aspect of prayer where we bring our specific acts of sin to God. While there is no need to wait for a specific time of prayer to confess sins, we can pause during a time of devoted prayer and ask the Spirit to bring to mind any sins we need to confess to cleanse our conscience before our God.

? **What is true about us if we say that we have no sin to confess in prayer?** *We are deceiving ourselves and are calling God a liar if we deny that we have sinned.*

? **What promise comes with confession?** *God promises He will forgive us and cleanse us from all unrighteousness.*

? **On what basis can we be cleansed from our sins?** *God is just to forgive us because Christ has paid the penalty for our sins with His blood.*

Adoration

Psalms 145:1–9

Confession

1 John 1:6–10

Psalm 139:23–24

- ? How could this passage be used as a part of your prayers of confession? *If nothing comes to mind, this passage could be a prayer to ask the Spirit to bring to mind things that need to be confessed.*

Thanksgiving

If you were just able to take a breath, you have reason to thank God. *Thanksgiving* is an attitude that we should bring to prayer, but we can also take time to identify certain things that we are thankful for. These can range from the simplest of joys in our lives, such as the ability to hear a bird's song, to physical blessings like a house or good health, to the gift of salvation, and the opportunity to commune with Him in prayer. The opportunities to thank God are endless. Psalm 95:2 calls us to “come before His presence with thanksgiving.”

2 Corinthians 2:14

- ? What does Paul thank God for? *For the victory in Christ as the message of the gospel spreads.*

2 Corinthians 8:16

- ? What does Paul thank God for? *For the love He put in the heart of Titus for the Corinthians.*

Ephesians 5:20

- ? What are we to thank God for? *All things.*

- ? When are we to thank God? *Always.*

- ? In whose name do we offer thanks? *In the name of our Lord Jesus Christ.*

Supplication

While it is not a word we use every day, *supplication* is something we do every day. It simply means to make a request. It can be for ourselves or on behalf of others (sometimes called *intercession*), but it is asking God to act in a certain way. As we mentioned earlier, this is not a demand of God, but a request that is in line with His will.

Matthew 6:9–13

- ? What requests does Jesus use in this prayer? *He asks for God's will to be accomplished, for daily bread (food), and to not be led into temptation.*

- ? What other elements of the ACTS model do you see in this prayer? *Adoration in honoring God's name; confession and seeking forgiveness for debts.*

Ephesians 3:14–19

- ? What does Paul request of God? *He asks God to strengthen the Ephesian saints with the various spiritual blessings mentioned.*

- ? On what basis does Paul make this request? *On the basis of the riches of the glories of God.*

Discover the Truth

While there are surely other aspects of prayer that could be included, this ACTS model can offer a helpful way to structure a devoted time of prayer to God. As with any other method or tool, it may become a bit stale if it is overused. But it is sure to help us to focus on God as not only the one we are praying to, but the one who can answer our prayers as He pleases.





Applying God's Word

WHAT YOU HEARD IN THE WORD

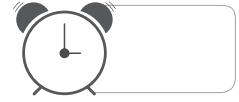
There have probably been thousands of books written on prayer, and the Bible is filled with examples of prayers from cover to cover. We know that we have only scratched the surface on what the Bible has to teach us on this topic, but I hope that our study today will spur you on to learn more on your own or with others.

Prayer is an amazing privilege—we have direct access to the Creator of the universe, and He is pleased to hear from us. Whether it is a prayer of lament, a confession of sin, or a request, we can approach the throne of grace with confidence and boldness knowing that our sovereign God will hear us. As we trust that God knows all and has all power, we can trust that He will answer our prayers in the manner that brings Him the most glory. The answer may not always be what we want, but it will be what is best in every situation because God works all things together for good for those who love Him and are called according to His purpose (Romans 8:28).

GOD'S WORD IN THE REAL WORLD

- ? As we have looked at prayer in the Bible today, what aspect of prayer has been most helpful to you or what have you learned? *Discuss various answers.*
- ? What is it about prayer that often makes it difficult for us to be diligently committed to it? *Discuss various answers including the fact that we do not hear a response when we pray or that we may not see the results immediately, making it hard to believe prayer does anything or changes anything.*
- ? Are there any habits in your prayer life, or in groups you regularly pray with, that seem contrived or superstitious (e.g., beginning or ending every prayer in the exact same way; "In Jesus's name, amen")? How could these patterns be inhibiting your communion with God through prayer? *If we just say the same things all of the time, it is evidence that we may not be thinking about what we are saying. Prayer is an act of our mind as much as it is an act of our spirit. Opening a prayer with a phrase like "Father, I come to you today knowing that I can speak to you because I have been reconciled to you through Jesus" at the beginning of a prayer rather than repeating the same phrase at the end could help to frame our thoughts as we begin to pray. Discuss other responses.*
- ? How do you see yourself using a prayer model like the ACTS model we talked about? *Discuss various answers, suggesting that it could be used regularly as a personal prayer or as a model for group prayer where different individuals pray for each of the aspects.*
- ? Many skeptics mock the idea of prayer as talking to an invisible man in the sky and expecting a response. If you were ever faced with such a

situation, how would you respond to this claim? *While we know that there will be many who will just mock regardless of what we say, we must make sure that any response is gracious and true, grounded in Scripture. One possibility would be to point to the example of Jesus as He prayed to His Father, noting that as a follower of Jesus you are doing as He has commanded you. Discuss other appropriate responses.*



MEMORY VERSE

1 Thessalonians 5:16–18 Rejoice always, pray without ceasing, in everything give thanks; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you.



GROUP PRAYER TIME

Be sure to pray with your class before you dismiss them.

- Thank God for allowing us access to Him through prayer.
- Praise God for His sovereignty in answering prayers to His glory.
- Ask God for a stronger desire to pray without ceasing.