

The Essentials of Effective Prayer



Kay Arthur, David & BJ Lawson

4minute
BIBLE STUDIES

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PRECEPT MINISTRIES INTERNATIONAL



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P R E S S

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THE ESSENTIALS OF EFFECTIVE PRAYER

Do you pray?
Really, do you pray? How often? How effective
do your prayers seem to be?

Do you question whether your prayer life is all it
should be? Do you ever wonder if God still answers
when people pray? Do you worry that you don't truly
understand what prayer really is?

If you've asked yourself these questions, you are not
alone. Almost all of us have questioned at some time
what prayer really is and how—or if—it really works.

In this study we will discover the answers to these
questions as we examine what Scripture teaches about
prayer and consider how to apply those truths to our
own lives.

We also will explore the connection between prayer and pleasing God. A. W. Tozer, a man known for the vitality of his prayer life, once wrote, “What the praying man does is to bring his will into line with the will of God so God can do what He has all along been willing to do.”¹

For the next six weeks we will learn how to bring our will in line with the will of God. We hope that by the end of this study your prayer life will be more exciting and vibrant than ever before.

¹ A. W. Tozer, *The Price of Neglect*, comp. Harry Verploegh (Camp Hill, PA: Christian Publications, 1991), 51–52.

WEEK ONE

We know prayer has to do with communicating with God, but what exactly does that look like? What's the point of praying? Does a sovereign God really care about our concerns? And if He does, how should we approach Him? What sort of things do we ask for or talk to Him about?

This week we'll try to understand the nature and purpose of prayer by examining some people of prayer and references to prayer in the Bible.

OBSERVE

James, the brother of Jesus, in his New Testament letter mentioned one of the great men of prayer from the Old Testament: Elijah.

Leader: *Read James 5:16b–18.*

- *Have the group say aloud and mark the words **prayer** and **prayed** with a **P**.*

As you read the text, it's helpful to have the group say the key words aloud as they mark them. This way everyone will be sure they are marking every occurrence of the word, including any synonymous words or phrases. Do this throughout the study.

JAMES 5:16B–18

16 The effective prayer of a righteous man can accomplish much.

17 Elijah was a man with a nature like ours, and he prayed earnestly that it would not rain, and it did not rain on the earth for three years and six months.

18 Then he prayed again, and the sky poured rain and the earth produced its fruit.

DISCUSS

- What did you learn from marking the references to *prayer* in this passage?
- Have you ever had an experience like Elijah's? Do you feel that your prayers "accomplish much"? Explain your answer.
- Elijah was a man like us, but his prayer life was unlike most of ours. It is a little intimidating, isn't it? Over the next six weeks we will see what it takes to transform our prayer life into one like Elijah's.

1 KINGS 8:27–30, 38–39

²⁷ "But will God indeed dwell on the earth? Behold, heaven and the highest heaven cannot contain You, how much less this house which I have built!

OBSERVE

Let's look at a prayer offered by King Solomon, the third king of ancient Israel, at the dedication of the first temple of God in Jerusalem.

Leader: *Read 1 Kings 8:27–30, 38–39. Have the group say aloud and...*

- put an **S** over each reference to **Solomon**. Since he is speaking in this passage, watch carefully for pronouns and synonyms that refer to him, including the phrase **Your servant**.
- mark every reference to **prayer** with a **P**, including synonyms such as **supplication, cry, and spreading his hands**.

INSIGHT

Supplication in this passage refers to a request for favor or grace.

DISCUSS

- What did you learn from marking the references to *Solomon*?
- What did you learn from marking the references to *prayer* in this passage?

28 “Yet have regard to the prayer of Your servant and to his supplication, O LORD my God, to listen to the cry and to the prayer which Your servant prays before You today;

29 that Your eyes may be open toward this house night and day, toward the place of which You have said, ‘My name shall be there,’ to listen to the prayer which Your servant shall pray toward this place.

30 “Listen to the supplication of Your servant and of Your people Israel, when they pray toward this place; hear in heaven Your dwelling place; hear and forgive.

38 whatever prayer or supplication is made by any man or by all Your people Israel, each knowing the affliction of his own heart, and spreading his hands toward this house;

39 then hear in heaven Your dwelling place, and forgive and act and render to each according to all his ways, whose heart You know, for You alone know the hearts of all the sons of men.”

- How did Solomon characterize God’s relationship with His people?
- What was he asking of God?
- Discuss the synonyms for prayer that you marked in this passage. What do they reveal about the nature of prayer?

OBSERVE

The book of Psalms is a collection of songs and prayers for the people of God. We will look at three psalms of David. The first was written when he fled from Absalom, his son who led a conspiracy to take not only David’s throne but also his life (2 Samuel 15).

Leader: Read Psalm 3:1–5 aloud. Have the group...

- put a **D** over each occurrence of the pronouns **my, me, him, and I** when they refer to **David**, who is speaking in this passage.
- put a **P** over the phrase **crying to the Lord**.

INSIGHT

The word *selah* appears frequently in the psalms. Its meaning is unclear, but many scholars believe *selah* is a musical term indicating a pause in the music.

DISCUSS

- What did you learn about David in verses 1 and 2? How would you describe his emotions at this point?
- The word *but* in verse 3 signals a contrast, a change in direction. According to verses 4 and 5, what actions did David take in the

PSALM 3:1–5

1 O LORD, how my adversaries have increased! Many are rising up against me.

2 Many are saying of my soul, “There is no deliverance for him in God.” Selah.

3 But You, O LORD, are a shield about me, My glory, and the One who lifts my head.

4 I was crying to the LORD with my voice, And He answered me from His holy mountain. Selah.

5 I lay down and slept; I awoke, for the LORD sustains me.

WRAP IT UP

Have you listened to others pray and felt intimidated because their words sounded so well composed? Relax. Prayer doesn't require an appointment, it doesn't require proper attire, and it doesn't even require proper grammar. As David's example shows, prayer is as natural as crying out. Crying out and telling God what is on your heart. Crying out and telling God what you need. Crying out and making supplication.

What is prayer? Prayer is simply drawing near to God and talking with Him. As we read in Hebrews 4, we have access to Him through our high priest, Jesus Christ. Because of Him, we can enter the throne room of heaven and draw near to God. There we can cry out, we can ask for help, we can lay our troubles at His feet. Then, as David demonstrated in psalms 3 and 4, we can rest because we know the Lord sustains us.

This week set aside some time to cry out to God about the concerns of your heart. Draw near to Him and enjoy His presence.

Leader: *If you have time, pause for the group to pray silently. Encourage them to cry out to God about the concerns of their hearts. Encourage them to draw near to Him and enjoy His presence. After a few minutes of silence, close in prayer, asking God to teach your group to pray.*



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