

S T U D Y G U I D E

# Prayer

R.C. Sproul



LIGONIER MINISTRIES

*Renew your Mind.*

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421 Ligonier Court, Sanford, FL 32771

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# How to Pray

## INTRODUCTION

Some have reduced prayer to merely talking to God. But there is more involved than a conversation between two parties. Before we pray, there are a couple of things we need to remember. In this lesson, Dr. Sproul helps us understand critical yet simple elements we need to incorporate into our prayers.

## LESSON OBJECTIVES

1. To consider why people often struggle with consistent prayer lives
2. To recognize that prayer is a sacred duty and effective when it is fervent and expectant of being answered
3. To show that we are called and commanded to be constant in prayer as modeled and taught by Jesus

## SCRIPTURE READING

*Therefore Hannah wept and would not eat. And Elkanah, her husband, said to her, "Hannah, why do you weep? And why do you not eat? And why is your heart sad? Am I not more to you than ten sons?" After they had eaten and drunk in Shiloh, Hannah rose. Now Eli the priest was sitting on the seat beside the doorpost of the temple of the Lord. She was deeply distressed and prayed to the Lord and wept bitterly. And she vowed a vow and said, "O Lord of hosts, if you will indeed look on the affliction of your servant and remember me and not forget your servant, but will give to your servant a son, then I will give him to the Lord all the days of his life, and no razor shall touch his head."*

—1 Samuel 1:7–11

## LECTURE OUTLINE

### A. The Christian approach to prayer

1. Many people struggle with the matter of prayer.
2. People carry guilt because they feel that they have not been proficient and consistent in their prayer lives.

### B. Praying like the biblical saints

1. Scripture reveals that the saints of old were characterized by consistent lives of prayer.
2. First Samuel 1 tells of Hannah and how the Lord God had closed her womb, which caused her great sorrow and misery.
3. Hannah prayed to the Lord and wept in great anguish because she wanted to be a mother.
4. One of the keys to effective praying is that prayers are fervent, not casual, and expectant of being answered.
5. When people like Jacob entered into conversations with God, they wrestled, stayed at it all night, and were persistent out of the depths of their heart.
6. Hannah prayed a silent prayer from the depths of her soul that resulted in her singing a song of celebration in response to God for answering her prayer.

### C. Prayer as a sacred duty

1. James the brother of Jesus was known as “Old Camel Knees” from having calluses on his knees from spending so much time in prayer.
2. Not everyone is called to the ministry of prayer with the same intensity and persistence, but we all have a capacity for growth in our prayer life.
3. Prayer should not be viewed as a burdensome obligation that causes guilt trips.
4. We are called and commanded by Christ and the Apostles to be constant in prayer.

### D. Prayer as an opportunity

1. It is sweet to come into the actual presence of God Himself and to speak to Him from the deepest level of our concerns from our hearts.
2. We should not consider ourselves failures simply because we have not been successful in achieving a consistent prayer life.
3. Prayerlessness is not the result of having no desire to fellowship or commune with God, nor is it because we have little time or lack discipline.
4. The reason that most people fall short and do not enjoy prayer is because they do not know how to pray.

### E. Jesus' example of prayer

1. The disciples asked Jesus how to pray because they often observed Him praying.
2. Jesus did not pray like the pious Pharisees but instead went away by Himself and quietly, intimately poured out His soul to the Father.

3. Jesus spent entire nights praying for spiritual power that was from and aligned with His Father's will.

### STUDY QUESTIONS

1. The saints in the Bible often struggled with inconsistent prayer lives.
  - a. True
  - b. False
2. Why did Hannah pray to the Lord and weep in great anguish?
  - a. Eli the priest thought she was undeserving.
  - b. God did not hear her silent prayers.
  - c. Her husband, Elkanah, was unsupportive.
  - d. She wanted to be a mother.
3. Prayer should not be viewed as a burdensome obligation that causes guilt trips but instead as which of the following?
  - a. A ministry
  - b. A measurement of spiritual growth
  - c. A sacred duty
  - d. The sole means of communicating with God
4. Which of the following is a mark of strong and effective prayers?
  - a. Boldness
  - b. Casualness
  - c. Fervency
  - d. Presumption
5. Which of the following reasons best explains why most people do not enjoy prayer?
  - a. Lack of personal discipline
  - b. Little desire to commune with God
  - c. Not enough time
  - d. No knowledge of how to pray
6. Why did the disciples ask Jesus how to pray?
  - a. They had often observed Him praying.
  - b. They had requests for God to hear.
  - c. They wanted to do miracles.
  - d. They were seeking forgiveness.

## DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. What reasons would you use in explaining to someone that prayer is an important part of the Christian life?
2. Does God hear and answer all prayers from all people equally? Why or why not?
3. What are some reasons that your prayer life is not as robust and satisfying as it could be? What would you change about your current prayer life?
4. How might you respond to the challenge that prayer is unnecessary because God already knows what you want to say? How are Jesus' recorded prayers and teachings on prayer part of the answer?

## 2

# Adoration

### INTRODUCTION

The Scriptures abound with examples of prayers and associated postures. Such postures are illustrative of accompanying attitudes that demonstrate honor, respect, submission, and humility before the presence of a king. What is the proper protocol for walking into the presence of God and communicating with Him in prayer? In this lesson, Dr. Sproul introduces the ACTS acronym for prayer and explains how prayer should begin with and be sustained by a spirit of adoration.

### LESSON OBJECTIVES

1. To recognize the significance of posture and attitude in prayers to God
2. To consider the fundamentals of proper prayer, which are knowing who God is and who we are
3. To show that a foundational focus of prayer should begin and end with adoration of God

### SCRIPTURE READING

*And when you pray, you must not be like the hypocrites. For they love to stand and pray in the synagogues and at the street corners, that they may be seen by others. Truly, I say to you, they have received their reward. But when you pray, go into your room and shut the door and pray to your Father who is in secret. And your Father who sees in secret will reward you. “And when you pray, do not heap up empty phrases as the Gentiles do, for they think that they will be heard for their many words. Do not be like them, for your Father knows what you need before you ask him. Pray then like this: “Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name.”*

—Matthew 6:5–10

## LECTURE OUTLINE

### A. The ABCs of praying is called ACTS

1. *A* for *adoration*
2. *C* for *confession*
3. *T* for *thanksgiving*
4. *S* for *supplication*

### B. Posture and attitude in prayer

1. Physical posture is linked to particular attitudes.
2. Kneeling in prayer to God is common since people knelt before royalty as a demonstrative sign of respect, submission, and humility.
3. Standing with open eyes and gazing heavenward with lifted hands is another common posture of prayer illustrated in the Old Testament.
4. Falling prostrate on one's face is also common as people came into the presence of God in Old and New Testament times.
5. There is no particular prescription for everyone, so find a prayer posture that is personally meaningful.
6. Though the whole prayer is not devoted to adoration, the whole time of prayer should be in a spirit or posture of adoration.

### C. Fundamentals to proper praying

1. Remember to whom you are speaking.
2. Understand and remember who is doing the talking.
3. Remember who God is and who you are.
4. We must learn the proper protocol for walking into the presence of the King.
5. Prayers to the King of kings and the Lord of lords must begin with an expression of adoration as well as with a posture and an attitude of adoration.

### D. Wish lists to God

1. A lot of prayer time is spent in the area of making requests of God.
2. There is nothing wrong with bringing requests to God, as we are scripturally instructed to make our requests known to Him with thanksgiving.
3. Many of the Holy Spirit-inspired prayers recorded in sacred Scripture give less attention to requests and significant attention to the adoration of God.

### E. The Psalms as model prayers of adoration

1. The Psalms are a collection of Holy Spirit-inspired prayers.
2. Those who immerse themselves in the Psalms have no problems saying what they want to say to God.
3. The Psalms extol God and express His greatness in fantastically beautiful language.

4. The psalmists pray by expressing reverence, honor, and adoration before a great and majestic God.
5. In the adoration phase of praying, think about the many excellencies of God, His attributes, character, and being, by praising Him for who He is.
6. The more people advance in their prayer lives, the more time they spend in adoration.
7. The ABCs of prayer begin and are sustained with a spirit of adoration.

## STUDY QUESTIONS

1. The four-element prayer acronym ACTS stands for *adoration, confession, theology, and spirituality*.
  - a. True
  - b. False
2. Kneeling, standing with lifted hands, and falling prostrate are prayer postures demonstrating which of the following?
  - a. Adoration
  - b. New Testament methods
  - c. Old Testament methods
  - d. Repentance
3. Dr. Sproul mentioned two fundamentals to proper prayer, which are knowing who God is and which of the following?
  - a. Knowing who Jesus is
  - b. Knowing who the Father is
  - c. Knowing who the Holy Spirit is
  - d. Knowing who you are
4. Many of the prayers recorded in Scripture give significant attention to the adoration of God and less attention to which of the following?
  - a. Attitude
  - b. Praises
  - c. Requests
  - d. Verbiage
5. A collection of model prayers can be found in which of the following books?
  - a. Leviticus
  - b. Obadiah
  - c. Psalms
  - d. Titus

6. The more people advance in their prayer lives, the more time they spend in which of the following area?
  - a. Adoration
  - b. Confession
  - c. Thanksgiving
  - d. Supplication

#### DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Have you ever attempted to do something similar to the thirty-day prayer experiment mentioned in the lecture? What resulted from your prolonged and intense prayers?
2. Have you ever applied the ACTS acronym or something similar to your personal prayer times, and if so, which area do you tend to primarily focus upon when praying? Are there particular prayer postures, locations, or times that are meaningful to you?
3. Why is it fundamental to proper praying to understand the contrast between the goodness, righteousness, magnificence, and holiness of God and the sinfulness, inconsistency, and the disloyalty of human beings? How do you resolve the tension in being a friend of Jesus while at the same time having a proper adoration protocol and respect when entering into prayer in the presence of the King?
4. How does immersing yourself in the Psalms improve praying? What other scriptural prayers have been models for your own prayer life?

# 3

## Confession

### INTRODUCTION

Christians are to keep short accounts with God and come before Him on a regular basis confessing their sin. Having a broken, contrite, and repentant heart should be our attitude every time we pray in order for God to grant full forgiveness. In this lesson, Dr. Sproul explains the importance of confession as a crucial element of prayer in the life of a Christian.

### LESSON OBJECTIVES

1. To show how the element of confession is crucial in the life and prayers of Christians
2. To recognize aspects of true repentance and how sin offends a holy God
3. To consider how God's mercy and forgiveness are granted to those who transgress His law

### SCRIPTURE READING

*Have mercy on me, O God, according to your steadfast love; according to your abundant mercy blot out my transgressions. Wash me thoroughly from my iniquity, and cleanse me from my sin! For I know my transgressions, and my sin is ever before me. Against you, you only, have I sinned and done what is evil in your sight, so that you may be justified in your words and blameless in your judgment. Behold, I was brought forth in iniquity, and in sin did my mother conceive me. Behold, you delight in truth in the inward being, and you teach me wisdom in the secret heart. Purge me with hyssop, and I shall be clean; wash me, and I shall be whiter than snow. Let me hear joy and gladness; let the bones that you have broken rejoice. Hide your face from my sins, and blot out all my iniquities. Create in me a clean heart, O God, and renew a right spirit within me. Cast me not away from your presence, and take not your Holy Spirit from me. Restore to me the joy of your salvation, and uphold me with a willing spirit. Then I will teach transgressors your ways, and sinners will return to you. Deliver me*

*from bloodguiltiness, O God, God of my salvation, and my tongue will sing aloud of your righteousness. O Lord, open my lips, and my mouth will declare your praise. For you will not delight in sacrifice, or I would give it; you will not be pleased with a burnt offering. The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit; a broken and contrite heart, O God, you will not despise.*

—Psalm 51:1–17

## LECTURE OUTLINE

### A. The importance of confession

1. Christians are to keep short accounts with God and come before Him on a regular basis confessing their sin.
2. The holiness of God should shape our attitude as our confession manifests genuine repentance.

### B. True and false repentance

1. Attrition is repentance that is motivated by the desire to escape paying for the cost of one's sin; it is a fear of punishment or of consequences.
2. True confession and contrite repentance involve a godly sorrow for having offended God and result in a genuine turning away from sin.

### C. Confession as an element of prayer

1. Psalm 51 illustrates David's contrite repentance for his sins.
2. Upon being confronted by Nathan, David was awakened to the reality of his guilt and the seriousness of his crimes of adultery and murder.
3. As fallen human beings, we tend to rationalize our sins, explain our sins to ourselves, and stop the accusing voice of our own consciences.
4. David had genuine remorse, and his prayer of confession has become a model for Christians ever since.

### D. God's mercy

1. David does not ask God for justice because he clearly understands that he is guilty; rather, he throws himself on the mercy of the court.
2. David makes no attempt to justify what he did but instead cries out to God for God's mercy.
3. David pleads for God to deal with him according to God's *hesed*, which is His tender mercy and loyal love in blotting out transgressions.
4. These sins were haunting David and he wanted them to go away and be removed; he sought to be washed and thoroughly cleansed from all iniquity.

### E. God's forgiveness

1. God has the ability, the power, and the Spirit to change bloody stains on our hands and to make them absolutely white.

2. God removes our transgressions from us and remembers them no more.
3. Once sin is forgiven by God, it is removed from the record and blotted out, and He makes us clean in His sight.

#### F. Our guilt before God

1. David said that it was against God and Him only that he had sinned, but in reality, the sins were against more people than God.
2. In the ultimate sense, sin is an offense against God because when we break God's law, we are violating Him because He is the lawgiver.
3. David is not trying to minimize his guilt before men but is trying to maximize and come to grips with the full measure of his guilt before God.

#### G. The true spirit of repentance

1. Until you come to the place where you really believe that God would be perfectly just to execute full punishment on you, you have not really repented.
2. As long as you think you deserve forgiveness or you deserve mercy, you have not really repented.
3. The truly penitent person forfeits all rights and acknowledges that God has every right to destroy him according to the full measure of the law.
4. Asking and pleading with God to not be destroyed, but even if He decides to, and admitting that there are no grounds to complain are the real spirit of contrition.

#### H. Born in sin

1. Being sinful at birth does not justify the circumstances or lessen the degree of guilt.
2. We sin because we are sinners who have a corrupt nature that penetrates the very core of our being and we must repent of that.
3. We cannot pass blame to our mothers nor to Adam because we are truly guilty in our participation in the fall.
4. David is not only asking for forgiveness for the particular sin that he has committed but also is praying for forgiveness for his sinful nature.

#### I. Praying for forgiveness

1. We tend to pray for forgiveness in general when we should be praying for forgiveness in particular for specific sins, asking for a clean heart.
2. David dealt with the consequences of his sins and took the resulting punishment; he then praised God in the end.
3. A broken and contrite heart should be our attitude every time we pray.
4. We need to contrast the beauty of God's holiness with a fresh confession of our transgressions before Him in a spirit of contrition.

## STUDY QUESTIONS

1. The act of confession is necessary only at conversion and optional after a person is saved.
  - a. True
  - b. False
  
2. What term represents the desire to escape paying for the cost of one's sin or having a fear of punishment and its consequences?
  - a. Attrition
  - b. Remorse
  - c. Contrition
  - d. Penitence
  
3. In Psalm 51, which of the following did David display in his prayer of confession as it pertained to his sin?
  - a. Blame for others
  - b. Genuine remorse
  - c. Partial responsibility
  - d. Rationalization
  
4. When confronted with his sin, David threw himself on the mercy of the court and avoided asking God for which of the following?
  - a. Forgiveness
  - b. *Hesed*
  - c. Justice
  - d. Discipline
  
5. Upon confession, God removes our transgressions from us and does which of the following?
  - a. Treats us and our sins fairly
  - b. Forgets that we are sinners
  - c. Remembers our sins no more
  - d. Grants conditional forgiveness
  
6. A truly penitent person acknowledges that God has every right to do which of the following?
  - a. Decline forgiveness
  - b. Destroy them
  - c. Grant conditional grace
  - d. Require a sacrifice

## DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. How would you respond to someone who says that genuine Christians do not sin or need confession? What are some distinctions between true and false repentance?
2. What did David mean in Psalm 51 when he said that it was against God and Him only that he had sinned? What is the relationship between God's holiness and our need for personal confession?
3. Why does being sinful at birth not justify our sinful actions or lessen the degree of guilt? How are we truly guilty in our participation in the fall of Adam when we were not there?
4. What did Dr. Sproul mean when he said that "we tend to pray for forgiveness in general when we should be praying for forgiveness in particular for specific sins"?

## 4

# The Lord's Prayer – Part 1

### INTRODUCTION

Jesus' disciples understood that there was something lacking in their prayer when they observed Jesus in prayer. When they asked, Jesus taught them to pray with what we now call the Lord's Prayer. Ever since, Christians have been relying on this prayer for guidance in their own lives. But is there ever a time when reciting the Lord's Prayer would be wrong? In this lesson, Dr. Sproul teaches us how and how not to use the Lord's Prayer.

### LESSON OBJECTIVES

1. To show how we are to bring our supplications to God with adoration and thanksgiving
2. To recognize that we should be praying for the triumph of the kingdom of God
3. To show how prayer is a Trinitarian exercise that addresses God as we come to the Father through the Son while dependent upon the Holy Spirit
4. To consider how the Lord's Prayer is an instructional model for His people to follow and not necessarily one that requires exact recitation

### SCRIPTURE READING

*Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.*

—Philippians 4:6–7

### LECTURE OUTLINE

- A. Prayer, peace, and thanksgiving
  1. There is no greater cure for fear and anxiety in the Christian life than rigorous prayer.
  2. Bring your worries and requests to God with thanksgiving.

3. According to Romans 1, we are guilty of refusing to truly honor God in our worship of Him and by having a spirit of ingratitude.
4. Every time we pray and enter His presence, we need to be thinking about expressing our thanks for the blessings we have received.

#### B. Answered prayer

1. We are not to subscribe to a magical “name it and claim it” doctrine that exhorts us to thank God for answered prayer before it is received.
2. Anytime we come before God, we acknowledge that He has the right to say no to our prayers.
3. There are some things, such as forgiveness, that God has guaranteed He will answer in a positive way for believers.
4. As illustrated by Jesus in the garden of Gethsemane, it is good to be grateful even when God says no to certain prayer requests.

#### C. The importance of thanksgiving

1. The ten lepers were all grateful for being healed by Jesus but only one went out of his way to demonstrate his gratitude to Christ.
2. We receive all kinds of benefits from the hand of God every day that we never take the time to say thank you for.
3. Paul emphasized that every time we come with our prayer requests, that we should come with a spirit of thanksgiving.
4. An important part of prayer is to remember all of the yeses that God has granted and not having a crisis in faith because God said no to something.

#### D. Supplications and prayer

1. Supplication and requests are basically synonymous in that we are pleading for something for ourselves, while intercession is for others.
2. Prayer requests are made through Christ in the knowledge that He is our intercessor and Great High Priest who carries our prayers to the Father.
3. Prayer is a Trinitarian exercise in that we ultimately address God in prayer as we come to the Father through the Son while dependent upon the Holy Spirit.
4. The Holy Spirit helps us pray properly in a godly way and not in a selfish or sinful manner.

#### E. The Lord's Prayer to the Father

1. Jesus' prayer was an instructional model for His people to follow and not necessarily one that required repetition or exact recitation.
2. The first thing Jesus begins with is to remind us to whom we are speaking, namely, the Father, who is the most high God.
3. Because of Jesus, we have been adopted into the family of God, and just as Jesus called God “Father,” we also can call God “Father.”
4. Addressing and honoring God at the beginning of prayer is a form of adoration.

#### F. Petitions for a hallowed name and coming kingdom

1. The first petition that Jesus prays for is that the name of God would be treated with reverence and that it would be regarded as holy by everyone.
2. Another important priority for prayer according to the Lord's Prayer is the success of the kingdom of God that Jesus inaugurated here on earth.
3. In today's world, the name of God is not regarded as holy, the kingdom is ignored, and the will of the Father is not obeyed.
4. We should be praying for the triumph of the kingdom of God at the center of our prayers if we want to follow the model of the Lord's Prayer.

#### STUDY QUESTIONS

1. There is no greater cure for fear and anxiety in the Christian life than rigorous prayer.
  - a. True
  - b. False
2. God has guaranteed that He will answer yes when we ask for which of the following?
  - a. Decreased pain
  - b. Forgiveness of sin
  - c. Minimal temptation
  - d. Relative prosperity
3. The parable of the ten healed lepers illustrates which of the following?
  - a. All were grateful and expressed gratitude
  - b. All were grateful yet only one expressed gratitude
  - c. One was grateful and expressed gratitude
  - d. None were grateful and expressed no gratitude
4. Which of the following statements best represents how supplication in prayer is defined?
  - a. Adoration toward God for who He is
  - b. Confession for our sins against God
  - c. Pleading for something for ourselves or others
  - d. Thanksgiving for all of our blessings
5. The thing Jesus begins with in the Lord's Prayer is a reminder of which of the following?
  - a. How we are to begin all prayers
  - b. Who we are
  - c. Why we are praying
  - d. To whom we are speaking

- 
6. Which of the following should be at the center of our prayers if we want to follow the model of the Lord's Prayer?
    - a. That we are forgiven
    - b. That we are sustained daily
    - c. The triumph of the kingdom of God
    - d. To not be led into temptation

#### DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Consider a time when God answered a prayer of yours with no. Did this cause a crisis of faith? Were you later grateful that the request was not fulfilled?
2. What is dangerous about the “name it and claim it” doctrine as it relates to prayer? Why is such a belief system not honoring to God?
3. How is prayer a Trinitarian exercise? Can we biblically address our prayers to all three members of the Trinity? Provide some examples from Scripture.
4. In what contexts have you prayed that God's name would be regarded as holy, that His kingdom would come, and that the will of the Father would be obeyed? How have you experienced answered prayer in any of these areas?

# The Lord's Prayer – Part 2

## INTRODUCTION

In a world where insecurity, pain, and distraction abound, the Lord's Prayer grounds us in the things that truly matter. Knowing that God provides, pardons, and protects us is reassuring to Christians who eagerly await the coming of His kingdom. In this lesson, Dr. Sproul explains how to rely on God, forgive others, and resist temptation for our own good and for the sake of God's glory.

## LESSON OBJECTIVES

1. To recognize a daily dependence upon the goodness of God's providence for our well-being
2. To show how to seek forgiveness by asking God to be as gracious to us as we are to those who offended us
3. To not overestimate our spiritual strength against the forces of the evil one
4. To recognize how God's kingdom, power, and glory are His alone

## SCRIPTURE READING

*Pray then like this: "Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name. Your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread, and forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors. And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil."*

—Matthew 6:9–13

## LECTURE OUTLINE

- A. A petition for our own needs
  1. Bread indicates our daily dependence on God's providence to supply the needs that are basic and fundamental to our lives.

2. Jesus calls attention to a daily, moment-by-moment dependence upon the goodness of God's providence for our well-being.
3. *Providence* comes from the same root in the English language as the word *provision* and has to do with how God provides for the needs of His people.
4. We need to be aware on a day-to-day basis that we live and move and have our being by His mercy, grace, and provision.
5. We should not fall into the trap of thinking that we are self-made people and that we are able to meet all of our own needs by ourselves.

#### B. Forgiven debts

1. We are asking God to be as gracious to us as we are to those who have offended and violated us and to give the same proportionate amount of mercy to us that we give to our enemies.
2. By nature, we are enemies of God, and when we sin against Him we commit hostile acts against His character and lordship.
3. If God's grace is as limited to the forgiving of our sins as our forgiveness is of forgiving those who have offended us, we are in deep trouble.
4. Christians are not obligated to give unilateral forgiveness to every person who sins against them but are to be ready to forgive the moment someone repents.
5. When speaking of forgiveness, Jesus ties together our vertical relationship with the Father and our horizontal relationship with people.

#### C. Temptation and evil

1. God does not entice us to sin; temptation comes from within.
2. Temptation can mean to be tested as Jesus was in the wilderness by Satan for forty days.
3. Adam, Eve, and Job were all tested to measure their loyalty toward God.
4. We should ask God not to put us to the test or put us in a place where we are left totally exposed to the assaults of the world, the flesh, and the devil.
5. We should never overestimate our spiritual strength against the forces of the evil one.
6. We must ask God to put a hedge around us to protect us from the wiles of the enemy as we are strengthened and protected from temptation to sin.

#### D. The kingdom, power, and glory

1. This is the most important part of the Lord's Prayer.
2. Two things to always remember when praying: the first is who it is to whom you are speaking, and the second is who it is that is doing the speaking.
3. When praying, we must acknowledge that the kingdom does not belong to us and the glory does not belong to us.
4. God is the God of absolute glory who will share His glory with no man because it is His kingdom, His power, and His glory.

## STUDY QUESTIONS

1. The first petition mentioned in the Lord's Prayer is for the needs of others.
  - a. True
  - b. False
  
2. Which of the following types of forgiveness is the Christian not obligated to give to every person who violates them?
  - a. Bilateral
  - b. Conditional
  - c. Unconditional
  - d. Unilateral
  
3. What is the source of temptation?
  - a. The Lord
  - b. Ignorance
  - c. Within
  - d. World
  
4. Which source of spiritual attack did Dr. Sproul identify as the one against which we should be particularly careful not to overestimate our spiritual strength?
  - a. The evil one
  - b. The flesh
  - c. The ungodly
  - d. The world
  
5. God's providence has to do with which of the following?
  - a. The ability to meet our needs by ourselves
  - b. The ability to let go and let God
  - c. The needs of His people
  - d. The wants of His people
  
6. It is vitally important to acknowledge which of the following in prayer?
  - a. That God will not act unless we first claim the blessings
  - b. That prosperity and happiness are for us to claim now
  - c. That the kingdom and glory do not belong to us
  - d. That the outcome largely depends upon us

## DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. How would you respond to someone who says that the idea of relying upon God for our needs creates laziness or passivity?
2. Why is unilateral forgiveness not scriptural? How do our vertical relationship with the Father and our horizontal relationship with other people affect forgiveness?
3. What do you do, or could you do, to ensure the temptations are minimized in your life?
4. What does the Lord's Prayer teach us about the relationship between God and us in the act of prayer?

# Providence & Prayer: If God Is Sovereign, Why Pray?

## INTRODUCTION

As the creator and ruler of the entire universe, God not only ordains all, but He also requires that His people communicate with Him through prayer. To some, this appears to be a contradiction: If He is sovereign, and the future is already predetermined, what power do human prayers have in altering what God has already decided? In this lesson, Dr. Sproul teaches about prayer's intimate link to the providence of God, saying that it is not only an honor and privilege to speak to the One who has our good in mind, but that prayer does actually change things.

## LESSON OBJECTIVES

1. To show how God sovereignly works in and through the prayers of His people
2. To recognize how prayer brings us into the sacred presence of Almighty God, who wants us to talk to Him for our benefit
3. To consider how prayer is a mandate and privilege that God has given His people because He cares and He will listen

## SCRIPTURE READING

*Is anyone among you suffering? Let him pray. Is anyone cheerful? Let him sing praise. Is anyone among you sick? Let him call for the elders of the church, and let them pray over him, anointing him with oil in the name of the Lord. And the prayer of faith will save the one who is sick, and the Lord will raise him up. And if he has committed sins, he will be forgiven. Therefore, confess your sins to one another and pray for one another, that you may be healed. The prayer of a righteous person has great power as it is working. Elijah was a man with a nature like ours, and he prayed fervently that it might not rain, and for three years and six months it did not rain on the earth. Then he prayed again, and heaven gave rain, and the earth bore its fruit.*

—James 5:13–18

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## LECTURE OUTLINE

### A. Prayer and God's sovereignty

1. God not only ordains the ends of the universe and of human history, He also ordains the means to those ends.
2. Just as God sovereignly has a plan of salvation, part of the way in which He works out His plan of redemption is through the preaching of the Word.
3. God works in and through the prayers of His people.

### B. Prayer and God's mind

1. Our prayers do not have the power or the influence to change the mind of the Almighty.
2. We are not God's guidance counselor who gets Him to change His mind because we convince Him that His first plan was not a good one.
3. Our prayers do not give Him information that He lacked before we talked to Him.

### C. For our benefit

1. The Father, who knows everything about us, knows what we are going to say before saying it, but He still says, "Come and tell Me what you need."
2. In prayer, God invites us into the sacred presence of the Almighty in heaven itself and wants us to talk to Him for our benefit.
3. We should not flatter ourselves such that we think our wisdom is greater than His wisdom.

### D. Prayer changes things

1. Some view the prayer of faith that saves the sick in the book of James as if it were an absolute promise to every request.
2. In the New Testament, there were prayers of the saints to which God said no or said that His grace was sufficient for them.
3. God does not always say yes, but we should not miss out on the opportunity to pray for the sick and suffering because God does answer prayers.

### E. Pain and suffering

1. There is no absolute guarantee that Christians are going to escape suffering, pain, and disease.
2. Faith-healing theology believes that if you are not rescued and delivered from your disease, then the problem is that you did not have the necessary faith.
3. Jesus modeled in the garden of Gethsemane that praying for God's will and not our own is the correct submissive attitude of prayer.

### F. Faithful prayer

1. *Deo volente* means "God willing"; this phrase exhibits faith that trusts God for the outcome even if He says no.

2. God is sovereign, and His will does not always agree with our wills.
3. Saying “If it be Your will” is not an act of unbelief but rather an act of trusting in God and His will.

#### G. Fatalism and fervency

1. We should not retreat into a fatalistic view that passively believes that whatever will be will be.
2. James tells us that a fervent and effectual prayer of a righteous person avails much.
3. Fervency means praying with some degree of passion that is in proportionate relationship to the severity of the need and the seriousness of things.

#### H. Efficacy and prayer

1. God will vindicate His elect who cry out to Him day and night.
2. If we feel on the edge of fainting or giving up, then chances are that we have been lax in our prayer because there is a corollary between prayer and hope.
3. Prayer is not only a mandate, it is also one of the greatest privileges that God has given His people because He cares and He will listen.

### STUDY QUESTIONS

1. God works in and through the prayers of His people.
  - a. True
  - b. False
2. Which of the following is true about prayer?
  - a. It does not have the power or influence to change our minds.
  - b. It does not have the power or influence to change the mind of God.
  - c. It has the power and influence to change the mind of God.
  - d. It sometimes has the power and influence to change the mind of God.
3. Which of the following properly describes what we should do when we come to God in prayer?
  - a. Be clean before coming into His presence
  - b. Come and tell Him what we need
  - c. Kneel or lay prostrate before Him
  - d. Recite and repeat the Lord’s Prayer
4. Which of the following is true of the prayer of faith that saves the sick in the book of James?
  - a. It is an absolute promise to fulfill every request.
  - b. It applies to pastors only.
  - c. It does not always guarantee healing.
  - d. It should be taken figuratively and not literally.

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5. Faith-healing theology holds that if you are sick and not delivered from the disease upon praying, which of the following is the reason?
    - a. It was an incorrect prayer.
    - b. God was unwilling to heal.
    - c. You had the wrong attitude.
    - d. You lacked the necessary faith.
  
  6. According to Dr. Sproul, prayer is both a mandate and which of the following?
    - a. A burden
    - b. A sign of faith
    - c. A privilege
    - d. A sign of submission

#### DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. How would you answer someone who asked you if prayer changes God's mind? How could you respond in a way that is both consistently biblical and hopeful?
  
2. Describe a time when God said yes to your prayer. Does the amount of faith one has have anything to do with how God answers prayer?
  
3. Describe a time when He answered a fervent prayer of yours with a negative response. What did you learn about God's will and faithfulness through that experience?
  
4. How would you describe your own personal prayer life? What have you done, or could you do, to improve it?

## ANSWER KEY FOR STUDY QUESTIONS

### Lesson 1

1. b
2. d
3. c
4. c
5. d
6. a

### Lesson 2

1. b
2. a
3. d
4. c
5. c
6. a

### Lesson 3

1. b
2. a
3. b
4. c
5. c
6. b

### Lesson 4

1. a
2. b
3. b
4. c
5. d
6. c

### Lesson 5

1. b
2. d
3. c
4. a
5. c
6. c

### Lesson 6

1. a
2. b
3. b
4. c
5. d
6. c

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