



Session 4

Getting to Know God More

This lesson develops the main point we made in the previous one, which is that being a Christian and living a God-centred life is all about developing a *relationship* with God. All relationships develop by *spending time together*. So if you want to know God better you have to find out as much as you can about him. We do this in a number of ways but primarily:

- **By reading** the Bible which teaches us all about God
- **By talking** with God, which we call prayer, and walking consciously in fellowship with the Holy Spirit – which is the expression of God that lives in you.

We will explore prayer in this lesson. What better way to get to know someone than by talking with them!

What's more, we will explore it by reading 2 passages of the Bible together, so you continue to understand that reading it is the main way we get to know God better.

What is prayer?

But first let's be clear what prayer is.

People from a religious background sometimes treat prayer as a set of ritualistic words they have to repeat to attract God's blessing or to be heard by God. It thus becomes a formula, essentially boring and what Jesus once called 'empty repetition'. This is not true prayer.

Prayer is simply ***talking with God***. Notice I said 'with' God, not talking 'to' God. Prayer is a conversation, a process of speaking and listening. It is an expression of your relationship with him. Just like you chat with your friends, so you chat with God. It does not have to be expressed in special words – just your normal way of speaking. God wants to hear your heart, your feelings, thoughts, fears and aspirations. He wants a relationship with you!

The Bible has lots to say about prayer and we read of people praying right the way through it. So for this lesson we have to be selective! But we will start with what Jesus taught about prayer:

What Jesus said about prayer...

Read the following passage through:

Matthew 6:5-13

'And when you pray, do not be like the hypocrites, for they love to pray standing in the synagogues and on the street corners to be seen by men. I tell you the truth, they have received their reward in full. ⁶ But when you pray, go into your room, close the door and pray to your Father, who is unseen. Then your Father, who sees what is done in secret, will reward you. ⁷ And when you pray, do not keep on babbling like pagans, for they think they will be heard because of their many words. ⁸ Do not be like them, for your Father knows what you need before you ask him.

⁹ *This, then, is how you should pray:*

"Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name,

¹⁰ *your kingdom come, your will be done on earth as it is in heaven.*

¹¹ *Give us today our daily bread.*

¹² *Forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors.*

¹³ *And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from the evil one.'*

Now, think your way through this passage a little more carefully:

- **Verse 5-6** This teaches us that prayer is normally a private thing, between you and God. It is deeply personal. There is no benefit in praying loud, fancy prayers to impress others. Even if they are impressed, God isn't!
- **Verse 7** Effective prayer is not about the quality or quantity of your words but is simply you sharing your heart with God as you would someone else you love and trust.
- **Verse 8** This is important. God knows your situation already! So why pray at all? Because God has established things relationally and our prayer involves God in a process with us. We draw him in, asking him to be with us, give us wisdom, strength and the breakthroughs we need – or whatever else you may be praying about. God wants to work with us 'according to our faith' in his ability to act and work with us. Prayer involves God in the process.
- **Verse 9** Prayer exalts God; it honours, praises and gives thanks to him.
- **Verse 10** Prayer calls heaven to earth. It connects with all that God is in heaven and asks that it will be outworked in our earthly life today. God's kingdom (the sphere of his rule) comes to earth as we live our lives under his kingship. So this is a very practical request.
- **Verse 11** Prayer deals with your immediate needs. God is interested in the detail of your life today.

- **Verse 12** Prayer confirms and affirms that we have forgiven others and are living in good relationship with people.
- **Verse 13** Prayer protects us from evil. A conscious awareness of God in your daily life, maintained through prayer, protects you from making bad choices and falling into sin.

All these points are confirmed elsewhere in the Bible's teaching on prayer, so watch out for them as you read and learn more about how to **live** a successful Christian life.

Now let's read what one of the greatest Christian leaders in the New Testament had to say about prayer:

What the Apostle Paul said about prayer...

Ephesians 6:18-19

¹⁸And pray in the Spirit on all occasions with all kinds of prayers and requests. With this in mind, be alert and always keep on praying for all the saints. ¹⁹Pray also for me, that whenever I open my mouth, words may be given me so that I will fearlessly make known the mystery of the gospel, for which I am an ambassador in chains. Pray that I may declare it fearlessly, as I should.'

- **Verse 18** *'Pray in the Spirit'*. Prayer is a spiritual thing. Even though you are thinking of things to say and expressing them in words, prayer actually comes from deep in your spirit. It is a 'spirit to spirit' conversation, your heart communicating with God.
- **Verse 18** *'On all occasions'*. Prayer is not just for the difficult times! Involve God in all you do. In another place Paul tells us to 'pray continually' (*1 Thessalonians 5:17*). You do this by having a constant awareness that God is with you, and you are constantly chatting to him as you do life. In fact you can be talking to a friend about something or doing your job, and at the same time your spirit is praying to God about the situation or even something completely different that is on your mind! It is 'spirit to spirit'.
- **Verse 18** *'With all kinds of prayers'*. There are many 'kinds' of praying. They reflect the situation you are talking to God about as you go through it. As you explore the Bible you will discover prayer described as *intercession* (praying for someone else), as *spiritual warfare* (praying against Satan's attempts to attack, stop or interfere with your spiritual progress, or a specific situation) and as *'requests'* (which is self explanatory).
- **Verse 18** Pray for other Christians, *'the saints.'* This stops prayer becoming selfish and becoming wrongly focussed on only getting from God what we want for ourselves.
- **Verse 19** Pray for Christian leaders and their ministry – some of the others we should pray for regularly. In fact Paul says in another place that we should

pray for '*all in authority*' so they rule well (1 Timothy 2:1-4) and so create a stable society in which the good news about Jesus can be shared freely.

Some practicalities of prayer:

Finally in this lesson, here are a few practical pointers to help you pray:

- ❑ Make time for *private* prayer, whether it is whilst driving your car, when alone in your bedroom, when out walking the dog, etc.
- ❑ Pray '*continually*' (1 Thessalonians 5:17) which is where most people do the majority of their praying – on the move!
- ❑ Pray *out loud* whenever possible. Get used to the sound of your own voice. Then when you need to pray as part of a group or with a friend, you will be less nervous.
- ❑ *Listen!* Prayer is a two-way thing. Take time to meditate on the Bible as you talk to God and leave plenty of space for him to drop thoughts into your heart and mind.
- ❑ Keep a note of *specific requests* and enjoy ticking them off as God works with you to resolve situations.