



Honest to God

A Master Class in the Lord's Prayer

Session 1 – Authentic Prayer

Jesus was a praying man. His disciples saw this about their teacher right away. He prayed every morning, often before the sun came up. They saw His habit of slipping away at the end of a long day for time alone with His Father. They heard Him pray and witnessed the power and peace that He carried into every aspect of His life and ministry. So, they asked Jesus to teach them to pray.

Goals for this Session:

- Discover how (and how not) to pray.
- Consider what experiencing God's presence in daily life is intended to be.
- Examine how God speaks to us through His Word.
- Pray unhurried prayers that are rooted in knowing and living in God's Word.

Ice Breaker

What is the first prayer you were taught to say? Who taught you?

Day One – The Big Idea

Read **Matthew 6:5–13** and **Luke 18:9–14** to get the overall idea. Follow the dialogue closely but without getting bogged down in details.

1. What is the central topic? State the main point of this passage in a sentence or two.
2. What insight does this give you into God's ways and our relationship to Him?
3. The Bible shapes our core beliefs about God and our conduct toward others. Share one takeaway lesson from this passage and how you can apply it to your life.

Day Two — The Power of a Simple Prayer

Read Matthew 6:5–13

Jesus gave the disciples more than a pattern of words to pray. In six phrases, this prayer shows us what experiencing God’s presence in daily life is intended to be.

1. So, are you ready to discover how to experience the power of God’s presence in six short phrases? Let’s get going! But wait—this isn’t a race. Not a sprint, anyway. We run a Hebrews 12:1–2 race where endurance is tantamount to winning. The pace is set by keeping our eyes on Jesus. We don’t have to run fast, we just need to stay close and keep in step with Him.

The Lord’s Prayer is short and easy to recite, but actually praying it cannot be hurried. We are used to *fast*—with a side of *while we’re at it* thrown in, because that’s the pace of this world we live in. Truth be told, being quiet and focused on just one thing for more than five uninterrupted minutes is getting harder to do.

- a. Jesus regularly removed Himself from busyness to pray. If Jesus needed to get away from distractions to pray, what does that say for us? If you could have five uninterrupted minutes with Jesus three times a day, how would you spend them? (No really, think about it and write something down.)
 - b. From what you know about Jesus’ earthly ministry, describe what a typical day’s routine might have been for Him.
2. To understand what prayer is, let’s be clear on what it is not. Even people who claim no particular faith in God may adopt prayer as a healthy practice for mental and emotional well-being. But prayer is not tapping into some energy we stir up in ourselves.

Prayer is conversing with God, and good conversation involves listening as well as speaking. God speaks first through His Word and authentic prayer is rooted in knowing and responding to God’s Word. Put another way, “Without prayer that answers the God of the Bible, we will only be talking to ourselves.”¹ Briefly note what will *always* be true of God speaking to us.

Psalm 119:105

Proverbs 8:32–34

2 Timothy 3:16

Hebrews 4:1

¹ Timothy Keller, *Prayer: Experiencing Awe and Intimacy with God*, pg. 62

3. Now think of God's promises that are attached to prayer. Here are a few to get you started.

Matthew 7:7

John 15:7

1 John 5:14–15

James 1:5

Jeremiah 29:12–13

Psalms 91:15

Isaiah 65:24

Psalms 34:17

Is there one promise in particular that resonates with you today? Briefly share why.

Memory Verse

Write the verse and let it be part of your prayers every day. Ask the Holy Spirit to work it into your heart and mind.

Do not be like them, for your Father knows what you need before you ask Him.
Matthew 6:8 ESV

Think it over . . .

What are three qualities about your Heavenly Father that settle your cares and concerns?

Day Three – Pray-Acting and Empty Words

Read Matthew 6:5–8 and Luke 18:9–14

Jesus began by telling the disciples how *not* to pray.

1. Jesus warned the disciples not to treat prayer like a performance in order to impress others or feel good about themselves. The problem wasn't when or where they prayed, but why they prayed.
 - a. Devout Jews observed public prayers three times a day, at 9:00 AM, noon, and 3:00 PM. If they couldn't be at the synagogue, they would stop and pray wherever they were. The men in Jesus' illustration made sure everyone knew how devout they were. The point Jesus made was that, if we only pray when others can see and hear us, we're missing the point! Why is it essential for us to get alone with the Lord to pray?
 - b. When believers pray together, in what ways might we be inclined to impress others or compare how we pray with someone else's prayer?
2. Jesus had more to say about hypocritical prayers. When pray-acting is used to draw attention to oneself, it's annoying. But what was the self-centered Pharisee in Luke 18:9–14 doing?
 - a. If we were in church with these men, what might we see? One, a regular church-going, tithe-paying, morally upright man. The other, a guy who sees the mess he's made of his life, asking God for a clean heart and a fresh start. Both are in church and both have reasons to be thankful. But which prayer does God accept? Why?
 - b. Jesus said the humble man went home justified. The other man went home with a log in his eye (Matthew 7:5). We might think, *he wasn't even a Christian*. Do we know that? This much we know; we don't want to be that man. As C.S. Lewis put it, "When we Christians behave badly, or fail to behave well, we are making Christianity unbelievable to the world."

As representatives of the gospel, what lends credence to our message?

John 13:34–35

3. Jesus cautioned the disciples not to use vain repetitions like those who pray to false gods. When the apostle Paul visited Athens, the philosophers wanted to hear what new techniques he might have to offer (Acts 17:18). They never knew which god might listen, so prayer was a ritual of calling out each god by name and reciting elaborate incantations.
 - a. Why did Jesus downplay using the same words and phrases repeatedly when we pray?
 - b. What did Jesus *not* mean when He said, “Pray then like this...” (Matthew 6:9 ESV).

4. Jesus gave the disciples simple guidelines on how *not* to pray. These may be some of the same hurdles that we need to clear. There may be other hurdles that come to mind for you.
 - a. In what ways do we tend to make prayer more complicated?
 - b. In what ways can these guidelines help to keep your own prayers simple and focused?

5. Authentic prayer means: (Check all that apply.)
 - a. Pray with a listening heart (Ecclesiastes 5:2). _____
 - b. Pray with a humble heart (2 Chronicles 7:14). _____
 - c. Pray with an undivided heart (Jeremiah 29:13). _____
 - d. Pray with a faithful heart (Mark 11:22–24). _____
 - e. Pray with an obedient heart (1 John 3:22). _____
 - f. Add your own thought to the list: _____

Memory Verse

Do not be like them, for your Father knows what you need before you ask Him.
Matthew 6:8 ESV

Think it over . . .

Is there a particular prayer habit you need to break? Why or why not?

Day Four – Ask, Seek, Knock ... and Run?

Read Matthew 7:7–11

Jesus talks about the generosity of persistent prayer.

When Jesus said, “Look! I stand at the door and knock,” (Revelation 3:20 NLT) He was speaking to a church that had gotten complacent in their relationship with Him. They were good at doing good things, but Jesus could see what they needed was a meal of fellowship...conversation... and communion with Him.

Some mornings we rush out the door, no time for coffee with Jesus. We grab a verse off our phone and wash it down with an inspirational quote. It isn't a meal, and it's not a sustainable spiritual diet—but some mornings it's the best we can manage. Surely better than nothing, but not ideal. Jesus understands *busy*. He didn't always have time for a meal and the crowds didn't go home after five. But He was in step with the Spirit and He knew how to keep *busy* from crowding out *best*. Surely, this is one reason the disciples asked Him to teach them to pray.

1. Having God's Word committed to memory is more than a good idea—it's a lifeline for us in the busy days. It will be “a strong refuge we can resort to continually...and my mouth shall tell of Your righteousness and Your salvation all the day...” (Psalm 71:3, 15).

Share a few favorite verses you've committed to memory that you can *resort to continually* throughout the day.

2. But in Matthew 7:7–11, Jesus turned the illustration and we are the ones who are at the door, asking, seeking, and knocking. As you read this familiar passage, what does it teach us about prayer?
 - a. In the Lord's pattern for prayer, Jesus said don't be repetitious in saying your prayers. Does that mean we shouldn't repeat our prayers? Explain the difference.

Memory Verse

Do not be like them, for your Father knows what you need before you ask Him.
Matthew 6:8 ESV

Think it over . . .

What is the most common name you use to address God when you pray? Why?

Day Five – The Things We Need

1. Did you know that worship and prayer is an aroma that God finds irresistible? In the Bible, incense is a symbol of prayer. Every morning and every evening, Aaron the priest would burn aromatic incense on the altar so that there would be “perpetual incense before the Lord” (Exodus 30:8). God Himself gave the formula for this sweet-smelling savor. We even get a glimpse of earthly prayers from Heaven’s perspective. The prayers of God’s people, mixed with incense, rising before God’s throne (Revelation 8:3–4).

a. Instead of vain repetitions and much words, what did David want his prayers to be? Psalm 141:2

b. Prayer has a way of refining our heart. We learn to pray, not just for right things but also for the right reasons. What do you want your prayers to be?

“After being with Jesus, half the questions that trouble you will be answered and the other half will not seem worth the asking.

You are His beloved and your heart can rest in that fact.”

**C.H. Spurgeon
“The Christ-Given Rest”**

Memory Verse

Do not be like them, for your Father knows what you need before you ask Him.
Matthew 6:8 ESV

Think it over . . .

Elisabeth Elliott said, “Never dig up in fear what you have already planted in faith.” Is there any replanting to be done today?

After His Heart

“The eyes of the Lord search the whole earth in order to strengthen those whose hearts are fully committed to Him.” —2 Chronicles 16:9 NLT

“God found in David a man who would stand in the gap, a man whose heart was fully committed to Him. Will He find that in you?”

Greg Laurie

For you personally, what has been the most important discovery or insight from this study?

How will you put living it into practice in the days ahead?

Prayer Requests

Notes

Lined area for taking notes, consisting of multiple horizontal lines.