

Blessed are those who have learned to acclaim you,
who walk in the light of your presence, LORD.

PSALM 89:15

WHY PRAY?

SESSION TWO

Very early in the morning, while it was still dark, Jesus got up, left the house and went off to a solitary place, where he prayed.

MARK 1:35

INTRODUCTION (5 MINUTES)

DVD Introduction by Philip Yancey

Questions to Think About

- Prayer helps correct myopia, calling to mind a perspective I daily forget. I keep reversing roles, thinking of ways in which God should serve me, rather than vice versa.... Prayer raises my sight beyond the petty ... circumstances of daily life to afford a glimpse of that lofty perspective. I realize my tininess and God's vastness, and the true relation of the two. In God's presence, I feel small because I am small.
- How can we know that our prayers actually make a difference?

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GROUP DISCOVERY (38 MINUTES)

DVD Discussion

DVD Teaching Notes

Jesus, the “magnifying glass” of faith

Jesus knew how the universe worked. He had lived in heaven and he lived on earth. He knew that prayer was a way to bring God and us human beings together. So, whenever something important happened in Jesus’ life, you’d find him at prayer.

From the video

Questions about prayer

- Is it worthwhile?

1. When Philip faces difficult questions about God, faith, and prayer, why does he look to the teachings and earthly life of Jesus for answers?

- Does it make a difference?

2. What do you think is the real point of talking to God about the needs and concerns of your life?

- Why pray about what God already knows?

- Does God really care?

3. How would you describe the relationship between prayer, God’s will being done in heaven, and our ability to do God’s will on earth?

Lessons from the prayers of Jesus

Bible Exploration

The Prayer Life of Jesus under the Magnifying Glass

Jesus valued prayer enough to spend many hours at the task. If I had to answer the question "Why pray?" in one sentence, it would be, "Because Jesus did." He bridged the vast gulf between God and human beings. While on earth he became vulnerable, as we are vulnerable; rejected, as we are rejected; and tested, as we are tested. In every case his response was prayer.

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Prayer, p. 50

1. Jesus, the Son of God, knows better than anyone how the universe works. After all, before he came to earth, he spoke worlds into being and sustained all that exists. Yet while Jesus was on earth, the Gospels tell us that he frequently prayed. In each of the following situations, why do you think prayer was important to Jesus? What you think Jesus wanted to accomplish by his prayers?

Matthew 14:8–15, 19–23

Mark 1:29-37

Luke 6:12-13

Luke 22:39–46

Bible Passage	What Jesus Prayed For	What His Example Teaches	How His Prayers Differ from Ours
Matt. 19:13 – 15			
Mark 6:41 – 44	Give them something to eat.	Jesus gave the people bread.	Jesus gave the people bread.
Luke 22:31 – 32	Lord, keep them from falling into temptation.	Jesus gave the people bread.	Jesus gave the people bread.
Luke 23:33 – 34			
John 11:38 – 42			
John 14:16 – 18			
John 17:20 – 23	Glory be to You, O Lord, and may Your Kingdom come.	Jesus gave the people bread.	Jesus gave the people bread.

Closing Group Discovery Discussion

In prayer we stand before God to plead our condition as well as the conditions around us. In the process, the act of prayer emboldens me to join the work of transforming the world into a place where the Father's will is indeed done as it is in heaven. We are Christ's body on earth, after all; he has no hands but ours. And yet to act as Christ's body we need an unbroken connection to the Head. We pray in order to see the world with God's eyes, and then to join the stream of power as it breaks loose.

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For Jesus, prayer was the lifeline that connected him with his Father and his Father's will. We've seen several examples that show how important prayer was to Jesus. John 17:6–19 records a prayer that Jesus offered on behalf of his disciples shortly before his departure from earth. What in his prayer indicates that prayer would also be essential in the lives of his disciples (then and now) as they continued God's work on earth?

DVD Wrap-up by Philip Yancey

WRAP-UP (12 MINUTES)

Jesus clung to prayer as to a lifeline, for it gave him both the guidance and the energy to know and do the Father's will. To maintain belief in the "real" world from which he came, to nourish memory of eternal light, he had to work at it all night on occasion, or rise before daybreak.

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the importance of prayer? If Jesus continues to participate in God's work through prayer, how significant is it that we too can participate in God's work through prayer?

Jesus didn't stop praying for his disciples after he ascended to heaven. In fact, the New Testament's only glimpse of what Jesus is doing right now depicts him at the right hand of God where "he always lives to intercede" for us (Hebrews 7:25). Just as Jesus once prayed for Peter and his disciples, he now prays for us. What does it mean to you that Jesus makes prayer one of his primary tasks? What does his example of ongoing prayer for us reveal about

It's no secret that evil is at work in our world. We live on a planet ruled by powers intent on blocking and perverting the will of God, but God calls us to ally with his forces on earth to battle evil. Just as prayer was Jesus' lifeline in accomplishing God's work on earth, prayer is our lifeline. It is the means by which God invites us to bring the stuff of our world — the rhythms of nature, harassing problems, disturbed emotions, personality conflicts — and request a new perspective and new energy to accomplish God's work in our imperfect world.

Prayer reminds us of the truth of the universe: that no matter how challenging and difficult life is or how out of control the world seems, the God of mercy, justice, and fairness is in control. Take the next few minutes to reflect on what you have discovered so far about how Jesus prayed. As you read the following Bible passages, focus your attention on how they apply to your life and relationship with God. Consider how you can direct your prayers to reconnect with God who is accomplishing his great purpose in the universe.

Pray because it matters.

Finally, be strong in the Lord and in his mighty power. Put on the full armor of God, so that you can take your stand against the devil's schemes. For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms. (Ephesians 6:10–12)

The weapons we fight with are not the weapons of the world. On the contrary, they have divine power to demolish strongholds. (2 Corinthians 10:4)

"Watch and pray so that you will not fall into temptation." (Mark 14:38)

Pray with confidence that God desires to respond.

"Your Father knows what you need before you ask him." (Matthew 6:8)

Let us then approach God's throne of grace with confidence, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help us in our time of need. (Hebrews 4:16)

As a father has compassion on his children, so the Lord has compassion on those who fear him. (Psalm 103:13)

Pray for the will of heaven.

"This, then, is how you should pray: 'Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name, your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven. Give us today our daily bread.'" (Matthew 6:9–11)

Ask for the help of heaven.

And pray that we may be delivered from wicked and evil people, for ... the Lord is faithful, and he will strengthen you and protect you from the evil one. (2 Thessalonians 3:2–3)

"If you remain in me and my words remain in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be done for you." (John 15:7)

Is anyone among you in trouble? Let them pray. (James 5:13)

Truly my soul finds rest in God; my salvation comes from him. Truly he is my rock and my salvation; he is my fortress, I will never be shaken. (Psalm 62:1–2)

Group Prayer

Take a few minutes to pray about your concerns and God's work in the world. Begin by praying aloud Psalm 34:4–8:

I sought the Lord, and he answered me; he delivered me from all my fears. Those who look to him are radiant; their faces are never covered with shame. This poor man called, and the Lord heard him; he saved him out of all his troubles. The angel of the Lord encamps around those who fear him, and he delivers them. Taste and see that the Lord is good; blessed are those who take refuge in him.

Remember, we have no more powerful way to bring together the visible and invisible worlds than through prayer. Prayer allows us to recharge our batteries. It allows us to present our world, whatever its circumstances, to God and ask for divine help in equipping us to counter the forces of evil. Take this opportunity as you pray to reconnect, refocus, and realign your hearts with God's unfolding plan for the world.

PERSONAL JOURNEY: TO DO ON YOUR OWN

• Psalm 44:20–21

God desires an ongoing relationship with us, and prayer closes the vast gap between infinity and us. It's a way of keeping company with God, who is already present, and responding to his presence. Prayer is where God and human beings meet, a way of asking God to pour some eternity into us.

From the video

• Luke 16:15

Bible Discovery

Paul wrote to the Ephesians, “For we are God’s handiwork, created in Christ Jesus to do good works” (2:10). Handiwork conveys rather clumsily the meaning of the Greek word *poiema*, from which we get the English word *poem*. So Paul is saying that we are God’s work of art. With his history of beatings, prison, shipwreck, and riots, who better than Paul knew the travail involved in the fashioning of that art—and the role that prayer played. Prayer offers an opportunity for God to remodel us, to chisel marble like a sculptor, touch up colors like an artist, edit words like a writer.

Prayer accomplishes its work because it connects our heart with the heart of God. As Philip states in the video, “God doesn’t need the ‘data’ of my life. What he cares about is my heart. He wants me to spend time with him so that I can share my passions, my concern, what I really care about.”

In the Hebrew context, heart (*lev*) is the core of a person’s being, the inner person, the center from which all else flows. It is the seat of affection and source of action. So let’s explore what God says about heart and why a heart that loves, seeks, and desires to obey God is such a treasure.

1. To what extent does God know our heart—our deepest desires, the core of our being?
- 1 Chronicles 29:17–18

2. The passages below and on page 34 reveal various ways we can demonstrate our heart commitment to God. Prayerfully consider how each one can strengthen the connection between your heart and God’s, then make a conscious effort to do them as you go about your daily life.

Bible Passage	How to Demonstrate a Heart Commitment to God	How to Demonstrate My Heart Commitment in My Daily Life
1 Sam. 12:24		
Ps. 9:1–2		
Ps. 62:7–8		
Ps. 112:7		
Ps. 119:9–10		

Bible Passage	How to Demonstrate a Heart Commitment to God	How to Demonstrate My Heart Commitment in My Daily Life
Ps. 119:57-58		

What Kind of Heart Does God Treasure?

SUPPLEMENTAL BIBLE DISCUSSION

The Bible has much to say about the hearts of those who seek after God. Yet how much do we know about a heart that longs to keep company with God? Take a look at the following passages to discover some of the qualities of such a heart.

Matt. 22:37	Thiên Chúa là Бог
Rom. 1:9	Đức Chúa Trời là Бог

• Psalm 57:7

• Psalm 51:10

- Hebrews 10:22
- Psalm 125:4

MY PRAYER JOURNAL

Let the hearts of those who seek the LORD rejoice.

1 CHRONICLES 16:10

I pray in astonished belief that God desires an ongoing relationship. I pray in trust that the act of prayer is God's designated way of closing the vast gulf between infinity and me. I pray in order to put myself in the stream of God's healing work on earth. I pray as I breathe — because I can't help it.

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During session two, you explored Jesus' commitment to prayer, God's promises concerning your prayers, and the power of prayer in combating evil. Feel free to use the following pages to write down some things you learned about prayer, God, and yourself; prayer requests; people for whom you plan to pray; and any sins that have created distance between you and God.

Remember, prayer is the means by which we bring who we really are — our honest selves — to God and gain the resources and strength to go out and do the Father's will on earth. Prayer invites God into your world and ushers you into God's. Just as Jesus counted on prayer as a source of strength to equip him to carry out a partnership with God the Father on earth, you can admit your dependence on God and receive the blessings promised in return.

Come near to God and he will come near to you.
Wash your hands, you sinners, and purify your hearts,
you double-minded.

JAMES 4:8

Prayer remains a struggle for me.... I persist because I am fulfilling God's command, and also because I believe I am doing what is best for me whether or not I feel like it at the time. Moreover, I believe that my perseverance, in some unfathomable way, brings pleasure to God. We should always pray and not give up, Jesus taught.

Prayer, p. 161