

**Core Seminar**

**Discipling**

**Class 7: Encouraging Biblical Prayer**

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Today, we’re going to talk about: (1) The importance of prayer; (2) Helping others to pray regularly and faithfully; (3) Encouraging others to pray effectively and according to God’s will; (4) Helping others to understand how God responds to prayers.

1. **Prayer is Important**

We need to remember that the **ultimate goal of discipling is to encourage our friend to greater fellowship with God and greater personal holiness that glorifies God. We need to teach others to know, love, and obey God.** This will not be achieved without prayer

**1 Corinthians 3:5-9** **5**What then is Apollos? And what is Paul? Servants through whom you believed, even as the Lord gave opportunity to each one. **6**I planted, Apollos watered, but God was causing the growth. **7**So then neither the one who plants nor the one who waters is anything, but God who causes the growth. **8**Now he who plants and he who waters are one; but each will receive his own reward according to his own labor. **9**For we are God’s fellow workers; you are God’s field, God’s building. (NASB)

The preeminent point here is without prayer there is an excellent chance your discipleship efforts will fail. **The #1 thing I do for someone I am discipling is to pray for them ~ daily.**  If you forget everything else today and remember this I will consider the class a success.

We are told in **John 17:3: “**And this is eternal life, that they know you the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom you have sent.” (ESV) Just as we can get to know other people by talking with them, prayer is one of the main ways that we can come to know the Lord, and one of the key ways we glorify the Lord we say we love to glorify. So, **we need to encourage our friends to pray regularly**.

Taking our Lord as our ultimate example, we see that Jesus took time away to pray.

In Matthew 14:23 and Mark 1:35, we see Jesus going off to a solitary place. All of John 17 is Jesus’ prayer to God just before He is betrayed and arrested.

Jesus also repeatedly instructed His disciples to pray.

In Matthew 6:5-15, Jesus gives specific instructions on prayer, including the Lord ’s Prayer as an example for them. Jesus gives the parable of the persistent widow in Luke 18:1-8 reflecting on the importance of persistent prayer to a just God. Pay particular attention to verse 8; persistent prayer shows your faith because prayer is an act of faith.

Throughout the New Testament epistles, we are encouraged to pray.

In Philippians 4:6, Colossians 4:2, and 1 Thessalonians 5:17, for example, we are urged to pray and present our requests to God, and to be devoted to prayer, and to pray continually.

**Prayer is definitely important**. Without it growth is stunted, faith is weak and sanctification is impeded.

**Prayer in Discipling**

If we recognize that prayer is important, **how then do we encourage it in discipling**?

Encourage prayer through modeling (Luke 11:1)

One of the most natural and most effective ways is simply by **modeling**. If you actually spend time praying, **your friend will hear** how you pray. Much like we as a congregation can learn how to pray by **listening to Sunday morning and evening prayers** (AM: types of prayers – ACTS; praying for other churches, authority figures, the spread of the gospel in other countries; PM: life transitions; evangelism), we can pass on effective and appropriate prayer to our friends simply by praying with them!

**Luke 11:1** *Now Jesus was praying in a certain place, and when he finished, one of his disciples said to him, “Lord, teach us to pray, as John taught his disciples.” (ESV)* We see in Luke 11:1 how Jesus modeled prayer in front of his disciples and how they responded to his example. One of the disciples asked the Lord to teach them how to pray.

Encourage prayer through instruction (Luke 11:2)

We should also intentionally help our friends by **teaching them *how to* pray**. By this, I’m NOT referring to feeding someone the exact words for their prayers (“Bob, pray this prayer after me… ‘I, Bob, repent of my sins and ask Christ into my heart.’)

Rather, you can teach them how to pray:

1. Share prayer requests, and agree to pray for each other. Remind yourselves of the Church Covenant[[1]](#footnote-1) and encourage a church community.
2. Model good prayer by **following up** with your friend mid-week. Text prayer requests.
3. To go a step further, **challenge** your friend to **set aside time to pray** each day.
4. When he goes through **major decisions**, **encourage him to pray** throughout them.

Using a book to teach prayer: *A Call to Spiritual Reformation*, Don Carson, IVP.

Even beyond that, have some **discussions about prayer**, or spend some time **studying** **prayer-related books or scripture**. In the rest of today’s class, we’re talking about ways to effectively and regularly pray. Think about passing these ideas on! A great book to go through would be D.A. Carson’s book*, A Call to Spiritual Reformation*, which I used heavily for today’s class! *(Have a copy of the book with you to show to the class. Point out that it is available on the CHBC bookstall.)*

1. **Helping others to pray regularly and faithfully**

Plan to pray

We will not likely pray unless we plan to pray. Set aside time during the day to pray and encourage your friend to do likewise. Periodically ask them how they are doing in this and share how your times in prayer are going. Ex for DVR: Starting prayer first in QT.

Ways to avoid mental drift

Adopt some practical ways to avoid mental drifting. Some helpful ideas: **speak aloud the words and journaling** (where we write down the substance of our prayers each day). **Pray through others’ written prayers** using a book like *Valley of Vision.* **Pray through scripture**, using the focus of a passage as an outline for what you will pray about OR using biblical words, phrases, ideas from the passage in your prayers. **Pray through the membership directory.** By praying for a page or two each day, you provide daily structure for who you pray for.

Pray with another Christian

Develop prayer-partner relationships. Set times aside to meet with people simply to pray. Hold each other accountable to regular prayer. This works great in a discipling setting!

Keep track of prayers and answers

Develop a system of keeping track of your prayers. Consider writing notes of prayer requests in a spiral notebook or Excel spreadsheet. Remind yourself to follow up with the person about specific prayer requests. You can be greatly encouraged by taking time to periodically go back and see how God has answered your prayers!

Pray until you pray

Pray until you actually start praying. When we start praying, our minds are often struggle with settling down and focusing on our prayers. When you start to pray, give yourself time for your mind to settle and focus on God.

This is just a quick sampling of some of the helpful topics about prayer that may be explicitly discussed in the context of a discipling relationship. Talk about some of these topics in your discipling relationships. Decide that you are going to show love for your friend by specifically asking about their times in prayer and discussing ways that you can both grow in prayer. [PAUSE FOR QUESTIONS]

**Overcoming excuses for prayerlessness**

So what do you do if the person you are meeting with is not spending much time in prayer and has a reason or excuse that they give to you for why they are not being faithful in prayer? For the next few minutes let’s consider a few excuses for prayerlessness and how to respond to them.

I’m too busy to pray (Luke 10:38-42)

Is daily work more important than prayer? Luke 10:38-42, the story of Mary & Martha shows that God must be first! Our work must never *replace* our relationship with God himself. If you’re too busy to pray, consider how your life needs to change in order to pray more consistently.

1. Would it help to start your day with prayer?
2. Do you need to drop something to make more room in your schedule? (Example: I had a friend who religiously read the paper every morning over breakfast, but he never did his bible reading and prayer. He stopped reading the newspaper in order to have time to read Scripture and pray)
3. What could you do to make it more integrated into your entire day? 1 Thess 5:17 Paul asks us to “pray continually.”

I’m too spiritually dry to pray

When you are dry, the last think you want to do is to read or pray. This is a time when you need to consider living obediently, even when you don’t feel like praying. You are letting your actions (your obedience) lead your heart.

It is good in these times of spiritual dryness to pray specifically for the Lord’s renewal of your heart and life. Cf. Ezek 37:1-10.

I feel no need to pray

Sometimes, at the root of our life, there can be an arrogance and pride that leads to prayerlessness. When we feel sufficient in ourselves for the task at hand and we don’t really believe that it is God who is doing the work, we are lead to prayerlessness. Richard Sibbes talks of two sins more dangerous than all others: spiritual pride & security.[[2]](#footnote-2) We need to learn to confront our pride and grow in our sense of dependence on God. Cf. James 4: 6 and Psalm 127: 1-3.

I’m too bitter to pray

Bitterness, grudges, or holding something against someone, can stand as obstacles to your prayer life. In Matt 6:14 we see that a lack of forgiveness toward others will hinder our prayers. Don’t be like the ungrateful slave in Matt 18, you cannot repay the debt (v 26) and you forgive because Christ forgave you (v 33) not because they deserve it. By forgiving others, we demonstrate we really want God’s forgiveness.

I’m too ashamed to pray

Shame leads us to hide from God, because we don’t want sinful parts of our lives exposed to him. Yet, for us to act as if we could hide from God is false. Hebrews 4:13 says that every part of our life is plainly seen before God. Because God already knows your life, it is good to not be lead astray by shame, but to regularly confess you sin to God and ask for mercy. Cf. Psalm 51:4 and Proverbs 28:13

God doesn’t seem to answer my prayers

God doesn’t always answer our prayers with a “yes”.

Sometimes we pray with wrong motives and God shows kindness by not granting us our selfish desires (James 4:3). Prayer is not merely about us getting what we want. There are bigger issues at hand—God’s glory, the fulfillment of God’s will, the proclamation of the gospel (just to name a few).

Sometimes we need to wait for God’s response, because his timing in answering is very different from ours. Your expectations will make a big difference in how you pray and what you expect from your prayers. You will disappoint yourself by wrong expectations. Align your expectations around God and not yourself. Expect God to be faithful, but on his own timing, not yours. Remember that God is in charge, not you.

1. **Encouraging others to pray effectively**

Another task of the discipler is teach people to pray effectively.

A tendency for young Christians is to pray according to their own will and their own desires. It’s far too easy to site verses like **Matthew 7:7-11** (ask, seek, knock), **Matthew 21:21-22** (if you believe, you can move mountains), and **James 1:5-8** (God grants wisdom to those who ask) and claim that we ought to get whatever we ask for from God. In such a case, we’re placing ourselves before God. Prayer should never be an impersonal incantation to get us things that we want. DA Carson writes: “*Effective prayer is the fruit of a relationship with God, not a technique for acquiring blessings” (A Call to Spiritual Reformation, Carson, p. 33)*

To teach people to pray effectively, we must teach them **to pray according to God’s will.** Teach them to pray with the **right motivations**, so that they can **rightly come before God**.

***1 John 5:14-15******14****This is the confidence which we have before Him, that, if we ask anything according to His will, He hears us.* ***15****And if we know that He hears us in whatever we ask, we know that we have the requests which we have asked from Him.*  Our requests must be aligned with God’s will, meaning his priorities in both the specifics and the general focus of our prayers.

So how do we follow God’s will in our prayers? How do we know if what we’re asking for is in line with God’s will? Scripture! Study it, and get a grasp of what God has already done. The most assured way of praying in line with God’s will is to actually pray through scripture. After you read a passage that challenges you in a certain way, there are several ways in which you can respond to that passage. The simplest thing to do is pray through passage, making the words of Scripture your own words. You can also pray that **God would help you to grow and change** according to what you see in the passage. You can offer **a prayer of thanks** for a certain **truth** that you read about. You can also **check your motives**. Are they to glorify you or God? Who’s interests are you trying to further? Likewise, **Talk to others**. **Have them pray for you**. Have them pray that you would pray for the right things!

When you study the Bible, pay particular attention to the prayers you find in Scripture. We can learn to pray effectively by **studying Jesus and Paul’s prayers** and **seeing how** **the priorities of their prayers clearly reflected God’s will**. Cf. 1 Thess 3:11-13. Go through the **prayers in the Bible** in your own time. Even better, **go through these prayers with the people that you disciple**! You can start with the Lord’s prayer, in Matthew 6. D.A. **Carson’s** **book**, A Call to Spiritual Reformation is a great book for you and your disciple friend to go through together. It looks at Paul’s prayers in Scripture and draws the priorities that we ought to have in prayer.

**Matthew 7:7 promises good gifts to God’s children** who ask them of God. As disciplers who will see different answers to different prayers, **we have to recognize** that no matter what the request, **God’s will comes first**. **God knows what is best** for us, even though we may think what is happening to us is bad. Faith believes God is good and is a rewarder of those who seek Him (Mark 10:18, Heb 11:1, 6)

Even with all of our study of Scripture, there will be some instances where we won’t always know what God’s will is. But fortunately, the Lord helps us out. **Romans 8:26-27** speaks of the way that the Holy Spirit intercedes for us in prayer.

1. **Understanding how God responds to prayer**

Finally, this brings us to the important issue of understanding how God responds to our prayers. We can think of God’s 3 responses in terms of waiting, Yes, or No.

Sometimes God has us **waiting**. It is in those cases that He calls us to persevere. As disciplers, we need to encourage our friends to persevere in prayer. Remember that parable of the widow and the persistence of the widow in pursuing the judge (**Luke 18:2-8**). Continue to support your friend in prayer, and encourage him or her to continue to pray about it weekly. Try to help them to recognize their **complete dependency on God** during such times.

Sometimes we see God respond with a “Yes.” As a discipler, **delight with your friend**, and encourage your friend to pray a **prayer of thanks** right there on the spot. Burn this memory into their mind, so that they can later remember what God has done for them!

But what happens if your friend has prayed earnestly and unselfishly, and thought he was praying in accordance with God’s will, but **he sees God respond with a “No” in the end?** As a discipler, part of your job is to be there for support. Remind him that God is good and trustworthy. Sometimes we don’t know His plans and His ways (Rom 11:33-36). We pray for God to heal the sick, and yet, dear friends pass away and we don’t know why. There are lots of other ways that we can pray for a change of circumstances (i.e., we want to see changes in our job, changes in people we know, or other changes in the world around us), and yet, those changes don’t happen. In the end, no matter what our prayer is, we still need to trust God.

We’ll talk at greater length in a few weeks about helping people to deal with pain. For now, I’d like to read us a quote that encourages us to persevere and utterly submit our own will to God’s:

“No matter how large a spiritual giant you may become, there will be days when God’s answer to your prayers will be no. Despite your seeking, searching, and the outpouring of your soul, your heavenly Father has decided against your petition. When this happens your *attitude* becomes the vital factor. Are you willing to give your hurt, disappointment, perhaps even grief, to Christ who died for you … and then begin to pray again? Prayer problems are usually not intellectual but volitional. In praying effectively the submission of your will is directly linked with finding God’s will. Prayer which God answers is offered with an attitude of submission. Are you willing to say, when God’s response to your urgent prayer is not the one you wanted: ‘Have thine own way, Lord’?”[[3]](#footnote-3)

In conclusion:

1. **Prayer is an important part of the Christian life. We need to help people look within themselves to see what sins have led to prayerlessness and help them look to Scripture to see how to pray biblically and effectively.**
2. **Encouraging a life of Biblical prayer may be one of the best gifts we can give to a Christian friend that we love.**

1. We will walk together in brotherly love, as becomes the members of a Christian Church, exercise an affectionate care and watchfulness over each other and faithfully admonish and entreat one another as occasion may require. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Richard Sibbes, *The Bruised Reed,* (Carlisle, PA: The Banner of Truth Trust, first published 1630) p. 95. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. W. Bingham Hunter, *The God Who Hears,* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Books, 1986) p. 65. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)