

DISCIPLESHIP PRINCIPLE #5

Eph. 6:18 / Rom. 12:12

BEING DEVOTED TO EFFECTUAL PRAYER

Our study of God's principles of living as a disciple of Christ God's now leads us to consider our prayer life with God. How would you rate yours? Our first text to consider is James 5:13-18. Notice that prayer is mentioned seven times in these verses.

*"Is anyone among you suffering? **Let him pray.** Is anyone cheerful? Let him sing praises. 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 offered in faith** will restore the one who is sick, and the Lord will raise him up, and if he has committed sins, they will be forgiven him.*

Therefore, confess your sins to one another, and pray for one another, so that you may be healed. The effective prayer of a righteous man can accomplish much.

*Elijah was a man with a nature like ours, and **he prayed earnestly** that it might not rain; and it did not rain on the earth for three years and six months. And **he prayed again**, and the sky poured rain, and the earth produced its fruit."*

— James 5:13-18

We want first of all to understand why God so emphasizes prayer to us. If you have not studied prayer and do not have a significant prayer life, then you have not understood **the great privilege and duty** that is yours as a Christian. This passage answers the four basic questions we have about prayer.

1. What prayer is for Christians.
2. Why God tells us to pray.
3. How we are to pray.
4. What we are to pray for.

So, let's observe first of all what God has revealed to us about prayer.

1. WHAT PRAYER IS

Prayer is a conversation with God and because of that **it is a great privilege** indeed. Prayer is life's greatest privilege as it is an audience with the King of Kings who loves us and wants to bless us beyond all that we can imagine or think.

Prayer is an audience with the Creator of the universe. It is a personal conversation with your Savior and Lord. It is of such importance to our God that He has sent the Holy Spirit to teach, guide, and assist you in this relationship and these conversations. (*Rom. 8:26-27*)

Learning about prayer comes down to learning about God and your relationship with him. So, as you get to know God's heart, and His plans, and His ways, and as you make him Lord of your life, prayer becomes more frequent, intimate, specific, and powerful.

The examples we have of prayer in the Bible tell us that men of God began their day habitually by talking with God. (*Ps. 5:3*) Then, they went through their day in a running conversation with God (*1 Thess. 5:17, Eph. 6:18*) Then, they ended their day by thinking and talking about it with God. (*Ps. 4:3-4*) So, we see that **prayer is the great privilege of having a conversation with the God of the universe.**

Let us note something else. Prayer is something that **God invites us** to do! It is His idea and delight. "Is any among you hurting?, come let us talk." (*Mt. 11:28*) "Is any among you sick?, come talk to me about it." (*James 5:14*) "Are you confused about life and what I think and what I am doing? Come let us talk." (*James 1:5*) There are 25 of these "Come let us talk" passages in the New Testament.

There is another aspect of the nature of prayer that we must learn. We are invited to talk with Him about anything and everything, we have seen this. God also tells us about His responses and answers to our prayers. He tells us that He answers us and that He does so **that through us He might be glorified!!** The big deal about prayer is not that we get what we ask, but that, in the fulfilling of our requests, God is glorified.

*"You did not choose me but I chose you and I appointed you that you should go forth and bear much fruit... **that whatever you ask of the Father in My name, He may give it to you. By this is my Father glorified, that you bear much fruit.**"*
— John 15:16

So, prayer is perhaps life's greatest privilege, it is something the Creator and Ruler of the universe has invited us to do, and He delights to hear and answer us because He wants to glorify Himself through us!!

2. WHY WE PRAY

Now, let us note that our text makes a **great assertion** regarding our prayers as Christians. Notice verse 17.

"The fervent effectual prayer of a righteous man can accomplish much."
— James 5:17

James does not only say that proper prayer **can** accomplish much but that **it does** accomplish much when we pray according to God's will and consistent with His Word.

Prayer can heal sickness. Prayer can move God to draw a person to Christ and forgive his sin.

The examples we have of answers to intercessory prayer in the Bible are numerous. They include, **natural events** such as stopping and starting rain, and **creative events** such as causing people to be born again with a new nature. Prayer is asking our supernatural God to intervene in the world to change things that would not change unless He answers our prayers.

The great assertion of the New Testament about a Christian coming to talk to God at His invitation and command is this: if you learn the right motives and goals of it, prayer can accomplish much, because it is asking God to intervene supernaturally in the world to do what would otherwise not be done! You can change the universe and all eternity from your kitchen table! The fervent effectual prayer of a righteous man can accomplish **much!**

The prayers of Christians are a big deal with God. This is because God has chosen to glorify Himself by intervening in history at the request of and through His people. This is because He has chosen to do the work of the present age, the building of His church THRU His people. (see Mt. 28:20) God has chosen to glorify Himself through his people, and through their prayers to Him.

*“With **all prayer** and petition pray at **all times** in the Spirit, and with this in view, be on the alert with **all perseverance** and petition for **all the saints**.”*

— Eph 6:18

*“**As a matter of first importance**, I urge that entreaties and prayers, petitions and thanksgivings, be made on behalf of all men, for kings and all who are in authority, in order that we may lead a tranquil and quiet life in all godliness and dignity. This is good and acceptable in the sight of God our Savior, who desires all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth.”— 1 Tim. 2:1-4*

So, we see very clearly why we as Christians are to pray. We are exhorted to pray and be devoted to it because God has chosen to glorify himself by intervening in history at the request of and through his people. Not just by their personal character and outward deeds, but also by their entreaties and petitions to Him. The fervent effectual prayer of a righteous man accomplished much!

Now let us look at James’ answer to our third question about prayer which is how we are to talk to God.

3. HOW WE ARE TO PRAY

Here in our passage James clearly states **how** we are to pray. What is the secret of answered prayer? Let us note that James makes three points about this.

First of all, our **prayers are to be fervent**. “The **fervent** prayer of a righteous man accomplishes much.” Without vision and hope and ardor and assurance that great things to God’s glory can attend our prayers, we become complacent, we think it a perfunctory exercise. We neglect it.

Secondly, our **prayers are to be effective**. “The fervent, **effectual** prayer of a righteous man accomplishes much.” So, what is effectual prayer? There are three clearly stated conditions in the New Testament regarding prayer that God will answer. Effective prayer must be:

- 1) according to **God’s word**,
- 2) according to **God’s will**, and
- 3) according to **God’s character**.

*“If you abide in Me, and **My words** abide in you, ask whatever you wish, and it shall be done for you. By this is My Father glorified, that you bear much fruit, and so prove to be My disciples.”*
— John 15:7-8

*“And this is the confidence which we have before Him, that, if we ask anything **according to His will**, He hears us. 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.”*
— 1 John 5:14-15

*“And whatever you ask **in My name**, (consistent with My character) that will I do, that the Father may be glorified in the Son. If you ask Me anything in My name, I will do it.”*
— John 14:13-14

Thirdly, our text declares that effective **prayer must come from a righteous man** to be answered. “The fervent, effectual prayer of a **righteous** man accomplishes much.” The prayers of unsaved people are not heeded. This does not mean that he will answer every prayer of the Christian because of what we’ve just seen, but it does mean that those who have been born again and who come to him according to his word and his will and his character will be heard and will be answered.

Puritan Pastor William Law, summarizing these three conditions and promises, wrote:

“We readily acknowledge that God alone is to be the rule and measure of our prayers: that in them we are to look wholly unto Him, and act wholly for Him; that we are only to pray in such a manner, for such things, and such ends, as are suitable for His glory.”

4. WHAT WE ARE TO ASK GOD FOR

This leads us to consider our final question about prayer: **what** we are to ask God for. James' answer in verses 13-20 is that God will glorify Himself by responding to our prayers in four areas:

1. We are to pray **for ourselves** (vs. 13)
2. We are to pray **for those God has given us responsibility for** (vs. 14)
3. We are to pray **for one another in the church** (vs.16)
4. We are to pray **for the lost** (vs. 19-20)

Remember the primary point here, that we are to ask for that which would glorify God. The big deal about prayer is not that we get what we ask for, but that God is glorified in our getting what we ask for

*"Whatever you ask in my name, that will I do, **that** the Father may be glorified."*
— John 14:13-14

So, given this, in each of these four areas of life and relationship, one approach to organize our thoughts and conversations with God is to ask **two questions** about each of these four areas.

#1. What is God's perspective on this? (Whatever you or others are facing in life.) What is His opinion? His will? What is revealed about this in His Word?

#2. How can God be glorified in and through this?

So, when you talk to God about:

6. **What you are facing in life**, ask yourself what God's will is concerning this, and then talk to Him about it. *"Let your requests be made known to God."* (Phil. 4:6) Also ask yourself how God could be glorified in this and *"with prayers and supplications make your requests known to God"* (Phil. 4:6-7).

"Is anyone among you suffering? Let him pray. Is anyone cheerful? Let him sing praises. 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 offered in faith will restore the one who is sick, and the Lord will raise him up, and if he has committed sins, they will be forgiven him."
— James 5:13-15

It is certainly appropriate, when we are facing trials, hurts, and opposition to ask God to change these things for the better. We know He will eventually do this. We also know He will not allow these things to push us beyond our ability to endure them by His enabling grace (I Cor. 10:13). We also know that He may allow them to remain for a season, for reasons He may not explain, but will eventually be shown to glorify Him the

more. The “with thanksgiving” for these difficult things is to be heard consistently in our prayers because we know that God will ultimately use them for our good and glory. (John 15:16)

*“Be anxious for nothing, 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 comprehension, shall guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.”* — Phil. 4:6-7

2. **When you talk to God about your friends** and what is going on in their lives, ask what God’s will is for them and how He can be glorified in their lives - and ask for these things.

“Therefore, confess your sins to one another, and pray for one another, so that you may be healed.” — James 5:16

3. **When you talk to God about those you are responsible for...** your family, your flock, those you are discipling ... ask what God’s will is for them and how He can be glorified in their lives - and ask for these things.

*“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 offered in faith will restore the one who is sick, and the Lord will raise him up, and if he has committed sins, they will be forgiven him.”* — James 5:14-15

Notice, and this is very important, there are two things **spiritual authorities** often will have to some degree when we ask them to pray for us: discernment regarding God’s will, and effectual power because of what they ask.

4. **When you talk to God about the lost**, ask yourself what God’s will is for them and how He could be glorified and ask for this. (vs. 19-20)

“My brethren, if any among you strays from the truth, and one turns him back, let him know that he who turns a sinner from the error of his way will save his soul from death, and will cover a multitude of sins.” — James 5:19-20

Because God has chosen to work for, with, and through His people, our fervent effectual prayers accomplish much for the salvation of lost souls, the encouragement and growth of the saints, and the glory of God. Therefore, be devoted to prayer (Col. 4:2), pray without ceasing (1 Thess. 5:17), with all prayer, at all times, with all perseverance, for all the saints!! (Eph. 6:18)

A Final Point

Have you ever made an “impossible” prayer list? What is an “impossible prayer”? It is asking God to change something or someone that will not change unless He intervenes supernaturally to do what you ask. Something that only He can do, that is consistent with His word, His will, and His character.

What unsaved people in your life are on your impossible prayer list?

What Christian folks that you know, going the wrong way, are on your list?

"Ask, and it shall be given to you; seek, and you shall find; knock, and it shall be opened to you. For everyone who asks receives, and he who seeks finds, and to him who knocks it shall be opened. Or what man is there among you, when his son shall ask him for a loaf, will give him a stone? Or if he shall ask for a fish, he will not give him a snake, will he? If you then, being evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more shall your Father who is in heaven give what is good to those who ask Him!" — Matt. 7:7-11

"You do not have because you do not ask. You ask and do not receive, because you ask with wrong motives, so that you may spend it on your pleasures." — James 4:2-3

UNIT STUDY SESSION #1

In preparation for the group study of this principle of living for Christ, read and study the above scriptures and summary and then complete the following self evaluation.

Evaluating My Prayer Life As A Disciple Of Christ

1. How Would You Evaluate Your Prayer Life?

Are you devoted to talking with God? On a scale of 1 to 10 where are you? _____

Do you begin and end the day talking with God? (see Psalms 4 and 5) _____

Do the 4 “alls” of Eph. 6:18 describe your efforts? _____

Are you a leader and initiator in the prayers of your family? _____

2. What does the study of this area tell you, as a disciple of Christ, that you need to be doing (or keep doing) to please your Lord and be an example in this area? _____

3. What commitments are you willing to make in this area? Are you willing to be accountable to someone to help you keep these? _____

Discussion Questions For Study Session #1

1. What testimonies could you give regarding answered prayer?
2. Can you explain why our prayers often go unanswered?
3. Do you follow David’s example of daily prayer times? We see that this was his habit in the following prayers of his from the Psalms. (5:3, 88:13, 55:17, 59:16, 119:147, 130:6)
4. What hinders our prayers?
5. How is it possible to pray for “all the saints”?
6. What insights might you have about teaching a child how to pray effectually?

UNIT STUDY SESSION #2

In preparation for the second study session please consider doing one of the following projects for the coming week.

Preparation For Session #2: Application Project

- Keep a prayer journal with daily entries and the answers received.
- Pray through your church directory once a day.
- Pray for all the Christians in a different country each day this week, trying to pray for a person/ministry/church that you know of there. Contact them, if possible, and ask for prayer requests.
- Memorize the following verses on prayer and be ready to quote them: John 15:7-8, 14:13-14, 1 John 5:14-15.

Discussion Questions

1. If you were able to pursue a prayer project, can you tell us how it went?
2. What have been your prayer habits since becoming a Christian, and how have you been encouraged by answered prayer?
3. Paul's prayers for those he was discipling are found in three passages in his epistles. Do you know what he asked for in these?

Prayer Together

Recommended For Further Study

- The Prayer Life by Andrew Murray
- Life's Ultimate Privilege by Devern Fromke
- Prayer and the Knowledge Of God by Graeme Goldsworthy