



PRAYER

SCRIPTURE
MEMORY

growing in

GRACE

The most basic definition of prayer is “**talking to God.**” It is the communication of the human soul with the Lord who created the soul. Prayer is the primary way for the believer in Jesus Christ to communicate her emotions and desires with God and to fellowship with God.

Prayer can be audible or silent, private or public, formal or informal. All prayer must be offered in faith (*James 1:6*), in the name of the Lord Jesus (*John 16:23*), and in the power of the Holy Spirit (*Romans 8:26*). The wicked have no desire to pray (*Psalms 10:4*), but the children of God have a natural desire to pray (*Luke 11:1*).

Prayer is described in the Bible as:

- seeking God’s favor (*Exodus 32:11*)
- pouring out one’s soul to the Lord (*1 Samuel 1:15*)
- crying out to heaven (*2 Chronicles 32:20*)
- drawing near to God (*Psalms 73:28, KJV*)
- kneeling before the Father (*Ephesians 3:14*).

Paul wrote, “Do not be anxious about anything, but in every situation, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus” (*Philippians 4:6–7*). **Worry about nothing; pray about everything.**

Everything? Yes, God wants us to talk with Him about everything. How often should we pray? The biblical answer is “**pray without ceasing**” (*1 Thessalonians 5:17*). We should keep a running conversation going with God all day long. We can pray under any and all circumstances. Prayer develops our relationship with God and demonstrates our trust and utter dependence upon Him.

The ACTS model for prayer includes these elements:

A

ADORATION – The *A* in the ACTS model stands for adoration, which means worship—glorying and exalting God. Through adoration, we show our loyalty and admiration of our Father. As we pray, we are called to worship God in adoration. This could be a song of praise to Him, praying a psalm of worship, declaring His attributes, or a myriad of other forms of worship.

C

CONFESSION – The *C* in the ACTS model stands for confession. The word *confess* means “to agree with.” When we confess our sins, we agree with God that we are wrong and that we have sinned against Him by what we have said, thought, or done. God forgives us and restores our fellowship with Him (*1 John 1:9*).

T

THANKSGIVING – The *T* represents thanksgiving. *Philippians 4:6* says, “With thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God” (ESV). How is thanksgiving different from adoration? The difference is that worship focuses on who God is; thanksgiving focuses on what God has done. We can thank God for many things including His love, salvation, protection, and provision.

S

SUPPLICATION – The *S* stands for supplication, which refers to prayer for our and others’ needs. A supplication is a request or petition. We may pray for mercy (*Psalms 4:1*), leading (*Psalms 5:8*), wisdom (*James 1:5*), and much more. Paul encouraged us to make “supplication for all the saints” (*Ephesians 6:18, ESV*), which means to pray diligently for our brothers and sisters in Christ.

WHY PRAY?

For the Christian, praying is supposed to be like breathing, easier to do than to not do. We pray for a variety of reasons:

- prayer is a form of serving God (*Luke 2:36-38*) and obeying Him. We pray because God commands us to pray (*Philippians 4:6-7*). Prayer is exemplified for us by Christ and the early church (*Mark 1:35; Acts 1:14; 2:42; 3:1; 4:23-31; 6:4; 13:1-3*). **If Jesus thought it was worthwhile to pray, we should also.**
- Another reason to pray is that God intends prayer to be the means of obtaining His solutions in a number of situations.
 - o We pray in preparation for major decisions (*Luke 6:12-13*)
 - o to overcome demonic barriers (*Matthew 17:14-21*)
 - o to gather workers for the spiritual harvest (*Luke 10:2*)
 - o to gain strength to overcome temptation (*Matthew 26:41*)
 - o and to obtain the means of strengthening others spiritually (*Ephesians 6:18-19*).



Does God answer prayers? – When God says “yes.”

In the first two chapters of 1 Samuel, Hannah prays and asks God to give her a baby. She had been unable to conceive which, in biblical times, was considered a mark of shame for a woman. Hannah prayed fervently—so fervently that a priest who saw her praying thought she was drunk. But God heard Hannah, and He allowed her to give birth to a child.

Jesus said, “Whatever you ask in my name, this I will do, that the Father may be glorified in the Son” (*John 14:13*). If you have prayed specifically for something and God has granted it to you, then you can be assured that it is His will. Nothing happens without God allowing it to happen (*Romans 8:28*).

Does God answer prayers? – When God says “no.”

In *John 11*, Mary and Martha wanted Jesus to heal their dying brother, yet Jesus allowed Lazarus to die. Why did He say “no” to these grieving women who loved Him so much? Because He had greater things planned for Lazarus, things that no one could possibly have imagined.

“No” is one of the hardest answers we can receive. But, once again, it is important to remember that God is all-knowing and is aware of the entire timeline of history. He knows every possible outcome of every possible choice in every possible situation; we do not. He sees the “big picture”; we see a partial brushstroke. *Proverbs 3:5* says to “trust in the LORD with all your heart, and do not lean on your own understanding.” When we get a “no” answer, we must trust that whatever we asked for was not God’s will.

Does God answer prayers? – When God says “wait, not now.”

Sometimes hearing “wait” is even harder than hearing “no” because it means we have to be patient (*Romans 8:25*). While waiting is difficult, we can be thankful God is in control and trust that His timing will be perfect (*Romans 12:12; Psalm 37:7–9*).

Sometimes you don’t hear a “wait” but He remains silent on the matter and so you continue to wait till you hear from Him.

God wants the best for your life. He does not want you to suffer needlessly. *Jeremiah 29:11* says, “For I know the plans I have for you, declares the Lord, plans for welfare and not for evil, to give you a future and a hope.” Be patient and know that He is your loving Father (*Psalm 46:10*).

Abide by *Philippians 4:6* as you make your requests to God: “Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God.” Then, when God responds, be prepared to accept His wisdom—whether or not you agree with His answer.

HOW TO PRAY THE WILL OF GOD?

Here are seven biblical instructions that will guide the believer in praying according to God's will:

(1) PRAY FOR THE THINGS FOR WHICH THE BIBLE COMMANDS PRAYER. We are told to pray:

- for our enemies (*Matthew 5:44*)
- for God to send missionaries (*Luke 10:2*)
- that we do not enter temptation (*Matthew 26:41*)
- for ministers of the Word (*Colossians 4:3; 2 Thessalonians 3:1*)
- for government authorities (*1 Timothy 2:1-3*)
- for relief from affliction (*James 5:13*)
- for the healing of fellow believers (*James 5:16*)

Where God commands prayer, we can pray with confidence that we are praying according to His will.

(2) FOLLOW THE EXAMPLE OF GODLY CHARACTERS IN SCRIPTURE.

- Paul prayed for the salvation of Israel (*Romans 10:1*).
- David prayed for mercy and forgiveness when he sinned (*Psalms 51:1-2*).
- The early church prayed for boldness to witness (*Acts 4:29*).

These prayers were according to the will of God, and similar prayers today can be as well. As with Paul and the early church, we should always be praying for the salvation of others. For ourselves, we should pray as David prayed, always aware of our sin and bringing it before God before it hinders our relationship with Him and thwarts our prayers.

(3) PRAY WITH THE RIGHT MOTIVATION. Selfish motives will not be blessed by God. "When you ask, you do not receive, because you ask with wrong motives, that you may spend what you get on your pleasures" (*James 4:3*). We should also pray, not so our lofty words can be heard and we may be seen by others as "spiritual," but mostly in private and in secret, so that our heavenly Father will hear in private and reward us openly (*Matthew 6:5-6*).

(4) PRAY WITH A SPIRIT OF FORGIVENESS TOWARD OTHERS (*Mark 11:25*). A spirit of bitterness, anger, revenge or hatred toward others will prevent our hearts from praying in total submission to God. Just as we are told not to give offerings to God while there is conflict between ourselves and another Christian (*Matthew 5:23-24*), in the same way God does not want the offering of our prayers until we have reconciled with our brothers and sisters in Christ.

(5) PRAY WITH THANKSGIVING (*Colossians 4:2; Philippians 4:6-7*). We can always find something to be thankful for, no matter how burdened we are by our wants or needs. The greatest sufferer that lives in this world of redeeming love, and who has the offer of heaven before him, has reason to be grateful to God.

(6) PRAY WITH PERSISTENCE (*Luke 18:1; 1 Thessalonians 5:17*). We should persevere in prayer and not quit or be dejected because we have not received an immediate answer. Part of praying in God's will is believing that, whether His answer is "yes," "no," or "wait," we accept His judgment, submit to His will, and continue to pray.

(7) RELY ON THE SPIRIT OF GOD IN PRAYER. This is a wonderful truth: "We do not know what we ought to pray for, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us with groans that words cannot express. And he who searches our hearts knows the mind of the Spirit, because the Spirit intercedes for the saints in accordance with God's will" (*Romans 8:26-27*). We have the Spirit's help in praying. At the times of our deepest depression or sorrow, those times when we feel that we "just cannot pray," we have the comfort of knowing that the Holy Spirit is actually praying for us! What an amazing God we have!

The most obvious hindrance to a potent prayer life **IS THE PRESENCE OF UNCONFESSED SINS IN THE HEART** of the one who is praying. "But your iniquities have separated you from your God; your sins have hidden his face from you, so that he will not hear" (*Isaiah 59:2*).

WHEN WE ARE LIVING ACCORDING TO THE FLESH, rather than in the Spirit, our desire to pray and our ability to effectively communicate with God are hindered. The flesh can gain control of our actions, attitudes, and motives unless we are diligent to "put to death the deeds of the body" (*Romans 8:13*) and be led by the Spirit in a right relationship with God. Only then will we be able to pray in close communion with Him.

WHEN OUR PRAYERS ARE SELFISHLY MOTIVATED, when we ask God for what we want rather than for what He wants, our motives hinder our prayers. "This is the confidence we have in approaching God: that if we ask anything according to his will, he hears us" (*1 John 5:14*). "When you ask, you do not receive, because you ask with wrong motives, that you may spend what you get on your pleasures" (*James 4:3*).

A hindrance to effective prayer is **A SPIRIT OF UNFORGIVENESS TOWARD OTHERS**. When we refuse to forgive others, a root of bitterness grows up in our hearts and chokes our prayers. How can we expect God to pour out His

blessings upon us undeserving sinners if we harbor hatred and bitterness toward others?

Another hindrance to effective prayer is **UNBELIEF AND DOUBT**. Praying without doubt means praying in the secure belief and understanding of God's character, nature, and motives. We must pray with the understanding that whatever He purposes is the best possible scenario. "But when he asks, he must believe and not doubt, because he who doubts is like a wave of the sea, blown and tossed by the wind. That man should not think he will receive anything from the Lord; he is a double-minded man, unstable in all he does" (*James 1:6-7*).

Finally, **DISCORD IN THE HOME** is a definite obstacle to prayer. Peter specifically mentions this as a hindrance to the prayers of a husband whose attitude toward his wife is less than godly. "Husbands, in the same way be considerate as you live with your wives, and treat them with respect as the weaker partner and as heirs with you of the gracious gift of life, so that nothing will hinder your prayers" (*1 Peter 3:7*). Where there is a serious conflict in family relationships and the head of the household is not demonstrating the attitudes Peter mentions, the husband's prayer communication with God is hindered. Likewise, wives are to follow the biblical principles of submission to their husbands' headship if their own prayers are not to be hindered (*Ephesians 5:22-24*).

Fortunately, all these prayer hindrances can be dealt with at once by coming to God in prayers of confession and repentance. We are assured in 1 John 1:9 that "If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness." Once we have done that, we enjoy a clear and open channel of communication with God, and our prayers will not only be heard and answered, but we will also be filled with a deep sense of joy.

IF PRAYER DOESN'T CHANGE GOD'S MIND, WHY PRAY?

So if prayer does not change God's mind, *why do we pray?*

- Our heavenly Father invites us to ask Him for everything we need.
- He delights to give it to us when it is within His plan.
- He knows we don't always understand His timing, but He expects us to trust and not doubt (*James 1:5-6; Matthew 6:8*).
- Our prayers help to align our hearts with His heart until His will is our highest goal (*Luke 22:42*).
- He promises to listen and grant the desires of our hearts when our hearts are wholly His (*Psalms 37:4; 2 Chronicles 16:9*).
- We can rest knowing we have given the circumstance to the One in control.

EXAMPLE: We can think of it this way: a father plans to give his daughter a car when she turns 16. He knows by that time she will have a job, be active in church and school activities, and be able to pay for her own insurance. But he also plans to wait to give it until she asks for it, because he wants her to value such a gift. But at age 11, she begins to beg for a car. She pleads, bargains, and gets angry when on her 12th, 13th, and 14th birthdays there is still no car. She matures a bit and stops asking, but then at 16 she approaches her father in a more thoughtful way, explains her need for a car, and expresses her confidence that her dad will take care of this need. In a very short time, he joyfully hands her the keys. Did he change his mind? No, he had always planned to give it to her. Did she need to ask? Yes, that was part of his decision.

SCRIPTURE MEMORY

WHY IS IT IMPORTANT?

Bible memorization is of utmost importance in the Christian life. In fact, memorizing Scripture is perhaps the single most crucial element to spiritual growth and victory over sin. The Word of God is powerful because it is literally “God-breathed” from the mind of the Holy Spirit (**2 Timothy 3:16-17**), and when we fill our minds with His words by memorizing Scripture, we avail ourselves of the most powerful spiritual tool there is.

When we memorize the Word of God, several things happen. **Psalm 119:11** tells us the psalmist hid God’s Word in his heart so that he would not sin against Him. Not only did he hear and read the Word, but he internalized it and laid it up in his mind and memory for future use. The Word of God is the believer’s only truly potent weapon against sin, and when placed in the mind through Bible memorization, it is a strong influence for godliness and righteous living. **Hebrews 4:12** tells us the Word of God is “living and active,” meaning that it has supernatural power to mold us into Christ-likeness when we meditate upon it, and there is no better way to meditate on the Word than to have it in our minds and memories.

Ephesians 6:13-17 describes the believer’s armor in the battle for our souls and spiritual survival. All of the elements of the armor are defensive except one. The only offensive weapon is the “sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God” (v. 17).

Just as Jesus used God’s Word to fend off attacks of Satan (**Matthew 4:1-11**), so must we be able to use the same weapon. But rarely does Satan give us time to “look up” the correct passages when we are confronted with his lies and deception. Bible memorization ensures that we will have the appropriate truths and principles in mind and be able to recall them instantly to effectively respond to the evil one who seeks to destroy us (**1 Peter 5:8**). **Romans 12:1-2** exhorts us to “renew” our minds so that we are no longer influenced by the thinking that conforms us to this world. The only way to renew the mind is to fill it with Scripture)

1. **READ THE ENTIRE CHAPTER IN ONE SITTING OVER AND OVER AGAIN.**

Memorization is easier when we understand the context. Many verses are part of a bigger idea, and, by understanding that idea, isolated verses make more sense. By reading an entire passage, we may decide to include a verse or two before or after the selected scripture to make a more complete thought. Reading the whole passage many times makes it more familiar, and we find it easier to memorize that which is familiar.

2. **HANDWRITE THE SELECTED VERSES** on notecards, and take them with you. By working on the verses a little at a time throughout the day, we are also keeping God's truth foremost in our minds. By writing only a few words of the verse on each card, we gain a sense of accomplishment when we master a card. Breaking up the verse also makes it feel more manageable.

3. **FIND A MEMORY BUDDY.** Memorizing with a friend helps keep us accountable and motivated. If the friend gets ahead, natural competitiveness kicks in, and we want to keep up. Having someone sharing our memorization journey also gives us opportunities to exchange thoughts about what the verse means to us and how God wants us to apply it. In doing so, we do more than simply repeat words in order. We allow the truth of them to go deeper where they take root and bear fruit.

4. **INCORPORATE MEDITATION** as part of the memorization (*Psalms 1:1–2*). Meditation is deep and focused thinking about the personalized application of a specific truth. The Bible encourages us to meditate on the Word: "I meditate on your precepts and consider your ways" (*Psalms 119:15*). When we meditate on the meaning of a particular passage and consider what it means to our lives, we go further than simply memorizing. We are obeying Jesus' command to abide in Him and allow His words to abide in us (*John 15:7*). Memorizing and meditating on Bible verses is a good way to abide in God's Word.

5. **READ AND RECITE THE VERSE ALOUD.** Or sing it. As we see it, say it, and hear it, we are using a variety of our senses and helping our brain store the information. The

more “actively” we participate in the learning of a Bible verse, the more distinct that verse becomes in our long-term memory, and thus the more memorable it becomes. This is also why using hand motions can often help a child learn a song or memorize a Bible verse.

6. For those with artistic flair, **ILLUSTRATING A BIBLE VERSE** is a good way to memorize it. Reducing the words to drawings or symbols requires a different part of the brain and may help cement the ideas in lasting ways. Illustrations also help children memorize. Encouraging children to draw their own pictures helps them personalize the verses and learn to meditate on God’s Word.

HERE ARE A FEW KEY THINGS THAT HAVE BEEN HELPFUL IN MEMORIZING SCRIPTURE:

- **ACCOUNTABILITY** – Have someone ask you how you’re doing and set deadlines for yourself. This year, I’m memorizing two verses each month, and one of my friends is checking in with me on the 1st and 15th of each month to see how it’s going.
- **REPETITION, REPETITION, REPETITION** – For some of you, that means writing the verse out several times, and for others, it’s saying it out loud. It may even be helpful for you to draw a picture that reminds you of the verse.
- **MEDITATE** – Spend time reflecting on the meaning of the verse. Don’t just memorize it without looking at the context to see what’s really happening. Make sure you know the bigger picture, and it will usually give you a better understanding of the verse you’re memorizing.
- **MAKE IT VISIBLE** – For me, I often put my verse on an index card above my steering wheel or on the mirror in my bathroom. Sometimes, I take a picture of my verse with my phone and use it as the background. Find what works for you!
- **CHOOSE A MEANINGFUL VERSE** – Find a verse that applies to your life.
- **DO THE VERSE JUSTICE** – Make it a point to know all of the words, and even the punctuation. It’s all there for a reason!

RESOURCES:

FAMILYLIFE PRAYER CARDS | Shop.familylife.com

- Lifting my husband through prayer
- Lifting my kids through prayer

NAVIGATORS TOPICAL MEMORY SYSTEM | navigators.org/resource/topical-memory-system

- Pocket-sized cards
- Also available on Google Play, and Apple App Stores

SEEDS FAMILY WORSHIP | SeedsFamilyWorship.com

- Free Memory Cards
- Scripture in Songs