Prayer is Expected

Highlight (Scripture references and Introduction.)

Matthew 6:5-9; 1 Thessalonians 5:17

There are some aspects of living that are absolutely certain! No matter where you live or during what century you live in you *will* pay taxes to whatever government is in rule. When you drive your vehicle, if you plan to get far, you will have to put fuel in it (the same is true for our bodies!). These certainties are known to all of us. We really don't have a choice about them.

The same is true in regards to Christianity and prayer. They go hand-in-hand. Prayer is the foundation of Christianity. It's how we are saved—when we cry out to God to save us from our sins. (Romans 10:13) It's also the relational component that sets our faith apart from every other world religion. We commune with the Lord through prayer. Prayer is essential and without it our faith is reduced to ideas *about* God versus an intimate knowing God.

J.I. Packer, in his classic book entitled Knowing God, asks a profound question, "How can we turn our knowledge about God into knowledge of God?" Packer goes on to write, "The rule for doing this is simple but demanding. It is that we turn each Truth that we learn about God into matter for meditation before God, leading to ***prayer*** and praise to God."

In this lesson, we will study how God ***expects*** us to pray. This is one of those black and white issues. There should be no misunderstandings about the expectation to pray. Why is this lesson so important? I would say after being a pastor for right at 25 years, it's my experience that prayer is one of the most underutilized disciplines that we have in our arsenal. Is there power in Prayer? Absolutely! Does it change things? Certainly! It changes our hearts, attitudes, and even circumstances. It gives us the ability to love our enemies and to overcome obstacles that are humanly impossible. It brings us into eternal life from being a dead person spiritually.

The main ideas will be *Jesus Makes It Clear and God Makes It Clear*. Prayer is expected! Lord, Give us wisdom and help us hear from you and live it out faithfully.

❖ Teachers – Begin to pray that God will help you implement this discipline in your own life. What a calling to be a teacher. (James 3:1) There is great joy in leading others spiritually. As a teacher, we need prayer as the foundation in our ministry. Prayer is the fuel to our combustible engine. Without it, we accomplish nothing because we need the activity of

the Holy Spirit to guide and direct us. To even anoint our words and actions. Pray for your small group members. I pray often that God would give me favor with people in my ministry. As we talk about prayer, let us not forget to pray much and lean on God!

Explain (Context and Commentary for the Scriptures.)

Point 1: Jesus Expects It (Scriptures are listed below, 1-6)

Discuss: This goes against the grain in our modern culture. We live in an anti-authoritarian society. Even at the Hunter household, I often hear my 4 year old tell her older sisters, "You're not the boss of me!"

Our Christianity is built on the idea that Christ is Lord. We've heard the preachers preach and use the phrase, "Christ is either Lord of all or not Lord at all." The question always goes back to authority. Who's in charge? This is the biggest problem we face as a society. Look at all of our institutions and how they are failing. Government, schools, churches, families. Will anyone ever give an account? If not, people will live like it. But if there will be a reckoning, we should live like it as well.

There is a clash of world-views right now that is happening all around us. The biggest debate that is happening in Washington D.C. right now is the existence of God. This belief or non-belief will determine everything about people and how they live. This is why the church has to be different. It's not a self-righteous difference that thinks we are so much better than everyone else. It's all about ***Who*** is our authority. Our minds and behaviors are being fashioned to be more like Christ. He is directing (no commanding) our steps.

God bought us with a price. When He sent His one and only Son that bled and died on the cross to pay for our sins. He ransomed us from the fall. He is our Lord. Only by His grace and mercy! We didn't earn it. We weren't born into it. It's only when we die to our sinful nature—then we become alive in Christ. But this means that Jesus is now our authority. This is what it looks like to be His disciple.

Jesus expects certain things from His children. Just as we parents have expectations on our children. Prayer is one of those expectations.

Here are just a few scriptures that are listed in Whitney's Spiritual Disciplines book. These are words of Jesus:

1. Matthew 6:5, "*And when you pray…*"
2. Matthew 6:6, "*But When you pray…*"
3. Matthew 6:7, "*And when you pray…*"
4. Matthew 6:9, "*Pray then like this….*"
5. Luke 11:9, "*And I tell you, ask…; seek…; knock….*"
6. Luke 18:1, "*And he told them a parable to the effect that they ought always to pray.*"

Looks pretty clear from the Gospels that Jesus expected prayer to be a normal and daily practice for His followers. Would your prayer life look different if Jesus told you face-to-face that you should pray like this, would your prayer practices look different? Lord, help us to pray often!

- **Further Commentary.** Jesus continually repeated the phrase “when you pray” or words that stress the same idea. This communicates the expectation Jesus had on His disciples to pray often. Today, we have this same privilege to pray to the creator of the universe. This is our pursuit of God, but also know that He is pursuing you at the same time. He created us for relationship. Don’t allow the word expectation to be a drudgery, but a royal invitation. (Hebrews 4:16)

- **Questions:**
  1. When we have this privilege of prayer, why do so many Christians confess that they don’t pray as they should?
  2. Jesus demonstrated His need for prayer, how much more do we need it in our lives?
  3. Is your view of God dimmed or do you see Him for Who He is? Does this affect your prayer life? Why or why not?

Point 2: God Expects It…So How Can We Do It?

Discuss: Robert Murray McCheyne's words are often cited because they remain painfully true: "You wish to humble a man? Ask him about his prayer life."

I understand that having a consistent prayer life can be hard. This discipline has been an ongoing struggle my entire life. I think most people would be humbled if they were honest about their prayer life.

While we understand with our theology that Christ is God incarnate, God the Father is clear in the rest of the New Testament with His expectation of prayer. When we pray without ceasing, it’s a demonstration of a believer’s unbroken relationship with God the Father. This helps us in our devotion to God and also helps us realize that God desires to abide with us. (John 15:5)

Praying without ceasing doesn’t mean that you are consciously praying 24/7, that would be impossible. But, we can always keep the Lord at the forefront of our minds. This is called having a God conscience. We are always aware of His presence. Sometimes we will be literally praying aloud or in our minds, other times we may just sit in solitude all the while being very much attuned to His presence with us.

I think there are some good tools that we can implement to help us meet God’s expectation of prayer:

1. **Know to whom you are speaking.**
   Prayer is a conversation with God, and every conversation begins by addressing the person to whom you are speaking by name. Jesus begins with “Our Father in heaven.” He focuses on a distinct person — the Heavenly Father with whom he has a personal

relationship. We share the same right to call God “Father,” and there are times when we need to talk with our Abba Father, Daddy God. But God is three distinct persons in One: the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit.

I find it helpful in my prayer times to focus on which of the Holy Trinity I need to talk to. Often I talk to Jesus, the friend who is closer than a brother and the Savior of my soul. Other times I cry out to the Holy Spirit, who fills and empowers me to do the tasks Father God has called me to do. Having a distinct sense of who I am speaking to helps me formulate what I want to say and how I want to say it.

2. **Thank Him.**
   A heartfelt thank you is always a great conversation starter. Like any parent, God loves to see that we have grateful hearts. But more importantly, as we take the time to praise God for all He has done in the past—the answered prayers, the impossible situations overcome, the healings and grace—our faith to believe for even greater answers to prayer grows stronger and more confident. Praise opens the gates of heaven and should always be part of our alone time with God.

3. **Ask for God’s will.**
   The Lord’s Prayer is not the only place where Jesus role-modeled a heart of obedience and submission to the will of God over his own desires and needs. In the Garden of Gethsemane, only hours before Jesus’ crucifixion, he would once again pray, “not my will, but yours be done.” In a world where right and wrong are frequently confused and the future is so uncertain, it can be hard to know how to pray or what to ask for when difficult circumstances arise. But the one thing we can know with absolute certainty is that God’s plan for those who love him is good, and the safest place we can be is in the center of his divine will.

4. **Say what you need.**
   In Jesus’ time, bread was a staple—one of the most basic needs of life—and he did not hesitate to ask God to provide it. But we often hesitate to bother God with the little things we need, thinking He shouldn’t be bothered. And when the big problems come, we try everything we can to solve the problem before we think to pray. The Bible says, “*You do not have because you do not ask God*.” So never hesitate to ask God for what you need. Your Father in heaven delights to give you good gifts.

5. **Ask for forgiveness.**
   James 5:16 reminds us that if we want our prayers to be heard, our hearts need to be right with God and with one another. If you feel your prayers are bouncing off the ceiling, take some time to check your heart.

6. **Pray with a friend.**
   There is power in agreement when we pray in Jesus' name. When I have an urgent need to take before the throne of God, I will often call a friend to pray with me. If you don't already have one, make finding a trusted prayer partner a high priority.

7. **Pray the Word.**
   My mother was a spiritual prayer warrior, and much that I know about prayer I learned from her. I loved to listen to her pray because for every need or situation, she would claim a scripture of promise. "The Word of God has power and is our great spiritual weapon," Mama would say. "Pray the Word. Pray the Word."

   Jesus did the same when he was tempted by Satan in the wilderness (see Luke 4:1-12). He was the Son of God, but he did not use his divine authority. Instead, he used the authority of the Scriptures.

8. **Memorize Scripture.**
   The most important key to a vibrant prayer life is to understand our spiritual authority in Christ as explained in the Scriptures. The only way to do that is to become intimately familiar with the Bible. Even a few minutes a day in the Word of God will add strength and authority to your prayers. (Excerpted from World Vision)

- **Questions:**
  1. If God the Father desires us to constantly have a "God consciousness", what does that mean and how do we do it?

  2. Do you need to work on your prayer life? Would the tools mentioned above help in that process.

Application (What does God want me to do?)

Anytime we have been challenged in our walk with God, there is a response or a call-to-action. What do you sense God is calling you to do. Are you satisfied with your prayer life? Is there something specific that you can add to strengthen your prayer time with God?

Respond (What specific commitment will I make?)

Remember, Jesus and God expects us to pray. Also, some helpful tools were given to aide in your prayer time. Have you resolved to make a specific commitment? Prayer is an expected privilege. We don't have to pray but we get to!

Lord, Thank you that we have this wonderful gift in our relationship to you. Help us as we strive to be more like Your Son. Help us to lean in to whatever you have planned for us. Help us to be faithful to our calling. Thank you for loving us enough to send your Son into the world

to pay my sin-debt. Help me to die daily to self and pick my cross up and follow You! In Jesus' Name, Amen.

Additional Study Resources

1. Additional Bible Study tools are available at www.biblecc.com.
2. Additional Bible Study tools are available at www.biblegateway.com.

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