

What Is Prayer?

(Matthew 6:5-7; 7:7-11)

Pre-Session Warm Up

What is prayer? Is it a magic wand we wave in front of God to get Him to do things our way? Prayer is talking to God. God loves you and wants to talk to you and He wants you to talk to Him. What sorts of things can you talk to God about? [Let kids respond.]

- You can tell Him how great He is.
- We can ask Him to forgive us when we do wrong.
- We can thank Him for all that He does for us and for others.
- We can talk to Him about the things that make us sad and the things that make us glad.
- We can ask Him to meet our needs and the needs of family members, friends, neighbors, and so on.

Prayer allows us to open our hearts to God and let him know our innermost thoughts and desires. The Lord Jesus prayed much Himself and He often talked about prayer. When His disciples wanted to know how to pray, He taught them what to do and what not to do.

Today we start a new series of lessons on prayer. We're going to find out what it is and how God wants us to do it. Let's start by each of us thanking God for one good thing that happened in the past.

Opening Prayer

Lord, we are excited about the lesson this morning. It's so important for us to learn how to pray. Give us attentive minds this morning so that we may be encouraged to spend lots of time talking to You about whatever is on our hearts. In Jesus' name, I pray. Amen.

Memory Verse

Don't worry about anything; instead, pray about everything. Tell God what you need, and thank him for all he has done. (Philippians 4:6)

Lesson

God wants us to talk to Him! Prayer is more than just saying thanks to God before we eat. And, it's much more than asking Him for stuff, like a new bike. It's a special way of telling God everything that's going on in our lives.

Our verse today is telling us that God doesn't want us to worry about things. He wants us to tell him what's going on in our lives so He can take care of it.

So, how should we pray? The first thing we're going to learn is that God doesn't listen to the prayers of people who are showoffs. It's the simple and honest prayers that mean the most to God.

God Doesn't Honor Showy Prayers

Matthew 6:5

When you pray, don't be like the hypocrites who love to pray publicly on street corners and in the synagogues where everyone can see them. I tell you the truth, that is all the reward they will ever get.

Jesus is telling us that we shouldn't pray like a hypocrite. What's a *hypocrite*? (A pretender, a deceiver, or a phony) A hypocrite is someone who pretends to be something he is not. Jesus was talking about people who pretend to be good when they are around others. The hypocrites love it when people see them praying. Have you ever met anyone who prays in such a way to be sure they are seen? They aren't praying from their hearts. *People* hear such prayers, but God doesn't.

It isn't that God doesn't want us to pray publicly. Prayer is a very important part of church and Sunday school. But when we pray with others, we must make sure we are talking sincerely to God, not trying to impress those listening.

The next thing we learn about prayer is that God wants us to do it privately.

Spend Time Talking to God Alone.

Matthew 6:6

But when you pray, go away by yourself, shut the door behind you, and pray to your Father in private. Then your Father, who sees everything, will reward you.

Praying with others is good, but it is not enough. Your prayer life should include private times just between you and God. When you pray, Jesus said, pray in your room or in another place where you can be alone. God the Father will hear as you pray from your heart, and He *will* answer.

Next, we learn that God wants us to keep our prayers short and to the point.

Make Your Prayers Simple and Sincere

Matthew 6:7-8

When you pray, don't babble on and on as people of others religions do. They think their prayers are answered merely by repeating their words again and again. Don't be like them, for your Father knows exactly what you need even before you ask him!

The Lord Jesus told them not to pray by just repeating the same words over and over. Some people think God will hear them if they pray with many words. But repeating yourself again and again is not praying from your heart. And it's not necessary. Jesus said, "*The Father knows the things you have need of before you ask Him.*"

Lastly, we learn that we can have confidence that God will answer our prayers.

Ask, Seek, Knock

Matthew 7:7-8

Keep on asking, and you will receive what you ask for. Keep on seeking, and you will find. Keep on knocking, and the door will be opened to you. (8) For everyone who asks, receives. Everyone who seeks, finds. And to everyone who knocks, the door will be opened.

What Jesus is telling us here is to be persistent in our prayers. Don't give up if God doesn't answer your prayers right away. Keep on asking, keep on seeking God, keep on knocking at the door. Trusting in God takes faith. Sometimes He doesn't answer your prayers right away; sometimes He makes us wait. But Jesus assures us that we will be rewarded. Don't give up in trying to seek God. Continue to ask Him for wisdom, love, and understanding. He will give them to you.

Matthew 7:9-10

You parents—if your children ask for a loaf of bread, do you give them a stone instead? (10) Or if they ask for a fish, do you give them a snake? Of course not!

If you were hungry and asked your parents for something to eat, your parents wouldn't give you a rock or a snake! They would gladly give you something that is good for you. It's the same with God. If you ask for something that is good for you, He will gladly give it to you. He loves you and wants what is best for you.

Matthew 7:11

So if you sinful people know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your heavenly Father give good gifts to those who ask him!

Jesus is showing us the heart of God the Father here. God is not selfish, or mean, or stingy. We don't have to beg or plead as we come with our requests. He is a loving Father who understands, cares, and comforts. If we humans can be kind, imagine how kind God, the creator of kindness, is!

1 John 5:14-15:

And we are confident that he hears us whenever we ask for anything that pleases him. (15) And since we know he hears us when we make our requests, we also know that he will give us what we ask for.

We don't need to use big words. What's important is that we come to God with the right attitude.

We should not be praying to bring attention to ourselves or to ramble on and on. Instead, we should be honest with God about what's going on in our lives and share that with Him.

[Teacher, spend the last few minutes of class in prayer with your students.] What is something each of you would like to pray for right now?

- Do you want to tell Him how great He is?
- Do you want to thank Him for something?
- Do you want to ask Him for something?

Let's all pray together....

Closing Prayer

Lord, it is an awesome privilege to be able to talk to You, the creator of the universe. It's amazing that You have the time and interest in hearing from us. Forgive us for the times we forget to come to You in prayer. Give us a desire in our hearts to come running to You at every opportunity. In Jesus' name, I pray. Amen.

Learning Activities

Craft Corner

My Prayer Place

One thing Jesus said was that it's a good idea to have a private place to pray. This lets us focus on God and not be distracted by others around us. Let's think about where we could find a prayer place and draw a picture of it.

Game Center

Way to Pray!

The Bible helps us know how to pray, let's look at a few more verses that give us directions about prayer. Look up the following verses and decide what it tells us about prayer, or what directions it gives us:

- 1 Timothy 2:8
- Acts 27:35
- 1 Thessalonians 5:17
- James 5:16
- Colossians 4:2
- Philippians 4:6
- Isaiah 30:19b
- Luke 11:9

Or, use the following questions in another game of your choice:

Review questions:

1. What is prayer? (Talking to God)
2. Name a few things that you can talk to God about? (You can tell Him how great He is. We can ask for forgiveness, we can thank Him, we can tell Him about the things that make us sad or glad. We can ask Him to meet our needs.)

3. What is a *hypocrite*? (A pretender, a deceiver, or a phony)
4. What did Jesus mean when He said not to pray like a hypocrite? (Jesus said we should not pretend to be good and faithful around others. We must make sure we are talking sincerely to God, not trying to impress those listening.)
5. Who hears the prayers of hypocrites? (Only people, not God)
6. Where is the best place to pray? (In the privacy of your own room or in another place where you can be alone. That's where you can really pray from your heart.)
7. Is it necessary to pray the same words over and over again to be sure that God hears you? (No! The Father knows your need before you even ask Him!)
8. What did Jesus mean when He said to ask and seek and knock? (He said to be persistent in our prayers. Not to give up too easily.)
9. Does God give us whatever we ask for? What if we ask for something that's not good for us? (God is a loving Father who understands our needs better than we do. He wants to give us the very best. Sometimes we're asking for something that isn't good for us; or sometimes God is telling us to wait for the thing we're asking for. We need to trust that the Father knows best.)