

**English Transcript**  
**Worship-based Prayer**  
**Lesson 3 - Problems with Prayer**

Welcome back to Worship-based Prayer: Everything changes when you seek God's face. We are continuing with Lesson 3.

The title of Lesson 3 is Problems with Prayer. Let me be very clear. There are no problems with prayer. There may be problems with church leaders and how individuals approach prayer.

I think this lesson will help us see why there is a need to teach the church to pray.

We will continue on page 10 in your handout.

Let's discuss the points listed on page 10.

**First, Jesus expects His church to pray.**

- In Mark 11:17, Jesus said that his father's house, would be a house of prayer for all nations.
- Matthew 6:6 tells us that it is not a matter of if you pray, but when you pray. Prayer is expected by Jesus. Jesus will then continue to describe the correct motive and method for prayer that is honoring to God.
- Luke 24 and Acts 1:14 make it clear that the early church gathered continually in prayer. Jesus taught on prayer and He modeled prayer. After his resurrection and ascension, the church continued doing what Jesus had started.

**Second, Jesus modeled instruction on prayer for his followers.**

- Luke 11:1-4 reveals that Jesus set an example for His disciples and they asked Him to teach them to pray. They could have asked Jesus to teach them to preach, to serve, to heal. They may have asked Jesus about these things, but what is recorded in Scripture is that they asked Jesus to teach them to pray.
- In Luke 9:18 we see that Jesus prayed alone with his disciples.
- In Luke 9:28 Jesus was on a mountaintop to pray by Himself. Jesus prayed in private and He prayed with others. He modeled prayer for others to see. He taught using words and He taught through His actions.
- In Luke 22:39 we see that it was Jesus' habit to pray. The Mount of Olives was a common place for Jesus to pray and His disciples knew this.

**Third, The church struggles in prayer.**

Numerous surveys have been conducted in the United States over the years related to prayer in local churches.

- Research by Bruce Demarest learned that the average person spends about five minutes a day in prayer and pastors spend seven minutes a day.
- The George Barna Group, discovered that pastors pray less than 30 minutes a day.
- Prayer Connect magazine estimated that only 5% of churches in the United States have a significant prayer ministry.
- Strategic Renewal surveyed thousands of pastors in the United States two years ago and the findings were startling.
  - 17% of the pastors surveyed, one out of six, said that they consider prayer to be mundane. This means that they consider prayer not to be exciting or as mission critical. It feels more like an obligation or duty.
  - 66% of the pastors, two out of three, said they were never disciplined to pray. No one ever taught them or mentored them in how to pray effectively.
  - 33% of the pastors, one out of three, felt like prayer was a job, it was more like a burden, it was a duty, an activity that was part of their job description.
  - 50% of pastors, one out of two, said they did not have a plan to develop a prayer culture within their churches.
- These results reveal that the church and its leadership struggles in prayer.

#### **Fourth, prayer is essential for supernatural impact.**

What impact is the church making in our culture today? We can look at many of the issues that dominate the culture today such as the occult, gender issues, same-sex marriage, high divorce rates, sex outside of marriage, abortion, suicide, idol worship, and addictions. It appears that there is a lack of supernatural impact in our culture today. Prayer is essential for supernatural impact. If we are not praying, if we are hindered in our praying, and if prayer is needed for supernatural impact, it should not be surprising that the church is having limited supernatural impact in many of the areas listed above.

#### **Fifth, prayer is the key to genuine spiritual revival.**

Dr. A.T. Pearson states that “there has never been a spiritual awakening in any country or locality that did not begin in united prayer.”

If you consider the 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> Great Awakenings in the 1700s and 1800s, the NYC Layman’s Revival of 1867, the Welch revival of 1904, and many others, each began with a small group of six to ten people praying fervently, praying consistently. The Spirit of God sparked a supernatural revival through these prayer gatherings that then transformed a church, a community, a nation and the world.

Our problem today is not the darkness in the world, but instead the issue may be related to the lack of light. In 1 Thessalonians 5, the Apostle Paul reminded the Thessalonian believers that they were children of the day, not children of the night, so live as children of the day, live as children of light. And that’s what we are still called to do today.

Consider Matthew 5:14-15.

*You are the light of the world. A city on a hill cannot be hidden, nor do people light a lamp and put it under a basket, but on a stand, and it gives light to the whole house. In the same way, let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father who is in heaven.*

Consider Philippians 2:14-15.

*Do all things without grumbling or disputing, that you may be blameless and innocent children of God, without blemish in the midst of a crooked and twisted generation, among whom you shine as lights in the world.*

Consider also Ephesians 5:7-14

Apostle Paul is exhorting the church not to live like the rest of the world.

*Therefore do not become partners with them. For at one time you were darkness, but now you are light in the Lord. Walk as children of the light, for the fruit of light is found in all that is good and right and true. And try to discern what is pleasing to the Lord. Take no part in the unfruitful works of darkness, but instead expose them, for it is shameful even to speak of the things that they do in secret. But when anything is exposed by the light, it becomes visible. For anything that becomes visible is light.*

We are not just to speak the Word of God but we are to live it out. We are to be salt and light in this world. To have the strength to live this way, flows from a deep intimate relationship with the Lord, an abiding relationship with Christ. And prayer is a key aspect of helping to live the life that God has called us to live.

What have we learned so far?

1. Jesus expects His church to pray.
2. Jesus modeled instruction on prayer.
3. The church struggles to pray.
4. There is a lack of spiritual impact in our culture.
5. There is a need for spiritual revival to transform the church and impact the culture.
6. There has never been a spiritual revival without united prayer.
7. Therefore, the only response is, Lord, teach us to pray!

**Lastly, constant, passionate pastoral leadership is essential to lead this transformation in prayer.**

- The prayer level of a church will never rise higher than its leaders.
- The message to pastors: If you want to take the temperature of your church related to prayer, you should put the thermometer in your own mouth.

Do we as leaders understand the significance of prayer in the life of the local church?

In Acts chapter 6, the early church was growing and expanding. There was an issue that needed to be addressed to help serve the church and resolve the conflict. The Apostles appointed godly men, filled with the Holy Spirit to resolve this issue so that they could remain focused on two things. We read this in Acts 6:4. The Apostles would remain focused on the ministry of the Word and the ministry of prayer. The main things for those early church leaders was to lead in the study and teaching of the Word of God and to lead in prayer.

Charles Spurgeon, famous pastor and preacher from England once said,  
*"I would rather teach one man to pray than to teach 10 men to preach."*

And there is a Brazilian proverb that says, *"The heart cannot taste what the eye has not seen."*

It is difficult to put something into practice if we have not seen it modeled for us. If we have not been mentored in prayer, if we have not been taught, it will be hard for us to practice an effective prayer life.

This is why there is such a great need to teach the church to pray. Prayer does not just happen. It must be learned.

We often give lip service to the importance of prayer. Who would ever say that prayer is not important?

Strategic Renewal conducted a survey with thousands of US pastors,

- 65% of the pastors who were surveyed said that they had a conviction for corporate prayer, to gather the church to pray together. They had a stated conviction to see this become a reality.
- In the same group though, 54% of pastors had not gathered even just one time in a full year for corporate prayer.

We say that prayer is important to us. We say we understand the need for prayer. Yet if we look at what happens in practice, it is very different from what we say or what we believe. So there is a problem with prayer that exists within the church.

I sense that this problem is not limited to the United States, but it is present on a global scale. Even in Senegal, pastors will say that people come on Sunday but very few gather for a prayer meeting.

What is the answer?

Do people understand the motivation to pray?

Do people understand the relational aspect of prayer?

Do people understand the great expectations from lesson 2 that flow from worship-based prayer?

Turn to page 11 and reflect on the first two questions.

## What is prayer?

If we are honest, prayer is somewhat mysterious for many people. Most Christians say that they want to understand prayer and grow in this spiritual discipline. Often though, our prayers become nothing more than a wish list or a list of needs. And we tend to miss the relational connection with God that is intended to be fostered through prayer.

Before refreshing and refocusing our prayer lives, I think it is helpful first to develop a biblical understanding of **what prayer is** and **what prayer is not**. If we were teaching in a group, I would break you into smaller groups and give you some time to discuss “What prayer is” and “what prayer is not”.

**You may want to pause the recording now and make your own list.**

Brainstorm your own list of **what prayer is**. How would you define prayer? What does prayer look like? And then **what prayer is not**. After you have written some ideas in your handout on page 11, restart the recording and I'll share some of my thoughts.

**Welcome back.**

**Here are some of my thoughts about “What Prayer is”.**

- Prayer is to be focused first on the glory of God.
- Prayer is relational. We have been emphasizing this point in the first two lessons.
- Prayer is a means to communicate with God.
- Prayer is access to God's power. People often say that prayer is powerful. I would say no, God is powerful and prayer is the means to access the power of God.
- Prayer is meant to be continual. To pray without ceasing. It is not limited to a few minutes of prayer in a weekly church service or a prayer meeting. Prayer is meant to be continual. It is a continual conversation with God, and a continual attitude of prayer.
- Prayer is learned. It is not something that just comes naturally when we trust Jesus. We do not naturally know how to pray. That is why the disciples asked Jesus to teach them to pray. Prayer is something that can be observed. It can be learned.
- We are to pray in the Spirit. This is praying through the power of the Spirit in the authority of Jesus, trusting God for His kingdom to come, His will to be done. The Spirit knows the mind of the Father. The Spirit of God will help align our prayers with the will of God.
- Prayer is in Jesus' name. This is not a magic phrase that we tack on at the end of a prayer. This means we are praying in the authority of Jesus. We are praying for the things that Jesus would be asking for.
- Prayer is asking. It's making requests of God for ourselves and for others.
- Prayer is meant to be balanced. Prayer includes praise, thanksgiving, confession, asking for forgiveness, being silent before God, surrendering to God's will, making requests of God, committing to change our behavior, and much more.

- Prayer requires discipline. It is not something that happens on its own. We can talk about prayer, have the best intent to pray, but it takes discipline to follow through by actually praying.
- Prayer is private and prayer is corporate. We will talk about this later. We can pray in private and and we can pray with others.
- Prayer is a big part of discipleship.
- Prayer is commanded by God.

### **Just as important is to being able to define what prayer is not!**

- Prayer is not a means to an end. Our motivation to pray should not be to get something. We do not pray to see the church grow. We do not pray to bring in more money. Those things may happen, but prayer is not primarily the means to get something. Prayer is primarily focused on building a relationship with God.
- Prayer is not a program. Prayer is not just about having a prayer ministry in the church.
- Prayer is not a strategy for church growth.
- Prayer is not reserved for just a few prayer warriors. Healthy prayer is meant for every believer.
- Prayer is not meant to be complicated.
- Prayer is not a magic formula. There is no perfect length of time we are supposed to pray. There are no magic words we are supposed to pray. Prayer is not based on how loud we pray, how long we pray, or our posture when we pray.
- Prayer is not done for show or attention like the Pharisees. We need to have the right heart motive when we pray. Not to glorify ourselves but to bring glory to God.
- Prayer is not a wish list.
- Prayer is not limited to Sunday morning.
- Prayer is not something to open and close meetings like a zipper.
- Prayer is meant to be incorporated into the life of the church. Every aspect of the church and even every aspect of our personal life.

I'll leave those last few questions on page 11 for you to consider on your own.

- How would you like to grow in your prayer life?
- How would you like to see your church grow in prayer?

On page 12 I have included quotes from a few pastors and theologians stating their definition of what prayer is. I will read the summary statements and you can read their definition on your own.

- Prayer is communication with God.
- Prayer is approaching God's throne of grace with confidence.
- Prayer is directed to our Heavenly Father as we see in Matthew 6.
- Prayer is asking, seeking, and petitioning.
- Prayer is an expression of our fellowship with God.
- Prayer is dependence on God.
- Prayer is to be fervent, passionate.
- Prayer is thankful. That's from R.C. Sproul.

“Thanksgiving must be an integral part of prayer. It should be inseparably related to our petitions and intercessions. Otherwise, Thanksgiving is illegitimate. The scriptures tell us to come to God and make all of our requests known with Thanksgiving. Thanksgiving is an acknowledgement of God and His benefits.”

These are some practical definitions of how others have described what prayer is.

On pages 13-16, you can read what God tells us in His Word related to effective prayer and what hinders our prayers.

### **What are some guidelines for effective prayer?**

- Pray with perseverance. In Luke 18:1, Jesus says, here's a parable to help you to pray and never give up.
- We are to pray with confidence. Hebrews 4:16 reminds us that we have a Great High Priest and we can come before the Throne of Grace with confidence, knowing that Jesus understands our need. When we come to him, we will receive grace and find mercy to help us in a time of need.
- Pray in God's power as we resist the devil. This is the focus of Ephesians 6 as we put on the full armor of God and take our stand against the devil's schemes. Ephesians 6:18 seems to be the key to activating the spiritual armor as we pray in the Spirit will all kinds of prayers and request and keep on praying for all the saints.
- We are to pray specifically, not just in general ways, but with all kinds of prayers and petitions, with thanksgiving. When the answer comes, we can also come back to God and thank Him.
- We are to pray in Jesus' name, in his authority, the way he would pray with his purpose and will.
- We are to pray in faith, based on God's character, based on what we see revealed in the Word of God. We may not know the timing of the answers, but we can trust God for the things that He has promised in His Word.
- We are to pray in the Spirit. We depend on the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit will move us and guide us in our praying. We pray in His power and according to His direction.
- We can pray according to God's promises. All God's promises are yes and amen in Christ.
- Pray according to God's will. If we ask for anything according to His will, we know we have what we have asked of Him.
- Pray with expectation. We pray God's promises. Not one of His great and precious promises has ever failed. So, we can pray with great expectation as we bring our requests before God.
- We are to pray with praise and thanksgiving. We are to enter His gates with thanksgiving and His courts with praise. Give thanks to Him and praise His name.
- We pray out of an abiding and obedient life. In John 15:7, Jesus says that if you remain in me and my words remain in you, ask whatever you wish and it will be done for you. This does not mean that prayer is like a vending machine. It means that as we put all these principles together, walking in step with the Holy Spirit and abiding in Christ, our prayer life will be impacted as well. As we grow in relationship with the

Lord by seeking Him, knowing Him, and loving Him, this should lead to a life of obedience where we will see God answer prayers for His glory.

- We are to pray fervently and earnestly. The prayer of a righteous man is powerful and effective.
- We pray from our position of authority in Christ.

As you take time to reflect on the Scriptures listed on pages 13 and 14, you will be on your way toward developing a sound theology of prayer.

**God's Word also provides us with guidance regarding things that may hinder our prayers.**

There are times when we feel like our prayers just are bouncing off the ceiling. They are not breaking through. There can be many reasons for this and here are some.

- Conscious, rebellious, unconfessed sin in our life may hinder our prayers.  
Psalm 66:18 ... if I had cherished sin in my heart the Lord would not have listened.
- Idolatry or occult involvement can impact our prayers.  
Ezekiel 14:3 ... Son of man, these men have set up idols in their hearts and put wicked stumbling blocks before their faces. Should I let them inquire of me at all?
- Stinginess and covetousness can hinder our praying.  
Proverbs 21:13 ... whoever shuts their ears to the cry of the poor will also cry out and not be answered.
- Unbelief and doubt can hinder our prayers.  
James 1:6-8 ... but when you ask you must believe and not doubt because the one who doubts is like a wave of the sea blown and tossed by the wind. That person should not expect to receive anything from the Lord. Such a person is double-minded and unstable in all they do.
- Unforgiveness and bitterness can hinder our praying as we see in Matthew 6.
- A wrong attitude towards your spouse may hinder your prayers.  
1 Peter 3:7 ... husbands we should treat our wives with gentleness as the weaker partner and co-heir with us of the gracious gift of life so that nothing would hinder your prayers.
- Pride can get in the way of effective praying.  
James 4:6 ... but he gives more grace. That's why the scriptures say God opposes the proud but shows favor or grace to the humble.
- Selfish motives when we are asking to promote our own agenda can also hinder our praying.  
James 4:3 ... when you ask you do not receive because you ask with wrong motives that you may spend what you get on your own pleasures.
- Lack of thankfulness can hinder our praying.  
1 Thessalonians 5:16-18 ... It is God's will that we rejoice always, pray continually, and give thanks in all circumstances.
- A love for the things of this world may hinder our prayers.  
1 John 2:15-17 ... A love for the things of this world is not the same as having a love for God. The lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, the pride of life will begin to consume us and will impact the way we pray.

- When we pray for show, trying to impress others, our prayers are hindered. Matthew 6:5 ... And when you pray, do not be like the hypocrites, for they love to pray standing in the synagogues and on the street corners to be seen by others. Truly, I tell you, they've received their reward in full.

I thank the Lord for showing us in His Word some basic prayer principles that can help us be more effective in our prayer lives.

I will close this lesson with the quote on page 16. This is from Daniel Henderson in a book he wrote called Old Paths, New Power.

*"The leaders of the early church knew that the ministry was received, not achieved. Their understanding was not that they should reach the world for Christ, but that Christ was ready to reach the world through them.*

*The former depends largely on human effort, talent, strategy, and programming.*

*The other is experienced by the power of the living Christ and the Holy Spirit who lives and works supernaturally in accordance with the Scriptures and is promoted for the sole glory of God, advancing the gospel.*

*Prayer was not an escape from the thorny situations of the ministry of that day. Prayer was a commitment with the One who alone had the wisdom, direction, power, and unifying grace to enable the apostles to approach these concerns as opportunities, opportunities for the glory of Christ as they demonstrated His strength through their human weaknesses."*

In this lesson, we focused on the problems with prayer. There are no problems with prayer itself. The problems are with how we approach prayer.

- Do we have a biblical theology of prayer?
- We may agree on the importance of prayer but do we practice what we believe?
- Jesus expects His church to pray.
- Jesus modeled instruction on prayer.
- The church struggles with prayer, so we are not praying as we should.
- There is a lack of supernatural impact in our culture.
- There is a need for spiritual revival.
- No spiritual revival has ever occurred without a focus on united prayer.
- So, the response is, Lord, teach us to pray.
- And may the teaching and learning begin with the leadership of churches, because constant, passionate pastoral leadership is needed to establish a culture of prayer.
- And when this begins to take place, there will be a fertile foundation for building churches into houses of prayer for all nations.

The first three lessons of this course were intended to create an understanding of the need for prayer in the church, the importance of prayer, and what may be lacking. As we move forward, we will look at a biblical model for prayer, a biblical theology for effective prayer in your personal life, and also in the life of the church.