

BE BRAVE

Bible Briefs

Three Timely Bible Lessons for the Busy and the Brave

THE SHAPE OF PRAYER

In the potter's hands, your prayer life is as unique as you are.

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LESSON 1

Prayer is the proclamation that we serve an almighty but also relational God. We build and maintain the relationship through other-worldly exchanges that can be transmitted

through verbal action, meditative contemplation, written words or in the secret places of our thought life.

Prayer is faith.

Prayer is trust.

Prayer is believing that our triune God is engaged with our purposes and lives.

Prayer is confessing our frail mortality and claiming our Maker's eternal plan.

TO CALL ON THE NAME

Let's begin shaping our prayer life by taking an historical look at prayer.

The Bible's first mention of prayer is found in Genesis 4:26: *"To Seth also a son was born; and he named him Enosh. Then people began to call upon the name of the LORD."* (NASB) In what begins as a story of Cain and Abel and ends with the birth of Enosh, the grandson son of Adam and Eve, we're told, that men *began* to call upon the name of the Lord.

DIVING DEEPER

Look at Genesis 2:16-17. What was God's command concerning the tree of the knowledge of good and evil? What would be the result of disobedience concerning this tree?

Look at Genesis 3:1-7. How were Adam and Even tempted to sin? What was the first recorded lie of the serpent (Satan)?

Read Genesis 4.

**** write your answers in your journal or electronic notebook**

Through the murder of Abel, Adam and Eve came face to face with the devastating consequences of their sin. Death had arrived. The original humans now mourned for the first time. Shocking, the sudden revelation of death likely hit hard. We're given a glimpse of their eye-opening epiphanies when their grandson is named.

The Word tells us: "Adam knew his wife again, and she bore a son and called his name Seth, for she said, 'God has appointed for me another offspring instead of Abel, for Cain killed him.' To Seth also a son was born, and he called his name Enosh. At that time people began to call upon the name of the Lord."

In Hebrew, Enosh translates to weak, mortal man. At the time of Enosh's birth, the frailty of mortal humankind had been experienced. Paramount, the people now understood the need for the eternal, all-powerful God.

By consuming the fruit of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, Adam and Eve moved from a trusting relationship with God to a pursuit of self will—man and woman seeking knowledge God had not yet granted. Since this time in the garden, humankind has fervently chased after the mysteries of life and universe. But don't we continue to come up short?

Striving to do it our way, we continually miss the mark. But rather than leave us to our own limited devices, God has given us a way to come back into the trusting relationship of the garden. Ultimately, that way is Christ. But until the time of our Savior's self-denying sacrifice, prayer provided not only the means to commune with God, but a recognition of our dependence upon Him.

To call on the name of the Lord is to **appeal to the authority** of our Lord and Maker.

TAKE ACTION

Look up the following verses:

Psalms 124:8 – According to this psalm, where is our help.

Psalms 92:2 – What is the promise for *calling on the name of the Lord*?

Joel 2:28-32 – During the awesome day of the Lord, how will men and women be saved? Can you explain why?

Romans 10:13 – What is a promise for recognizing we cannot save ourselves but must *call upon the name of the Lord*?

Zephaniah 3 – In this prophetic chapter of Zephaniah, what happens after God's wrath is poured upon the earth? Will we still call upon His name? See verses 8 – 9.

**** Use your journal or electronic notes to record your thoughts.**

INTERNALIZE:

We know we need God's perspective and power in every area of our lives, but in this season of life, where are your weak areas? What are the heavy burdens? Have you, as when Adam

and Eve were removed from their eternal status in the Garden, come face to face with your mortality? Call upon the name of the Lord. Through prayer, confess your fragile humanity, the need for Christ, your Savior, and the power and purposes of our Triune God.

Wrap up: Moving further into the mysteries of prayer, we've now laid a foundation through confession that without the Lord, we are powerless. Acknowledgement of who He is and who we *are not* is the beginning of a favorable prayer life.

LESSON 2 The Shape of Prayer



HOW GOD PRAYS

Assuming we all understand the three natures of the One True God, we'll take a look at how God—in the nature of Christ the Savior—took on flesh and not only walked, but prayed among us frail, mortal humans. The Bible records some twenty-five accounts of Jesus praying and we can look to Him as our perfect example. If we've ever been confused, doubtful, or shy about prayer, we have, God in the flesh, showing us how it should be done. And the interesting thing about Christ's prayer life? He offered up prayer in a variety of circumstances and places, bringing the act of holy prayer to the common, everyday man's life.

A PERSONAL ACCOUNT

I'd like to interject a personal story here. I received Christ as my savior when I was eight years old, and I've been a disciple of Christ for some thirty years now. I've been to conferences on prayer, read books on the topic, and prayed with a variety of people—some mighty, mighty prayer warriors. But it was one quick conversation on the subject several years ago that made me stop and evaluate my prayer life.

I helped a couple of friends move their ministry offices and while we packed boxes, prayer came up in the conversation. We talked of the power of prayer for healing the sick, and that's when one of my friends made this statement: "Whenever someone says, 'if it be your will, Lord,' in prayer, it's not a prayer of true faith. It's copout prayer and if I'm sick, I want a prayer of power and faith, claiming God's healing, not wimping out by saying, 'God's will.'"

Since I was one those "if it be your will," type prayers, I thought I'd better dig deeper and see if, indeed, my prayers were of a weak, cop-out nature.

After studying the Word (and not depending on someone else's opinion—books, conferences, or friendly chats), I pray differently now.

Let's continue the study and I'll show you what I discovered.

CHRIST AND PRAYER

In Lesson One, we determined that God is all powerful and all sufficient, and we weak and fragile humans should call upon His authority—*call upon the name of the Lord* as our true source of all.

Since Christ is God, it seemed to make sense to me that the next step in my prayer study should be discovering how and when our Savior prayed. I went to the Word.

TAKE ACTION

Understanding our fickle hearts and sometimes confused minds, Christ taught us **how** we should pray and **what** we should pray for. We'll find a chunk of His instructions in the book of Matthew.

Read Matthew 6:8-13 (The Lord's prayer)

1. Before Jesus says, "Pray then, in this way," He makes a declaration about what the Father knows. What is this declaration? How does it affect you?
2. In verse 9, Jesus calls upon the name of the Lord. How does He describe God's name?
3. In verse 10, does Christ name and claim His own will? His own agenda? Whose will does Christ ask be done? And where?
4. Outline the Lord's prayer in your journal or electronic notebook.

Perhaps one of the most heart-wrenching prayers found in God's Word is the prayer Christ prayed in the Garden of Gethsemane. In these holy suspended moments between the last supper with His disciples and the wild and unjust court judgements against His kingship, He spent His final, free moments with the Father in prayer.

Read Matthew 26:36-47.

1. Christ clearly understood what would be taking place in a matter of hours. How did He pray during this distressed time?

2. Though He wanted the Father to change the circumstances, to alter the course, whose will did Jesus ultimately submit to?
3. How many times did our Christ ask to have the cup of wrath taken from Him? What are your thoughts about praying God's will?

**** Write your answers in your journal or electronic device.**

The prayer for God's will is not a prayer of weak faith, but a prayer of sold-out trust in God's plans.

The prayer of God's will is a prayer that communicates, *your ways are perfect, O God, unlike mine.*

INTERNALIZE

We've rediscovered that calling on the name of the Lord is saying to the Lord and ourselves (and any nearby principalities) that we are dependent upon Him. This is truth. Our Maker is our sustainer in all aspects. As well, we've taken a deeper look at praying God's will. Telling the Lord our desires is always encouraged. However, stating that God's will is better than anything you or I can imagine, tells His heart and ours that we believe His outcomes are perfect and glorifying.

Craft a prayer at these basic levels. Don't rush past the *hallowed be you name* part to get to your agenda. Take time and let Him know you are small; He is colossal. Then lay out one big request you've had on your heart. Wrap up your prayers with, *not my will, but yours, Lord.* Say it in your own words letting your Maker know you trust Him with outcomes.

Lesson 2 Wrap up

There's a certain relief in knowing that my prayers are to intersect with the will of God.

Nothing in God's kingdom is dependent upon my bringing well, thought-out proposals to the Lord. My laments, requests, and thanksgivings are a privilege offered by my Maker and it is through our communion that I join Him in His work. He doesn't join me in mine.

Actually, I'm not the one working. I prepare. He works out His will.

Your prayers are shaped within His will. Amen.

LESSON 3 – The Shape of Prayer



MORE PRAYER REVELATION

We've looked at how and why the first prayers of mankind were offered up to God. We've studied two of Christ's prayers recorded in the book of Matthew. Now, let's take a broader sweep of a biblical-based prayer life.

We'll start today's study following Jesus again. Here's a brief of the different circumstances in which Christ prayed. Look up each and discover the details of His prayer life.

1. Christ prayed in community: Matthew 18:20
2. Christ prayed alone: Luke 5:16
3. Christ prayed for you and me (all the people the Father gives him): John 17:9
4. Christ prayed *after* performing miracles: Luke 5:15, 16
5. Christ prayed for resurrection: John 11:41-43
6. Christ prayed with thanksgiving: Matthew 12:25; Matthew 15:36; Luke 22:19

** Interesting note: there is no biblical record of Christ praying before performing a miracle of healing. Could it be that the power to heal eternally resided within His knowing faith? While I don't have a biblical explanation to share, it's something interesting to ponder.

Prayers of the Saints

There are some 650 prayers recorded in the Bible. Here are a few of the standout prayers. Each is unique and each a personal communion with the Lord. Some are short, some are long. The reasons and words are varied. But each serves as a biblical example of how God's children sought His help, guidance, forgiveness, and mercy for others.

Samson's prayer – "O Lord God, please remember me and please strengthen me just this time, O God that I may at once be avenged of the Philistines for my two eyes ... Let me die with the Philistines!" – Judges 16:28, 29(b)

Hannah's prayer – "And she, greatly distressed, prayed to the Lord and wept bitterly. And she made a vow and said, 'O Lord of hosts, if Thou indeed look on the affliction of Thy maidservant and remember me, and not forget Thy maidservant, but wilt give Thy maidservant a son, then I will give him to the Lord all the days of his life, and a razor shall never come to his head.' Now as it came about, as she continued praying before the Lord, that Eli was watching her mouth. As for Hannah, she was speaking in her heart, only her lips were moving, but her voice was not heard." (1 Samuel 1:11-13)

David's prayer – "And David inquired of the Lord saying, 'Shall I pursue this band? Shall I overtake them?'" (1 Samuel 30:8)

David's prayer – “Be gracious to me, O God, according to Thy lovingkindness; According to the greatness of Thy compassion blot out my transgressions. Wash me thoroughly from my iniquity and cleanse me from my sin.” (Psalm 51:1-3)

Solomon's prayer – “Then Solomon said, “Thou hast shown great lovingkindness to Thy servant David, my father, according as he walked before Thee in truth and righteousness and uprightness of heart toward Thee: ... And now, O Lord my God, Thou has made Thy servant king in place of my father David, but I am but a little child; I do not know how to go out or come in. ... So give Thy servant an understanding heart to judge Thy people to discern between good and evil. For who is able to judge this great people of Thine?” (1 Kings 3:6-9)

Job's prayer – “Then Job answered the Lord and said, ‘Behold I am insignificant; what can I reply to Thee? I lay my hand on my mouth. Once I have spoken and I will not answer; Even twice, and I will add no more.’” (Job 40:3-5)

Stephen's prayer – “And they went on stoning Steven as he called upon the Lord and said, ‘Lord Jesus, receive my spirit!’ And falling on his knees, he cried out with a loud voice, ‘Lord, do not hold this sin against them!’ And having said this, he fell asleep.” (Acts 7:59-60)

INTERNALIZE THE WORD

Using the Scriptures above, make observations on how the different people approached prayer. Do you find instances of calling on the name of the Lord? Instances of faith? Record insight from the list above or use the following verses to discover how different biblical Christians approached prayer: Nehemiah 6:9; Job 42:1-6; Psalm 90; Daniel 12:8; John 17; Ephesians 1:3 (written prayer).

In the potter's hands, your prayer life takes on a shape as unique as you are.

** Record your thoughts in your journal or electronic notes.

WRAP UP

Prayer is the proclamation that we serve an almighty God. When trust pours forth from our hearts and tongues, we internalize the truth that He is the source and we are the sponge.

Prayer is the proclamation that we serve a relational God. Let's face it, we know that the Lord can accomplish all things without the need for our opinion or input. Yet, His desire is to let us take part in enacting His will. Through our realized trust in Him, He shares more of Himself.

Why not finish your week contemplating prayer. After all, we're told in Ephesians to pray without ceasing—communing constantly with our Source. Take time to seek the Lord and ask Him how he'd like to commune deeper with you.

That's all for now. Lord willing, we'll have more on prayer in the future as this one Bible Brief isn't near enough to exhaust the subject.

Be sure and check out my [biblical blogs](#) and latest [brave-inducing Christian fiction](#) at www.lauriegreenwestlake.com

Pray on and be brave,

L.G. Westlake (Laurie)

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STUDY QUESTIONS FOR COFFEE SHOP AND ZOOM GROUPS

From the *Shape of Prayer* Bible Brief

1. What have you/we learned about prayer?
2. Do you see calling on the name of the Lord as an important part of your prayer life?
Why?
3. Which of the prayers of the saints did you identify with most?
4. What will you be changing about your own prayer life?
5. **Keeping it current** – If you were to lead a Bible Study on Prayer what verses would you choose first?
6. Email each member of the group a written prayer you're willing to share. Don't be shy or self-conscious. Remember, in the Word of God we read intimate prayers offered by the saints of old who are alive today in heaven. Millions of people have read their vulnerable prayers—including you!

