

"Take Time to Pray"

One of our greatest blessings and privileges is the ability to speak directly to God. Hello, I'm Phil Sanders, and this is a Bible study "In Search of the Lord's Way." Today we're examining our blessing and the need to take time to pray.

Welcome to In SEARCH of the Lord's Way! We're here to search the Scriptures for God's will. God's will has always been in a relationship, where God speaks to us and blesses us and we speak to Him. God wants to hear from us regularly. He cares and can do what no one else can do. For Christians, God is our Father in heaven who knows what we need even before we ask. His ear is open to those who love and obey Him. We rob ourselves when we fail to pray to the One who wants to listen to us. We'd love to hear from you and want to be a part of your life each week.

Private prayer alone with God is certainly the one of the most important spiritual activities of any Christian. The essence of prayer is simply communicating to God your hearts and minds, speaking with humility and openness to the One that you love and the One who loves you and already knows all about you. Humble, fervent prayer to our Father and Creator is one the Christian's greatest needs and greatest privileges. People are at their best when they get on their knees before God. They see the awesome glory of God and the blessing of approaching Him.

Prayer, by its very nature, is an act of faith in God our Father. Prayer acknowledges not only His existence but also His care for us as His children. We must never let busy lives keep us from drawing close to the throne of grace and having fellowship with our Father in heaven. Faithful, loving Christians pray daily and often. Weak Christians may go days, even weeks, without prayer. When was the last time you spent more than ten minutes in prayer? When was the last time you got alone with God on your knees and earnestly called out to Him?

We offer this study, Take Time to Pray, free! If you'd like a printed copy and live in the United States, mail your request to In Search of the Lord's Way, P.O. Box 371, Edmond, OK 73083 or send an e-mail to searchtv@searchtv.org. Or, you can call our toll-free telephone number. That number is 1-800-321-8633. We also have programs and free materials on our website, www.searchtv.org. You can also see us on YouTube.

We'll now worship in song. We'll read from Ephesians 3:14 to 19, and examine the importance of taking time to pray every day.

Our reading today comes from Paul's epistle to the Ephesians. Ephesians 3 verses 14 to 19. And there Paul talks about a magnificent prayer wanting love to be at our hearts.

For this reason I bow my knees before the Father, from whom every family in heaven and on earth derives its name, that He would grant you, according to the riches of His glory, to be strengthened with power through His Spirit in the inner man, so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith; and that you, being rooted and grounded in love, may be able to comprehend with all the saints what is the breadth and length and height and depth, and to know the love of Christ which surpasses knowledge, that you may be filled up to all the fullness of God.

What a marvelous prayer Paul prayed. And I hope that we can have that knowledge of God's love. Let's pray together. Heavenly Father we're thankful that You have loved us so much. Help us to have that great love rooted and grounded in our hearts. And Father may we always do Your will to show our love to You. In Jesus name, Amen.

The simple statement, "pray without ceasing" (1 Thessalonians 5:17), seems to be impossible. No one can pray twenty-four hours a day, seven days a week. Paul isn't saying this but is encouraging

saints to never stop praying. One can go days without even saying one meaningful prayer. The Lord God wants to hear from us and draw close to us. Should we stop praying, we're denying God a time of our fellowship. Jesus made an active prayer life a priority; and He spent much time alone with God. "Jesus would often slip away to the wilderness and pray." And we should make prayer our priority.

No matter how busy we are, we must never be too busy to pray to the Father in heaven. We need Him, and He wants to hear from us. The Lord Jesus said in Matthew 7:7 to 8, "Ask, and it will be given to you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you. For everyone who asks receives, and he who seeks finds, and to him who knocks it will be opened." Prayer time is never wasted; it gives us the strength and confidence to face busy and hectic lives. Prayer time keeps us from anxiety and worry, "casting all your anxiety on Him, because He cares for you" (1 Peter 5 verse 7).

Daniel would rather spend a night in the lion's den than cease praying to the Father in heaven. We too should make our prayers a priority! We should have regular prayer times and spontaneous prayer times when we are in need. There's simply no substitute for prayer in our spiritual lives.

To pray effectively, first prepare. Focusing on God before we pray sets our hearts in the right direction. The Lord Jesus admonished the apostles, "Keep watching and praying that you may not enter into temptation; the spirit is willing, but the flesh is weak" (Matthew 26 verse 41). We mustn't forget, "Be of sober spirit, be on the alert. (because) Your adversary, the devil, prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour" (1 Peter 5 verse 8). And each of us will face challenges to our faith. A morning prayer prepares us for the day's challenges. Connecting each day with God helps us to remain devoted to Him.

How we think matters, so let's focus on God continually. Paul said in Romans 12 verse 2, "And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, so that you may prove what the will of God is, that which is good and acceptable and perfect." A morning prayer and Scripture reading renews our minds, so that we can meet the challenges and we can prove in our lives what the will of God is. Preparing for spiritual tests keeps us from being surprised by others who don't share our faith. Preparing helps us to know how to respond to temptations. Preparing helps us to stand strong!

To pray effectively, second, let's pause. We used to hear people say, "Before you do something you'll regret, count to ten!" Well we must be careful never to act before we think. Pausing gives us time to think about what we ought to do. It gives us time to ask, "What would Jesus do?" or "What does the Bible say about this?" Proverbs 15 verse 28 reminds us that, "The heart of the righteous ponders how to answer, But the mouth of the wicked pours out evil things."

We've all said cruel and hateful words without thinking, only to regret what we have said. Reacting to anger with anger never helps a situation. James 1:19 to 20 says, "This you know, my beloved brethren. But everyone must be quick to hear, slow to speak and slow to anger; for the anger of man does not achieve the righteousness of God." When Peter was faced with the crowd coming to arrest Jesus, he drew a sword and cut off the right ear of Malchus (John 18 verses 10 to 11). And Jesus told Peter to put up your sword; Peter was interfering with the cup Jesus was to drink, and His death on the cross (Matthew 26 verse 39). When we act without thinking or are unprepared for the challenge, we too can act unwisely and create more problems. We have to take time to think before we act. When we pause and pray about a matter, it helps us have the right perspective.

It's an amazing thing to recognize that in prayer I am speaking to God Himself in heaven. I am speaking to the One who created this universe and gave me life. I am speaking to the One who has loved me and provided for my needs, to the One who sent His Son to die on the cross for my sins and

forgives me, and to the One who wants me to spend eternity in heaven with Him as His child. Oh He has time for me. I don't have to beg for an opportunity to pray. His heart and His ear is always open to those who love Him and do His will.

To pray effectively, third, we have to pray and speak our hearts with love and humility. Our prayers don't have to be long. We can pray one-sentence prayers to the Lord. We can ask for strength, for patience, for comfort, or for wisdom. The Lord gives us wisdom to know how to deal with the challenges of everyday life. This is not a personal, miraculous revelation, where God directly talks to us; but it does come from God in answer to prayer.

James encourages us in James 1:5 to 8, "But if any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask of God, who gives to all generously and without reproach, and it will be given to him. But he must ask in faith without any doubting, for the one who doubts is like the surf of the sea, driven and tossed by the wind. For that man ought not to expect that he will receive anything from the Lord, being a double-minded man, unstable in all his ways." God is happy to help us when we need help and don't know what to do. Remember "your Father knows what you need before you ask Him" (Matthew 6 verse 8). We don't know all the things the Father is doing to help us face our problems and challenges. But we do know that He cares and will answer our requests.

Before Jesus picked the twelve apostles, He spent the whole night in prayer (Luke 6 verses 12 and 13). When Nehemiah heard about the terrible condition of Jerusalem with its walls torn down, He fasted and prayed weeping and mourning for days. He asked God to help him. God gave Nehemiah an opportunity to speak to King Artaxerxes for help. Before Nehemiah answered the question of King Artaxerxes about his sadness, Nehemiah briefly prayed to God. You see he realized that he needed God's help to answer this great king wisely.

Nehemiah 2:1 to 5 says: And it came about in the month Nisan, in the twentieth year of King Artaxerxes, that wine was before him, and (Nehemiah says) I took up the wine and gave it to the king. Now I had not been sad in his presence. So the king said to me, "Why is your face sad though you are not sick? This is nothing but sadness of heart." Then I was very much afraid. (Nehemiah says) I said to the king, "Let the king live forever. Why should my face not be sad when the city, the place of my fathers' tombs, lies desolate and its gates have been consumed by fire?" Then the king said to me, "What would you request?" (Then Nehemiah says) So I prayed to the God of heaven. I said to the king, "If it please the king, and if your servant has found favor before you, send me to Judah, to the city of my fathers' tombs, that I may rebuild it."

God heard Nehemiah, and the king granted his great request. You know when we face a struggle in life, it's important to call upon the Lord to help us fulfill His will and to do what is right. In the end, God is the One who decides where our steps lead. Proverbs 16:1 says, "The plans of the heart belong to man, but the answer of the tongue is from the Lord." God listens to our prayers and He can make great things happen. Proverbs 3:5 to 6 says, "Trust in the LORD with all your heart And do not lean on your own understanding. In all your ways acknowledge Him, And He will make your paths straight."

To pray effectively, fourth, we must be patient. David wrote in Psalm 40 verse 1, "I waited patiently for the LORD; And He inclined to me and heard my cry." In Psalm 147:11 David said, "The Lord favors those who fear Him, Those who wait for His lovingkindness." God cares for His people and gives them what they need when they are ready for it. And while we may long for things, we may not be ready to handle them properly. God encourages us to be patient for Him to act in His time.

James 5:16 to 18 says, "Therefore, confess your sins to one another, and pray for one another so that you may be healed. The effective prayer of a righteous man can accomplish much. Elijah was a

man with a nature like ours, and he prayed earnestly that it would not rain, and it did not rain on the earth for three years and six months. Then he prayed again, and the sky poured rain and the earth produced its fruit." God doesn't answer every prayer immediately, but He does answer when the time is right!

To pray effectively, fifth, pray expecting an answer. The Lord Jesus said in Mark 11:22 to 24, "Have faith in God. Truly I say to you, whoever says to this mountain, 'Be taken up and cast into the sea,' and does not doubt in his heart, but believes that what he says is going to happen, it will be granted him. Therefore I say to you, all things for which you pray and ask, believe that you have received them, and they will be granted you." We need to believe God's promises will come true and not doubt that He is listening and will respond.

God through the prophet Isaiah could say to a rebellious people in Israel in Isaiah 65:24, "It will also come to pass that before they call, I will answer; and while they are still speaking, I will hear." "God is ready for us to call upon Him, and to pray. He will help us. Hebrews 4:14 to 16 says of the Lord, "Therefore, since we have a great high priest who has passed through the heavens, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold fast our confession. For we do not have a high priest who cannot sympathize with our weaknesses, but One who has been tempted in all things as we are, yet without sin. Therefore let us draw near with confidence to the throne of grace, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need." We can have confidence in Christ.

When should we pray? Well, pray when you hurt, pray when you are blessed, pray when you need wisdom, pray when life is stressful, pray when you need to be forgiven, pray when you need to forgive others, pray when your friends and family hurt, pray for those who are lost, pray for our nation and its leaders, pray for your enemies, pray for forgiveness, and pray for God's will to be done. Pray with thankfulness because God has been good to you. Rejoice in the Lord and in His love. Thank God for the joy of salvation, for the hope of heaven, for His steadfast love. And never let a single day not even one day, pass without a prayer from your heart to God.

Let's pray together. Heavenly Father, haloed be Your name, and we praise You and thank you for all the good things that You have done for us. Help us Heavenly Father to be more devoted to You in love and service. Help us to be strong in our faith. And Father we pray that You will bless us and help us through all the struggles of life that we face. Give us each day our daily bread. In Jesus name we pray, Amen.

Why not decide today that you will devote yourself to prayer. You can pray brief prayers within your heart or you can pray much longer prayers. You can pray once a day, but I hope you'll pray often each day to the Father who is your best friend. Get alone with God in private prayer. Think about what is on your heart to say to God. This is a time of spiritual intimacy with God who created you and who loves you. He invites you to ask, to seek, and knock. Spend a moment preparing to pray. Focus on the fact that you're coming into God's presence.

As you pray, recall that you're speaking to God Himself. Pray humbly, confidently, and lovingly. Christians should offer adoration and praise to God, they should confess their sins and ask for forgiveness, they should thank God for all that He has blessed them, and ask God to supply your needs. It's not enough to talk about praying, we must put it into practice every day. Why not decide to begin praying regularly to the Father?

God's promise to hear our prayers belongs to those who love and obey Him. Do you? Now to become a Christian, believe in the Lord Jesus Christ and trust what He teaches and what He has done for you on the cross and at the empty tomb. Repent of your sins, deny yourself, take up your cross, and

follow the Lord! Confess the Lord Jesus Christ is the Son of God. And be baptized into Christ, immersed in water. Baptism isn't something that you do; really it's something done to you. A person immerses you in water, but in baptism God unites you with Christ, forgives your sins, gives you newness of life, and makes you His child. As a loving and obedient Christian you have all the blessings and promises of God. So get right with God.

We hope that our study, Take Time to Pray, has caused you to improve your prayer life. If you live in the United States and want a free printed copy, send your request to In Search of the Lord's Way, P.O. Box 371, Edmond, OK 73083 or send an e-mail to searchtv@searchtv.org. Or, you can call the Search office toll-free at 1-800-321-8633. Now there's a schedule of our programs and a map of churches in your area at www.searchtv.org. SEARCH is also on YouTube! Subscribe to our channel, "SearchTVMinistry" and then like the programs you watch. We also offer free Bible Correspondence courses. Now don't worry if you get a hold of us, we're not asking for money. We're here to help you draw close to God.

We do ask that you show God your love by worshiping at church in person. You need a church family. And if you can attend, don't neglect worshiping at church. There's probably a church of Christ near you. If you're looking for a healthy, Biblical church home, we'll gladly help you find one. Well we'll be back next week, Lord willing. Keep searching God's Word with us and tell a friend about this program. And as always we say, God bless you and we love you from all of us at In Search of the Lord's Way.