

# THE PRIORITY OF PRAYER

## SESSION #1

### Prayer: The Christian's Declaration of Dependence

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#### The Place of Prayer in the Christian Life

- Few people would disagree with the assertion that genuine Christians are to be known as *praying people*.
- Early in the Old Testament, the primary characteristic that marked a God-fearer was that he or she “called on the name of the LORD”:
- **Genesis 4:26** – “Then men began to call upon the name of the LORD.”
- **Psalm 99:6** – “Moses and Aaron were among His priests, and Samuel was among those who called on His name; they called upon the LORD and He answered them.”

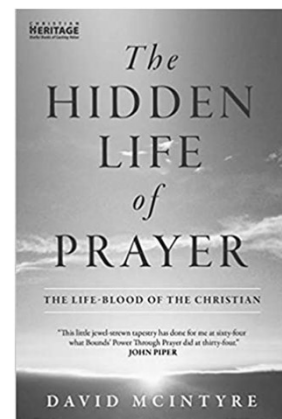
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- For the Christian, his or her new life begins with prayer:
- **Romans 10:9-13** – “that if you confess with your mouth Jesus *as* Lord, and believe in your heart that God raised Him from the dead, you will be saved; for with the heart a person believes, resulting in righteousness, and with the mouth he confesses, resulting in salvation . . . for “WHOEVER WILL CALL ON THE NAME OF THE LORD WILL BE SAVED.”
- The Christian’s life also continues with prayer:
- **Luke 18:1** – “Now He was telling them a parable to show that at all times they ought to pray and not to lose heart.” (Also 1 Thess 5:17; Eph 6:18; Col 4:2; etc.)

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“Our Lord takes it for granted that His people will pray. And indeed in Scripture generally the outward obligation of prayer is implied rather than asserted.”

—MacIntyre, *The Hidden Life of Prayer*



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“As it is the business of tailors to make clothes and of cobblers to mend shoes, so it is the business of Christians to pray.”

—Martin Luther



“Beggars beg. Christians pray.”

—Thomas Watson

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- More than anything else, prayer is the expression of *dependency*.
- Breathing expresses our dependency upon oxygen. Eating and drinking—upon physical nourishment. Sleeping—upon rest and physical rejuvenation. Prayer expresses our dependency *upon God*.
- To pray biblically is to affirm this dependency. To fail to pray is to live in practical independence.
- **Jeremiah 17:5** – “Thus says the LORD, ‘Cursed is the man who trusts in mankind and makes flesh his strength, and whose heart turns away from the LORD.’”

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“If any of you should ask me for an epitome of the Christian religion, I should say it is in that one word—  
prayer.”

—Charles Spurgeon



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**What Is the Role of Prayer  
in Your Life?**

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## 1. Prayer is rare among many.

- It is *inconvenient* for those whose daily routine is full of commitments and obligations.
- It is *unnecessary* for those whose lives are saturated with success and stability.
- It is *forgotten* by those who are self-sufficient—who seem to satisfy their own needs and solve their own challenges.
- It is *futile* for those who believe that God is either not good, not powerful, or not interested.

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- Man was created for communion with God (Gen 3:8); as such, it is instinctive to pray.
- But sin *separated* and *corrupted* this spiritual instinct.
- Thus, prayerlessness is the natural response of the atheist or agnostic (Ps 14:1; 53:1 – “The fool has said in his heart, ‘There is no God’”), and perverted prayer is the natural response of the worshiper in a false religions (Isa 54:20 – they “pray to a good who cannot save”).
- Richard Baxter: “If thou art not a praying person, thou art not a Christian.”

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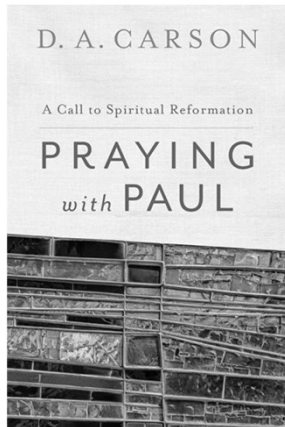
- But weak, sporadic prayer is also a reality for many true disciples of Christ.
- **Luke 11:1** – “It happened that while Jesus was praying in a certain place, after He had finished, one of His disciples said to Him, ‘Lord, teach us to pray just as John also taught his disciples.’”
- **Matthew 26:39-41** – “And He came to the disciples and found them sleeping, and said to Peter, ‘So, you *men* could not keep watch with Me for one hour? Keep watching and praying that you may not enter into temptation; the spirit is willing, but the flesh is weak.’”

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“A failure in our prayer life is generally a failure to know Jesus. ‘If you knew who was talking to you, you would ask Me!’ A prayerless Christian is like a bus driver trying alone to push his bus out of a rut because he doesn’t know Clark Kent is on board. ‘If you knew, you would ask.’ A prayerless Christian is like having your room wallpapered with Saks Fifth Avenue gift certificates but always shopping at Goodwill because you can’t read. ‘If you knew the gift of God and who it is that speaks to you, you would ask—you would ask!’”

—Piper, *Desiring God*, 162

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“What is both surprising and depressing is the sheer prayerlessness that characterizes so much of the Western church. It is surprising because it is out of step with the Bible that portrays what Christian living should be; it is depressing because it frequently coexists with abounding Christian activity that somehow seems hollow, frivolous, and superficial.”

—Carson, *Praying with Paul*, ix

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## 2. Prayer is average among some.

- *The flesh and sinful habits* obscure the need for God and dampen the eagerness to enter His presence.
- *Busyness* commandeers daily schedules and leads to *forgetfulness* of the purposes and privileges of prayer.
- *Misunderstanding the nature of the Christian life* leads to self-sufficiency and the turn to prayer as “Plan B.”
- *Procrastination* leaves prayer to the end of the day, once all other priorities have been accomplished.
- *Love for the Lord* grows cold and *disappointment* grows over unanswered prayer.

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- *Emotionalism* chokes out healthy, persevering prayer and leads to burnout and dissatisfaction.
- *Unsound theology* leads some to view incessant prayer as man-centered or manipulative in nature.
- *Lack of discipline* prevents the implementation of good intents.
- *An aversion to legalism* leads some to avoid any talk of prayer as a responsibility or discipline.

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- That a practice of true prayer is “hard work” testifies to two realities:
  - (1) It is hard because it is part of a spiritual battle.
    - **Ephesians 6:12** – “For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the powers, against the world forces of this darkness, against the spiritual *forces* of wickedness in the heavenly *places*.”
  - (2) It is hard because it mortifies dependency on the flesh.
    - **James 4:2-3** – “You lust and do not have . . . . You are envious and cannot obtain . . . . You do not have because you do not ask. You ask and do not receive, because you ask with wrong motives, so that you may spend *it* on your pleasures.”

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### 3. Prayer is great among a few.

- **David** – “Give ear to my prayer, O God; and do not hide Yourself from my supplication. . . . Evening and morning and at noon, I will complain and murmur, and He will hear my voice” (Ps 55:1, 17).
- **Daniel** – “Now when Daniel knew that the document was signed, he entered his house (now in his roof chamber he had windows open toward Jerusalem); and he continued kneeling on his knees three times a day, praying and giving thanks before his God, as he had been doing previously” (Dan 6:10).
- **Nehemiah** – “I was fasting and praying” (1:4); “I prayed to the God of heaven” (2:4); etc..

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- **Anna** – “And there was a prophetess, Anna . . . . She was advanced in years and had lived with *her* husband seven years after her marriage, and then as a widow to the age of eighty-four. She never left the temple, serving night and day with fastings and prayers.”
- **The early church** – “They were continually devoting themselves to the apostles’ teaching and to fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer.”
- **The Apostles** – “But we will devote ourselves to prayer and to the ministry of the word” (Acts 6:4).
- **Epaphras** – “Epaphras, who is one of your number, a bonds slave of Jesus Christ, sends you his greetings, always laboring earnestly for you in his prayers, that you may stand perfect and fully assured in all the will of God” (Col 4:12).

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- **Jesus Christ**

- “In the early morning, while it was still dark, Jesus got up, left *the house*, and went away to a secluded place, and was praying there” (Mark 1:35).
- “But Jesus Himself would *often* slip away to the wilderness and pray” (Luke 5:16).
- “It was at this time that He went off to the mountain to pray, and He spent the whole night in prayer to God” (Luke 6:12).
- “After He had sent the crowds away, He went up on the mountain by Himself to pray; and when it was evening, He was there alone” (Matt 14:23).

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- It is this kind of demonstrable dependency that in view in Scripture’s exhortations about *unceasing* prayer:
- **Luke 18:1** – “Now He was telling them a parable to show that at all times they ought to pray and not to lose heart.”
- **1 Thessalonians 5:17** – “Pray without ceasing.”
- **Ephesians 5:18** – “With all prayer and petition pray at all times in the Spirit, and with this in view, be on the alert with all perseverance and petition for all the saints.”

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“I have read the lives of many eminent Christians who have been on earth since Bible days. Some of them, I see, were rich, and some poor. Some were learned, some unlearned . . . some were Calvinists, and some were Arminians. . . . But one thing, I see, they all had in common. They all had been men of prayer.”

—J. C. Ryle



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“What is the reason that some believers are so much brighter and holier than others? I believe the difference, in nineteen cases out of twenty, arises from different habits about private prayer. I believe that those who are not eminently holy pray *little*, and those who are eminently holy pray *much*.”

—J. C. Ryle



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“Those who have left the deepest impression on this sin-cursed earth have been men and women of prayer.”

—D. L. Moody

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“The most healthy state of a Christian is to be always empty in self and constantly depending upon the Lord for supplies; to be always poor in self and rich in Jesus; weak as water personally, but mighty through God to do great exploits; . . . and hence the use of prayer, because, while it adores God, it lays the creature where it should be, in the very dust.”

—Spurgeon, *Morning and Evening*



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**What does your practice of prayer declare?**