

Xenos Christian Fellowship
Christian Principles Unit 3, Week 1
Prayer as a Means of Growth

Introduction to the means of growth

Participating in the Means of Growth is only one of the three elements of *walking by the Spirit*.

- Setting your mind on the things of the Spirit.
- Sow to the Spirit (regular participation in the "means of growth")
 - 1.
 - 2.
 - 3.
 - 4.

- Keep in step with the Spirit (Responsiveness to God's personal leading)

Qualifications:

1. Don't participate in the means of growth legalistically.

2. Feed ourselves spiritually.
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3. Consistently participate in *all* of them.

Prayer as a means of growth

Prayer is the privilege of personal communication with God.

Esther 4:11 "All the king's servants and the people of the king's provinces know that for any man or woman who comes to the king to the inner court who is not summoned, he has but one law, that he be put to death, unless the king holds out to him the golden scepter so that he may live. And I have not been summoned to come to the king for these thirty days."

Jer. 30:21 21 'And their leader shall be one of them, And their ruler shall come forth from their midst; And I will bring him near, and he shall approach Me; For who would dare to risk his life to approach Me?' declares the LORD.

Rom. 5:1,2 Therefore having been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, (2) through whom also we have obtained our introduction by faith into this grace.

Heb 10:19 Since therefore, brethren, we have confidence to enter the holy place by the blood of Jesus, by a new and living way which He inaugurated for us through the veil, that is, His flesh, and since we have a great priest over the house of God, let us draw near with a sincere heart in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled clean from an evil conscience and our bodies washed with pure water.

Matt. 6:7 "And when you are praying, do not use meaningless repetition, as the Gentiles do, for they suppose that they will be heard for their many words . . . Pray, then, in this way . . ."

Most Christians struggle with their prayer-lives. When you do, remember a couple of things:

"If you want to humble a man, ask him about his prayer life." (Oswald Sanders. *Spiritual Leadership*).

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Rom. 8:26,27 And in the same way the Spirit also helps our weakness; for we do not know how to pray as we should, but the Spirit Himself intercedes for us with groanings too deep for words; (27) and He who searches the hearts knows what the mind of the Spirit is, because He intercedes for the saints according to the will of God.

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Books: D.A. Carson: "Spiritual Reformation" and "Teach Us to Pray"; O. Hallesby, "Prayer"; Bill Hybels, "Too Busy Not to Pray"; E.M. Bounds, "Power Through Prayer"; Mark Bair, "Mobilized Weakness."

Types of Prayer

The way we pray reveals the way we view God.

NOTE:

1. PRAISE & THANKSGIVING

Praise-

Psalm 147:1 Praise the LORD! For it is good to sing praises to our God; For it is pleasant *and* praise is becoming.

(See also Psalm 100 and Revelation 5:9)

Thanksgiving –

Col. 3:15-17 And let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, to which indeed you were called in one body; and **be thankful**. (16) Let the word of Christ richly dwell within you, with all wisdom teaching and admonishing one

another with psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing with **thankfulness** in your hearts to God. (17) And whatever you do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus, **giving thanks** through Him to God the Father.

Why is this type of prayer so important?

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"I think we delight to praise what we enjoy because the praise not merely expresses but completes the enjoyment; it is its appointed consummation ...the delight is incomplete till it is expressed...the worthier the object the more intense this delight would be."¹

2. PETITION

Phil. 4:6 Be anxious for nothing, but in everything . . . let your requests be made known to God.

Since God already knows what we need before we ask him (Matt. 6:8), why must we ask him?

3. INTERCESSION

Col. 4:12,13 Epaphras, who is one of your number, a bondslave 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. (13) For I bear him witness that he has a deep concern for you and for those who are in Laodicea and Hierapolis.

Why is intercession so important?

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4. CONFESSION

Ps. 51:3, 4 I know my transgressions, and my sin is always before me. (4) Against you, you only, have I sinned and done what is evil in your sight, so that you are proved right when you speak and justified when you judge.

¹ C.S. Lewis. *Reflections on Psalms*. 95-96.

Why is confession so important?

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Heb. 3:7, 8, 13 . . . Today if you hear his voice, (8) do not harden your heart . . . (13) But encourage one another daily, as long as it is called today, so that none of you may be hardened by sin's deceitfulness.

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Qualifications:

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Heb. 10:22 Let us draw near to God with a sincere heart in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled to cleanse us from a guilty conscience and having our bodies washed with pure water.

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Psalm 139:23,24 (23) Search me, O God, and know my heart; test me and know my anxious thoughts. (24) See if there is any offensive way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting.

5. WARFARE

Eph. 6:18 With all prayer and petition pray at all times in the Spirit, and with this in view (previous context is spiritual warfare), be on the alert with all perseverance and petition for all the saints . . .

Key aspects of prayer warfare

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Qualifications:

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Practical Guidelines for Prayer

1. Balance in different *types* of prayer.

2. Balance in different *modes* of prayer.

- Spontaneous , throughout the day

1 Thess. 5:16-18 (16) Rejoice always; (17) pray without ceasing; (18) in everything give thanks; for this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus.

- Planned Private Prayer

Luke 5:15,16 (15) . . . the news about him spread all the more, so that crowds of people came to hear him and to be healed of their sicknesses. (16) But Jesus often withdrew to lonely places and prayed.

Luke 11:1 One day Jesus was praying in a certain place. When he finished, one of his disciples said to him, "Lord, teach us to pray . . . "

"What is meant is that Christians should pray long enough and honestly enough, at a single season, to get past the feeling of formalism and unreality that attends to little praying. We are especially prone to such feelings when we pray only a few minutes, rushing to be done with a mere duty. To enter the spirit of prayer, we must stick to it for a while. If we 'pray until we pray,' eventually we come to delight in God's presence, to rest in his love, to cherish his will."²

- Corporate Prayer

Matt. 18:19* "Again I say to you, that if two of you agree on earth about anything that they may ask, it shall be done for them by my Father who is in heaven.

Reasons For Ungranted Requests

1. **Our request was not according to God's will.**

Matt. 6:10 " . . . your will be done, your kingdom come . . . "

Matt. 26:39b " . . . not my will but yours be done . . . "

"Prayer is not a convenient device for imposing our will on God, or for bending his will to ours, but the prescribed way of subordinating our will to his. It is by prayer that we seek God's will, embrace it, and align ourselves with it. Every true prayer is a variation on the theme 'your will be done.'"³

1 Jn. 5:14,15* This is the confidence we have in approaching God: that if we ask anything according to his will, he hears us. (15) And if we know that he hears us--whatever we ask--we know that we have what we asked of him.

² D. A. Carson, *A Call to Spiritual Reformation*, (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1997), p. 36.

³ John R. W. Stott, *Tyndale New Testament Commentaries: The Epistles of John* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 1983), p. 185.

John 14:13,14 And whatever you ask in My name, that will I do, that the Father may be glorified in the Son. (14) If you ask Me anything in My name, I will do it.

Matt. 7:7-11 Ask, and it shall be given to you; seek, and you shall find; knock, and it shall be opened to you. (8) For everyone who asks receives, and he who seeks finds, and to him who knocks it shall be opened. (9) Or what man is there among you, when his son shall ask him for a loaf, will give him a stone? (10) Or if he shall ask for a fish, he will not give him a snake, will he? (11) If you then, being evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more shall your Father who is in heaven give what is good to those who ask Him!

2 Cor. 12:8, 9 Concerning this I entreated the Lord three times that it might depart from me. (9) And He has said to me, "My grace is sufficient for you, for power is perfected in weakness." Most gladly, therefore, I will rather boast about my weaknesses, that the power of Christ may dwell in me.

Biblical Prayer Priorities:

"Most of us . . . get bogged with down with trivia: Jane's sinus trouble, Ben's discouragement, Mary's problem with her mother-in-law . . . All of these may be important, but prayer, like warfare, calls for strategy. It is said of Napoleon that he would watch the development of his battles from a vantage, quietly analyzing the situation while he watched. His key general would watch with him. 'That farm,' he once said to Marshall Ney, 'that farm that you can see on the ridge there. Take it. Seize. Hold it. For if you can, the battle is won.' In praying for the Ephesians, Paul was aware that if the key to the whole battle was won, lesser skirmishes would sort themselves out rather easily. Smaller problems are so often symptomatic of larger issues . . . Prayer must be directed to that which is the key. It concerns itself with strategy, not with tactics . . . If therefore one thinks that Paul's prayer is spiritual and not practical, it is a sign of how blind he is to what life is all about . . ."⁴

- More practical insight into scripture so that you can apply it to your life .

Col. 1:9,10 For this reason also, since the day we heard *of it*, we have not ceased to pray for you and to ask that you may be filled with the knowledge of His will in all spiritual wisdom and understanding,¹⁰ so that you may walk in a manner worthy of the Lord, to please *Him* in all respects, bearing fruit in every good work and increasing in the knowledge of God

- Better understanding of what God has given you in Christ (Eph. 1:16-19) and how much God loves you (Eph. 3:18,19).
- Greater love for other people (1 Thess. 3:12) and better discernment on how to love them effectively (Phil. 1:9).
- Opportunities to witness and the courage and wisdom to make the most of those opportunities (Col. 4:2-4*; Eph. 6:19,20).
- Spiritual empowering and protection for ministry (2 Thess. 2:16-3:3).
- Exposure of attitudes that are counterproductive to your spiritual growth (Phil. 3:15; Ps. 139:23,24).
- Wisdom to understand what God wants to teach you through adverse circumstances that are in your life (Jas. 1:5).
- That God may raise up more workers (Matt. 9:36-38)

⁴ John White, *Daring To Draw Near* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1977), p. 137.

2. Our request was answered, but not according to our expectations.

2 Cor. 12:7-9 (7) . . . to keep me from becoming conceited because of these surpassingly great revelations, there was given me a thorn in my flesh, a messenger of Satan, to torment me. (8) Three times I pleaded with the Lord to take it away from me. (9) But he said to me, "My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness." Therefore I will boast all the more gladly about my weaknesses, so that Christ's power may rest on me.

3. God's timing for answering our request is different than ours.

This is one reason why we need to be persistent in prayer (see Lk. 11:5-13; 18:1-8). The point is not that God is like the judge or neighbor. Rather he is unlike them in key ways.

Judge	God
Unrighteous & unjust	righteous & just
no concern for the widow	concerned (Lk. 12:7)
grants grudgingly	delights to answer (Jas. 1:5)
Puts off until worn down	grants as soon as appropriate ("speedily")

Why does God sometimes delay answers?

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4. We have a legitimate request--but asked with wrong motives.

James 4:3 You ask and do not receive, because you ask with wrong motives, so that you may spend it on your pleasures.

Examples:

Qualifications:

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5. You have a legitimate request--but you have a controversy with God.

James 1:6-8 But let him ask in faith without any doubting, for the one who doubts is like the surf of the sea driven and tossed by the wind. (7) For let not that man expect that he will receive anything from the Lord, (8) being a double-minded man, unstable in all his ways.

Ps. 66:18 If I regard wickedness in my heart, The Lord will not hear;

1 Pet. 3:7 You husbands likewise, live with your wives in an understanding way, as with a weaker vessel, since she is a woman; and grant her honor as a fellow heir of the grace of life, so that your prayers may not be hindered.

Example:

6. God will not normally violate a person's free will to grant your request.

Examples:

Conclusion

We are not saying that we can *always* determine why God has not granted our requests. God will not always reveal (in this life) the specific reasons for this. He chose to explain to Paul why he wouldn't heal him (2 Cor. 12), but he evidently didn't explain to Job why he lost everything. We should evaluate the possible reasons on our part, do our best to eliminate those reasons or amend our prayers--and then trust him with it and go on.

Prayer as it relates to the other means of growth

<p style="text-align: center;">Fellowship</p>	<p>Jesus gave corporate prayer a special place when he said, “If two of you agree on earth about anything that they may ask, it shall be done for them by My Father who is in heaven” (Matthew 18:19). Based on this promise, we may fairly conclude that corporate prayer is more powerful than individual prayer, if only because when two or more agree, they have a better chance of truly discerning the will of God. The prayer ministry of the church is one of its most important.</p>
<p style="text-align: center;">Ministry</p>	<p>A ministry weak in prayer will tend to be overly strong on human effort. What we cannot accomplish via the power of God, we will try to supply through our own power. As we lose faith in the effectiveness of prayer, we may succumb to the temptation to use force and compulsion on people in an effort to bend them to our will.</p>
<p style="text-align: center;">Word</p>	<p>We need to pray that God will take scriptural truth and apply it to our lives in a living way. If we have learned the scriptures in good measure, God will find it easier to bring us understanding about what he is doing in our daily lives.</p>
<p style="text-align: center;">Suffering</p>	<p>Cultivating the vertical perspective through abiding in Christ is a prerequisite for making the Lord’s discipline effective in our lives. As we shall see later, those who will not take their trials to God in prayer--not just asking that the trial go away, but that they understand what he is teaching--will not benefit from the suffering they undergo.</p>

Memory Verses

1 Jn. 5:14,15* We can be certain God will answer our requests when they are according to his will.

Col. 4:2-4* We should be consistent, alert, and thankful in prayer. We should pray for opportunities to share the gospel with non-Christians.

Matt. 18:19* Corporate prayer may be more effective than individual prayer.

Assignment

Read *Loving God’s Way*, chapters 1-3 and answer the questions at the end of each chapter.