

BILLY GRAHAM SERMON SERIES

PRAYER



**BILLY
GRAHAM**
Evangelistic Association
Always Good News.

**GOD HIMSELF IS THE POWER
THAT MAKES PRAYER WORK.
FIND OUT HOW YOU CAN PRAY
MORE EFFECTIVELY AND RECEIVE
THE ANSWERS TO PRAYER THAT
ONLY GOD CAN GIVE.**

- Avoid short-circuiting your prayers
- Pray in step with God
- Approach the throne of God

BY BILLY GRAHAM

The men upon whose shoulders rested the initial responsibility of Christianizing the world came to Jesus with one supreme request. They did not say, “Lord, teach us to preach”; “Lord, teach us to do miracles”; or “Lord, teach us to be wise” ... but they said, “Lord, teach us to pray.”

No one has given more encouragement to praying than did Jesus. The followers of Christ were both encouraged to pray and taught how to pray. They saw constantly the example He set in praying, and they

noted the direct relationship between Jesus' unusual ministry and His devout life of prayer.

Jesus considered prayer more important than food, for the Bible says that hours before breakfast, *"In the morning, having risen a long while before daylight, He went out and departed to a solitary place; and there He prayed"* (Mark 1:35, NKJV).

To the Son of God, prayer was more important than the assembling of great throngs. The Bible says, *"Great multitudes came together to hear, and to be healed by Him of their infirmities. So He Himself often withdrew into the wilderness and prayed"* (Luke 5:15–16, NKJV).

The precious hours of fellowship with His Heavenly Father meant more to our Savior than sleep, for the Bible says, *"Now it came to pass in those days that He went out to the mountain to pray, and continued all night in prayer to God"* (Luke 6:12, NKJV).

He prayed at funerals, and the dead were raised. He prayed over the five loaves and two fishes, and a multitude were fed with a little boy's lunch. He prayed, *"Not My will, but Yours"* (Luke 22:42, NKJV), and a way was made whereby sinful men and women might approach a holy God.

It pleased God to relate His work in the world to the prayers of His people. Noah prayed, and God handed him a blueprint of the ark of deliverance. Moses prayed, and God delivered the Israelites from Egyptian bondage. Gideon prayed, and the host of a formidable enemy fled in fear before his valiant, prayerful 300. Daniel prayed, and the mouths of the lions were closed. Elijah prayed, and the fire of God consumed the sacrifice and licked up the water around the altar. David prayed, and he defeated Goliath on the Philistine battleground.

The disciples prayed, and they were filled with the Holy Spirit so that 3,000 were added to the church in one day. Paul prayed, and hundreds of churches were born in Asia Minor and Europe. God does answer prayer.

AVOID SHORT-CIRCUITING

Some prayers are answered with a “yes” and some with a “no.” But what about unanswered prayer?

Perhaps your prayers have been mingled with doubts. Perhaps you have prayed selfishly. Perhaps you have asked God for things which were not best for you.

“I prayed earnestly and nothing happened,” many will say in a tone of dismay. “I asked for guidance, and I’m in serious trouble” ...

“I asked God for a companion, and I have found no one” ... “I asked God for a good home, and look at the misery and confusion in our house.”

The Bible says that there are specific reasons why prayers are not answered.

Some prayers are answered with a “yes” and some with a “no.”

It may be that your prayers are not answered because of disobedience. A disobedient son cannot expect to “have his cake and eat it too,” as we say. The Bible says, *“If you do not obey the voice of the Lord your God, to observe carefully all His commandments and His statutes which I command you today, that all these curses will come upon you and overtake you”* (Deuteronomy 28:15, NKJV).

Perhaps your prayers are not answered because of secret sin. David said (and he should know), *“If I had cherished sin in my heart, the Lord would not have listened”* (Psalm 66:18). Sin short-circuits the communication system between Earth and Heaven, and your praying with an evil heart will not even reach God.

Another reason for prayers not being answered is selfishness or willfulness. The Bible says, *“When you ask, you do not receive, because you ask with wrong motives, that you*

may spend what you get on your pleasures” (James 4:3). Prayer serves a dual purpose: the blessing of man and the glory of God. If a prayer is prayed willfully for our own benefit but not for God’s glory, it’s not worthy of being answered. “*Not my will, but Yours, be done*” (Luke 22:42, NKJV) is the spirit of effectual prayer.

Prayer, in the true sense, is not a futile cry of desperation born of fear or frustration.

Real prayer is not a vain repetition of words uttered in public for religious display. Jesus said, “*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 have received their reward in full*” (Matthew 6:5).

Prayer, in the true sense, is not a futile cry of desperation born of fear or frustration. Thousands of people pray only when they are under great stress or in danger, overcome by uncertainty. I have been in airplanes when an engine died; then people started praying. We have flown through bad thunderstorms when people who may never have thought to pray before were praying all around us. I have talked to soldiers who told me that they never prayed until they were in the midst of battle.

There seems to be an instinct in people to pray in times of trouble.

We know “there are no atheists in foxholes,” but the kind of Christianity that fails to reach into our everyday lives will never change the world.

Prayer is not limited to conventional religious postures; nor is it restricted to houses of worship or religious ceremony. The Bible says, “*I want the men everywhere to pray, lifting up holy hands without anger or disputing*” (1 Timothy 2:8).

When you pray, your physical posture is not so important as the attitude of your heart. Many people put a great deal of emphasis on the position of the body during prayer. Some groups or sects insist that you kneel every time you pray or that you fold your hands in a certain way. All of this is relatively unimportant, though kneeling is an act of humility when sincerely done.

PRAY IN STEP WITH GOD

Praying is simply a two-way conversation between you and God. The reason many of the great saints have closed their eyes while praying is to shut out the affairs of the world so that their minds could be completely concentrated on their conversations with God. However, nowhere in Scripture does it say that

even the closing of the eyes is important, though it certainly lends itself to the attitude of prayer.

The next question many ask is, “Who is told to pray?” Scripture gives the answer: “All men.”

Again, many ask: “Where are we commanded to pray?” Paul gives us the answer when he says, “Everywhere.”

Some may also ask, “When are we told to pray?” The Scripture says, “Always.” It is a command, a duty, and a privilege.

In this modern age in which we live, we have learned to harness the power of the mighty Niagara and turn its force to our use and our good. We have learned to hold steam captive in boilers and release its tremendous power to turn our machines. We have learned how to contain gasoline vapors in a cylinder and explode them at the appointed second to move our automobiles and trucks quickly along our highways. We have even discovered the secret of releasing energy in the atom, which is capable of destroying entire cities and civilizations.

But very few of us have learned how to fully develop the power of prayer. We have not yet learned that men and women are more powerful when they are in prayer than when

they are behind the most powerful guns we have ever developed. We have not learned that a nation is more powerful when it unites in earnest prayer than when its resources are channeled into defensive weapons. We have not discovered that the answers to all our problems can be had through contact with Almighty God.

Scores of missionaries, in all parts of the world, have told me, “Please get the people back home to pray for us. We would rather have their prayers than anything else.” If the Christians back home realized how much their prayers meant to these valiant heroes of the faith, they would not cease to pray day and night for their representatives out there in foreign mission fields.

Christian workers here at home also need your prayers. I know from personal experience. We are only able to move forward in our evangelistic work—the Crusades, films, television, radio, and internet—by your prayers. If it were not for the prayers of thousands of God’s people throughout the world, our ministry would completely fail.

Men and women are more powerful when they are in prayer than when they are behind the most powerful guns we have ever developed.

APPROACH THE THRONE OF GOD

Now let us look at prayer objectively. What does the Bible say about effectual praying?

First: Prayer is for God's children.

Jesus said, "When you pray, say: Our Father ... " (cf. Matthew 6:9).

God has a particular responsibility to His children, and unless we have been born into the family of God through the new birth, we have no right to ask favors of God. The Bible says, "*As many as received Him, to them He gave the right to become children of God, to those who believe in His name*" (John 1:12, NKJV).

I have had new Christians say to me, "I don't know how to pray. I don't have the right words."

Prayer is more than a wish turned Heavenward ... it is the voice of faith directed Godward.

When our children were just learning to talk and had difficulty finding the right words, they still managed to make themselves understood to my wife and me, and the mistakes they made

only endeared them to us. In fact, I am sure I treasure their early attempts at conversation more than the words of most adults speaking without hesitation and without error.

Oh, my anxious friend whose prayers have not been answered, God invites you to the intimacy of spiritual sonship, *“that you may become blameless and pure, ‘children of God without fault in a warped and crooked generation.’ Then you will shine among them like stars in the sky”* (Philippians 2:15).

Second: Effectual prayer is offered in faith.

The Bible says, *“I tell you, whatever you ask for in prayer, believe that you have received it, and it will be yours”* (Mark 11:24).

Maltbie Babcock said, “Our prayers are to mean something to us if they are to mean anything to God.” It goes without saying that if our prayers are aimless, meaningless, and mingled with doubt, they will go unanswered. Prayer is more than a wish turned Heavenward ... it is the voice of faith directed Godward.

God invites you to the intimacy of spiritual sonship.

Third: Dynamic prayer emanates from an obedient heart.

The Bible says, *“Whatever we ask we receive from Him, because we keep His commandments and do those things that are pleasing in His sight”* (1 John 3:22, NKJV).

I know a wealthy father who refused to get his son a bicycle because the boy's report card showed disgracefully low marks, a yard remained unraked, and other assignments had not been carried out. I am sure the

Prayer couples you with God's true purposes for you and the world.

father would not have been wise to lavish gifts upon such a disobedient and ungrateful son.

The Bible says, "*If you do not obey the voice of the Lord, but rebel against the commandment of the Lord,*

then the hand of the Lord will be against you" (1 Samuel 12:15, NKJV).

If you want to get your prayers through to God, surrender your stubborn will to Him, and He will hear your cry. Obedience is the master key to effectual prayer.

Fourth: We are to pray in Christ's Name.

Jesus said, "*Whatever you ask in My name, that I will do, that the Father may be glorified in the Son*" (John 14:13, NKJV).

We are not worthy to approach the holy throne of God except through our Advocate, Jesus Christ.

The Bible says, "*Seeing then that we have a great High Priest who has passed through the heavens, Jesus the Son of God, ... let us*

therefore come boldly to the throne of grace”
(Hebrews 4:14, 16, NKJV).

God, for Christ’s sake, forgives our sins. God, for Christ’s sake, supplies our needs. God, for Christ’s sake, receives our prayers. The person who comes with confidence to the throne of grace has seen that his approach to God has been made possible because of Jesus Christ.

Many may ask, “Is there no other way to pray except through Jesus Christ?” You may pray, but according to the Bible, “*There is ... one mediator between God and mankind, the man Christ Jesus*” (1 Timothy 2:5).

Fifth: We must desire the will of God.

Even our Lord, contrary to His own disposition at the moment, said, “*O My Father, if this cup cannot pass away from Me unless I drink it, Your will be done*” (Matthew 26:42, NKJV).

Prayer couples you with God’s true purposes for you and the world. It not only brings the blessings of God’s will to your own personal life, but it brings you the added blessing of being in step with God’s plan.

And last: Our prayer must be for God’s glory.

The model prayer which Jesus has given us concludes with, “*Yours is the kingdom*

and the power and the glory forever”
(Matthew 6:13, NKJV). If we are to have our prayers answered, we must give God the glory.

Our Lord said to His disciples, *“Whatever you ask in My name, that I will do, that the Father may be glorified in the Son”*
(John 14:13, NKJV).

What a privilege is ours—the privilege of prayer! Christian, examine your heart, reconsecrate your life, yield yourself to God unreservedly, for only those who pray through a clean heart will be heard by Him. The Bible says, *“The prayer of a righteous person is powerful and effective”* (James 5:16).

We are to pray in times of adversity, lest we become faithless and unbelieving. We are to pray in times of prosperity, lest we become boastful and proud.

We are to pray in times of danger, lest we become fearful and doubting. We need to pray in times of security, lest we become self-sufficient. Sinners, pray to a merciful God for forgiveness! Christians, pray for an outpouring of God’s Spirit upon a willful, evil, unrepentant world. Parents, pray that God may crown your home with grace and mercy! Children, pray for the salvation of your parents!

Christians, saints of God, pray that the dew of Heaven may fall on Earth's dry, thirsty ground and that righteousness may cover the Earth as the waters cover the sea. Pray, believing, with this promise of our Savior in mind: *"Whatever you ask for in prayer, believe that you have received it, and it will be yours"* (Mark 11:24).

"Satan trembles when he sees the weakest saint upon his knees"—so pray, Christian, pray!

**[Jesus] prayed at funerals,
and the dead were raised.
He prayed over the five
loaves and two fishes,
and a multitude were fed
with a little boy's lunch.
He prayed, "Not My will,
but Yours," and a way
was made whereby sinful
men and women might
approach a holy God.**

MOVING FORWARD

The world has no power greater than prayer. Here are some practical steps to encourage you in praying.

1. Desire the Will of God

Jesus taught us to pray, “Your will be done.” The key is not the words but your attitude. Seek God’s will and God’s best for whatever you are praying about. He may respond in unexpected ways that please Him and will delight you.

“Your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven.”

—Matthew 6:10, ESV

2. Search Your Heart

God may not respond when you allow sin to remain in your life. If so, don’t stop praying. Rather, confess your sins or wrong motives to God. He already knows your heart. God has promised always to respond to that prayer (see 1 John 1:9).

“If I had cherished iniquity in my heart, the Lord would not have listened.”

—Psalm 66:18, ESV

3. Pray in Faith

Express your requests freely to God in childlike faith. As a child who trusts a wise and loving parent, ask in complete faith that He is able to do whatever you ask and that He will know what is best.

“The prayer of a righteous person has great power as it is working. Elijah was a man with a nature like ours, and he prayed

fervently that it might not rain, and for three years and six months it did not rain on the earth. Then he prayed again, and heaven gave rain, and the earth bore its fruit.”

—James 5:16-18, ESV

4. Pray Every Day

God wants to hear from you regularly. He wants a relationship. Take time to talk to God daily and throughout the day, not just when you face a crisis and not only with a list of wants and needs.

“Pray without ceasing.”

—1 Thessalonians 5:17, ESV

5. Pray for God’s Glory

Pray for things to happen in such a way as to provide God with the credit and to give God the glory. He is powerful, magnificent, and majestic. And He is still our closest, most intimate Friend. Praise Him and ask for things that matter to Him.

“To the only wise God be glory forevermore through Jesus Christ! Amen.”

—Romans 16:27, ESV

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STEPS TO PEACE WITH GOD

Step 1: God's Purpose—Peace & Life

God loves you and wants you to experience peace and life—abundant and eternal. The Bible says, *“For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life”* (John 3:16, NKJV).

Step 2: The Problem—Sin Separates Us

People choose to disobey God and go their own way. This results in separation from God. The Bible says, *“For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God”* (Romans 3:23, NKJV).

Step 3: God's Remedy—The Cross

God sent His Son to bridge the gap. Christ did this by paying the penalty of our sins when He died on the cross and rose from the grave. The Bible says, *“But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us”* (Romans 5:8, NKJV).

Step 4: Our Response—Receive Christ

You cross the bridge into God's family when you ask Christ to come into your life. The Bible says, *“But as many as received Him, to them He gave the right to become children of God”* (John 1:12, NKJV).

The invitation is to: REPENT (turn from your sins), ASK for God's forgiveness, and by faith RECEIVE Jesus Christ into your heart and life and follow Him in obedience as your Lord and Savior.

Prayer Commitment: “Dear God, I know that I am a sinner. I want to turn from my sins, and I ask for Your forgiveness. I believe that Jesus Christ is Your Son. I believe He died for my sins and that You raised Him to life. I want Him to come into my heart and to take control of my life. I want to trust Jesus as my Savior and follow Him as my Lord from this day forward. In Jesus' Name, amen.”

If you have any questions, please visit PeaceWithGod.net or call the Billy Graham 24/7 Prayer Line at 855-255-7729.

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