

LIFE-CHANGING PRAYER

THE THRONE OF GRACE

If you could go anywhere in the world, where would you go?
Discover the perfect destination in this lesson!

For the next three months our Bible studies will focus on life-changing prayer. Prayer is simply conversation with God. Prayer is a great adventure and it is essential to our growth as followers of Jesus to make prayer a priority in our lives. **1 Thessalonians 5:17 (ESV)** ¹⁷ *pray without ceasing*. Praying regularly trains us to stop focusing on the distractions of this world and focus instead on Jesus and His promises.

Reading the history of the early church beginning in Acts reveals that wherever God has praying people, there are open doors. Churches today depend on so many other resources while neglecting the God-given resource of prayer. Prayer changes things, prayer changes people, prayer changes churches. Things really happen when churches pray!

One of my first memories of intense prayer was from my childhood. An old man named Brother Johnson would come to visit my parents to talk about spiritual things. He walked with a cane and he always prayed before he left. He prayed sitting, leaning on that cane. I don't remember all the words he prayed – but I do remember one phrase he always used as his body jerked while supporting himself with the cane – THANK YOU, JESUS! THANK YOU, JESUS! Those words were so powerful that I can still hear them decades later. Those words of praise to God thrilled my heart as a little girl. The lasting memory of Brother Johnson's prayers in my mind reminds me of a passage in **Revelation 8:4 (ESV)** ⁴ *and the smoke of the incense, with the prayers of the saints, rose before God from the hand of the angel*. As I think of how I loved those 'thank you, Jesus' prayers, I am reminded of how our Lord loves our prayers even more.

As wonderful and awesome as the prayers of the past may be, those prayers are just that – prayers of the past. Each of us should be praying new prayers, seeking new answers, having new conversations with the Living God. When I was growing up, my parents did not argue; however, Daddy would say that Mother was very good at giving him what he called 'the stony silence.' I am afraid that there are times when we treat Jesus with our stony silence for a variety of reasons. Maybe we are mad at Him but possibly we are just careless – caught up in our affairs forgetting to visit with Him on a daily basis.

Jim Cymbala in his Life-Changing Prayer study reminds us that the most wonderful place to visit outside of heaven is the throne room of grace. So, exactly what is the throne room of grace? It is in heaven and it is the place where Jesus is enthroned!

Hebrews 4:14-16 (ESV) ¹⁴ *Since then we have a great high priest who has passed through the heavens, Jesus, the Son of God, let us hold fast our confession.* ¹⁵ *For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but one who in every respect has been tempted as we are, yet without sin.* ¹⁶ *Let us then with confidence draw near to the throne of grace, that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need.*

There are those who feel they must confess their sins to a priest. During Old Testament times, the mercy seat on the ark of the covenant symbolized God's throne in Israel. The high priest was only allowed beyond the curtain partitioning off the Holy of Holies on the Day of Atonement (**Lev. 16**). The other priests were only allowed to go as far as the drawn curtain and everyone else was forbidden even to enter the holy area of the tabernacle and the temple. What a difference grace makes! Grace is undeserved acceptance and love received from another, especially the grace of God which provides salvation for sinners who do not deserve it. Jesus' sacrificial death on the cross opened that curtain that separated God from us. Unlike in Old Testament times when access to the 'throne room' was limited, our High Priest, Jesus, sits enthroned in heaven waiting for us *to come boldly to the throne of grace!*

This passage of scripture makes it clear that Jesus is the only High Priest we need. Jesus resisted Satan in the power of the Holy Spirit through prayer, meditation, scripture, and complete dedication to God's will. Jesus set the pattern for His children to follow.

On different occasions, people have said to me they believe the Lord hears my prayers. I know that God hears the prayers of all His children. He does not judge our prayers on vocabulary or diction. He is a discernor of the heart. One thing I have learned is to claim the promise of coming boldly to His throne of grace and He will provide help in time of need. He gives me confidence and that confidence is for His children. **1 John 5:14-15 (ESV)** ¹⁴ *And this is the confidence that we have toward him, that if we ask anything according to his will he hears us.* ¹⁵ *And if we know that he hears us in whatever we ask, we know that we have the requests that we have asked of him.* Learn to come boldly to the throne of grace. Practice seeking Jesus' help daily. This will strengthen your faith's confidence to pray for yourself – to pray for others – to pray for your church.

In a sermon on the throne room of grace, Charles Spurgeon explained, "True prayer is an approach of the soul by the Spirit of God to the throne of God... True prayer is not a mere mental exercise, nor a vocal performance, but it is deeper far than that—it is a spiritual exchange with the Creator of heaven and earth."

From the beginning it has been God's desire to communicate with those who He created in His own image. Things got rough after Adam and Eve were removed from the Garden. Their son Cain killed their son Abel. **Genesis 4:16** tells us that Cain went out from the presence of the

LORD and his descendents though skillful and talented did not magnify their Creator. Adam and Eve had another son, Seth, and at this point in man's history we read something significant.

Genesis 4:25-26 (ESV) ²⁵ *And 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."* ²⁶ *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.*

The Hebrew word translated *call upon* carries the meaning of praying in God's name and also proclaiming His name in worship. The sentence can also be translated "men began to call themselves by the name of the Lord." After the split in the 'first family', the believing remnant met to praise God and pray to Him for help; and in time, they identified themselves as those who bore His name. Throughout man's history, it has been the godly remnant that has kept the work of the LORD going in this world. The Old Testament reveals how time after time, the nation of Israel – the very nation called to bring the Light of the world to the people drifted into idolatry, but a believing remnant was always raised up to keep the light burning. These courageous people cried out to God for deliverance, and He heard them and answered their prayers. We today are living in a world of spiritual idolatry. Let's be a part of the remnant who keep the Light of Christ burning by crying out to God – crying out that souls will be saved before the great and terrible day of the Lord – souls we know and souls we don't know!

Crying out to God is prayer! During the trials of life, God's children cry out to Him and that is what He wants us to do! David, known for being a man after God's own heart cried out to God in His time of need.

Prayer is a Link Between Heaven and Earth!

Psalm 57:1-5 (ESV) ¹ *Be merciful to me, O God, be merciful to me, for in you my soul takes refuge; in the shadow of your wings I will take refuge, till the storms of destruction pass by.* ² *I cry out to God Most High, to God who fulfills his purpose for me...* ⁵ *Be exalted, O God, above the heavens! Let your glory be over all the earth!*

This psalm was written by David concerning the time in his life when he was being pursued by King Saul and hid in a cave. He began with a cry for mercy just like we are instructed to do in **Hebrews 4:16**. David depended on the grace of God to see him through his trials. Wiersbe comments that, "His worship and prayer turned the cave into a Holy of Holies." David realized that he was hiding in the shadow of the wings of Living God. **Psalm 61:4 (ESV)** ⁴ *Let me dwell in your tent forever! Let me take refuge under the shelter of your wings! Selah*

Notice that even in David's terrible distress he still exalted God. *Be exalted, O God, above the heavens! Let your glory be over all the earth!*

There are many situations in life where we do not know what to pray. Sometimes the most heartfelt prayer we can pray are three words, “Lord, help me.” But they are enough.

Romans 8:26 (ESV) ²⁶ *Likewise the Spirit helps us in our weakness. For we do not know what to pray for as we ought, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us with groanings too deep for words.*

Jesus knows all about our troubles because He personally experienced the same pain and sorrows of living in a sin-filled world that we experience and He experienced even more. When Jesus arrived at Mary and Martha’s house after the death of Lazarus we read in **John 11:33 (ESV)** ³³ *When Jesus saw her weeping, and the Jews who had come with her also weeping, he was deeply moved in his spirit and greatly troubled.* Jesus shares in our sorrows.

We can be comforted in our trials and suffering because we are assured that our Savior is at work in this world. **Romans 8:28 (ESV)** ²⁸ *And we know that for those who love God all things work together for good, for those who are called according to his purpose.* Remember the words of Spurgeon, “True prayer is an approach of the soul by the Spirit of God to the throne of God.” It is mind-blowing that we can approach the Infinite God, our Creator, our Savior and He listens and He answers our prayers.

One of the chief secrets to any successful ministry is a praying church. Spurgeon was asked ‘what is the secret to the success of his ministry in this church?’ After the meeting he took that inquirer down under the main body of the church to a hall underneath, and there were hundreds of people praying while Spurgeon was preaching the Gospel! Is there any wonder that people were being converted!

Colossians 4:2 (ESV) ² *Continue steadfastly in prayer, being watchful in it with thanksgiving.*