



NAC-USA  
DEVELOPMENT  
INSTITUTE

What is  
Prayer?

Individual  
Prayer

Corporate  
Prayer

**MIDWEEK  
SCRIPT**

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**2019**

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July

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## Session 1 – What is Prayer?

Welcome to our midweek experience for the month of July. This month, we will discuss what it means to be a praying church. Today, we will explore what prayer is and its purpose.

Prayer is a cornerstone of our relationship with God. It should be a dialogue between us and Him. In order to understand prayer, let us begin with the creation. God gave Adam and Eve characteristics that were not shared with any other creature in the natural creation. One of these such characteristics is the ability to speak, which made it possible for Adam and Eve to communicate with God. Thus, God created a way in which His relationship with humankind could develop and deepen. After the fall into sin, face-to-face communication was no longer possible, but God's desire to have a relationship with humankind did not change. Prayer is a wonderful mechanism for our communication with God, and thereby, for building our relationship with Him.

In the Catechism we read, "In prayer, the believer experiences: God is present, God hears, and God answers" (CNAC 13.1). Prayer should be an experience with God! All too often, people act as if prayer is nothing more than an opportunity to tell things to God – a one-way street where they explain what's happening in their lives and ask Him for things. Surely, God in His omnipresence and omniscience hears every prayer. But for prayer to accomplish its purpose, we must understand that it should be a two-way street. God wishes to make His presence known, make it evident that He hears, and provide answers.

If we are to experience God when we pray, it can be very helpful to consider the well-known structure for prayer, which has its roots in the Old Testament. Psalm 95 teaches, *Oh come, let us worship* (Psalm 95:6). Psalm 106 gives the instruction, *Oh, give thanks to the lord, for He is good! For His mercy endures forever* (Psalm 106:1). In Numbers 21, we read how Moses interceded for the people (Numbers 21:7). And in Psalm 51, David gives us an example of how and what to request from God (Psalm 51:10-12).

- We begin with worship. When we take the time to discuss with God who He is – almighty, all-knowing, ever-present – our perspective changes. The One to whom we pray can do anything. He knows us and knows every detail of our lives, thoughts, and feelings; He is always at our side.
- Next, we bring thanks. We recount to God what He has already done for us. We acknowledge that His greatness has had an impact on our lives, over and over again. Through thanksgiving, we recognize that our relationship with God is truly a personal one.
- Before bringing our own petitions to God, we practice intercession in order to fulfill Jesus' teaching to love others as He has loved us (John 13:34). That is to say that we put the needs of others before our own. This broadens our horizon and causes us to recognize that we are not the only person with needs.
- Finally, we bring our personal petitions before the Lord. Having taken the first three steps in the process, our perspective should be greatly changed. We recognize that God can help, and He has helped us.

Remembering that prayer should serve to build our relationship with God, it is important to consider our expectations when we pray. Do we treat our prayers like a vending machine, expecting that He will respond by giving us exactly what we have asked for? And that He should provide it immediately? Or worse, do we just go through the motions when we pray, for instance, before a meal?

The Chief Apostle provided a wonderful teaching about prayer in a divine service where he used the verses from John 12:27-28: *Now My soul is troubled, and what shall I say? "Father, save Me from this hour"? But for this purpose I came to this hour. Father, glorify Your name. Then a voice came from heaven, saying, "I have both glorified it and will glorify it again."* When we read these verses, please notice that Jesus is taking time to carefully consider what the content of His prayer should be. He expresses His feelings. Knowing that His death is imminent, He says, *"My soul is troubled."* But then He takes time to think, asking Himself the question, "What should I say to the Father?" He gives the Holy Spirit the opportunity to work within Him.

Take time to ponder what the content of your prayer should be. We can pray with the guidance of the Holy Spirit as mentioned in Jude 20-21: *But you, beloved, building yourselves up on your most holy faith, praying in the Holy Spirit, keep yourselves in the love of God, looking for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ unto eternal life.*

Jesus listened to the Spirit, who reminded Him of His purpose. Because the Lord Jesus was seeking to align His will and desires with those of the Father, the “answer” to His prayer seems to have nothing to do with His original concern. Jesus experienced the Father in that the Father revealed something much greater to Him. The Spirit also wishes to remind us that we have a purpose, to show others that Jesus is alive and that He is among us. This leads to the understanding that the plan of salvation is much more important than our momentary circumstances. Our prayer changes, as did that of the Lord Jesus, and we say, “Father, glorify Your name!”

Finally, let us consider the realities of life. There are occasions when we truly don’t have the time or capacity to bring a formalized prayer to God, but any sincere expression to God is a prayer. On the cross, the Lord Jesus cried, “*My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me?*” (Matthew 27:46). This was an effective prayer because Jesus had spent His life praying. He had a strong relationship with His Father. When we consistently take the time to build our relationship with our Father in regular prayer, we can be assured that He will hear and respond to any heartfelt expression.

When we integrate worship, thanks, intercession, and petition into our prayers, we create a space for the Holy Spirit to change our perspective and reveal God’s message. In this way, prayer becomes a true two-way communication with God and deepens our relationship with Him.

## **Session 2 – Individual Prayer**

Hello, and welcome to our second session for July. Today, we’ll take an in-depth look at individual prayer. Why is it important that we should spend time alone in prayer? How should we approach God in prayer, and when is it appropriate to pray? What should our personal prayers consist of?

Let’s look first at why we should spend time alone in prayer. With the busyness of life that so easily consumes our time and focus, this is an important question. The more we understand why we should pray, the more likely it is that we’ll feel compelled to spend significant time in communication with God.

Matthew 6:6 provides us with a powerful answer: *When you pray, go into your room, and when you have shut your door, pray to your Father who is in the secret place; and your Father who sees in secret will reward you openly.*

Why should we spend time alone in prayer? Christ makes it clear that solitude and prayer belong together if we desire to build our relationship with God. Christ also showed the importance of individual prayer. On many occasions, He withdrew Himself to quiet places so that He could spend time alone with His Father. Although He was both true God and true Man, this communication was of utmost importance to Him. If this spiritual discipline was important to Christ, it should also be important to us. Christ’s prayers sustained Him through the challenges of His life on earth and enabled Him to fulfill His calling.

Paul also stressed the necessity of prayer on several occasions. In Romans 12:12, he tells the people that they should be *rejoicing in hope, patient in tribulation, continuing steadfastly in prayer.* And in Philippians 4:6, he says, *Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known to God.* The Bible continuously reminds us of the value of prayer.

When we pray, we show our devotion to God. When we choose to spend the precious resource of time with Him, we show Him how much we love Him and how much He means to us. Our prayer life testifies of our priorities.

Let’s talk now about how and when we should pray. How should we approach God in prayer? In James 4:10, it says that we are to *humble ourselves before the Lord.* When we pray to God, we should do so with reverence and humility. We recognize the value of our Lord, who He is, all that He’s done, and the riches we so freely

receive from Him. We also recognize that our ability to connect with God is a gift from Him. This is a very humbling thought.

It's worth noting that, as our Catechism states, prayer is not bound to any external, physical form (CNAC 13.1.5). While the intensity and fervency of our prayers can be increased by closing our eyes, folding our hands, and kneeling, these components are not necessary for every prayer. Often, words don't even need to be spoken aloud – silent prayers also find their way to God. Prayer can be much less complicated than we often times make it.

When should we pray? In one of our hymns, we sing, "E'er you left your room this morning, did you think to pray?" (Did you think to pray?). Certainly we can, and should, pray at the beginning and end of each day. After all, each day is a gift from our heavenly Father. We should also feel compelled to pray every time we sit down to eat, as food is also a gift from Him. Our prayers, however, should not be confined to specific moments of the day. David once said of the Lord, *His praise shall continually be on my lips* (Psalm 34:1). What a noble and worthwhile goal, that the praise of God be continually on our lips, whether in prayer or conversation. At the beginning of the parable of the persistent widow, Christ says that, "*men always ought to pray and not lose heart*" (Luke 18:1). The lesson of this parable is that we are to be persistent in our coming to God. Over and over in the Bible, we're reminded that prayer should be something we do regularly and intensely. Paul admonishes the Thessalonians to *pray without ceasing* (1 Thessalonians 5:17). We could even understand prayer to be an ongoing conversation with God throughout the whole day.

Lastly, what should our prayers consist of? There are many answers to this question, but we'll focus on two here: profession and confession. What is it that we are to profess in our prayers? We profess our awareness of God's glory and divine nature. We profess our love for Him, and our reliance on the power of His love. We profess our thanksgiving for all that He has done. We profess our trust in Him, knowing that He works for our good. We profess our hope for the future He's preparing, and our desire to be a part of it. We profess our belief in Him, that He is who He says He is, and that He'll do what He says He'll do. Our prayers should be filled with profession.

Individual prayers should also contain confession. When we come to the Lord in prayer, the Holy Spirit makes us aware of our sin and shortcomings, and urges us toward confession. God delights in seeing our awareness and confession, and that this turns to repentance. Our prayers should attest to the fact that we desire to turn away from sin, and resolve not to return to it. This opens the way to forgiveness and to a closer relationship with Him.

Let's increasingly show that we understand the value of individual prayer and of time spent alone with God, just as our Savior did.

Please join us for our next session, where we'll be discussing the importance of corporate prayer. See you next week.

### **Session 3 – Corporate Prayer**

As we conclude our month-long study on prayer, let's take a few minutes to focus on corporate prayer. Individually, we establish a private prayer life where we share our adoration and worship, thankfulness, intercessions, and petitions with our Heavenly Father. Our private prayers are where we express our souls in a very personal way. God is the One who knows all things, the One who created all things, and is forever above and in control of all things. In recognition of this, we openly express what lives in the depths of our soul to Him who loves us most.

Personal or private prayer certainly does not need to adhere to any particular structure, and it can arise from the momentary needs of the individual. It should be just that – personal, spontaneous, honest, and open. These prayers must come from the heart and do not require a focus on form or structure.

Public prayer is distinct from private prayer in both form and content. Though both come from the heart, they are different. Public prayer, also known as corporate prayer, occurs when we pray together with other people in settings like services and small groups. One person speaks a prayer while the remainder of the group actively listens. When praying in public, we are no longer praying on our own behalf, but for all who are gathered together. Public prayer also comes from the heart, but it should be relevant to all who are listening, and allow them to feel the holiness and presence of God. That's why it is important to take into account all who are present, and pray in a style that everyone will understand, inspiring them to say, "Amen!"

As we journey through the Bible, we can see how corporate prayer played a role in the lives of God's people. Already in Genesis 4, after we learn about the birth of Adam and Eve's son, Seth, we read the following: *Then men began to call on the name of the Lord* (Genesis 4:26). This demonstrates a fundamental characteristic of prayer: human beings turn to God and call upon Him in the firm belief that He hears them. Moving through Genesis and the remainder of the Old Testament, we can see how prayer was a part of the life of Abraham, Moses, Joshua, David, and the prophets, as well as the people that they served. As we turn to the New Testament, we find in the Gospels the prayers which Jesus spoke publicly in the presence of His disciples and, often times, many more people. Then in the book of Acts, we read how seriously the first Christians took prayer, and the role it played in the spread of Jesus Christ's message.

Corporate prayers are intended to be unifying and educational. Firstly, they serve to unify the group that is gathered by bringing them together in their praise and their desire that God will hear their prayer and assure them of His presence. Think of the prayers spoken in a divine service. These prayers should unify us as a body of believers who have gathered to be edified by God's Word. They express our thankfulness for the grace provided through the work of Jesus Christ. A public prayer spoken in the midst of a small group unifies that group of believers as they seek to grow together in faith.

Participating in corporate prayer gives us opportunities to learn how to pray and discover new ways to express ourselves in prayer. As one person prays, all those present should be fully engaged in the prayer. Chances are that we all learned how to pray by listening to someone else. We see this repeatedly in Scripture. Certainly, the disciples learned how to pray by listening to Jesus' prayers. Children learn how to pray from those they listen to. That's why it is important for parents to take the time to pray with their children.

A unique aspect of the divine service is the communal praying of the Lord's Prayer. This is different from corporate prayers because each person participates in speaking the words of the prayer. The praying of the Lord's Prayer unites us with Jesus Christ, demonstrates discipleship through our willingness to follow His example, and leads us to confession and repentance. The disciples received the Lord's Prayer in response to their request that Jesus teach them how to pray, and we can also use it as a model for how to pray privately. We can even use the words of the Lord's Prayer, or other prayers in the Bible, when we pray.

As we come to the end of our time together this month, pause and think about all that we've heard and learned about prayer. Prayer brings to expression our love and reverence for God. Prayer signifies an encounter with God. How beautiful it is when the body of believers gathers together and unites their hearts in a humble expression to their heavenly Father, and thereby experiences God's presence.