



Week 2

Today we're finishing our two-week series called ***Direct Message***. Before we begin this week's lesson, let's quickly review what we learned last week. In Week 1, we discussed how prayer is a way for you to connect with God who wants the best for you and how prayer is more than just asking God for things; it is a method of communicating back and forth growing and developing our relationship with God.

Last week, we talked about figuring out your own prayer pattern. [Did you decide to start a new prayer pattern](#) (listed below for easy reference)? [If so, how did it go?](#) [If not, would you be open to trying it this week?](#)

Prayer Patterns:

- a. Write your prayers down and read them out loud to God.
- b. Be intentional about taking a literal break from talking.
- c. If you never tried praying before, invite someone to pray with you until you are comfortable praying by yourself.

Okay, onto this week's lesson...

If you're anything like me, you've struggled to know exactly how to pray. Sure, you've probably got a bunch of ideas about prayer. But are they true? And do they even work? The whole thing can seem so mysterious!

You may have questions like . . .

- **How do I start a prayer?** Is it like writing a letter? Do I say "Dear God," and then catch Him up on what's been happening in my life as if He doesn't already know?
- **What do I say to God?** I mean, He is *God* after all, and I am just me. What does someone like *me* say to this all-powerful being?
- **How long do I have to pray?** Is there a time requirement that makes it count? Or can I just pray for a little bit? If I pray for a long time do I get extra credit?
- **What posture do I have to have?** Do I need to get on my knees or lay on my face in order for God to hear and accept my prayer? Do my eyes have to be closed? If I fall asleep, does my prayer still count?
- **What kind of language do I use?** Does it need to be formal and proper? Do I need to have a bunch of Bible words in there for God to understand me?

[When it comes to prayer, which of these do you have the hardest time with? \(How to start a prayer, What to say to God. How long to pray. What posture to have, and/or What kind of language to use\)](#)

For a lot of us, it's not that we don't want to pray, but we just aren't sure how to pray. It's just like trying to get our social media post right. There are so many factors to consider. It's overwhelming, so sometimes we just give up. We look at prayer and say, "I'm pretty sure there's a right way to pray, and I'm *not* doing it."

If you feel this way, it should be encouraging that you're not the first group of people to struggle with the idea of prayer. In fact, for *thousands* of years people have wondered how to take something as mysterious as talking to God and make it something practical that we all can understand and engage in. What's even better? This is something that Jesus specifically talks about! A lot of our questions in life don't get such clear answers. But prayer is something He covered directly. So, when we ask the question, "How do I pray?" we can look at an *actual* conversation that happened between Jesus and His followers.

To set the scene, Jesus is on a mountainside. He sits down to teach His disciples. As they are listening, Jesus decides to address the question, "How should we pray?" He starts by saying something you may have heard before (if not, no worries!). Check it out:

"This, then, is how you should pray: 'Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name, your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven. Give us today our daily bread. And forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors. And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from the evil one'" (Matthew 6:9-13 NIV).

Maybe you've heard or even said that prayer before at a sporting event or church service. But what you may *not* know is that it came from Jesus when He was addressing the question, "How should we pray?" He's not saying that the *only* way to pray is to use these exact words. He's giving us a framework on how to build a prayer of our own.

To do that, we need to break His example down into sections.

He starts by saying, *"Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name."* Chances are you don't say the word "hallowed" in real life. But all *hallowed* means is holy, special, and one-of-a-kind. So, when Jesus starts this way, He's basically saying that God is as close and personal as a great dad. But He's also set apart as one-of-a-kind.

This is a great way to start a prayer—by acknowledging who God is, to both us and the world. It's a way of praising and complimenting God for how big and loving He is. Jesus doesn't model prayer by going straight for what we want out of the gate. (Although that's fine, too. A good dad is okay with his children begging him for stuff.) **But this allows us to keep the right perspective of who God is, right out of the gate!** When we acknowledge that God is a good and loving Father—and that there's no one else like Him—we can both praise Him and humble ourselves before we move on with the rest of our prayer.

Jesus goes on to say, *"Your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven."* We don't talk about "kingdoms" very much in our culture. But a kingdom is simply a place that has a king or a queen in charge. **So when Jesus prays for God's kingdom to come, He's saying, "I want you to be in charge, God. I want You to have Your way here on earth, just like You do in Heaven."**

And what is God's way? What is unique about God's kingdom? God's kingdom is about love, compassion, generosity, and selflessness. Where these things are happening, God's

kingdom is there. So, in our praying, we can ask God to have His way in the world around us.

We're also asking that God would allow us to be a part of His kingdom by working in us and through us. We're asking God to help us model how He, the King, works, so that we can demonstrate His character to others. This is our way of acknowledging that we want God's plan for the world, not just ours.

Next, Jesus asks God to provide for Him. He asks, **"Give us today our daily bread."** To the Jewish people hearing this 2,000 years ago, it was a familiar idea. When their ancestors, the Hebrew people, were being led by Moses out of Egypt—where they had been slaves—into a new land of freedom, God provided food for them every day. As they spent 40 years in the desert, every morning they would wake up and God had literally dropped food from the sky. (Crazy, right?) But it wasn't enough food for two days or a week. It was enough for just one day.

So when Jesus teaches us to pray this way, He's pushing us toward a place where we trust that God will provide for us and give us exactly what we need, when we need it, day by day.

Everything we've read so far sounds good. But the next part of Jesus' prayer may be a little harder for us to pray. Next Jesus models how to pray for *other people*. He says, **"Forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors."**

The first thing Jesus prays about when it comes to other people is forgiveness. And Jesus doesn't just say, "Help me to forgive." Nope, He says, "Forgive *us* like we forgive others." **He makes the connection between our willingness to forgive others and God's forgiveness of us.** That's a big deal, because that leaves *us* with the power to forgive or not forgive!

Everything we've prayed up until now has been about God and what He's like. But this? This is about us realizing what's in our control. And forgiving others is all up to us! The point of this part of the prayer is to remember that as hurt as we may be by someone, *we also require forgiveness.* **It puts our responsibility to forgive in proper perspective.**

Lastly, Jesus prays a prayer of *protection* by saying, **"And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from the evil one."** Jesus recognizes that life is hard. **He knows that we're surrounded by opportunities to make less-than-wise choices, and that we can't handle those temptations all on our own. This is a really honest prayer, which is exactly what God wants from us. He wants us to ask for help.** And when we do, it's another way of acknowledging how big God is and how much we trust Him when we acknowledge our need for Him.

In fact, when you get down to it, that's what all of prayer is.

Prayer is about remembering who God is and who we are.

It's about re-establishing the relationship we have with God. It's about re-aligning with God to work along side of Him to make our lives the best they can possibly be.

God isn't looking for you to pray all of these things word-for-word. He's giving you a guide that focuses us on the *purpose* of prayer, which includes both His role and yours. It's a step-by-step process of how to pray that includes . . .

- **Praise** for who He is.
- His **plan** for the world.
- His **provision** for us, His beloved children.
- How to interact with **people**.
- His **protection** from life's difficult temptations.

Why do you think Jesus taught His disciples how to pray specifically, instead of just telling them to "talk to God"?

So, as we wrap up this series about prayer, here's a challenge for you: **I want you to pick one of those five prayers and begin to pray it.** If you're already praying one of them, then I want to challenge you to add one. Once you get the hang of praying for one of them, add the next one and begin to build your prayers to look like Jesus' prayer. Not because it's magic, but because doing this allows you to better connect with God and remember who He is and who you are in relation to Him.

And here's one more tip as you work on your prayer life: **Determine an amount of time you want to pray.**

- Some of you already pray for ten minutes every day; I want to challenge you to pray for 15.
- Others of you struggle to pray at all. I want you to set a goal of five minutes.

There are some things that can help you to focus on prayer...for me, writing my prayers out really helps me focus on spending time with God. For others, it might be having instrumental music playing in the background for your prayer time. Other people might benefit from setting a timer or alarm, so they remember, and focus on spending time in prayer with God every day.

And as you do this, you'll see prayer go from something completely mysterious, to something that actually improves your quality of life. When you connect with God, and you're reminded of who you are and who He is, all the ups and downs in life become easier to process. You'll begin to see prayer as something that has the potential to make your life and your connection with God better.

- What if next year you could look back and see the pattern of prayer impacting your life?
- What if you were able to look back and see the things God has done in and through you?
- What if you began to practice prayer everyday, and began regularly inviting God into your life through praise, plan, provision, people, and protection?

I think you would find that sending a direct message to God could truly change everything!

As you head to into this next week (and with everything going on in our lives), I want you to think about your answer to this question: *How would you pray today if you knew it could change everything for you?*