

Flint Hills Bible Church
Biblical Soul Care Sunday School
Persevering in Prayer
Part 1

I. Introduction

According to a survey conducted by Pew Research Center in 2014, about 55% of American Christians pray daily. According to some other surveys conducted in the past, Christians typically spend around five minutes per day praying. Younger individuals aged between 18-29 were found to pray for shorter durations compared to older generations. On average, they tend to devote around three minutes every day towards prayer while those above the age of 50 often spend close to eight minutes daily in prayer.

1. Why is it so hard to spend time in prayer?

2. When do we usually pray and for what?

Objective:

That we would grasp and appreciate the importance of personal prayer. That we would see personal prayer as vital to our spiritual health.

II. The Importance of Personal Prayer

a. It is Vital in Salvation.

Because, if you *confess* with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. 10 For with the heart one believes and is justified, and with the mouth one *confesses* and is saved. - Romans 10:9–10.

If we *confess* our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. - 1 John 1:9.

Whoever *confesses* that Jesus is the Son of God, God abides in him, and he in God. - 1 John 4:15.

3. Can we be forgiven of our sin without confessing it to God?

4. How do we confess our sin to God?

b. It is the Distinguishing Mark of a True Christian.

Just as the very first sign of life in a new born baby is the act of breathing, so the first act of men and women when they are born again is praying. - JC Ryle

Now there was a disciple at Damascus named Ananias. The Lord said to him in a vision, "Ananias." And he said, "Here I am, Lord." 11 And the Lord said to him, "Rise and go to the street called Straight, and at the house of Judas look for a man of Tarsus named Saul, for behold, he is praying, 12 and he has seen in a vision a man named Ananias come in and lay his hands on him so that he might regain his sight." 13 But Ananias answered, "Lord, I have heard from many about this man, how much evil he has done to your saints at Jerusalem. 14 And here he has authority from the chief priests to bind all who call on your name." 15 But the Lord said to him, "Go, for he is a chosen instrument of mine to carry my name before the Gentiles and kings and the children of Israel. 16 For I will show him how much he must suffer for the sake of my name." 17 So Ananias departed and entered the house - Acts 9:10–17.

5. What proof did God give to Ananias that Saul was a true believer?

6. How could understanding the habit of personal prayer (or lack thereof) in the life of a counselee help to diagnose spiritual problems, or give direction where the counseling discussion needs to go?

III. Hindrances to Prayer

a. Sin

If I had cherished iniquity in my heart, the Lord would not have listened. - Psalm 66:18

Behold, the LORD's hand is not shortened, that it cannot save, or his ear dull, that it cannot hear; but your iniquities have made a separation between you and your God, and your sins have hidden his face from you so that he does not hear you. -Isaiah 59:1-2

Thus says the LORD concerning this people: "They have loved to wander thus; they have not restrained their feet; therefore the LORD does not accept them; now he will remember their iniquity and punish their sins." 11 The LORD said to me: "Do not pray for the welfare of this people. 12 Though they fast, I will not hear their cry, and though they offer burnt offering and grain offering, I will not accept them. But I will consume them by the sword, by famine, and by pestilence." - Jeremiah 14:10–12

Likewise, husbands, live with your wives in an understanding way, showing honor to the woman as the weaker vessel, since they are heirs with you of the grace of life, so that your prayers may not be hindered - 1 Peter 3:7

7. Why does God not hear our prayer when we are harboring sin in our heart?

8. What other ways could sin hinder our prayers?

b. Disobedience

As I called, and they would not hear, so they called, and I would not hear," says the LORD of hosts. - Zechariah 7:13

So I spoke to you, and you would not listen; but you rebelled against the command of the LORD and presumptuously went up into the hill country. 44 Then the Amorites who lived in that hill country came out against you and chased you as bees do and beat you down

in Seir as far as Hormah. 45 And you returned and wept before the LORD, but the LORD did not listen to your voice or give ear to you. - Deuteronomy 1:43–45

See Also: Proverbs 1:20-31

9. What kind of disobedience is being described here?

10. Why does God not answer the prayer of those who are disobedient in this way?

11. If you find yourself in this category of disobedience, what kind of prayer would the Lord hear and respond to?

c. Selfishness

You ask and do not receive, because you ask wrongly, to spend it on your passions. - James 4:3.

12. How does selfishness hinder our prayer?

13. How do we know if our prayers are selfish?

14. What are some examples of selfish prayers we might offer to God?

IV. **Why is Prayer neglected?**

a. **A Lesson from Joshua (Joshua 7:1-7)**

15. What did Joshua not do before the battle of Ai? What might be some reasons for this?

Thus says the LORD: "Cursed is the man who trusts in man and makes flesh his strength, whose heart turns away from the LORD - Jeremiah 17:5.

16. What are some examples in your life where you have neglected to pray because you were self-reliant?

b. **A Lesson from Ahaziah (2 Kings 1:1-4)**

17. Why did Ahaziah not seek God for guidance? What caused him to neglect prayer to God?

18. How does idolatry crowd out our personal prayer to God?

c. **A Lesson from Peter (Matthew 26:36-46)**

19. What caused Peter to neglect prayer?

The end of all things is at hand; therefore be self-controlled and sober-minded for the sake of your prayers. - 1 Peter 4:7.

20. What steps can we take to avoid Peter's mistake?

V. The Dangers of Neglecting Prayer

a. Spiritual Backsliding

But watch yourselves lest your hearts be weighed down with dissipation and drunkenness and cares of this life, and that day come upon you suddenly like a trap. 35 For it will come upon all who dwell on the face of the whole earth. 36 But stay awake at all times, praying that you may have strength to escape all these things that are going to take place, and to stand before the Son of Man.” - Luke 21:34–36.

Watch and pray that you may not enter into temptation. The spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak. - Matthew 26:41.

Of course the secrets of exactly why believers stumble and fall will not be known until the last day. I believe that backsliding generally starts with a failure to pray. Reading our Bibles without prayer, listening to sermons without prayer, carrying on marriages without prayer, choosing houses without prayer, traveling without prayer, forming friendships without prayer, hurrying over our daily prayers, saying them without engaging our hearts. They are all downward steps by which it is very easy to descend into spiritual apathy.

You can be very sure that people fall in private, long before they fall in public. They are backsliders when it comes to their knees long before they backslide openly in the eyes of the world. Like Peter, they first ignore the Lord’s warning to watch and pray; then, like Peter, their strength is gone and, when tempted, they deny their Lord. The world sees their fall and scoffs loudly. But the world knows nothing of the real reason. - JC Ryle

20. What do you think of J.C. Ryle’s belief that lack of prayer leads to backsliding?
Have you ever considered this thought before?

b. Alienation from God

For behold, those who are far from you shall perish; you put an end to everyone who is unfaithful to you. - Psalm 73:27.

c. Disloyalty to Jesus

Then he began to invoke a curse on himself and to swear, “I do not know the man.” And immediately the rooster crowed. 75 And Peter remembered the saying of Jesus, “Before the rooster crows, you will deny me three times.” And he went out and wept bitterly. - Matthew 26:74–75.

d. Ineffective Ministry

Abide in me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit by itself, unless it abides in the vine, neither can you, unless you abide in me. 5 I am the vine; you are the branches. Whoever abides in me and I in him, he it is that bears much fruit, for apart from me you can do nothing. - John 15:4–5.

21. How does a healthy habit of personal prayer allow us to be effective in our ministry roles, and in our soul care for other believers?
22. When we spend time praying for a specific ministry opportunity that we have, and it turns out to be successful, what temptation can arise afterward?