

# A Simple Way to Pray

Vital Life – May 2025

## Session One: A Theology of Prayer

The eyes of the LORD are toward the righteous  
and his ears toward their cry.  
The face of the LORD is against those who do evil,  
to cut off the memory of them from the earth.  
When the righteous cry for help, the LORD hears  
and delivers them out of all their troubles.

—Psalm 34:15–17

*Why this Class?*

Prayer is *not* \_\_\_\_\_.

Our goal: definition, context, and practice

*Clearing the Field*

Law—the revelation of God’s character in his commands to mankind for our instruction and obedience.

Gospel—the revelation of God’s character in his gracious provision for mankind in our salvation, sanctification, and perseverance.

Prayer is both.

**1 Thessalonians 5:17, 23-24** pray without ceasing . . . Now may the God of peace himself sanctify you completely, and may your whole spirit and soul and body be kept blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. He who calls you is faithful; he will surely do it.

*What is Prayer?*

**Becon** “An earnest talk with God.”<sup>1</sup>

**Blake** “Prayer is the breathing of the soul.”<sup>2</sup>

**Bridge** “That act and work of the soul, whereby a man doth converse with God.”<sup>3</sup>

**Calvin** “[To] enter into conversation with God whereby we expound to him our desires, our joys, our sighs, in a word, all the thoughts of our hearts.”<sup>4</sup>

**Whitney** “Prayer is talking with God.”<sup>5</sup>

Six Categories: family, future, finances, work, Christian concern, current crisis<sup>6</sup>

**Hallesby** “Prayer is the breath of the soul, the organ by which we receive Christ into our parched and withered hearts.”<sup>7</sup>

**Heitland** “Prayer is the verbal response of our souls to the inscrutable and living God.”

*Why do we pray?*

Thankfulness

**Psalm 118:21** I thank you that you have answered me and have become my salvation.

**Heidelberg Catechism**<sup>8</sup> “Prayer is the most important part of the thankfulness God requires of us.”

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<sup>1</sup> Alec Ryrie, *Being Protestant in Reformation Britain* (Oxford: OUP, 2013), 99.

<sup>2</sup> Thomas Blake, *Living Truth in Dying Times* (London, 1665), 100-101.

<sup>3</sup> William Bridge, *The Works of the Rev. William Bridge* (London: Thomas Tegg, 1845), 2:102.

<sup>4</sup> John Calvin, *Institutes*, 2:853.

<sup>5</sup> Donald Whitney, *Praying the Bible* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2015), 11.

<sup>6</sup> Whitney, 18-19.

<sup>7</sup> Ole Hallesby, *Prayer* (Minneapolis, MN: Augsburg, 1994), 14.

<sup>8</sup> HC 116, “Q: Why do Christians need to pray?”

Petition

**Heidelberg Catechism**<sup>9</sup> “Everything we need, spiritually and physically, as embraced in the prayer Christ our Lord himself taught us.”

**Calvin**<sup>10</sup> “It is . . . by the benefit of prayer that we reach those riches which are laid up for us with the Heavenly Father.”

**Matthew 7:11** If you then, who are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father who is in heaven give good things to those who ask him!”

*What is the relationship between prayer and Scripture?*

**Matthew 4:4** But he answered, "It is written, "Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that comes from the mouth of God."

**Bingham** “Scripture is God’s appointed means for communing with this people. And it is through communion with the living God that the people of God are conformed more and more to his likeness.”<sup>11</sup>

**Ames**<sup>12</sup> “In hearing the word we receive the Will of God, but in Prayer we offer our will to God, that it may be received by him.”

Scripture = God speaking to man

Prayer = man speaking to God

**Whitney**<sup>13</sup> “God gave the Psalms to us so we would give the Psalms back to God. No other book of the Bible was inspired for that express purpose.”

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<sup>9</sup> HC 118, “Q: What did God command us to pray for?”

<sup>10</sup> *Institutes*, 2:851.

<sup>11</sup> Matthew Bingham, *A Heart Aflame for God* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2025), 91.

<sup>12</sup> William Ames, *The Marrow of Sacred Divinity* (London, 1639), 244.

<sup>13</sup> Whitney, 46.

“There is nothing in my devotional life that more quickly and consistently kindles my consistently cold heart like praying the Bible.”<sup>14</sup>

Revisit Psalm 34:15-17

### *Prayer and Helplessness*

**Ephesians 6:10** “Finally, be strong in the Lord and in the strength of his might.”

**John 14:12-14** “Truly, truly, I say to you, whoever believes in me will also do the works that I do; and greater works than these will he do, because I am going to the Father. Whatever you ask in my name, this I will do, that the Father may be glorified in the Son. If you ask me anything in my name, I will do it.”

**1 Peter 2:2–3** Like newborn infants, long for the pure spiritual milk, that by it you may grow up into salvation—if indeed you have tasted that the Lord is good.

**Hallesby** “Will we give Jesus access to our needs? That is the one great and fundamental question in connection with prayer.”<sup>15</sup>

“Prayer and helplessness are inseparable. Only those who are truly helpless can truly pray.”<sup>16</sup>

“Your helplessness is your best prayer. It calls from your heart to the heart of God with greater effect than all your uttered pleas.”<sup>17</sup>

### *Prayer and Faith*

**Hallesby** “Without faith there can be no prayer, no matter how great our helplessness may be. Helplessness united with faith produces prayer.”<sup>18</sup>

“The essence of faith is to come to Christ.”<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>14</sup> Whitney, 85.

<sup>15</sup> Hallesby, 15.

<sup>16</sup> Hallesby, 18.

<sup>17</sup> Hallesby, 19.

<sup>18</sup> Hallesby, 28.

<sup>19</sup> Hallesby, 30.

*Application: Anxiety*

**Philippians 4:5b–9** The Lord is at hand; do not be anxious about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.

Finally, brothers, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is commendable, if there is any excellence, if there is anything worthy of praise, think about these things. What you have learned and received and heard and seen in me—practice these things, and the God of peace will be with you.