

“Lord Teach Us To Pray”

Introductory Lesson and Primer for our Study in the Exposition of the Prayers of Paul ¹

This Study Guide was designed to be read and applied in sections each day of this week and be brought back with you to your class next Sunday to be discussed with your Sunday School Class. You do not have to comply with the prescribed “Day Structure” provided; this was for your benefit. It would be beneficial to you and your class to have worked through all of the material and not rush it all in on Saturday evening. This is an exercise in thinking, growth, and application.

- Day One Opening Letter of Study, Begin Lesson 1, and Begin Setting up Prayer Guides (Pages 1-5, 14-16)
- Day Two Finish Lesson 1 and Continue Working on Setting Up Prayer Guides (Pages 1-5, 14-16)

Please note that the first two days constitute the base of this week’s lesson and thereby the most material, which is why I divided the introduction and lesson one over two days. Please do your best to walk through each day of the lesson as prescribed.

- Day Three Lesson 2 & Application in Prayer! (Pages 5-7)
- Day Four Lessons 3,4 & Application in Prayer! (Pages 7-10)
- Day Five Lessons 5,6 & Application in Prayer! (Pages 10-12)
- Day Six Lesson 7 & Application in Prayer! (Pages 12-13)

DAYS ONE & TWO

My philosophy of education and discipleship gives greater attention to robust depth and details over practical nuances and applications. This is primarily because I am persuaded that all persons can, to various degrees and not necessarily at the same time, acclimate to more intensive teaching and will from such more rigorous work derive greater benefit. Further, when actively applying oneself to the skills and demands of listening and learning, it is the Holy Spirit who serves as the greatest teacher by way of providing particular application(s).

However, I do strive to provide reasonable amounts of application, and in various contexts and seasons I am persuaded that more intensive times of application are particularly helpful. This study of the “Exposition of the Prayers of Paul” is designed to be such a season of intensive practicality. But why such an intensive practicality on the discipline of

¹ Prepared by David Crowe for Pray’s Mill Baptist Church Adult Sunday School
ALL Scripture Quotations are from the ESV Bible unless the Scripture reference is in a quote from another author – their original translation was kept.

prayer when it is in itself one of the most consistently referenced disciplines of the Christian life and at its root quite elementary? Because in my experience prayer is the most deficient element of the contemporary American Christian's experience. A people who seem to have an insatiable appetite for communication in every imaginable format and medium would sooner find almost any other thing to do than to isolate a few minutes to directly communicate with the Lord of glory. It is as reasonable as the chronically parched ravenously consuming saltwater when fresh springs are immediately available. Prayer to the Lord is all too often treated like an unknown neighbor whose name you may or may not remember. The neighbor that you, perhaps on a daily basis, wave at or nod to – perhaps even say hello and comment about the landscape and weather (out of politeness) before hurrying along. Then on special occasions and holidays you talk a bit more, and if there is tragedy there are awkward engagements and expressions of condolences. Too often this is the American Evangelical prayer life. You could add to this neighbor scenario shameless interruptions into their day or night with wild requests for help or resources, not unlike the random engagements the Lord might experience from far too many in the church. This is not communication in worship or relationship. So, as a Pastor charged with your care and progress in the faith, I am charting an intensively practical approach to engage this struggle and seek to resolve it among those who would walk in faithful discipleship among our church body. We might not be esteemed as many things when we finish this study in the Fall, but we can be regarded as a people mighty in prayer.

To aid us in this journey I am securing the help of a brother who has served me generously in his teaching and writing – only on two occasions in person, but frequently in other formats. I will be crafting our “Intensively Practical Study Guides” primarily from D.A. Carson's work in his book, Praying with Paul: A Call to Spiritual Reformation. This is one of, if not the single most helpful book that I have personally read on prayer.

Now, as we begin this study I want to encourage you to avail yourself of the fact that it is designed to be intensively practical and you are participating in it with a fellowship of like-minded believers who want both you and themselves to be successful. Your respective Sunday School Class is as a unit committed to this common goal, so be vigilant to both be held accountable and to stir others up in the act of faith and good works. Also, avail yourself of the Study Guide's formatting. This season of study was designed to accommodate the provided materials to be put into a three-ring binder primarily to serve as a prayer notebook as each lesson will not only have questions to write out/work through, but will have sections for personal notes on prayer too. You will find these on pages 14-16 of this study guide along with instructions on how to use them.

As you work through each day of the week I will draw on a lesson or lessons from Carson's book regarding practical helps to develop a robust life of prayer.

Lesson One:

“Much praying is not done because we do not plan to pray. We do not drift into spiritual life; we do not drift into disciplined prayer. We will not grow in prayer unless we plan to pray. That means we must self-consciously set aside time to do nothing but pray.”²

Personal Response:

Take each of the sentences of this first lesson and respond to them in two ways: 1) determine if it is a factual and fair statement, 2) if it is a factual and fair statement, what will you do about it?

Much praying is not done because we do not plan to pray.

1) Is this factual and fair statement: _____

2) If it is a factual and fair statement, what will I do about it?

We do not drift into spiritual life; we do not drift into disciplined prayer.

1) Is this factual and fair statement: _____

2) If it is a factual and fair statement, what will I do about it?

We will not grow in prayer unless we plan to pray. That means we must self-consciously set aside time to do nothing but pray.

1) Is this factual and fair statement: _____

2) If it is a factual and fair statement, what will I do about it?

² A Call to Spiritual Reformation: Praying with Paul; D.A. Carson; Baker Academic, 2014; (Hereafter: Carson), Pg. 1

Further Examination:

“But after all the difficulties have been duly recognized and all the dangers of legalism properly acknowledged, the fact remains that unless we plan to pray we will not pray. The reason we pray so little is that we do not plan to pray. Wise planning will ensure that we devote ourselves to prayer often, even if for brief periods: it is better to pray often with brevity than rarely but at length.”³

We must be intentional in our commitment to prayer. Wisdom would say draft a plan and adapt it until it becomes consistent – *do not let failure dictate success*. Further, do not excuse yourself as a “non-planner,” claiming that your life’s schedule is just too dynamic or is not conducive to that kind of daily ordering. It is possible that your life is unique in its demands for flexibility, but for most this is just indicative of a lack of discipline. However, even with the most dynamic of lives there is still enough planning to: wake up, apply proper hygiene, eat, and sleep. Therefore, there is enough structure to address a time of prayer (even if brief initially), and if there is not such a time then reexamine your life and seek wise counselors to reorder necessary elements of time. That is not legalism, that is a call to the most rudimentary of disciplines that the history of the Christian Church could not comprehend someone excusing as not being a priority.

Personal Response:

- 1) Will you commit to a life of more consistent or robust prayer? _____
 - 2) Will you pray, self-examine, and if necessary seek counsel regarding what might need to change in your life to accommodate time for prayer? _____
 - 3) Identify some of these challenges and how they might be engaged (write out what you can now and return to this on Saturday with additional identified challenges and a plan of attack to resolve them): _____
- _____
- _____
- _____
- _____
- _____
- _____

Action in Prayer:

Begin setting up your own prayer guide. Even if you have a robust plan please consider also implementing this model for this time of study for continuity within the class. I have a method that I have been using and love, but I too will be using this to supplement and walk with my own class through this process.

³ Carson, Pg. 2

The prayer guide is set up as follows:

Page 14 (In this Study Guide): Items that you are praying for every day such as prayers of adoration, prayers of confession/repentance, prayers for family, prayers for the beloved, etc.

Page 15 (In this Study Guide): Urgent/Dated items that are very pressing for temporary seasons such as illnesses and immediate needs/struggles. Also, items that are dated such as surgeries and special engagements. The other list on this page is items of prayer from this week – ways that you are praying for your class and others.

Page: 16 (In this Study Guide): Open prayer items are consistently prayed for on a constant basis, but not necessarily every day, such as various friends and/or church members, missionaries, unbelievers, government leaders, general requests and needs you know about, etc.

An important element of the exercise is the “Date Prayed” column. Note each day that you prayed for a given item as this will aid in your discipline and likely prove very encouraging to you and others that you have prayed for too.

Finally, take advantage of the “Notes/Updates” column to keep requests fresh and up to date so that you are informed in your praying. This will also provide encouragement when the Lord answers certain prayers and provide greater earnestness when things appear to digress too.

Is this work? Yes, but it is some of the finest work that you can do.

“Rejoice always, pray without ceasing, give thanks in all circumstances; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you.” 1 Thessalonians 5:16-18

DAY THREE

Lesson Two:

“Adopt practical ways to impede mental drift.”⁴

Personal Response:

What do you suppose Dr. Carson is communicating with this very simple statement? “Adopt practical ways to impede mental drift.” _____

⁴ Carson, Pg. 2

Further Examination:

The local church constitutes a family of members that range from very young children, who have only recently come to faith and are only beginning to grapple with what a life of joyful obedience looks like, to the most seasoned of saints, who give healthy contemplation to the finishing of their races – seeking to finish them well. With this range of age, experience, and maturing in the Lord, there is an even more complex and nuanced range of struggles to maintain a healthy attention to the matter at hand when praying. The mind is already susceptible to wander, and recent years have conditioned it to have constant stimulation and engagement. When such stimulation is not present, the mind often begins searching for it as rapidly as possible. There are also the pressing burdens and concerns of life that while always present seem to demand an audience when everything else is finally silenced. Add to this complexity the reality that many persons pray when engaged in other activities such as driving, watching small children, or exercising. It would be wrong and irresponsible for a driver to give undivided attention to the matter of praying while operating a vehicle, or for a mom to be fixed in struggle before the Lord while a child finds new items to ingest or writes on creative surfaces, or for the runner to give little attention to traffic. So, we might need to seek wisdom with better times to pray unless this is truthfully the best times that we have, and if this is so, then we need grace in the moment and wisdom to find better opportunities soon.

Regardless of the nuance and nature of this struggle it simply is a reality for most of us.⁵

Some practical suggestions that Dr. Carson offers are:

- 1) Vocalize your prayers. Volume is not the matter of concern unless you are becoming a distraction or putting on a show. The issue is joining the mind with the voice for a more complete engagement of the person while in the act of praying.
- 2) Pray over the Scriptures. Read and then respond with prayer or even adapt the text to a prayer. This can take a number of forms such as praying in view of daily or devotional reading, praying various Psalms, adapting the prayers of others throughout the Scriptures, or even using portions of Scripture as a catalyst for praying for like matters that they address (sometimes worship, sometimes faith, sometimes forgiveness, etc.).
- 3) Pray using various worshipful resources such as robust hymnals – allowing their truth dense material to direct your mind and focus your attention. Perhaps even looking up the Scriptural references associated with the hymn/song. While there are many “song books” and even hymnals that should be disregarded for this exercise there are also many very well crafted and truth-dense hymnals recently produced.

⁵ In the interest of full disclosure, I frequently, but not always, pray while walking the church parking lot (it is large and rather safe during the day so long as you stay near the building) – the physical dynamic keeps me sharply focused.

- 4) Pray while journaling – a discipline that we are softly applying with this Study Guide, but one that could certainly be done in a more robust and profitable way through other formats and adaptations too. The heart of journaling is to slowly, intentionally, and articulately work through the discipline of prayer as you write, record, and muse over each item, and to have a wonderful source to examine the Lord’s kindness in maturing you and answering as he was pleased.

Personal Response:

- 1) Do you struggle with “mental drift” in prayer? If so what are primary contributors to this common problem (lack of sleep, distracted, bad timing, etc.)? _____

- 2) In view of this common struggle, what will do to more fruitfully combat it? What changes will you make or disciplines will you seek to employ to better focus?

Action in Prayer:

Be intentionally praying through your prayer guide.

“Rejoice always, pray without ceasing, give thanks in all circumstances; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you.” 1 Thessalonians 5:16-18

DAY FOUR

Lesson Three:

“At various periods in your life, develop, if possible, a prayer-partner relationship.”⁶

Personal Response:

This can certainly be done on the individual and small group level, but we are seeking to first secure this on the Sunday School level during this season of study. Will you resolve to strengthen your brothers and sisters in the Lord by entering a season of mutual commitment in which you build into one another’s life through mutual accountability and encouragement? If yes, then sign and date below (it is not a binding contract, but a resolve

⁶ Carson, Pg. 4

to personally commit) and tell your class that you desire to strengthen and be strengthened by them in mutual commitment during this season of study.

Signature of Committee

Date

Sunday School Class

Further Examination:

We have asked for a class level prayer-partner relationship, but the actual spirit of this lesson is really for a more intimate context in which we more directly pour into another's life – an intensive life on life discipleship and care. However, wisdom must be applied when entering into such a commitment (more than just not making a commitment that will not be honored). It is always wise not to engage on so personal an exercise with a person of the opposite sex on a one-on-one basis.

If you are able to secure a more traditional prayer partner this always proves to be a particularly sweet season of growth as you invest in one another's lives and together worship and petition the Lord. These times provide unique encouragement and blessing. There is also an opportunity to strengthen another in their own effort to become stronger in prayer.

The Lord has been pleased to use small groups of persons praying for precise matters too, many a missionary's roots and works can be traced back to groups and persons committed to praying together.

Lesson Four:

“Choose models – but choose them well. Most of us can improve our praying by carefully, thoughtfully listening to others pray. This does not mean we should copy everything we hear.”⁷

Further Examination:

As you seek to employ the skills and principles that have already been discussed, seek also to be a good student of prayer by identifying prayers that can be learned from and can serve as healthy models. The most immediate places that this should be available to you is the local church context, particularly in corporate worship services. While participating in the act of corporate prayer try to also intentionally listen to what is prayed, how it is prayed, etc. Listen for affirmations and responses to Scriptural truths, for direct quotations or allusions to Scripture, for thoughts informed by being in the presence of God, for contemporary matters and concerns of the church that are struggled through in prayer, for great matters that supersede any temporal elements of our immediate experience, for dealing with sin and repentance, for worship, for joy, and for weeping.

⁷ Carson, Pg. 7

Avail yourself of robust prayers secured in writing such as what we observe throughout the Scriptures and even those in other respected, albeit not inspired, formats such as letters in biographies and even books with collections of prayers (The Valley of Vision comes to mind, not many contemporary resources...).

The rich range of prayers in the Scriptures alone could consume one's full attention: Abraham petitioning The LORD for Sodom and Gomorrah, Hannah begging the LORD for a child, David broken in his unjust struggles and later over the gravity of his own sin, Asaph grappling with the plights of the just and unjust, Nehemiah's constant burst of petitions. Jesus teaching his disciples to pray, Jesus rejoicing in prayer regarding the exclusivity of the Father calling whom he will, Jesus petitioning for the unity and care of his church, and Jesus grappling with the weight of the Father's will for him. Paul's numerous prayers through the epistles (where our attention will be soon). John's petition that Jesus return soon! So very many examples of which these are just a small sampling.

Other, non-inspired, recordings of prayers can be quite instructive too. Walking with seasoned saints who have recorded their entreating of the Lord on paper can be a precious gift and one that should not be disregarded for its potential for instruction.

Personal Response:

1) Where can you hear good prayers modeled, and how can you implore their strengths without just mimicking them? _____

2) Identify two prayers in the Scriptures and write down three observations from each of them that you want to employ in your own praying:

Prayer Passage 1: _____
Observations to apply in my own prayer life: _____

Prayer Passage 2: _____
Observations to apply in my own prayer life: _____

Action in Prayer:

Be intentionally praying through your prayer guide.

“Rejoice always, pray without ceasing, give thanks in all circumstances; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you.” 1 Thessalonians 5:16-18

DAY FIVE

Lesson Five:

“Develop a system for your prayer lists.”⁸

This is effectively what you were encouraged to do at the beginning of this Study Guide with the direction provided. The hope is that you will give this approach a try as we seek to apply these principles as Sunday School classes, but do not implement something new if it will do harm to an already robust system/approach. If you do have another approach that is working you will be more than able to interact with the class with this too, but the objective is that we are praying!

Also, know that there are innumerable systems – try and apply this one and adapt it as needed. Or try and apply another system if you are so inclined... but simply do not allow temporary struggles and failures to determine the outcome of your course in robust prayer.

Personal Response:

Apply wise principles to the discipline of securing a strong prayer life. Also know that what may appear artificial for a season can develop to a joyful element of life. As a freshman in college I was required to pray for missions for approximately ten to fifteen minutes a night for the full semester that I was in a particular class. By the end of the year I was proactively guarding my hour of prayer – it was too precious to be infringed upon. Discipline can mature to delight, especially in prayer!

Lesson Six:

“Mingle praise, confession, and intercession; but when you intercede, try to tie as many requests as possible to Scripture.”

This is not speaking only to having a healthy breadth in prayer, but a healthy permeation of Scripture into one’s prayers too – identifying how truth informs one’s requests.

⁸ Carson, Pg. 11

Personal Response:

1) Do you have a habit of being too singularly focused in your prayers (only making petition, only giving thanks, etc.)? If so how can you mature in praying more comprehensively? _____

2) Is there any reason to tie your prayer requests with Scripture? Why or why not?

3) Do you marry your petitions with infusions of Scripture? If not how can you begin doing this in the future? _____

Further Examination:

Theological clarity and precision from knowing and loving the Scriptures is the preeminent way to enrich your prayers. It is also the most practical way to safeguard you from praying poorly – outside the prescribed will of God or in ways not consistent with the character of God and his revealed truths.

Dr. Carson further develops this matter:

“...we must remember that the Bible simultaneously pictures God as utterly sovereign, and as a prayer-hearing and prayer-answering God. Unless we perceive this, and learn how to act on these simultaneous truths, not only will our views of God be distorted, but our praying is likely to wobble back and forth between a resigned fatalism that asks for nothing and a badgering desperation that exhibits little real trust.”⁹

“Even a little reflective acquaintance with the God of the Bible acknowledges that he is not less than utterly sovereign, and not less than personal and responsive.”¹⁰

“Where shall we learn the will of God, the values of God, the character and purposes of God, the promises of God? We shall learn such things in the Scriptures he has graciously given us. But that means when we pray, when we ask God for things, we must try to tie as many requests as possible to Scripture. That is an immensely *practical* step.”¹¹

⁹ Carson, Pg. 13

¹⁰ Carson, Pg. 13

¹¹ Carson, Pg. 14

Personal Response:

How does your knowledge of the Scriptures and Theology personally impact your praying?

Action in Prayer:

Be intentionally praying through your prayer guide.

“Rejoice always, pray without ceasing, give thanks in all circumstances; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you.” 1 Thessalonians 5:16-18

DAY SIX

Lesson Seven:

“If you are in any form of spiritual leadership, work at your public prayers.”¹²

Do not let me lose you here – either because you are not in leadership or because you think this makes prayer disingenuous. I intentionally included this lesson because it yields valuable things to think through for more than just those in spiritual leadership.

Consider the act of praying in public. It is not an act conducted in complete silence for two primary reasons: 1) we are affirming the prayer made by the one as a prayer for the whole of us, 2) the very prayer to God is also of immediate blessing and service to others who hear.

Personal Response:

What is your role when there is public/corporate prayer?

Further Examination:

Regarding the benefit of public prayers for other believers:

“It is a question not of pleasing our human hearers, but of instructing them and edifying them.”¹³

¹² Carson, Pg. 15

¹³ Carson, Pg. 16

“The point is that although public prayer is addressed to God, it is addressed to God while others are overhearing it. Of course, if the one who is praying is more concerned to impress these human hearers than to pray to God, then rank hypocrisy takes over. That is why Jesus so roundly condemns much of the public praying of his day and insists on the primacy of private prayer (Matt. 6:5-8). But that does not mean that there is no place at all for public prayer. Rather, it means that public prayer ought to be the overflow of one’s private praying.”¹⁴

To this I would also add that there is a sweet service we render another when we have labored for them in our private prayers and when in their presence, we again entreat the Lord for them. This is not a show for the other, but a service of grace in their presence.

Finally, consider the benefit public prayers render the unbelievers present too. In general contexts, the unbeliever hears a people in reconciled relationship with God directly petitioning him with joyful confidence, with broken hearts, with longing, with trust, etc. These unbelievers indisputably have a witness before them that they must contend with, and this is a magnificent grace to them.

Also, there are times when in personal relationship and in overt evangelism that one will have opportunity to pray for a lost person aloud and in their presence. It can be difficult, heart breaking, and a superior kindness all at once for this person to hear someone that they love plead for their soul. I have seen the effectiveness of this first hand, and am grateful that I was afforded and in God’s grace took such opportunities.

Personal Response:

- 1) When in the context of believers, how should you pray if called upon? _____

- 2) Is it ever appropriate to pray for an unbeliever’s soul in their presence? What does this look like? _____

Action in Prayer:

Be intentionally praying through your prayer guide.

“Rejoice always, pray without ceasing, give thanks in all circumstances; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you.” 1 Thessalonians 5:16-18

¹⁴ Carson, Pg. 16

Praying: Urgent/Dated Items

Prayer Item	Date(s) Prayed	Notes/Updates

Praying: This Week's Items

Prayer Item	Date(s) Prayed	Notes/Updates

If you need additional copies of this sheet they are available in Pastor David Crowe's door box.

