

STRENGTHENING YOUR GRIP

Strengthening Your Grip on Prayer

Matthew 6:5–15; Philippians 4:1–9



LET'S BEGIN HERE

Wait—don't skip this lesson! This isn't a typical guilt-inducing, anxiety-producing, schedule-restricting lesson on prayer. No one will come to our homes to peer over our shoulders, stopwatch in hand, evaluating our devotional time. No one will inspect our knees for callouses caused by long hours of prayer.

No, the goal of this lesson is to help us see prayer as a way to lighten our burdens, not add to them; to relieve anxiety, not to increase it. The last thing we need is for someone to pour fuel on the fire of our angst. We already have enough of that—from not quite being the people we really want to be and from not living the Christian life as abundantly as we'd hoped. Instead, this lesson will help us open up the lines of continual communication with our Lord, giving us joy, hope, and stability in our anxiety-producing world.



LET'S DIG DEEPER

1. What Everyone Wants but Few of Us Have (Philippians 4:1–9)

Stability . . . harmony . . . joy . . . patience . . . pure thoughts . . . consistency. What spiritually minded person wouldn't want such things? Yet because we don't achieve these in our lives, we become anxious. Add to our imperfect walk with God the unforeseen tragedies, temptations, and pressures that assault us, and our worry needle goes off the scale. The answer is, of course, to *pray*—to exchange our anxiety with the inexhaustible peace that comes from time spent with the Lord. No complicated formula. No rigid schedule. Just talk to God. It sounds so simple. But we have the tendency to take the simple things of God and complicate them with religious formulas and ritualistic drudgery.



Quotable

*“That which
will keep a
ministry on target
is a faithful
commitment to
the Word
of God.”*

—Charles R. Swindoll



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2. What Jesus Taught to Set Things Right (Matthew 6:5–15)

By the time Jesus stepped on the scene, prayer had degenerated in at least four ways:

1. It had become formal and ritualistic.
2. It had become long and verbose.
3. It had become repetitious.
4. It had become prideful.

Into this pharisaic system of dos and don'ts came Jesus with His own instructions on prayer. He irritated the self-impressed religious leaders of His time by offering freedom instead of legalism and teaching that prayer was made for God's ears, not man's applause. Jesus taught that we must pray to be heard by God, not to be admired by people. We must pray from our hearts, not with meaningless repetition. And we must forgive others before approaching God. If we follow these simple instructions, we will draw closer to God and to others.

As we share with God every worry that weighs us down, our circumstances may not change but we will. We begin to let Him carry the heavy loads that we can't bear. We start to trust Him to handle the problems that we can't control. And our anxiety lessens as we learn to wait on His timing and His provision.



A CLOSER LOOK

Prayer God Will Answer

If you knew God would answer your petitions, how would that change your prayer life? Would you pray more fervently and more often? Philippians 1:9–11 records Paul's plea for the Philippian church—it was a prayer God was certain to answer.

Joy saturated Paul's prayers for the believers at Philippi. They had joined Paul in the gospel community—as his brothers and sisters in Christ, as his supporters, and as his partners in suffering.

So, Paul sought the Lord on his friends' behalf. He prayed that God would increase their love for God, for one another, and for Paul. Although Hollywood defines love as blind, godly love thrives in an atmosphere of truth. Paul asked God to increase their love “in real knowledge and all discernment” (Philippians 1:9). Real knowledge comes through God's Word, and the Holy Spirit provides Christians with discernment—the ability to distinguish good from evil.

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Continued from previous page

Paul prayed for the Philippians so that they would recognize and pursue the things that please God (Philippians 1:10). Obedience to God begins in the mind. The thought-life of Christians often determines their actions. Later in this letter, Paul highlighted the excellent ideas that should fill the Philippians' minds: "whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is of good repute, if there is any excellence and if anything worthy of praise, dwell on these things" (4:8). Christlike thinking and living will help believers to live holy lives until Christ returns.

Paul reminded the Philippians that God had already produced in them righteous fruit, and that their lives would bring God glory until Christ's return. In Galatians 5:22–23, Paul defined the fruit of the Spirit—"love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control." When the Holy Spirit invades a believer's life and waters the seed provided by God's Word, He produces these attributes, which reflect the character of God.

So if you want God to answer your prayers for fellow believers, model them after the prayers recorded in Scripture. Let's start asking God to accomplish His plan recorded in His inspired, inerrant Word today!



LET'S LIVE IT

Do you still feel a little anxious about talking with God? Take a few moments to review the Lord's Prayer in Matthew 6:9–13. Using this prayer as a guide, spend some time talking with God. Remember that grace, not guilt, compels us to pray. Our heavenly Father loves us and loves to hear our prayers.

Do you relate to God as your loving Father? If not, how do you see Him?



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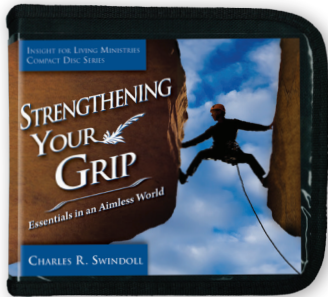
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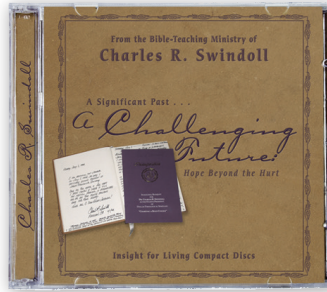
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