

FIRST STEPS

4

Your personal guide to understanding the essentials of following Jesus.

4 | NEW PRIVILEGE



FIRST STEPS | Book 4 – “New Privilege”

One of the greatest joys of a parent is to hear their child's first words. For a mother to hear "mama" or for a father to hear "papa" is a treasured experience. It may surprise you to know that God the Father is no different. He loves for his children to talk to him. He wants you to share with him your joys, sorrows, temptations, needs & everything in between. Nothing is too small & nothing is too big to bring to him. In fact, God reserves many of his blessings just for his children who talk to him. How sad it would be to miss God's best because we are too proud or busy to talk to him (James 4:1-2).

I've Never Done That Out Loud Before

Talking with God is called prayer. If you can think and talk, you can pray! It is only as complicated as you make it. We can pray silently or out loud. We can pray privately or in a group. We can pray anywhere and at any time. God isn't looking for fancy prayers.

- 1. Read the story told by Jesus in Luke 18:10-14. What seems to be most important to God when we pray?

Attitude is huge! In other words, we don't arrogantly come to God in an effort to impress him, to "make-a-deal" with him, or to twist the arm of a reluctant God. We must remember that God is also not too busy to hear or answer us.

- 2. Rather than being impersonal or distant when we talk to God, how did Jesus teach us to pray in Matthew 6:9?

For some of us, rather than being comforting, the name "Father" stirs up a lot of hard feelings. Our earthly fathers may have abandoned, abused, ignored, or hurt us in different ways. In contrast, your Heavenly Father is perfect. He is perfect in his love, his character, his motives & his actions. **He does what he says he will do, not just once in a while, but all of the time.**

3. Matthew 7:9-11 compares our earthly father with our Heavenly Father. What do we learn about our Heavenly Father's heart toward us when we pray to him?

How does that make you feel?

When we are faced with life's challenges, we basically have two choices: **We can panic or we can pray.** When we panic we lose sight of the Father's greatness and his incredible love for us.

4. Use Philippians 4:6-7 to answer the following questions:

What should we not do? _____

What should we do instead? _____

Why does that make more sense?

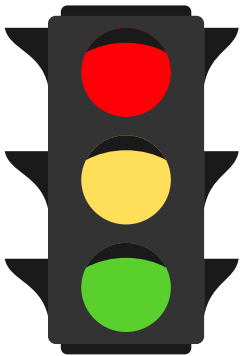
What does God promise he will do when we make the choice to pray?

Red Light, Green Light

The heart of God is generous. **He loves to do what is best for his children.** But maybe you've prayed a prayer in the past that appears to be unanswered. A fair question is, "does God answer every prayer?"

5. What does Matthew 7:7-8 say about God answering prayer?

If that is the case, then what may have happened with the prayer you feel has gone unanswered? A helpful analogy when it comes to how God answers prayer is a stoplight.



NO | "I have something better in mind."

SLOW | "Trust in My perfect timing."

GO | "This is my good and perfect will."

A green light means: go. When our prayer lines up with what God wants and knows will be best for his child, he may answer rather quickly. But God also knows that sometimes we ask for things that really aren't what is best for us or what he is trying to accomplish. So, being a perfect and loving Father, he answers with a red light: no. None of us like to be told "no" but I hope you can appreciate that God is for you and only wants to do what is best for you. Another reason that God may answer "no" is because we are actively clinging to a particular sin. Sin disrupts our relationship with God. It is as if God is saying, "first things first." Getting your relationship right with him takes priority over anything else.

Before we move on, put an X here _____ when you've read Psalm 66:18

But then there's the yellow light: slow. Often, timing is important to God's plan. Some prayers are crock pot prayers - they need time to cook before they are ready to be answered. In our quick-fix society, waiting isn't popular, but it is often in the waiting that God teaches us the most. It is important to know that God answers every prayer either go, no, or slow. He never ignores us!

The Pocket Full of Nickels Plan

6. What is an important thing to know about prayer in Luke 18:1?

Why do you suppose God designed prayer that way?

Think about this story: *A boy visited an uncle whom he had never met before when he was about 12 years old. When he got there the uncle had a big wad of nickels in his pocket. (This is when a nickel was actually worth something) The uncle introduced himself & then said, "See this wad in my pocket? Those are all nickels & you can have one anytime you ask." The boy was obviously impressed but didn't want to appear to be greedy. So he waited awhile then tested the waters & quietly asked for a nickel. To his delight & surprise his uncle said, "Sure, son, you can have a nickel anytime you ask," & proceeded to hand him a nickel. "This was too good to be true," the boy reasoned, but every time he asked for a nickel he got one. It wasn't long until wherever the uncle went so did his 12 yr old nephew. At one point the enterprising pre-teen said, "Uncle, I'm going to save you a lot time and trouble. Why don't you just give me all the nickels in your pocket so I don't have to bug you anymore?" His uncle wasn't convinced. Toward the end of their visit, the uncle told the boy he had a confession. He said, "When I heard you were coming I knew you wouldn't want to hang out with an old guy like me so I devised a plan. I planned to bribe you into spending time with me so I could get to know you better & you could get to know me. I knew if I gave you all the nickels at one time you wouldn't want to spend any more time with me. So, it was one nickel at a time & I think we are now both richer because of it."*

To us, getting nickels or yes answers to our prayers is often the highest priority. But as we grow and mature, we begin to understand that God has an even greater plan when it comes to prayer.

7. Read John 15:7. What is God's greatest priority when it comes to prayer? ("remain" means to stay close to, depend upon)

What Should I Pray About?

As stated in the beginning of this lesson, you can pray about anything and everything & it brings a smile to God's face when we do. Still, some find it helpful to know what they can pray about. The following is what Jesus taught his followers.

8. Read Matthew 6:9-13 & match the verse with the prayer category.

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| Verse 9 | Pray for relationships - especially those where forgiveness is needed. |
| Verse 10 | Praise God for who he is and your relationship with him. |
| Verse 11 | Pray for protection from temptation and the evil one. |
| Verse 12 | Pray for God's will & work in the world to be done just as it is in Heaven. |
| Verse 13 | Pray for God to provide for your daily needs |

Putting It All Together

9. If God already knows your thoughts & needs, why does he want you to pray?

10. Read James 5:16-18. Does prayer really change anything?

11. What are somethings you need prayer for right now?

Bible Verses Used in this Lesson

James 4:1-2 | What causes fights and quarrels among you? Don't they come from your desires that battle within you? You desire but do not have, so you kill. You covet but you cannot get what you want, so you quarrel and fight. You do not have because you do not ask God.

Luke 18:10-14 | Two men went up to the temple to pray, one a Pharisee and the other a tax collector. The Pharisee stood by himself and prayed: 'God, I thank you that I am not like other people—robbers, evildoers, adulterers—or even like this tax collector. I fast twice a week and give a tenth of all I get. But the tax collector stood at a distance. He would not even look up to heaven, but beat his breast and said, 'God, have mercy on me, a sinner.' "I tell you that this man, rather than the other, went home justified before God. For all those who exalt themselves will be humbled, and those who humble themselves will be exalted."

Matthew 6:9 | "This, then, is how you should pray: 'Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name..."

Matthew 7:9-11 | "Which of you, if your son asks for bread, will give him a stone? Or if he asks for a fish, will give him a snake? If you, then, though you are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father in heaven give good gifts to those who ask him!

Philippians 4:6-7 | Do not be anxious about anything, but in every situation, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus

Matthew 7:7-8 | "Ask and it will be given to you; seek and you will find; knock and the door will be opened to you. For everyone who asks receives; the one who seeks finds; and to the one who knocks, the door will be opened.

Psalm 66:18

If I had cherished sin in my heart,
the Lord would not have listened;

Luke 18:1 | Then Jesus told his disciples a parable to show them that they should always pray and not give up

John 15:7 | If you remain in me and my words remain in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be done for you.

Matthew 6:9-13

9 “This, then, is how you should pray:

“Our Father in heaven,
hallowed be your name,

10 Your kingdom come,
your will be done,

on earth as it is in heaven.

11 Give us today our daily bread.

12 And forgive us our debts,
as we also have forgiven our debtors.

13 And lead us not into temptation,
but deliver us from the evil one.’

James 5:16-18 | Therefore confess your sins to each other and pray for each other so that you may be healed. The prayer of a righteous person is powerful and effective. Elijah was a human being, even as we are. He prayed earnestly that it would not rain, and it did not rain on the land for three and a half years. Again he prayed, and the heavens gave rain, and the earth produced its crops.

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