

A Guide to Prayer

Connecting with God

Basic Bible Studies
for Everyone



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CONNECTING WITH GOD

Stonecroft Bible Studies

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Welcome to Stonecroft Bible Studies!

At Stonecroft, we connect you with God, each other, and your communities. It doesn't matter where you've been or what you've done... God wants to be in relationship with you. And one place He tells you about Himself is in His Word—the Bible. Whether the Bible is familiar or new to you, its contents will transform your life and bring answers to your biggest questions.

Gather with people in your community—women, men, couples, young and old alike—and discover together what the Bible says about communicating with God. Find out how prayer helps you trust Him more and confidently relax in His love and provision for you. As you become closer to Him, your life will increasingly take on His marvelous character traits.

Each chapter of *Connecting with God* includes discussion questions to stir up meaningful conversation, specific Scripture verses to investigate, and time for prayer to connect with God and each other.

Discover more of God and His ways through this small-group exploration of the Bible.

Tips for Using This Study

This book has several features that make it easy to use and helpful for your life:

- The page number or numbers given after every Bible reference are keyed to the page numbers in the *Abundant Life Bible*. This handy paperback Bible uses the New Living Translation, a recent version in straightforward, up-to-date language. We encourage you to obtain a copy through your group leader or at stonecroft.org.
- Each chapter ends with a section called “Thoughts, Notes, and Prayer Requests.” Use this space for notes or for thoughts that come to you during your group time or study, as well as prayer requests.
- In the back of the book you will find “Journal Pages”—a space available for writing down how the study is changing your life or any other personal thoughts, reactions, and reflections.
- Please make this book and study your own. We encourage you to use it and mark it in any way that helps you grow in your relationship with God!

If you find this study helpful, you may want to investigate other resources from Stonecroft. Please take a look at “Stonecroft Resources” in the back of the book or online at stonecroft.org/store.

stonecroft.org

The Purpose of Prayer

Those persons who know the deep peace of God,
the unfathomable peace that passeth all understanding,
are always men and women of much prayer.

—R.A. Torrey

Two young Americans were traveling in China. One day, craving a taste of home, they went to a McDonald's for a chocolate shake. While they were standing in line, one of the men, Jeff, discovered his wallet was missing. Everything he needed was in that wallet—his passport and visa, 2300 American dollars, and all of his required travel records. He grabbed his friend's arm in panic. "My wallet's gone! We've got to find it!"

His friend tried to calm him, telling him he'd pray while Jeff retraced his steps, but Jeff resisted, "No—you've got to help me! We've both got to go look for it, *now!*" His friend looked around and spotted a bench. "Look, the best thing I can do for you right now is to pray. I'm going over to that bench right there, and I'm going to sit there and pray while you look for your wallet."

So while Jeff headed down the street in search of the missing wallet, his friend sat on the bench and prayed. The streets were clogged with people, and Jeff pushed urgently through the crowd, going into

all the shops they had visited. His Mandarin was limited, and the shop owners didn't speak English—and with every shake of the head his panic increased. Finally, on the corner of two busy streets, he stopped to pray. “God, you know where these things are. Only you can find them for me.”

When he looked up, he saw a traffic officer standing in the middle of the intersection, dressed in an olive uniform with a bright white sash across his chest and around his waist. Jeff had passed countless similar officers in his search, but he somehow knew this one could help him. He dashed into the intersection, and the officer waved him back. Jeff ignored the signal, dodging cars and bicycles, determined to reach the man. The officer waved him back more urgently, but Jeff persisted. When he got to him, he tried to explain his predicament, but like the shop owners, the officer didn't speak English.

Near despair, Jeff felt a tug on his arm. Looking down he saw a little girl dressed in a plaid school uniform. “Can I help you, sir?” she asked in classroom English.

“I've lost my wallet,” Jeff said. “It's blue. It has my passport and a large amount of money in it.” The little girl turned and translated to the traffic officer. Suddenly the man's eyes lit up. Without hesitation, he left his post and dashed across the street, Jeff close at his heels. He hurried down a side street—one Jeff had never been on—to a small watch-repair stand. An aged man sitting on a bench rose to greet them. The officer talked briefly to the man, who then reached behind his bench and pulled out the wallet.

“Praise God!” Jeff cried in huge relief. He turned to thank the little girl who'd helped him, but she was nowhere to be seen.¹

Prayer

Father, you are my refuge and shelter. I love you and trust in your name. You rescue me and protect me. When I call on you, you will answer. You will be with me in trouble and you will rescue me (Psalm 91:1,14-15, page 456).

Prayer Is Communication

God answers the prayers of His people. *Always*. Sometimes His answers are so soft you are aware of them only after the fact. Sometimes they are so incredible they literally drop you to your knees in gratitude and relief. But into every answer is woven this unchangeable truth: There is no power on this earth—absolutely no power—that is equal to God. And prayer connects us with Him, the One who penetrates the impenetrable, reaches the unreachable, and destroys the indestructible. He is the One who has toppled nations and found lost car keys; He has channeled tornados and soothed crying babies. Prayer connects us to His very heart and mind.

Connecting with God is a journey of discovery into communication with our almighty, all-powerful God, and I'm glad we're taking it together.

To get started, write down how you define the word *communication*.

Google defines it as “the imparting or exchanging of information or news.” Webster adds that it can mean “personal rapport.” I like the picture that *exchanging* portrays—emphasizing the two-way, back and forth aspect of communication in which both parties speak and both

parties listen. And the word *rapport* underscores the idea of being personally involved.

Communication is instinctive to all living beings, connecting them by whatever means God has designed. Creatures that are isolated decline and die. There are amazing stories of prisoners of war who have developed means of communication through intricate combinations of taps. Their communication has become the lifeline that connects them, in spite of the impenetrable cell walls that have kept them physically isolated.

Prayer is the means by which we connect with God in an intensely personal way. No other created being has been given this privilege. The need to connect with God is designed into us, so since the beginning of time people have prayed. People searching desperately for Him pray to all manner of things—nature, animals, images of stone or wood, even other human beings. Prayer is instinctive to all humans, but it is vital to God’s children. What breathing is to physical life, prayer is to spiritual life. It is our lifeline—our connection to God.

Have you ever wondered, *Does God really hear me when I pray? How can I know He will answer?* Although you may have questions about prayer, don’t let them stop you from praying! We don’t have to understand prayer to pray. The more you communicate with God, the fewer questions you’ll have about prayer, and the more vital it will become to your well-being. It will become a connection you don’t want to live without.

When you hear the word *prayer*, what comes to your mind?

Prayer Is Connection

Perhaps the most important aspect of prayer is that it is a dialogue, not a monologue. The second most important aspect is its simplicity. There are no “rules” for praying, no specific wording or posture or previous knowledge required. Prayer is simply talking and listening. It’s no surprise that God has made it so basic—He wants to communicate with everyone, even the youngest. In the Bible, prayer is described by such simple words as *ask*, *call*, *cry*, and *come*.

Prayer doesn’t require “religious” or flowery language. It doesn’t require a certain posture or technique. Don’t become sidetracked by technique and lose sight of the purpose of prayer—heart-to-heart communication with God. He responds to the honesty of our prayers, not the eloquence.

Proverbs 15:8 (page 491) says that the Lord “*delights in the prayers of the upright.*” Imagine! God delights in our communication with Him!

Think of when your phone rings and the name of someone you love very much is displayed on the screen. How do you feel?

Isn’t it amazing to think that’s how God feels when we connect with Him? But it goes even further than that. Is there someone with whom you talk more intimately—with whom you share your innermost thoughts?

What is your relationship to that person? Why are you willing to share your most private thoughts with them?

That's how God feels about *us*! That's the level of communication He wants to have with us. And we have the great privilege of prayer, in which God opens His heart to us and makes us privy to His thoughts.

Prayer: When and Why

The disciples learned many things about Jesus as they spent time with Him while He lived on earth. One thing they observed was the importance of communication with His Father in Jesus' life. Read the following verses and note when and under what circumstances Jesus prayed.

“Through the ongoing discipline of prayer, we are brought into direct and intimate contact with the Father's heart. As we continually behold His glory, we are changed into His image. As He has constant access to us, He realigns our vision, recreates our desires, reproduces His heart. Powerful, earth-changing prayer begins in the heart of God and flows through the hearts of His people.”

—Jennifer Kennedy Dean

Mark 1:35 (page 762)

Matthew 14:23 (page 746)

Luke 6:12-13 (page 786)

Luke 9:15-16 (page 790)

Mark 14:32-36 (pages 775-776)

How do the following verses instruct us in when and how we pray?

Hebrews 4:16 (page 922)

Matthew 26:41 (page 758)

Ephesians 6:18 (page 898)

1 Thessalonians 5:17 (page 907)

What do you see as being the key points?

The concept of always praying is very strong, isn't it? Pray at all times...on every occasion...never stop...keep watch and pray. In other words, never stop communicating with God. Stay connected!

How well are you doing this?

The Bible gives many compelling reasons to pray. Read the following passages and note what they say.

1 John 5:14-15 (pages 943-944)

Ephesians 6:18 (page 898)

Proverbs 3:5-6 (page 482)

John 14:13 (page 823)

It is easy to stop after the first part of the verse in John 14: *“Ask for anything in my name, and I will do it.”* However, we need to read the entire verse and this includes the last part, which is an acknowledgment that whatever is done brings glory to God.

Which of the above verses did you find most compelling?

There is an interesting instruction in prayer in Matthew 6:7-8 (page 737). What does it say?

If God already knows what we need, why is prayer so important?

It goes back to prayer being a form of communication. It's not just a means of giving God a list of our needs. It's how we acknowledge our dependence on Him. It's how we align our will with His, and it provides an opportunity for us to see His faithfulness and love. Prayer helps us to first become familiar with God and then intimate with Him. It gives Him the opportunity to demonstrate His power to do the impossible. Ultimately, our prayer brings glory to Him—it gives Him the credit for everything that is good.

Prayer Is Not Complicated

God is holy and righteous. He stands completely apart from us in His purity and absolute moral perfection. The thought of communicating with Him might seem intimidating or even impossible, but nothing could be further from the truth. Only one thing is required for us to talk to God, and that is a personal relationship with Him. When we accept Jesus as our Savior, we become a part of God's holy family. He actually refers to us as His children, and we have the privilege of coming to Him as confidently as a child comes to an earthly parent.

How does Luke 11:2 (page 793) teach us to address God when we pray?

God wants us to view Him as our Father. For many of you, depending on your relationship with your earthly father, this might not be very comforting. However, if you were to write out your definition of an ideal father, what would it be?

Your words could describe God. He is everything you could ever want in a father and so much, much more. Take a moment and connect with God as your Father, and then ponder the assurance of His unconditional love for you.

As we approach God in prayer, we can relax and enjoy our time of conversation with Him. It is our privilege to talk with Him, child-to-parent or best-friend-to-best-friend. The more personal our prayer is, the more it becomes real communication.

In Luke the disciples asked Jesus to teach them to pray—they didn't say "how to pray" just "to pray." And that is our prayer for this study. "*Lord, teach us to pray.*" Through this study, we will be considering various aspects and advantages of prayer that will help us learn to pray. But the best way to learn is to just do it.

At the beginning of each chapter you'll find a "Prayer Profile"—an example of prayer from the Bible. For this chapter, however, we're ending with one. It focuses on a prayer that King Solomon prayed.

Prayer Profile: Solomon

Background: Solomon was a son of King David and the successor to him on the throne of Israel. Biblical scholars estimate that he was about 20 years old when he prayed the following prayer. Read 1 Kings 3:7-13 (page 260).

What did Solomon pray for in these verses?

Did you notice the humility of Solomon's prayer? At the beginning he acknowledged his lack of ability to carry out the duties of king, as well as his need for God. He not only asked for understanding as he governed his people, but he asked God to help him know the difference between right and wrong. His request was very wise, because right and wrong isn't always clear, is it? Can you think of a time when you needed God's help in discerning the difference between right and wrong?

What were the results of your decision?

How did God answer Solomon's prayer?

God was clearly pleased by the lack of ego in Solomon's prayer. He wasn't praying so much for his own sake, but for the sake of the people he would be ruling, God answered.

Did you gain any insight about prayer? If so, what did you learn?

As we continue this study on prayer, ask the Lord to increase His importance in your life, and the importance of connecting with Him. Regardless of whether you have communicated with God for only a short time or for years, ask Him to give you something new and fresh that will enrich your prayer life.

Personal Reflection and Application

From this chapter,

I see...

I believe...

I will...

Prayer

Father, you have said I don't have to worry about anything; instead, I should pray about everything. You have told me to tell you what I need and thank you for all you've done. Thank you for your promise that when I do this, I will experience your peace, which exceeds anything I can understand. Your peace will guard my heart and mind as I live in Christ Jesus (Philippians 4:6-7, page 901).

