

Prayer

***“Sing praises to God, sing praises;
sing praises to our King, sing praises.***

For God is the King of all the earth; sing to him a psalm of praise.”

Psalm 47:6-7

This study was written by Marilyn Miller, a staff minister at Abiding Word Lutheran Church, Houston, Texas. It was reviewed for theological content by Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary Professor-emeritus Armin Panning.

The study is designed to be used in conjunction with reading the book *Prayer: An Audience with the King* by Joel V. Petermann, part of the People's Bible Teachings Series. The book is available through NPH. Each of the six lessons should take 60-90 minutes, depending upon the amount of discussion.

Prayer

Based on *Prayer: An Audience with the King* by Joel V. Petermann

Part of the People's Bible Teachings Series

Leader's Guide

Chapter 1: The King—The One to Whom We Pray

Chapter 2: The Subjects—Those Seeking an Audience

Opening prayer

1. What images come to mind when we hear the word “king”? Who are some of the rulers that form and influence our idea of a king?

2. Psalm 47:6-7 says “Sing praises to God, sing praises; sing praises to our King, sing praises. For God is the King of all the earth; sing to him a psalm of praise.” Based on what we know from Scripture, from life, and what is discussed on page 12-16, fill in the following comparisons between an earthly king and our KING, the one to whom we pray.

Characteristic	Earthly king	Our Lord and King
Size of kingdom		
Length of reign		
Superiority		
Power		
Justice		
Compassion		

“This, then, is the one to whom we pray. Since he is the Maker and Creator of everything and everyone, he is King of everything and everyone. To understand and know him is critical if we are going to pray to him. What we know about him will affect our prayers to him” (pg. 16).

3. What do we learn about approaching an earthly king from Nehemiah going before King Artaxerxes (Nehemiah 1:11), from Queen Esther seeking an audience with her husband King Xerxes (Esther 4:11,16), and from Queen Bathsheba and Nathan going before King David (1 Kings 1:15-16,22-23)?

4. According to Psalm 14:1-3, and repeated in Romans 3:10-18, what status do we have before the King?

5. From Proverbs 20:2 what should we expect from our King?

6. Read Proverbs 1:20-33 found on page 22 as Wisdom, a personification of the Lord's will and ways, speaks to the simple ones, all those who are morally bankrupt. From this passage what do we learn about our ability to obtain an audience with our King?

7. Do we learn anything new from Isaiah 1:15-18?

8. What is the message in Zechariah 7:13?

The same message is repeated in James 4:3. The author summarizes the situation well when he states: "They do not cry out as subjects, but as self-serving rebels who see prayer as a means for personal benefit. This is something the King detests" (pg 25).

9. How will the renewed knowledge of this barrier between you and your King make a difference in your life?

This is the hard law under which we sometimes choose to live, never paying too much attention to the consequence of our unrepentant sin. But we know we do have an audience with the King through our Savior, Jesus Christ. More on this next week.

For next week read chapters 3 and 4. Also read through Psalm 51 several times, a great Psalm of repentance.

Closing prayer

Ask God to let us heed his call, to purify our hearts and minds, to forgive our sins, and to allow us into his presence.

If you need a copy of the book, order it from NPH.net or call 1-800-662-6022.

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Chapter 3: An Audience—The Right to Speak and Be Heard

Chapter 4; The Father—King Speaks First!

Opening prayer

Last week we learned that we are rebels and the King's anger burns against us. Somehow there must be reconciliation; the King must desire to allow the rebels into his presence. "They cannot reconcile themselves to the King. He must reconcile them to himself. He must first put away his burning anger. He must lay aside his sentence of condemnation and treat them other than as rebels who deserve to die under the laws of the kingdom. Who would approach a tyrant? Who would approach a vengeful king who offers no hope of reconciliation? Isn't it the hope of kindness and mercy that brings subjects before a mighty monarch, even if they have wronged him?" (pg 27-28).

10. Read John 8:29, Hebrews 5:7, Matthew 3:17 and Matthew 17:5. Who is the only person readily given an audience with the King and why?

11. Read John 3:36 and Romans 3:23-26. What do these words mean:

- justified
- grace?
- redemption?
- atonement?

12. Put these passages into your own words to explain what this means for us, the rebels.

13. Read Romans 5:9-10. Does this passage add anything to what we've just said?

14. 2 Corinthians 5:18-19 says, "All this is from God who reconciled us to himself through Christ and gave us the ministry of reconciliation: that God was reconciling the world to himself in Christ, not counting men's sins against them." What impact does this reconciliation have on our prayers?

15. From 2 Chronicles 7:13-16, how does impenitence affect our prayers?

16. What is repentance?

17. Jesus taught us to pray, "Our Father in heaven...". How did "the King" become "our Father"?

This is a whole different relationship. With the completion of Jesus' work and the faith that has been put into our hearts, is he now "our Father" or still "our King"?

18. We know it is proper etiquette, when in the presence of a superior, out of respect we do not speak until spoken to. Has God invited us to speak? (Ps 50:15)

19. When approaching an earthly king, we must first listen to what he has to say before speaking. How and when do we hear what our King has to say? (Hebrews 1:1-2)

20. The author makes the statement "Reading the Bible keeps our prayers fresh" (pg 47). Do you agree? Why? You might want to consider John 15:7 in your answer.

21. How will this discussion about listening before speaking and repentance make a difference in your prayer life?

22. How will meditating on the great gospel message of reconciliation make a difference in your prayer life?

For next week read chapters 5 and 6. Also if it isn't already a regular part of your life, begin reading your Bible every day. Read your Bible before you pray and see if it makes a difference in your prayers.

Closing prayer

Ask God to forgive our sins, thank him for his abundant grace, and ask him to help us hear and understand his message.

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Chapter 5: We Speak to the King

Chapter 6: We Bring Our Requests to the King

Opening prayer

The first week we learned that we are rebels and the King's anger burns against us; our sins build a barrier between us and the King. Last week we learned about the great reconciliation that is ours because of the work of Jesus, our Lord and Savior. He removes the barrier, and the King speaks to us through the Bible, inviting us to come into his presence. This week, we will talk about how we speak to the King.

23. What are some of the ways in which you pray?

24. What are some of the different types of prayer?

- Ps 98:1, 4

- Ps 136:1, Matt 14:19
- Ps 32:3-6
- 1 Sam 1:11
- Exodus 32:31-32, Luke 23:34

Do your prayers include all of these?

25. The author says prayer always seeks divine favor (pg 61). Reflect and comment on this statement.

26. Martin Luther says in his discussion of the Fifth Petition of the Lord's Prayer: "And forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us. *What does this mean?* We pray in this petition that our Father in heaven would not look upon our sins or because of them deny our prayers; for we are worthy of none of the things for which we ask, neither have we deserved them, but we ask that he would give them all to us by grace; for we daily sin much and surely deserve nothing but punishment." What impact does unforgiven sin have on our prayer? Why?

27. Read Hebrews 11:6, Psalm 32:6 and Psalm 145:18. Can an unbeliever pray? Justify your answer.

As repentant believers we take to heart Luther's comment "A Christian without prayer is just as impossible as a living person without a pulse." The author adds (page 68) "We cannot live like Christians and do what Christians do until we are Christians. Once a person becomes a Christian by God's grace and the power of the Holy Spirit, however, at that very same moment that person begins to act like a Christian. That includes the heartfelt desire to pray."

28. When we pray for ourselves, what are some of the things that we take to God in prayer?

- Luke 11:13
- James 5:13a
- Luke 22:46
- Acts 8:22

- Philippians 4:6

29. The Bible not only tells us to pray for ourselves, but it also teaches us to pray for others. For whom do we pray?

- 1 Timothy 2:1-2

- Acts 26:29

- Romans 15:30-31

- Luke 22:32

- James 5:14

- Matthew 5:44

- Matthew 19:13a

- For whom do we not pray? (Hebrews 9:27)

30. Sometimes we feel inadequate in our prayers, or our faith is weak, or we don't even know what to pray for. Based on Romans 8:26, should this concern us?

31. How do we take advantage of this work of the Holy Spirit?

32. How will our discussion today—the different types of prayers, what we are to pray for, those for whom we are to pray, the impact of unrepentant sin on our prayers, and the role of the Holy Spirit in our prayers—make a difference in your prayer life?

For next week read chapters 7 and 8. Also if it isn't already a regular part of your life, begin reading your Bible every day. Read your Bible before you pray and see if it makes a difference in your prayers.

Closing prayer

“The prayer of a righteous man (person) is powerful and effective” (James 5:16).

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Chapter 7: Common Courtesy—The Etiquette of Prayer

Chapter 8: More Etiquette: Language and Location

Opening prayer

The way we speak to others says something about our understanding of our relationship to them. Today we will discuss the words we choose, our posture, what we do with our hands, and where we choose to pray.

33. In what posture do you usually find yourself when saying your private prayers? Where do you usually pray?

34. Do you find these physical things make a difference in your ability to pray or the quality of your prayers?

35. The Bible doesn't say there is a preferred posture but gives us examples of several.
 - Kneeling: 1 Kings 8:54 (*Solomon at dedication of temple*), Daniel 6:10 (*Daniel routinely praying 3 times a day*), Luke 22:41 (*Jesus in Garden of Gethsemane*), Acts 21:5 (*Believers praying as Paul leaves them for Jerusalem*)

The author's informal survey indicated only 7% of those who pray in private kneel for those prayers, though 57% said they had knelt at some time. When might we consider kneeling for prayer and what benefits might it provide?

- Standing: 1 Samuel 1:26 (*Hannah asking for a child*), Nehemiah 9:2 (*the people confessed their sins*), Mark 11:25 (*Jesus' instruction to his disciples*).

The author's informal survey indicated 24% of the people who pray in private stand while praying. When might we consider standing for prayer and what benefits might it provide?

- Sitting 2 Samuel 7:18 (*David before the Lord*), 1 Kings 19:4 (*Elijah under the broom tree*)

The author's informal survey indicated 51% of the people who pray in private sit while praying. When might we consider sitting for prayer and what benefits might it provide?

- Lying down: Ps 6:6 (*I flood my bed with weeping*) and possibly Psalm 63:6 (*On my bed I remember you*)

Lying down does not appear to be a common posture for prayers in Scripture. The author's informal survey, however, showed that 54% of those who pray in private most often pray while lying down. When might we consider lying down for prayer and what benefits might it provide?

36. Are there any concerns with this posture?

37. What do you do with your hands while praying?

38. Again, we have nothing commanded or even recommended in Scripture. Interesting for us as Lutherans, we do have a number of examples in Scripture (1 Kings 8:54, Exodus 9:29, 33, Ps 141:2, 1 Tim 2:8) of people praying with outstretched hands, ready to receive the gifts from God. Would you feel comfortable doing this, or seeing someone else in our worship service doing this? Why?

39. What things might we consider as we decide our posture during our prayers?

40. Do you prefer to use your own words when you pray or use prayers that others have written? When might each be appropriate?

41. Do you say your prayers out loud or just in your heart? What are some of the benefits of learning to say your prayers out loud?

42. Does it matter to God if we say our prayers aloud or from our heart? (Ps. 139:2,4)

43. How often should we pray? Look at Daniel 6:10 (*Daniel prayed three times a day*), Matthew 14:23 (*Jesus went to a quiet place to pray*) John 11:41,42 (*Jesus speaking to the Father*), Luke 23:34 (*on the cross*), 1 Thess. 5:17 (*pray continually*).

44. When it comes to where we should be when we pray, do you think these passages give us conflicting messages?

- Matt. 6:6
- Matt. 5:16
- Matt. 14:19
- Acts 21:5

We may want to seek a quiet place following Jesus' example in Matthew 5 for our regular time in prayer. However, there is nothing wrong with praying in a restaurant, in a hospital room, or any of a number of other places as long as we have the proper motive and not one like the Pharisee wanting praise from others.

Does anyone want to share a favorite place for prayer?

45. What difference will our discussion today make in your prayer life?

For next week read chapters 9 and 10. Also if it isn't already a regular part of your life, begin reading your Bible every day. If you're comfortable with it, try kneeling or raising outstretched hands and see if it makes a difference in your prayer.

Closing prayer

“The prayer of a righteous man (person) is powerful and effective” (James 5:16).

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Chapter 9: An Open Invitation from the King

Chapter 10: Our Petitions to Our Father-King

Opening prayer

46. What types of things do you ask for in your prayers?

47. Jesus said in Matt. 21:22 "If you believe you will receive whatever you ask for in prayer."
What does "if you believe" tell us about how our prayers are answered?

48. Read 1 John 5:14-15 and Jesus' words in Mark 14:36. How does the thought "according to his will" affect the answer we get to our prayers?

49. When is it correct to add “if it is your will” to our prayers?

50. When is it appropriate not to add “if it is your will” to our prayers?

51. Have you ever thought there are things too trivial to pray for, or have you felt some requests might be too bold? Explain.

52. What does it mean to pray “in Jesus’ name?”

53. From where do we get the confidence to pray boldly?

54. Read the quote from Luther on page 120 and comment on what it means to you.

55. Read Luke 11:9-10. What does this tell us about our prayers?

56. Why do you think we are encouraged to ask for some things more than once?

57. In Luke 6:28 God tells us to pray for our enemies and yet we have examples of David calling down curses on his enemies. How are we to understand the imprecatory psalms, such as Psalm 59:12-13, where David asks that his enemies be punished?

58. What kinds of prayers do we find in Scripture?

- Acts 4:24, Psalm 103:1-2
- Psalm 51:1-2, Luke 23:42
- Psalm 136:1, Luke 17:15-17
- Jonah 2:2, Acts 12:5
- Judges 16:28, Luke 1:13, James 5:16

59. What are the most common things in your prayers?

60. If you have ever prayed for your enemies or for those who made your life difficult, what difference did it make in your relationship?

61. Have you ever prayed for the Holy Spirit to work in your life or the life of someone else? Have you seen it happen?

62. What changes in your prayer life do you wish to make based on what we have discussed today?

For next week read chapters 11 and 12. Also if it isn't already a regular part of your life, begin reading your Bible every day. Make a list of the changes you'd like to make in your prayer life and consciously begin making those changes.

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Chapter 11: The Father-King Answers Prayer

Chapter 12: Handbook on Prayer

Opening prayer

63. Have you ever delayed answering the request of someone, whether a child, friend, or spouse? Why did you delay?

64. Do you think God might use the same reasons for delaying answers for us or giving us something different than we thought we were asking for?

65. The author reminds us that similar prayers may be answered differently. When James the brother of John and an apostle was arrested by Herod Agrippa, he was executed. But when Peter, also an apostle, was arrested by the same man, his life was saved. Believers were praying for the preservation of both men. How can we understand these very different answers to what appear to be very similar prayers in very similar situations?

66. The author states “There are times when the Lord denies our prayers simply because they are not proper prayers” (pg. 143). As a reminder from previous weeks, what types of things could make our prayers improper?

67. If God had a master plan from the beginning of eternity (Ps. 139:16), if he knows everything even before it happens (1 John 3:20), if he is in control of all things (Rom. 8:28), if he is changeless (Ps. 33:11, James 1:17), can our prayers really change God’s course of action?

68. To whom should we pray? Is there ever a reason to pray to anyone or anything other than the Triune God? On what do you base your answer?

69. What are some of the practical applications of this in our world today?

70. Father, the Son, or the Holy Spirit—to whom should we pray?

71. What are three reasons that we use the Lord's Prayer?

72. How do we keep it from becoming a mechanical recitation?

73. A quick review of the Lord's Prayer:

- Of what does "our Father" remind us?

- How do we "hallow his name?"

- What does it mean to ask that God’s kingdom come?
- What do we mean when we say “thy will be done?”
- When we ask for “daily bread”, what might we be thinking about?
- Of what are we reminded when we ask that our sins be forgiven?
- What warning are we to consider when we say “as we forgive those who have sinned against us?”

- What do we mean when we ask that we not be led into temptation?

- What does “deliver us from evil” make us think about?

God invites our prayers and has the power to answer them. With him, nothing is impossible. Amen—so be it!

You may want to study the Lord’s Prayer in more detail, using Luther’s Catechism. Make a list of the changes you’d like to make in your prayer life and consciously begin making those changes.

Closing Prayer

The Lord’s Prayer

“The prayer of a righteous man (person) is powerful and effective” (James 5:16).