Prayer Basics for Adults
(Lesson 1: Introduction)

(A study guide resource built to accompany the book *Prayer Basics: The Who, What, When, Where, Why, and How of Prayer* and brought to you by the Office of Prayer and Spiritual Care, a ministry of the General Council of the Assemblies of God.)

The Office of Prayer and Spiritual Care

Equipping the Church...
...Answering the Call
LESSON 1: Prayer: What’s It All About?

STUDY TEXT:
Genesis 1:26,27; 2:7; Psalm 34:15; 66:18,19; 145:18; Proverbs 1:20-33; Luke 10:38-42; Matthew 6:33; John 16:13; 1 Thessalonians 5:17; James 4:3; 1 John 5:14,15

LESSON FOCUS:
God has created us in His own image, designed us for eternity, and desires to have a personal relationship with us; prayer provides the fundamental means by which we stay connected with God and grow in this relationship.

KEY VERSE: Genesis 1:27
God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them (NIV).

Open the Study

DISCUSSION STARTER:
Begin by having students discuss the following, either in small groups or as a class. Because this activity serves as an opportunity to get to know each other, encourage all students to respond: “Name the three people you talk to the most during the course of an average day.” (Possible responses include a spouse, child, boss, and coworker.)

Now discuss what would happen if students either stopped or severely restricted communication with these individuals. How would the relationship be impacted? (A marriage would become strained without communication. Children would grow estranged. A work supervisor would grow frustrated, ultimately leading to the loss of a job. Similarly, relationships with coworkers would become strained and unproductive.)

ASK:
What are some ways we communicate with God? (While there might be several answers, at its root that question is answered in one word: prayer.)

EXPLAIN:
God created us for an important purpose: to experience a close, eternal relationship with Him. Everything we do as Christians—worship, evangelism, godly living—flows out of that relationship. For that reason, it’s impossible to have that close relationship with God if we fail to stay in communication. Thus, as Christians, prayer deserves top priority in our lives.

In this study, we will examine three vital aspects of prayer, and what they tell us about the importance of prayer.
Examine the Word

1. Prayer Is About Communication

ILLUSTRATION:
Brainstorm with the class some common forms of communication throughout history. Remind them that many forms of communication have become obsolete, such as smoke signals, cave drawings, and telegraph. Others are unique, specialized, or otherwise less common, like pantomime, sign language, or even postal mail. In our electronic age, we might consider face-to-face talking itself to be growing less common, giving way to E-mail, Internet chat rooms, blogging, cell phones, and text messaging. After listing results on the board, use the following questions for discussion:

- **What would be some of the positives and negatives of each form of communication?**
- **What are the most common ways you communicate? Why do you think you choose these methods?**

EXPLAIN:
It seems as if new forms of communication are developing all the time. Yet despite their diversity, from extremely complex electronics to simply writing words on paper, communication basically remains the same: A message is given, then that message is received. Unless these two events take place, communication breaks down.

Yet as simple as this is, it is also extremely important. God has created humanity with an intense desire for interaction. So true is that when a prisoner is punished, the strongest punishment is isolation from others. We are not made to be alone; interaction is vital to our emotional—and spiritual well—being.

- **Prayer is the model for healthy communication with God.**

READ:

**Genesis 1:26,27; 2:7**

EXPLAIN:
We are unique among all created beings in that we have been made in the image of God. This “image” doesn’t refer to physical appearance, but to our spiritual makeup. Unlike every other living thing, we’re able to respond to God, enjoy relationship with Him, and experience a desire to know Him better. It also gives us the ability to see right and wrong. We’re capable of knowing how to set priorities and make decisions that line up with His plan for us.

From the beginning, God created us differently than every other living thing, uniquely breathing into us the breath of life (2:7). It was the ultimate “personal touch.” As a result, we’re able to experience real intimacy with Him.
ASK:
How does prayer impact this unique relationship with God that we enjoy? (In a sense, a strong, consistent prayer life initiates a powerful growth cycle in our spiritual lives. Prayer puts us in contact with the spiritual realm, where we get to know God better and discover His plans for our lives. And the closer our relationship with God becomes, the clearer and stronger that communication will in turn become.)

2. Prayer Is About Relationship

• Sometimes we are challenged by the “stuff” of life.

READ:
1 Thessalonians 5:17

EXPLAIN:
God longs for His followers to have constant, unbroken communion with Him throughout the day. For many of us, however, the stuff of life can easily crowd out not only spending time in devotional prayer, but thinking about God at all; and when the “stuff” of life becomes the substance of life, there is little time for anything else.

EXAMPLE:
Note Luke 10:38-42. It’s easy to become caught up in life’s demands, much like Martha during Jesus’ visit to her and her sister Mary’s home. Martha, who “was distracted by all the preparations that had to be made” (verse 40), complained to Jesus that Mary wasn’t helping her. Jesus’ response: “Martha, Martha... you are worried and upset about many things, but only one thing is needed. Mary has chosen what is better, and it will not be taken away from her” (verse 42). Mary had chosen to take time to be in His presence, to sit at His feet and hear from Him; the stuff of life could wait.

• Practice God’s Presence

EXPLAIN:
Of course, we cannot cloister ourselves away and spend every waking moment in prayer. However, we can remain attuned to the voice of the Holy Spirit and aware always of God’s presence—by expressing praise and adoration to God as we go about our daily tasks, giving thanks to the Lord for His presence, His love, His provision, His guidance, and His many other blessings. Such practice will:

* Help us gain victory in the battleground of our minds.
* Keep us more attuned to the voice of the Spirit.
* Prepare us to become greater witnesses of the gospel.

REFLECTION QUESTIONS:
> Where does intentional time with God and His Word fit on your calendar?
> What is some “stuff” that you could eliminate or bypass that would allow more time for you to spend with God?
How does taking a few moments to express praise and adoration to God make a difference in your day?

What are some steps you can take to help make spirituality flow through your day-to-day life?

3. Prayer Is about Alignment

**DISCUSS:**
Talk about the different ways people define “true friendship.” How do they know if someone is truly their friend? What does a true friend do for them that no one else would do? What would a true friend never do to them? What are some of the “hard things” we have to do for each other when we are friends?

**EXPLAIN:**
True friendship means being there for someone, and knowing that person will do the same. This even rings true when “being there” means doing something unpleasant. For example, if we’re about to make a terrible mistake, a true friend will confront us and help us make a better choice. But this kind of honest interaction only happens in the context of relationship.

This is especially true in our relationship with God. He confronts us when we’re about to make wrong choices, and He’s there for us in the best and worst of times. Yet this kind of relationship doesn’t happen without commitment and effort. It grows from solid communication. That’s where prayer comes in.

- **Prayer keeps us aligned with God’s righteousness.**

  **EXPLORE:**
  Note and discuss what each Scripture passage teaches concerning how prayer keeps us aligned with God’s righteousness.

  * **Psalm 34:15; 66:18,19.** Right standing with God is always dependent on repentance. In this regard, prayer serves two purposes: It keeps us attuned to God’s will for us, and it forms the line of communication allowing us to approach God in repentance when we have sinned.

  * **Proverbs 1:20-33.** Those who refuse to follow godly wisdom will not receive answers to their prayers.

  * **Matthew 6:33.** The more intentional we are about cultivating God’s presence, the more fully His character and image is revealed in us.

- **Prayer keeps us aligned with God’s truth.**

  **BRAINSTORM:**
  Note specific roles that prayer plays in keeping us aligned with God’s truth, as seen in these verses, then talk about why our alliance with truth is so vital.

  * **John 16:13.** Prayer brings wisdom and counsel to deal with life’s struggles, as well as understanding of the truths and principles of Scripture.
* Psalm 145:18. As we align ourselves with truth, God brings answers to our prayers.

- Prayer keeps us aligned with God’s will.

**EXPLAIN:**

Countless voices call for our attention, and our response, every day. The cares of the world, the pull of temptation, and the lure of temporal pleasures and enjoyment all have a message for us. How vital it is to know and embrace God’s will for us. When we have aligned ourselves with His will, our prayer lives will flourish. Note what Scripture teaches us:

* James 4:3. People often question, struggle, and even begin to doubt when their prayers are not answered. Yet James 4:3 offers a simple answer as to why. We avoid the pitfall of asking with wrong motives when we know and embrace the will of God. And such an alignment of our hearts and minds with God comes when we commit to prayer.

* 1 John 5:14,15. One might perceive this as the “positive” side of the principle found in James 4:3. While God cannot be manipulated, He does promise to fulfill His will and purpose for our lives. Thus, when we pray according to His will, He does hear and answer.

**REFLECTION QUESTIONS:**

> Are there areas in your life where you feel you need to align more closely with God’s righteousness? Explain.

> Think about the prayers you’ve prayed recently. How much have those prayers related to aligning with God’s will versus meeting personal wants or interests?

> How does prayer affect your Bible reading and vice versa?

> What has been the result as you have endeavored to pray according to God’s will?