Lesson 7:
How Should We Pray?

(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 7: With Confidence, Persistence, and Power!

STUDY TEXT:
Psalm 34:15; 103:13; Isaiah 45:18,21; Matthew 6:9; 7:7,8; Romans 8:26,27; Ephesians 3:12; 6:10-18; Hebrews 11:1

LESSON FOCUS:
God wants prayer to come from the heart, bathed in humility and sincerity, and embodying the confidence we can have in our all-powerful God.

KEY VERSE: Colossians 4:2
Devote yourself to prayer, being watchful and thankful (NIV).

Open the Study

DISCUSSION STARTER:
Ask students to name and describe the person they looked up to the most when they were young. It could be a relative, pastor, teacher, mentor, or friend. Talk about how they felt about the person, especially the degree to which they trusted him or her. Note that when you have that kind of relationship with a person, it is marked with trust, openness, and sincerity. We are very willing to respond to the instruction and advice of such a person, and enjoy spending time with him or her. Likewise, barriers of that communication are usually let down because of the respect that is held.

ASK:
“What are some ways we show respect for and submission to God?”
(Liken our response and approach to God with how we might approach a mentor or respected friend. Our communication with them is heartfelt, open, and sincere.)

EXPLAIN:
Explain that prayer must be something that comes from our hearts and occupies sincere, meaningful roles at the center of our lives. We are communicating with our powerful Creator who is also our loving Lord. It’s easy to see the role we give prayer, simply by looking at how we pray. Are we humble about prayer, or do we take God for granted and treat prayer like a birthday or Christmas list? Are we confident when we pray, or do we struggle to believe that God has earned our trust? Do we take prayer seriously, or will we let it slide at the slightest distraction? And do we treat prayer like a collection of religious words, or are we looking for power when we pray? How we answer these questions will make a big difference in the kind of influence prayer holds in our lives.
Examine the Word

1. The Importance of Humility

ASK:
“Is it possible to be disrespectful in prayer? What are some examples? Why is it important to avoid those practices that seem disrespectful?”

EXPLAIN:
Note that while God sees us as children, and He values a close relationship with us, He still expects us to give the honor due to Him when we go to prayer. We need to recognize who He is and who we are in comparison to Him. We can always be sure we’re respectful when we remain humble in our prayers.

READ:
Read the Scriptures below, noting what each can tell us about God, as well as about being humble when we pray.

- Matthew 6:9 (We need to remember that God is holy when we pray. Before even listing our needs, Jesus told us to recognize God for who He is: the all-powerful Creator of the Universe who expects us to approach Him with an attitude of worship and a respect for His standards of holiness, goodness, and love. This includes recognizing that we are sinful, and lost without His forgiveness.)

- Psalm 103:13 (“Fearing God” means recognizing God for who He is. We fear God by respecting His plans for us, honoring His will, and humbling ourselves by making Him the highest authority in our lives.)

- Isaiah 45:18,21 (We hallow God’s name, giving Him due honor before presenting our requests. Hallowing God means worshiping Him. This worship helps us avoid becoming presumptuous in our approach to Him. God is our Father, altogether righteous, holy, and just. Our approach to Him should, then, always should include an attitude of humility.)

DISCUSS:
Talk about why people might tend to jump right in with requests when they pray, even making those requests the focus of their prayers. Ask students to ponder how their prayer lives are affected when they take time for reverent worship, spending time quietly meditating on Him and listening for His voice rather than simply asking Him to do something.

2. Pray with Confidence and Faith

ACTIVITY:
Have students answer the following “Have you ever...” questions, then discuss their responses. Then use these questions, as well as their answers as a lead-in to discussing how boldness and confidence can impact the way we pray. Discussion starters are included with each question.
• Have you ever dreamed about doing something big, but hesitated because of uncertainty or fear of taking a risk? (Confidence in prayer helps us trust God when we sense Him telling us to do something we don’t think we can do—or could never hope to do on our own.)

• Have you ever really opened up and expressed your deepest emotions to someone, only to later worry about having said something silly or embarrassing? (It’s normal to feel a bit self-conscious about letting our emotions be seen. As a result, we might tend to only “open up” in front of people we really trust and respect. That’s how God wants us to view Him when we pray. We can trust and respect Him enough to have the confidence to open up in prayer, knowing that He will never belittle us or look down on us because of our fears.)

• Have you ever gotten in trouble for saying something you shouldn’t have said, either because it was untrue or inappropriate in that setting? (All of us experience times when our words get us into trouble. The great thing about prayer is that God knows our thoughts and needs. We can’t lie to Him because He already knows the truth, and He won’t be shocked by anything we have to say. We can be totally confident when we pray, assured that God is listening, He cares, and He knows the future in ways we never could imagine.)

READ:
Ephesians 3:12

DISCUSS:
Ask students to describe what it means to approach God with “confidence.” Emphasize that this isn’t self-confidence on our part. It doesn’t mean we feel as though we can kick down His door and declare, “I’m here, Lord, and this is what I want to say!” Confidence means we don’t have to feel self-conscious, afraid that God is rejecting us, looking down on us, or demanding that we prove our worthiness before He hears us. We’re confident, and we feel free to speak, because we know God is listening, He loves us, and He cares about what we have to say.

READ:
Hebrews 11:1

ASK:
“How do you define the word, ‘faith’?”

EXPLAIN:
Note that there are many ways to define faith. It’s what keeps us believing in spiritual reality when skeptics insist that God does not exist. Faith helps us believe in God’s goodness and the Bible’s promises when life seems hopeless. Faith leads us to put our own desires aside to obey God. But in many ways, faith can be defined in one word: “trust.” We give Him our lives and futures because we trust Him.

PONDER:
Ask students to think of the three people they trust most in the world. Why do they trust these people? How do they demonstrate that trust? How does trust affect their relationships with these people? Discuss how trusting someone will change the kinds of conversations we have with them.
EXPLAIN:
God wants us to be bold and confident when we pray. This attitude doesn’t come from anything we’ve done. Spiritual “giants” have no more right to approach God this way than people who just started a relationship with Him. This is a great promise to those of us who struggle with self-confidence or wonder how God could really want to listen to us. We can be confident because we trust God. It’s a trust He deserves because He has been faithful from the moment He entered our lives.

3. Pray with Persistence

DISCUSS:
Brainstorm with students on several areas where a person might struggle with patience. What are some things they do not like to have to wait for. Examples could include eating, getting in to see the doctor in a medical emergency, or, on a lighter note, checking their e-mail. Talk about reasons why a person would struggle to wait in this situation. Also discuss why waiting can be a good thing.

EXPLAIN:
Note that waiting is one of the hardest parts of prayer. We might start building our prayer lives with great intentions, only to struggle when it seems like nothing is happening. If we let frustration take over, we’ll soon find ourselves letting prayer slide in favor of doing things that seem to bring results.

ASK:
“What are some reasons God might want us to wait, and be persistent when we pray?” (Note that there are times when we don’t understand the big picture, so we’re unable to see God’s plans clearly. Yet we still must trust Him. Or perhaps God wants us to grow in trust, He wants us to learn patience, or we may be involved in spiritual battles we can’t even see. Whatever the case, we can’t let the lack of a quick answer become an excuse to neglect prayer.)

READ:
Matthew 7:7,8

DISCUSS:
Talk about what these verses tell us concerning how we should pray. Note that we are challenged to make continuous effort: continue asking, don’t stop seeking, and knock repeatedly. When we’re willing to practice this kind of persistence, God’s answer will come.

READ:
Psalm 34:15

ASK:
“Why can it be hard to stay persistent and wait for answers to prayer?” (Note that some prayer needs are very intense, such as when a friend or loved one is extremely ill. We might be facing a desperate situation ourselves, or feeling serious anxiety about a decision. Times like these make prayer challenging, and even tempt us to look elsewhere for answers. Yet it is during exactly these times that we must remember God has not forgotten us. He does hear us, and He wants the best for us. Thus, as we continue to pray, we can do so with assurance that those prayers are heard.)
SHARE:
Invite students to talk about times when they’ve persisted in prayer, and finally did see the answer come. Talk about the rewards that come from this kind of faith, as well as some of the struggles experienced while waiting. Was there ever a temptation to slack off when it came to prayer, or to find another answer? How was that temptation overcome?

4. Pray with Power

READ:
Ephesians 6:10-18

EXPLAIN:
Discuss what these verses teach us about being Christians. Explain that Christians are in constant battle with spiritual enemies. We prepare for this battle by studying the Bible, building faith, and living out righteousness. Yet the foundation of all this preparation is seen in verse 18: We must make prayer the center of our relationship with God.

DISCUSS:
Have students name some common battles Christians confront today. Examples include relationship struggles, whether they be between spouses, parents and children, friends, or others who are especially close to us. Other common struggles come in the form of financial needs or job insecurities. One battle we all face involves standing for truth in a society that is increasingly hostile toward Christianity.

READ:
Romans 8:26,27

ASK:
“What is meant by the phrase ‘groans that cannot be uttered’? How does the Holy Spirit intercede for us in this way?”

EXPLAIN:
Note that prayer can be emotional. We hurt inside as we long to experience more of God and receive all that He has planned for us, as well as focus on the intense needs we see or experience. The Holy Spirit lives in us, and “groans” along with us as we pray. There is, then, a real presence of empathy in these verses. The Spirit senses our suffering, as well as our longing for that blessed day when we are delivered from this difficult world. In times like these, the Spirit often guides our prayers as well. As a result, there are many different ways we find help in prayer from the Holy Spirit.

INVITE:
Ask students if they’ve ever experienced a time when they felt the Holy Spirit helping them to pray, perhaps by revealing something to them or giving them peace to express what was on their hearts. This is a good opportunity to discuss how the baptism in the Holy Spirit can enhance our prayer lives—bringing a stronger sense of God’s presence and power.
CLOSING ACTIVITY:
Challenge students to examine how their current prayer life impacts, or fails to impact, their ability to endure spiritual challenges. How much growth have they seen in accomplishing God’s will, and how has the presence or absence of prayer made a difference? End with a time of prayer, during which students can pray for one another, asking God to make them stronger in prayer and more serious about their prayer lives.

REFLECTION QUESTIONS:
Encourage students to ponder these questions during the coming week.

• **What rewards have you experienced from persistent prayer?**

• **What purposes has God worked out in your life as a result of persisting in prayer?**

• **Describe a time when you were especially aware of the Holy Spirit’s enablement as you prayed.**

• **How is your current prayer life impacting your effectiveness in dealing with the spiritual challenges you face?**