

COVENANT PRAYER

Dear Jesus,

I thank you that you want a relationship with me. I want to commit to the habits necessary for spiritual growth and maturity – to pray to you, to study your Word, the Bible, and meeting with other Christians who follow you.

Signed _____

Key Texts to Memorise

Psalm 119:105

“Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light for my path.”

Matthew 7:7,8

“Ask and it will be given you; seek and you will find; knock and the door will be opened to you. For everyone who asks receives; he who seeks finds; and to him who knocks, the door will be opened.”

New Disciples Guide

Knowing God in Christ

Freedom in Christ

Growing in Christ

Loving God in Christ

Hope in Christ

Victory through Christ

Living for Christ

Worshiping Christ

Community in Christ

Growing in Christ

Growing in Christ

All relationships grow as a result of communication, sharing, learning, spending time and doing things together. The same applies to our relationship with God. There are several different ways of developing our relationship with God. We will look at them this week. This is only a brief introduction as getting to know God is a constantly growing and developing experience. The ways we will look at are: *prayer, the Bible and other Christians.*

The God Who Speaks to Us

Paul said God “*is not far from each one of us*” (Acts 17:27). He is constantly seeking to lead us to him. God has already been speaking to you, that is why you are following him now. While sometimes God acts very forcefully in some people’s lives, he is usually very gentle. God does not overwhelm us. You know that God has spoken to you, to your heart and conscience. He has placed new desires within you, but you can’t describe it as actual audible words or always pin down a single moment. This is normal. God works mysteriously in our thoughts and life.

Learning to Communicate back to God

God wants to open up the lines of communication. He wants to speak to us and for us to speak to him. This means much to him. Prayer is one of the key foundations to the Christian life. What do you think prayer is? Prayer is actually quite simple to understand. One of the best definitions of prayer is this:

Prayer is the opening of the heart to God and talking to him as you would talk to your very best friend.

Asking, Seeking and Knocking

What does Jesus encourage us to do in Matt 7:7-11?

What is a Cell Group?

It is a small group of Christians getting together and doing what the disciples in Acts did. They met in each other's *houses* and prayed, learnt, worshipped, ate, and fellowshiped together (see Acts 20:20, Rom 16:5, Col 4:15, Phil 2:1).

A Warning and an Encouragement

Read Hebrews 10:24,25,32-34.

What is the warning in verse 25?

What positives practices are encouraged?

What does he commend about their past?

One cannot be a Christian on one's own. God never made us to be alone. That's why he puts us with other believers so we can help each other and grow together. In addition to meeting in small groups, the early Christians also met together in larger groups for worship. We should do both.

One of the ways God has a relationship with us is through other believers. Are you fellowshiping with other believers? Are you in a cell group?

Can you name the three basic ways we maintain a relationship with God? Here's a checklist to help our relationship with God:

- Am I regularly reading God's Word? (Try and do so at the same time each day and the same place, if possible).
- Am I praying regularly to God? Do I pray with others?
- Am I fellowshiping with other believers?

Part of a Family

In the natural world no baby is born without a family. It is the same for the spiritual world. God places us amid other believers. Here, we both receive from others and give to others. In this way, God wishes to develop in us the kind of character that is like him. Life in the believing community is varied and involves many things.

The Early Christians

Read Acts 2:42-47 and list the many different things the first Christians did:

_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____

The above description is the result of Christ's salvation and the giving of the Holy Spirit to a group of believers. Here is a crucial truth: ***The Christian is one who lives in community with God and other believers.***

Join a Cell Group

It is important for a new believer to do what the early Christians did. They met in each other's houses and encouraged each other. Today we call these groups 'small groups', 'home groups' or 'cell groups.'

Jesus Teaches Us to Pray

What has praying to God been like to you? Maybe it is very special or maybe you don't know how too. The disciples once came to Jesus and asked that he teach them how to pray. In response, Jesus gave a simple model prayer that can guide us as we learn to pray.

Look up Matthew 6:9-13 and fill in the blanks (some translations will be different):

Our _____ in heaven, _____ be your name.

We must pray only to God, never to saints or Mary or spirit guides or the dead. We must see God as a loving Father, not a cold, harsh or distant one. To 'hallow' means to respect and honour. We should praise God.

Your _____ come, Your _____ be done, On earth as it is in heaven.

We should ask that God would align us with his will and that his will be done in our lives. We can hand specific situations over to him in prayer, yield our will and ask for his will to be done.

Give us today our daily _____.

We can present our needs to God. Read Matt 6:25-34 for a beautiful description of the God who provides for us.

_____ us our debts, As we also forgive our _____.

We should seek forgiveness for our sins. And we should ask God to make us forgiving, like him. Jesus said God will not forgive us if we refuse to forgive others (Matt 6:14,15).

And lead us not into temptation, but _____ us from the evil one.

We can ask God for protection, strength and deliverance from temptation and the devil.

Jesus was saying, "Here is a model of what prayer should be like. It is something like this ..." We can learn how to pray from this prayer and the many others that occur in the Bible. But the best way is to simply pray!

Spend time in prayer with God now, using Jesus model to help you.

Day Two

Types of Prayer

There are different types of prayer for different situations. There is public prayer in church. There is the prayer of thanks for food, commonly known as 'grace.' But the most important form of prayer for us is secret prayer. Read Matthew 6:5-8 and answer the following questions:

Secret Prayer

Jesus said we are not to pray as the hypocrites and the Gentiles pray. What are these two ways of praying? (Matt 6:5,7,8)

How then should we pray and in what sort of place should we pray? (Matt 5:6)

Prayer is the Breath of the Soul

Prayer is the breath of the soul. Just as we can't live physically without breathing so we can't live spiritually without praying. It must become as habitual as breathing. We may pray to God in our minds at any time. We do not need to be on our knees (see Neh 2:4). Paul tells us in 1 Thess 5:16-18 "*Rejoice always, pray without ceasing, give thanks in all circumstances; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you.*" Prayer is anytime, anywhere for anything.

Answers to Prayers

Jesus said God is very willing to answer our prayers. Someone has said that all prayers are answered by God, either by a 'yes', 'no' or 'wait.' However, some prayers are not answered in the way we would wish. The following texts explain why some prayers are not answered as we want. Write down the answers why:

How to Test Religious Claims

The Bible has a simple test to evaluate religious or spiritual claims. Isaiah 8:16, 20 says, *“Bind up the testimony, seal the law among my disciples. To the law and the testimony! If they do not speak according to this word, it is because there is no light in them.”* (NKJV).

The Law and the Testimony

We need to test all truth claims by the “law and the testimony” – the commandments and the Bible. The Bible is how we test to see if a teaching is true or false. The Bible has more authority than any church, church tradition, pastor, reason, or experience. Even if you were to have a vision of an angel or God, but the vision told you to disobey some part of the Bible or its gospel – you should follow the Bible and not a vision! If you don’t believe read Galatians 1:8!

Scripture Twisting

What warning and good advice does Peter give in 2 Peter 3:14-18?

Here Peter warns us against twisting the Scriptures as some were doing in his day. Here are some guidelines to help you.

- ‘Scripture twisters’ focus on the hard to understand parts of the Bible. It is safe for you to stick to the easy to understand parts of the Bible.
- ‘Scripture twisters’ love to get a following, rather than to build up God’s community.
- ‘Scripture twisters’ make obscure ideas into big issues. They have hobbyhorses and are obsessed with one detail. Stick to the basic and broad truths about Jesus, and salvation, and discipleship.
- ‘Scripture twisters’ ignore the context of verses

The best way to learn about scripture is to start reading. The first books of the Bible you should read are the gospels. Mark is the shortest and a good one to start with.

Day Four

A Guide for Our Lives

God seeks to guide us in this fallen world by the Bible. 2 Tim 3:14-17 describes the manner in which the Bible came and its purposes. Read this text and fill out the following.

Purpose of the Scriptures

In verse 15 what are the scriptures' purpose?

“All Scripture is _____ by God.” (Some translations will word it differently.

From verse 16 list the four functions or uses of scripture

1

2

3

4

What is the end result mentioned in verse 17?

Notice the Bible is the test for all doctrine or teaching and how to live. The Bible is supreme in matters of faith, belief and practice. There is no other authority about God and spiritual truth that is equal to it. The Bible is above all other claims or claimants.

Why Prayers are not Answered or Answered Differently

James 1:5-8

James 4:3

Psalm 66:18

1 John 5:14,15

Prayer's main purpose is to connect us with God, not to give us everything we want. Prayer is connection with a personal God of love, not a lucky lotto ticket. God won't give what would damage us or others nor will he cater to sin or selfishness. How prayer works is often mysterious. One Christian lady who knew God very well once wrote, "God is too wise to err and too good to do me harm."

Prayer connects us with God

One thing about prayer is for certain – no-one has ever sustained a life with God apart from it. There is something in the practice of prayer that helps us to be more aware of the unseen spiritual realities around us. It makes us more alert to God's unspoken voice.

Our spirit can often be lifted to God in prayer. It is as if sometimes God draws us out to himself and we encounter him in special ways. God loves to have us communicate with him. Prayer is simple but not simplistic. It is deep, profound and the greatest privilege. There is much more to learn about prayer and the best way is to pray.

Put into life practice what you are learning and spend time in prayer

Day Three

Building your Relationship by the Word

Prayer, along with study of the Bible form the basis of what many Christians call their 'Quiet time.' That is time spent alone with God each day. Ps 5:3 says *"In the morning, O Lord, you hear my voice: in the morning I lay my request before you and wait in expectation."* The New Disciples' Guide helps one start quiet time with God. Begin with a few minutes, maybe 10, and aim to build up to 20 minutes or more. Try to do this regularly each day in an undisturbed place.

How God Informs Us

The Bible reveals that God is a communicating God. Not only does God speak to our hearts in mysterious ways and invites us to pray to him, but God also speaks to us through his Word – the Bible. The Bible goes hand in hand with prayer in our relationship with God.

What the Bible Is and Isn't

The Bible has great transformative power because the Spirit of God works through it. The Bible is not an encyclopaedia to tell you everything there is to know. Rather, it is given so we can know God personally. The Bible is so deep you can't exhaust it, yet it has plenty that you can understand right now. It is exciting to grow in a knowledge of God's word.

The Power of God's Word

What does Psalms 33:6-9 tell us about God's Word?

God's Word is powerful! Think of how vast the universe is and that it is upheld by his Word (Heb 1:3). God's word is powerful to heal, cast out unclean spirits and gives us salvation (Luke 4:36-40). This spoken word has taken on a written form in the Bible. The same powerful God is behind both.

The Key to Understanding the Bible

What is the ultimate focus of the written Word? John 5:39.

The Bible leads us to know Jesus, who is the ultimate focus of scripture. The written word is given to lead us to the Living Word. When we read and accept the Bible, the Spirit speaks and brings Christ to us. The Bible's purpose is not to lead us to study the Bible just for the sake of knowledge and facts, but to lead us to know God through Jesus.

The Ultimate Word

Jesus is the focus of the Bible because he is the ultimate Word of God. In John 1:1-14 we read that Jesus is the Word who became flesh and dwelt with us. John is not talking about a mere word from God. This Word is God himself! Jesus is God the Word. He is the revelation of God (vs. 18).

Below are more verses that describe some of the other functions and roles the Bible performs in our lives. Write down what you discover:

Roles and Functions of the Bible

1 Peter 1:23

Heb 4:12

Psalms 119:105

Rom 15:4

It is great to realise God has given us a guide for our spiritual journey. Commit to being informed and guided by it through your life.