

A8 - The Christian Life

A Disciplined Life

Study 1 - Talking to God

BIBLE READING:

**Matthew 6: 5-13; Hebrews 11: 6;
James 1: 5-8**

KEY VERSE:

“The prayer of a righteous person has great power as it is working.”

James 5: 16

As we have seen previously, it is important for Christians to meet and worship together in a local church. It is also important for every Christian to have some time alone each day away from other people, in a quiet place to read the Bible and pray. Our communication with God is two-way; when we read the Bible, God is speaking to us and when we pray, we are speaking to God. These studies will focus on how we develop in our personal relationship with God.

We will begin by learning about personal prayer.

1. WHY SHOULD I PRAY?

Some people say that because God knows everything there is no point in praying; we are only telling Him what He knows already. But prayer is not just telling God things. It is communicating with Him, so that we can have a relationship with Him. Prayer is a wonderful privilege; God desires to be at work in response to our prayers.

2. WHERE SHOULD I PRAY?

The Lord Jesus said to go into a private place and **“pray to your Father who is in secret”**. (Matthew 6: 6) Personal prayers are between us and God, not about us showing off to others. In public prayer we pray about matters which the whole church can engage in but in private prayer we speak to God about our personal concerns.

3. WHEN SHOULD I PRAY?

Daniel prayed to God three times a day. (Daniel 6: 10) We should make it a habit to pray, at least once a day, for those specific things which are on our hearts. It is a good idea to keep notes of what we prayed for and when, so that we can thank God when He answers our prayers.

4. WHAT CAN I PRAY ABOUT?

It is right to begin personal prayer by praising God for who He is, reflecting on His character and giving Him our appreciation. The first part of the prayer which Jesus used in teaching His disciples focuses on **“Our Father in Heaven...”**. (Matthew 6: 9) We should not forget to thank God for saving

us and making us His children. We ought to thank Him every day for the many good things He gives us.

We should be honest and tell God what is on our minds or hearts, bringing our hopes, fears and requests to Him. We can also pray for guidance, for increased understanding of the Bible, for victory in overcoming temptation and that our lives would be honouring to Him.

It is important that our prayers do not become a personal wish-list! God expects us to pray for others, including **“kings and all who are in high positions...”**. (1 Timothy 2: 1, 2) You can also pray for friends who are not yet Christians, for family, for government and country, along with any current news items.



5. HOW SHOULD I PRAY?

We should pray believing that God will answer our prayers. Praying in faith is very important. (James 1: 6, 7; Hebrews 11: 6)

Our prayers should be earnest and from our hearts. The Key Verse states that this kind of prayer will have great power. (James 5: 16) We can count on it being effective. Praying earnestly means that we are sincere in our prayers and look to God to answer so that He is glorified. Instead of saying, “Bless mum and dad, and help my friend, Amen,” our prayers should be along these lines, “Lord, I long for my friend to know You. Please help her to understand the Good News about the Lord Jesus. Give me opportunities to explain things to her.” Our prayers for Christians who are facing difficulties should be specific and with understanding.

Prayer should be from holy hearts. That doesn't mean we have to be perfect when we pray, but it does mean that if we are wilfully disobeying God, He will not respond to our prayers. **“If I had cherished iniquity in my heart, the Lord would not have listened.”** (Psalm 66: 18) Confessing our sins is always an important part of our personal prayer life. (1 John 1: 9)

The Lord Jesus commanded His disciples, **“Watch and pray.”** (Matthew 26: 41) and that is what we should be doing. This brings a challenge to us all to be active in prayer.

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Study 2 - Listening to God

BIBLE READING: Psalm 19: 7-14

KEY VERSES:

**“Make me to know Your ways O Lord,
teach me Your paths. Lead me in
Your truth and teach me, for You are
the God of my salvation...”**

Psalm 25: 4, 5

In the previous study we looked at the incredible privilege we have to be able to speak to God in prayer. We now turn to consider how God speaks to us through His Word.

Hebrews 1: 1 tells us that in Old Testament times God spoke to people in various ways through the prophets. The prophets brought messages from God to the people and spoke on His behalf. The Lord gave His word to the prophets in various ways, including direct speech, dreams, and visions.

In New Testament times God spoke to men and women through His Son, the Lord Jesus. (**Hebrews 1: 2**) This was done during Jesus' time on earth. Jesus was **“the Word”** who **“dwelt among us”**. (**John 1: 14**) He told people the things they needed to know about God. Then God, through the Holy Spirit, caused men to remember and write down the words and miracles of Jesus. In this way, people who hadn't seen Him or heard Him could know what He had said. He also revealed other things by the Holy Spirit to the apostles, who wrote them down. These writings were collected together to form a book, or series of books, called the Bible.

God speaks to us today when we read the Bible. He speaks to us by helping us understand the meaning of the words He has written. Through His Holy Spirit, the words teach us, rebuke us, correct us, inspire us and guide us. (**2 Timothy 3: 16, 17**) The Bible contains everything we need to know to be saved and live the Christian life. (**2 Peter 1: 3**)

As well as listening to the teaching of God's Word in church, it is important for all Christians to take some time each day to read the Bible on a personal basis. Start by setting aside a short time each day to find a quiet place to read the Bible and pray. Mornings are a good time to meet with God when your mind is fresh and uncluttered from the busyness of the day. You may not be a 'morning person', however, and prefer to read and pray at another time of day - find a time that works best for you!

Pray first and ask God to help you understand what you are going to read. We have previously suggested that Bible books such as the Gospel of John, Acts of the Apostles and

Genesis are good places to begin to read. Have a notebook and a pen beside you to write down things that you learn or questions you want to ask. Many people find it beneficial to use daily Bible reading notes, along with their Bible. A wide range of Bible reading notes are available in print and online. Here are a few suggestions:

Our Daily Bread: <https://odb.org/>

Scripture Union: <https://content.scriptureunion.org.uk/bible-reading-guides>

Bible Reading Fellowship: <https://www.brfonline.org.uk/pages/bible-reading-notes-at-a-glance>

There is no set formula for having a Quiet Time with God each day - it is about developing a relationship with Him. However you may find the following steps helpful:

1. Pray and ask God to help you understand what you are about to read.
2. Read the Bible passage selected for the day.
3. Think / meditate on what you have read. Re-read the Bible passage again slowly, if you find that helpful. You may want to consider the following questions (see A1 Study 4):

What does the passage tell me:

- a) about who God is and what He does?
- b) about the Lord Jesus Christ?
- c) about my salvation?
- d) about the kind of life I should live to please God?

4. Write down what you think God is saying to you through the Bible reading. Write down anything you have learned or any questions that you have.
5. If you are using Bible reading notes, read them at this point.
6. Thank God for what He has taught you through your reading. You may want to use the words of Scripture or the concepts which they contain as a basis for prayer. You can then continue your personal time of prayer as outlined in Study 1.



Answer Sheet

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Study 1 - Talking to God

Name: _____ Return address on back of answer sheet

Address: _____

1. How would you answer someone who said that there is no point in praying because God knows everything anyway?

□ /3

2. Read *Matthew 6: 5-13* again.

a) Where did Jesus say "*the hypocrites*" prayed? _____

b) Why did they do this? _____

c) In contrast to "*the hypocrites*", how were the disciples of Jesus to pray? _____

d) What do you find most wonderful about our Father in relation to our prayers? _____

e) Which phrase in the Lord's Prayer refers to asking God to meet our needs each day? _____

□ /5

3. 'Daniel was a man of prayer.'

a) How frequently did he pray each day? (*Daniel 6: 10*) _____

b) What two things did Daniel thank God for? (*Daniel 2: 23*) _____

c) Write a list of things which YOU could thank God for. _____

□ /6

4. Answer the following questions:

a) What do you think "*let him ask in faith*" means? (*James 1: 6*) _____

b) Why is faith so important when we pray? (*Hebrews 11: 6*) _____

□ /2

5. Read *1 Timothy 2: 1, 2* again.

a) There are several different words used for 'talking to God'. Which words in **verse 1** would you connect with the kinds of prayer in the phrases below?

• being grateful to God _____

• praying for other people _____

• asking God to supply needs _____

b) Whom are we specifically asked to pray for? _____

c) Name a couple of people in these categories in your country whom you could pray for.

□ /6

6. Explain in your own words what *Psalms 66: 18* means.

□ /3

THINK: Have you learned something new about personal prayer in this study that you can put into practice from now on?

TOTAL = □ /25

Answer Sheet

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Study 2 - Listening to God

1. Finish these sentences to explain how we can communicate with God:

- a) When we pray, we _____
- b) When we read the Bible _____

 /2

2. Read 1 Samuel 3: 1-14.

- a) In what way did God speak to the young boy Samuel? _____
- b) What mistake did Samuel make? _____
- c) What did he say when he eventually answered the Lord? (**1 Samuel 3: 10**) _____

 /6

3. Answer TRUE or FALSE:

- a) Today God speaks mainly to us through dreams. _____
- b) The Holy Spirit guided the men who wrote down the words which the Lord Jesus had spoken. _____
- c) The Bible is the chief way in which God speaks today. _____
- d) It is impossible for anyone to understand the Bible properly without the help of the Holy Spirit. _____
- e) Reading the Bible once a week is sufficient. _____
- f) Morning is the only time we can meet with God. _____

 /6

4. In Psalm 19: 7-11 there are several names, such as “the law”, “the testimony”, “the commandment”. These words all stand for ‘the Word of God’, or ‘the Bible’. From these verses, write down three effects which the Bible can have on us - if we read it!

 /6

5. Read Luke 10: 38-42.

- a) What did Mary do when Jesus came to visit? _____
- b) What did Martha do? _____
- c) What did the Lord Jesus say about Mary's choice? _____
- d) How can we follow Mary's good example? _____
- e) What can distract us from listening to the Lord Jesus? _____

 /5

THINK: Am I spending time with God each day in prayer and Bible reading? Do I need to adjust my schedule to make sure that happens?

 TOTAL = /25

Answer Sheet

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Study 3 - Learning about God

1. Why do you think it is important to study the Bible, not just to read it?

/3

2. In what way can a commentary help us in our study of the Bible?

/2

3. Read Acts 17: 10-12 again.

a) Why do you think the people of Berea were said to be **“more noble”** than those in Thessalonica?

b) In what way are the Christians at Berea a good example for us today? _____

/4

4. Read 2 Timothy 2: 15-18 again.

a) What are the characteristics of **“a worker who has no need to be ashamed”**? _____

b) What does Paul tell Timothy to avoid? _____

c) What are the names of the two men who had **“swerved from the truth”**? _____

d) In what way had they **“swerved from the truth”**? _____

/8

5. Read Ephesians 4: 14 ,15.

a) How does Paul describe people who are impacted by false teaching? _____

b) What does Paul recommend as the solution to this? _____

/3

6. Read 2 Timothy 3: 14-17.

a) When did Timothy first hear the Word of God? _____

b) How is Timothy to use the Word of God? _____

c) What benefits would result from it? _____

/5

THINK: Am I prepared to take the time to study the Bible seriously and become **“a worker who has no need to be ashamed, rightly handling the word of truth?”**

TOTAL = /25

Answer Sheet

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Study 4 - Giving to God

1. Answer the following questions:

a) Write a sentence to explain what 'tithing' meant for the Israelites. _____

b) What were the money and goods that were collected used for? _____

 /4

2. The first Christians, in Jerusalem, were very generous and caring in their attitudes towards each other. Read *Acts 4: 32-35* and write in your own words, what they did to help their brothers and sisters who were in need.

 /3

3. *1 Corinthians 16: 1-3* contains Paul's instructions to the church about "the collection for the saints". (i.e. the Christians)

a) Write out the phrase which tells us that the collection was to be regular.

b) Which words suggest that the amount which a person gives may vary, from week to week?

c) Write out the words which instruct us that ALL the members of the church were to contribute.

d) Where was the collection to be taken to? _____

 /4

4. Read the instructions which Jesus gave His disciples about 'giving', in *Matthew 6: 1-4*.

a) Which instrument did Jesus say they were not to sound? _____

b) What do you think this means? _____

c) Complete the missing words: "**Do not let your _____ hand know what your _____ hand is doing**".

d) What does this saying mean? _____

e) Who sees our secret giving? _____

f) What will the Father do if we give secretly? _____

 /7

5. Read *Luke 21: 1-4* and complete the grid to contrast what Jesus observed.

Rich people

gave out of their _____

still had money left for themselves

A poor widow

gave _____ small copper coins out of her _____

gave _____ that she had.

 /4

6. Read *2 Corinthians 9: 7* and write TRUE or FALSE after the following statements:

a) Giving is a matter of the heart. _____

b) The church leaders can tell Christians how much they ought to give. _____

c) God loves a cheerful giver. _____

 /3

THINK: Reflect on your giving in the light of what you have learned from this study.

Return your completed answer sheet to:

TOTAL = /25 UNIT TOTAL = /100

08/2022

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Study 3 - Learning about God

BIBLE READING:

Acts 17: 10-12; 2 Timothy 2: 15-19

KEY VERSE:

“Do your best to present yourself to God as one approved, a worker who has no need to be ashamed, rightly handling the word of truth.”

2 Timothy 2: 15

Now that you have become a believer, it will soon become clear to you that you have a new desire to read the Bible yourself. Reading the Bible on its own is very important. It makes it possible for God to speak to you, as we saw in the previous Study.

It is also very important for you to study the Bible. Studying the Bible is more than just reading it. It means coming to the Bible to ask questions and find answers. You should ask such questions as, “What do these words I have just read in the Bible mean?” and “What does the Bible teach about such things as - love, relationships, work, money, war?” To help you to understand and study the Bible more fully you will probably need some good books.

1. You should try to get a one-volume COMMENTARY on the Bible. A commentary is a book that comments on each passage of the Bible and helps us to find the meaning of it. There are several excellent one-volume commentaries available on the Bible.

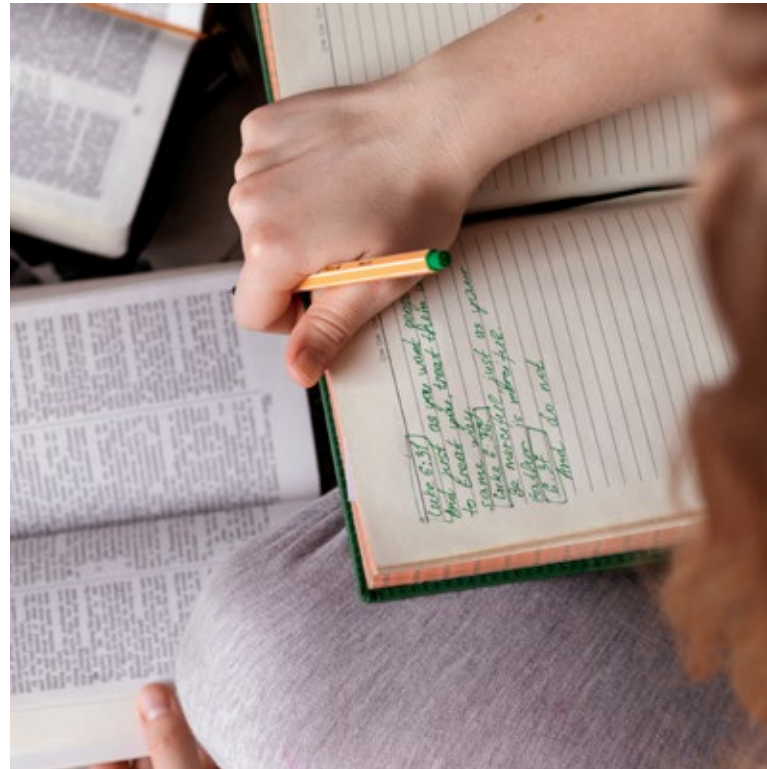
2. Another book you will find useful is a BIBLE DICTIONARY or ENCYCLOPAEDIA. It contains information on all kinds of Bible subjects. These, along with the maps, charts, and diagrams, will help you in your Bible study.

There are various online Bible study tools available. Some of these are free, while others require a subscription. Here are some useful websites:

- <https://www.biblegateway.com>
- <https://biblehub.com>
- <https://www.blueletterbible.org>
- <https://www.biblestudytools.com>
- <https://www.gotquestions.org>

A word of caution: there is an abundance of online biblical material. While you can learn much by reading online articles, keep in mind that not everything you read is biblically sound. It's very easy to get false information from a source that looks reputable, especially if you're just learning how to understand

the Bible for the first time. So, while you can learn a lot this way, you do need to make sure you also learn how to study the Bible for yourself. Read what they say, examine it against Scripture, and see if it makes sense. Read multiple, reputable sources.



Once you have these study tools, you will be able to sit down with a notebook and pen, turn to the section of the Bible you want to study in depth, then ask yourself questions to help you to understand what the passage is saying:

- Who wrote these words?
- Who are they writing/speaking to?
- Why did the author write this passage?
- What is this passage mostly about?
- What does this passage teach me about God's/Jesus' character?
- What should I learn from this passage?
- What should I do, or avoid doing?

The Bereans in the New Testament were commended for the fact that **“they received the word with all eagerness, examining the Scriptures daily to see if these things were so.” (Acts 17: 11)** We should also pray that God will help us understand His Word. **(Psalm 119: 18)** We, too, should study the Bible so that we know what it teaches. Then we will be sure of two things. First of all, we will not be **“carried about by every wind of doctrine”.** **(Ephesians 4: 14)** That means if we know what the Bible teaches we will not be confused by other people. Secondly, we will be able to help other people to understand what the Bible teaches.

As Paul encourages Timothy in **2 Timothy 2: 15**, (Key Verse), we too need to apply ourselves to the serious study of God's Word to become **“a worker who has no need to be ashamed, rightly handling the word of truth.”**

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Study 4 - Giving to God

BIBLE READING:

Luke 21: 1-4; 1 Corinthians 16: 1-3

KEY VERSE:

“Truly I tell you, this poor widow has put in more than all of them.”

Luke 21: 3

How does God’s work grow? The Holy Spirit makes it grow when He uses our witness about the Lord Jesus. From a practical point of view this involves expense. Our church buildings have to be maintained and we may need to buy resources. There are missionaries who need financial support and projects all over the world to spread the message of the Gospel. Where does the money come from? It comes from Christians. God expects us to give what we can to support His work.

OLD TESTAMENT TITHING

One of the things that God expected His people in the Old Testament to do was to give a tithe to God. A tithe means a tenth, and in Old Testament times the Israelites were required to give a tenth of all their crops and animals to the Lord. (See **Leviticus 27: 30, 32** and **Deuteronomy 14: 22**) The produce and money collected through tithes were passed on to the Temple priests and Levites who were dependent upon it for their livelihood. In addition to tithing, the Israelites gave ‘free-will offerings’; these were voluntary, whereas tithing was compulsory.



NEW TESTAMENT GIVING

There is no commandment given to us in the New Testament about giving ten percent of what we have to the Lord. The early Christians were so keen to help each other that they shared what they had and handed it out **“as any had need”**. (**Acts 2: 44, 45**) Much later on, Paul was concerned that some believers were very poor and had no one to help them. So he wrote to Christians in **1 Corinthians 16: 1-2, saying, “concerning the collection for the saints . . . on the first day of every week, each of you is to put something aside, and store it up, as he may prosper...”**

Here we see four principles of Christian giving:-

1. IT IS TO BE REGULAR.

Most churches had, and still have, a weekly collection, into which believers put a contribution. The offering was made **“on the first day of every week”**.

2. IT IS TO BE INDIVIDUAL.

“Each of you is to put something aside...”. Both rich and poor, were involved.

3. IT IS TO BE PROPORTIONATE.

The principle is determined not by a fixed ten percent but according to how the individual **“may prosper”**. So, if someone has more money one week than the previous week, the person is to give more.

4. IT IS TO BE PURPOSEFUL.

Giving is to be thoughtful and cheerful, always bearing in mind how much the Lord has given to us. (**2 Corinthians 9: 7**)

2 Corinthians 8: 1-4 shows us that the Corinthians, from a position of extreme poverty were willing to distribute to other Christians who were in financial need. On occasions, Paul received gifts from churches to whom he had brought the Gospel in the first place. As an example of this, we read in **Philippians 4: 15-19** of how he thanked the church at Philippi for their generosity towards him. No doubt other apostles and missionaries were helped in the same way. Nowadays, churches use the money from the offerings for all kinds of expenses, such as the costs of heating and lighting the church building, Sunday School resources or Christian literature. The church will also want to give financial support to Christians who give all their time to God’s work locally or in other countries, in the same way as the early Christians supported Paul.

Putting something in the collection should be done carefully and privately so that no one sees what we give. The important thing, Jesus said, is to give so that only God knows how much we give. (**Matthew 6: 1-4**) The Lord Jesus said that the widow in **Luke 21**, who had given only two mites, had contributed more than all the rich people, because she had given everything she had. However little we are able to give, it will be recognised and rewarded by the Lord, if we have done it for His sake! His promise is, **“Those who honour Me I will honour”**. (**1 Samuel 2: 30**)

This is the third of five units on
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08/2022

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