

Lesson #6 - Effective Prayer

The moment the doctor left the room after diagnosing me with pancreatic cancer, the first thing I did was pray—but it was not a prayer of faith. It was a negotiation with God filled with anger, fear, disappointment, and questions about why this was happening to me. For about thirty minutes, I wrestled with resentment and the feeling that life was unfair. My wife had a similar reaction, but then we both shifted from emotion to surrender. I remembered Jesus praying in the Garden of Gethsemane, asking if there was another way, yet ultimately saying, “Not my will, but Yours be done.” That became my prayer.

Since that moment, God has been transforming my understanding of prayer and deepening my relationship with Him. He has been moving me away from fear, comfort, and the desperate desire to escape pain, into a place of faith, trust, and surrender. Through prayer, Scripture, and the support of my wife and others around me, I’ve learned that true healing begins with a foundation of faith. The body has an incredible ability to heal, but lasting peace and strength only come when we remain rooted in God and fully surrendered to Him.

In the Old Testament, only the High Priest could enter the Holy of Holies to stand before God, but when Jesus died, the veil of the temple was torn, removing the separation between God and man (Matthew 27:51). Through Christ, we are now the temple of the Holy Spirit and have direct access to God through prayer (Hebrews 10:19–22). God created us for relationship with Him, and through Jesus that fellowship was restored by grace through faith (Ephesians 2:8–9). As believers, we now walk in spiritual authority through prayer, obedience, and faith, boldly declaring God’s promises with power, love, and a sound mind (2 Timothy 1:7). As Jesus said, “He who believes in Me, the works that I do he will do also” (John 14:12).

1. Pray with the Right Heart (Sincerity & Humility)

God looks at the condition of our heart, not outward performance. That is why David was called a man after God’s own heart, even though he committed great sin—because he continually returned to God in humility, repentance, and faith. True prayer begins with humility and surrender, free from pride, meaningless repetition, or the desire to impress others with fancy words. God desires honesty, sincerity, and a genuine relationship with Him.

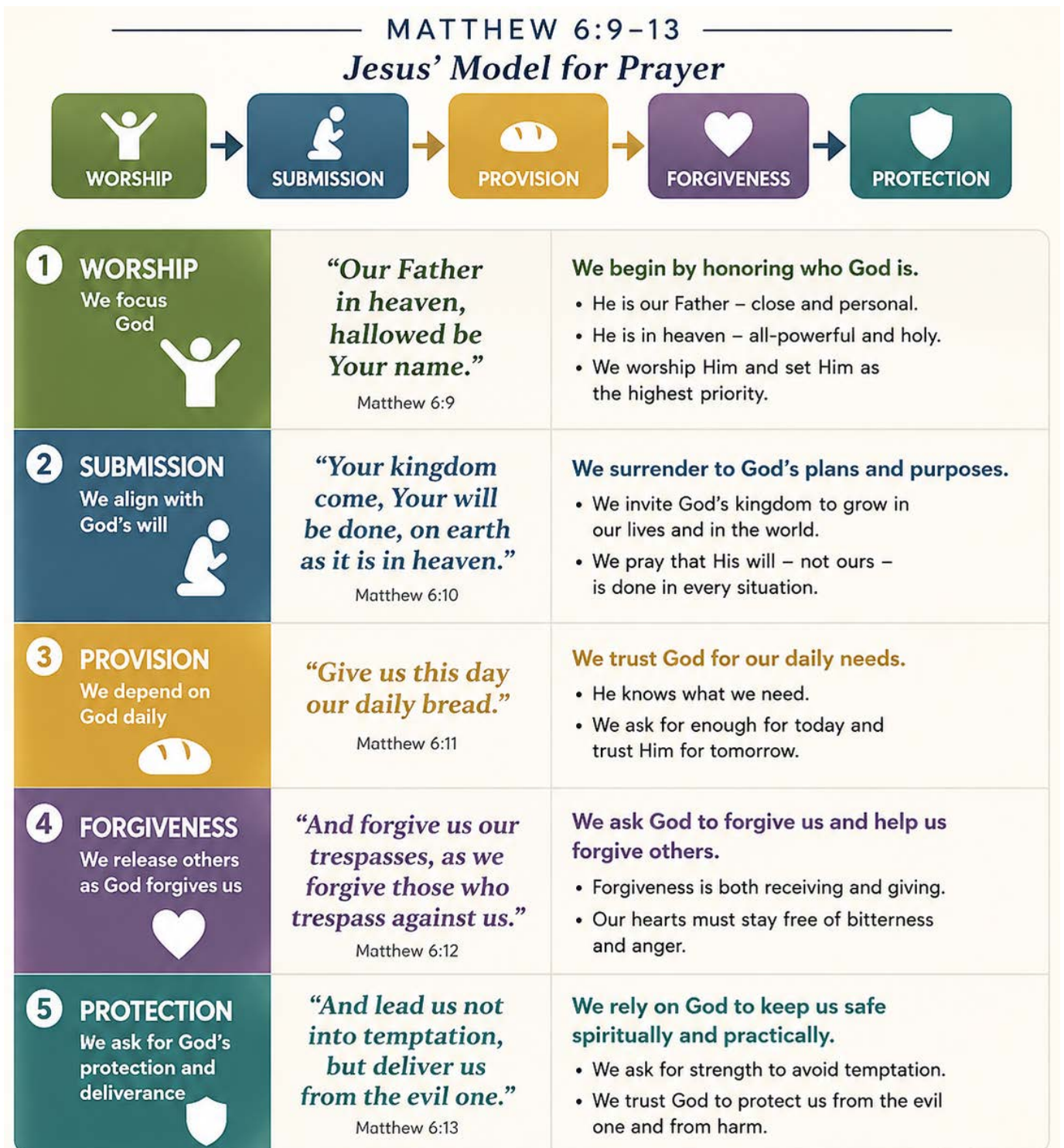
- **Matthew 6:5–6** – Pray in secret; God rewards sincerity
- **Psalms 51:17** – A broken and contrite heart God will not despise
- **Luke 18:10–14** – The humble are justified, not the self-righteous

2. Follow Jesus’ Model for Prayer (Structure)

Jesus gave us a model for how to pray in Matthew chapter 6 through what is known as the Lord’s Prayer—the most well-known prayer in history. It was not meant to be just repeated words, but a

framework showing us how to approach God through worship, submission, provision, forgiveness, and protection. I downloaded this diagram because I believe it does a great job of laying out the basic structure Jesus used to teach us how to pray and how He prayed for us.

- Worship → Submission → Provision → Forgiveness → Protection
- **Matthew 6:9–13** – The Lord’s Prayer (“Our Father...”)



3. Pray According to God's Will

Our prayers must align with God's will, and the only way to know His will is through studying Scripture and understanding His character. Prayer gives us an eternal perspective, helping us see beyond daily struggles and remember that others are watching how we live, respond, and trust God through every season.

- **1 John 5:14–15** – If we ask according to His will, He hears us
- **Luke 22:42** – “Not My will, but Yours be done”

4. Pray with Faith, Expectation & Persistence

I've learned that my prayers must align with God's will, and the only way I can know His will is through Scripture and understanding His character. When worry and doubt creep in, I start leaning on my own understanding and what feels comfortable. God is teaching me to pray with faith, expectation, and persistence, trusting Him even when the path ahead is unclear.

Believe God hears and responds. Don't quit when answers delay

- **Mark 11:24** – Believe you receive when you pray
- **James 1:6–7** – Ask in faith without doubting
- **Luke 18:1** – Always pray and not lose heart
- **1 Thessalonians 5:17** – Pray without ceasing

5. Confess Sin & Live Righteously

Jesus taught that if we have anything against our brother, we should leave our offering and first seek reconciliation. Scripture also says that sin separates us from God and can hinder our prayers. I've learned the importance of honestly acknowledging my sins and shortcomings for what they are—sin—and bringing them before God in confession and repentance. During the Feast of Unleavened Bread (the week after Passover), yeast is removed from the home as a symbol of removing sin from our lives. It's a powerful reminder to ask God to search our hearts, reveal hidden sin, and restore deeper fellowship with Him, leading to stronger faith and more effective prayer.

- **Psalms 66:18** – Sin in the heart blocks prayer
- **1 John 1:9** – Confess and be cleansed
- **James 5:16** – Prayer of a righteous person is powerful
- Unforgiveness blocks spiritual flow
- **Mark 11:25** – Forgive so your Father forgives you

7. Pray with Thanksgiving

Unless you've been diagnosed with a disease that could end your life, it's hard to fully understand what that feels like. But through this journey, I've found myself growing closer to God and looking back on my life with overwhelming gratitude and thankfulness. Every morning I wake up thanking Him for another day. I've learned that prayer should come from a place of gratitude and thanksgiving, not just requests and fear.

- **Philippians 4:6** – Pray with thanksgiving
- **Psalms 100:4** – Enter His presence with gratitude

9. Pray in the Spirit (God Helps Us)

I've always felt uneasy when people refer to God casually as "the big man upstairs" or in ways that lack reverence and respect. Scripture says the beginning of wisdom is the fear of the Lord—not a fear of rejection, but a healthy reverence and fear of disappointing Him. At the same time, God desires a close relationship with us, like a loving Father who wants deep and meaningful conversation with His children. Through prayer, the Holy Spirit guides us, and even intercedes on our behalf when we don't know what to say.

- **Romans 8:26–27** – The Spirit intercedes for us
- **Ephesians 6:18** – Pray in the Spirit at all times

10. What to Expect from Prayer

What can we expect from prayer? Over my lifetime, I've prayed for many people. I've seen God perform miracles, bring healing, and answer prayers in powerful ways. I've also seen moments where healing didn't come the way I hoped, and times when it felt like God was silent. But I've learned that silence does not mean absence. God is always listening, and He answers prayers according to His perfect will, wisdom, and timing—not always according to our understanding.

- God hears, answers, and gives peace (not always immediate or as expected)
- **Jeremiah 33:3** – "Call to Me and I will answer you"
- **Philippians 4:7** – Peace that surpasses understanding
- **Isaiah 55:8–9** – God's ways are higher than ours

James 4:3 says, "You ask and do not receive, because you ask amiss, that you may spend it on your pleasures." Often our prayers are completely outside of God's economy and centered more on our comfort, desires, or selfish ambitions than His will. I joke with the young guys in my soccer ministry about praying for a wife while sitting on the couch watching English Premier League soccer. The prayer sounds something like: "*Lord, please bring me a wife—preferably a hot supermodel delivering pizza while I watch this game. She needs a good job, a nice car, and a 750 credit score. And hopefully she understands that I play soccer all the time and hang out with my friends every weekend.*" We laugh, but the point is real: many times we want God to bring blessings into our lives while we do little to prepare ourselves spiritually, emotionally, or practically.

Like anything meaningful in life, we need to learn how to pray, how to approach God, and how to understand His character and will. A strong relationship with God requires growth, humility, study, obedience, and genuine fellowship. God is not an ATM machine we only approach when we need something—He desires a real relationship with us that transforms who we are.

What I've experienced most deeply lately is the truth of Philippians 4:7: a peace that surpasses all understanding. Even in uncertainty, fear, and suffering, God can give a supernatural peace that the world cannot explain. I've learned that His ways are far higher than ours, and we cannot fully comprehend His thoughts or decisions (Isaiah 55:8–9). That's why I encourage everyone to keep praying and to learn how to pray more deeply, specifically, and honestly—to move beyond routine words and into a real, one-on-one relationship and conversation with God.