

Th123 A Study of the Holy Spirit

Th123-21 The Spirit Will Help Us Pray

If someone were to ask you, “Do you know how to pray?” how would you answer? Most of us would answer, “Yes.” However, we might quickly add, “I need to learn how to pray better.” This must have been how Jesus’ disciples felt when they approached Him and asked, “Lord, teach us to pray, just as John taught his disciples” (Luke 11:1).

Jesus responded to His disciples’ request in two ways. First, He gave them a model prayer. Today, we call this prayer the Lord’s Prayer. Second, in response to His disciples’ request, Jesus explained to them how to be filled with the Holy Spirit (Luke 11:9-13). He was, in effect, saying to them, “If you want to pray like Me, then like Me, you must be filled with the Holy Spirit.”

In this lesson, we will examine the intimate relationship between prayer and the Holy Spirit. In doing this, we will discover two important spiritual truths. The first truth is, *to be filled with the Holy Spirit, we must pray*. The second truth is, *to pray, we must be filled with the Holy Spirit*. Let’s look a bit closer at each of these parallel spiritual truths.

The Bible closely connects ‘believing prayer’ with receiving the Holy Spirit. Luke especially emphasizes this relationship. Throughout his Gospel and Acts, he consistently associates prayer with the coming of the Spirit. For instance, in his Gospel, Luke tells us that Jesus was praying when the Holy Spirit descended upon Him (Luke 3:21-22). Then in Acts, he tells us that before the outpouring of the Spirit at Pentecost, the disciples “all joined together constantly in prayer” (Acts 1:14). Later, they prayed again, and “they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and spoke the word of God boldly” (Acts 4:31). Then, in chapters 9 and 10, Luke tells us that Paul was in prayer before He received the Holy Spirit, and both Cornelius and Peter were in prayer before the Spirit was poured out on the Gentiles in Caesarea.

This connection between prayer and receiving the Spirit is consistent with Jesus’ promise in Luke 11: “So I say to you: Ask [in prayer] and it will be given to you; seek and you will find; knock and the door will be opened to you... your Father in heaven [will] give the Holy Spirit to those who ask him!” (vv. 9-13). In other words, God bestows His Holy Spirit on His children in answer to believing prayer.

We can thus see two important lessons concerning the relationship between prayer and the experience of the Spirit. First, we learn that if we want to be filled with the Holy Spirit—or if we want to lead others into the experience—we must pray. Second, we learn that if we are to remain full of the Holy Spirit, we must, in the words of Jesus, “Keep on asking.... Keep on seeking, and... Keep on knocking.” As Paul tells us, we must “never stop praying” (1 Thess 5:17, NLT). Just as Jesus lived in constant communion with His heavenly Father, so must we. Such communion is key to living the Spirit-empowered life.

So, Scripture teaches that to be filled with the Holy Spirit, you must pray. It also teaches that, to pray as you should, you must be filled with the Holy Spirit. Paul explained how the Spirit enables our prayer:

The Spirit helps us in our weakness. We do not know what we ought to pray for, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us with groans that words cannot express. And he who searches our hearts knows the mind of the Spirit, because the Spirit intercedes for the saints in accordance with God's will (Rom 8:26-27).

Such prayer in the Spirit can occur in two ways. Generally speaking, any prayer that is prompted and directed by the Spirit of God is prayer in the Spirit. It can be described as a “team effort” between a Spirit-filled intercessor and the Spirit himself. The Holy Spirit directs and prompts the prayer; the intercessor yields and cooperates. However, in Romans 8 when Paul speaks of “groans that words cannot express,” he is more specifically speaking of prayer in tongues. He explained this to the Corinthians, where he said, “If I pray in a tongue, my spirit prays” (1Cor 14:14).

Oh, how we need this kind of help in prayer! How many urgent needs do we fail to pray for simply because we are unaware of them? Even when we are aware of a need, we do not know how to pray, because we do not know God’s will in the matter. And all too often we pray with the wrong motives, or, even worse, we simply lack any motivation to pray at all. At such times, we need for the Holy Spirit to come and help us. As we yield ourselves to the Spirit, He prays through us in words that He gives.

A closer look at Romans 8:26-27 reveals four powerful ways the Spirit helps us in prayer. First, Paul says that the Spirit “*intercedes for us.*” As we in faith yield ourselves to the Spirit, He comes to us. He fills us with His power and presence, and prays through us, directing our prayers. Second, the Spirit prays through us “*with groans which words cannot express.*” In other words, the Spirit of God prays through us in words and phrases which He inspires. The words are expressions of His own creation. Third, Paul tells us that as we pray, the Spirit *searches our hearts.*” As we yield to His sanctifying power, our hearts are purified and made clean (Ps 51:10-12). We are thus placed in a position where God can answer our prayers (Isa 59:1).

Finally, Paul tells us that the Spirit of God “*knows the mind of the Spirit.*” And because He knows perfectly the mind and will of God, He “*intercedes for the saints according to the will of God.*” As we allow the Holy Spirit to pray through us, we pray according to His perfect will. Such prayers have great spiritual power (1John 5:14-15). Oh, how foolish we would be to neglect the marvelous privilege of prayer in the Spirit!

This lesson is **important** because it explains the close relationship between the experience of the Spirit and prayer.

The **main truths** we learn from this lesson are to be filled with the Holy Spirit, we must pray. Also, to pray as we should, we must be filled with the Holy Spirit.

Let’s **review** some important truths we have learned from this lesson:

1. When the disciples asked Jesus to teach them how to pray, how did he answer them?
 - A. [PAUSE] If you answered, “He gave them a model prayer, and He taught them how to be filled with the Spirit,” you are right.

2. What connection does Luke make between prayer and the Holy Spirit?
 - A. [PAUSE] If you answered that, in both his Gospel and in Acts, Luke often connects the outpouring of the Holy Spirit with believing prayer, you answered correctly.

3. According to Paul in Romans 8, how will the Holy Spirit help us in prayer?
 - A. [PAUSE] If you answered, “The Holy Spirit will help us by coming to us, filling us, and praying through us,” you are right.

4. When Paul says that the Holy Spirit will pray through us in “groans too deep for words,” what kind of prayer is he talking about?
 - A. [PAUSE] If you answered that Paul was talking about intercessory prayer in tongues, you are correct.

Your **assignment** for this lesson is to re-listen to it until you understand the relationship between the Holy Spirit and prayer. You should also begin practicing prayer in the Spirit in your own devotional life. Also please memorize Romans chapter 8, verses 26 and 27: “The Spirit helps us in our weakness. We do not know what we ought to pray for, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us with groans that words cannot express. And he who searches our hearts knows the mind of the Spirit, because the Spirit intercedes for the saints in accordance with God's will” (Rom 8:26-27).