

# TEACH US TO PRAY

Week One | October 15, 2017 | How to Pray in Good Times

## PREPARATION

### MONDAY THROUGH WEDNESDAY

Spend some time alone in God's Word reading through 1 Kings 8:22–53. Pray that God, through His Spirit, would bring to life the truths of this text and allow you to teach it well to those in your care.

### THURSDAY THROUGH SATURDAY

Read through the questions included in the guide this week. Many questions have been included in this lesson for discussion. Determine which questions will work well to encourage, push, and grow your group in the best way.

### DAILY

As you prepare, pray for the preaching of God's Word this coming week at the corporate church gathering. Pray also for your time together as a group, that the Spirit would make effective your teaching and bring gospel clarity, gospel change, and a heart for gospel mission to those who are present.

## THIS WEEK

### KEY BIBLICAL REALITY

In the “good times,” we should pray by exalting God's character and asking Him to hear and act on behalf of His church and the lost world.

### THEOLOGY APPLIED

When we learn to properly pray during the good times, we avoid our natural inclination to coast, forgetting God or forgetting others.

### MEDITATE

*“O Lord, whatever prayer by any man or by all your people Israel, each knowing the affliction of his own heart and stretching out his hands toward this temple, hear in heaven your dwelling place, and forgive and act, that they may fear you all the days that they live” (1 Kings 8: 28,38–40, select portions).*

## GETTING STARTED

+ Use this section to prepare your heart and mind for the truths of this week. This section will help to introduce the focus of this week's lesson.

🗣️: *What sunk the Titanic? Why do you think this happened?*

🗣️: *How would you describe the “good times” in a church’s life? In an individual’s life?*

🗣️: *Why do we naturally want to coast during spiritual times of prosperity?*

As well known as the historic Titanic tragedy is, most people don't think about what could have easily prevented the ship's sinking. Looking back, we know in today's time that a more modern vessel design or GPS tracking could have greatly helped. However, an answer to one underlying problem could have solved all the ship's problems, even before modern technology started ruling the transport industry. The solution? Consistently checking in with operators charged with keeping an eye on the weather. While many weather operators sent messages to the Titanic warning the crew of the destructive icebergs ahead, the Titanic operators were busy using the wireless messaging system for other purposes. At one point, the Titanic operator, who was in over his head with messages piled up to send out and organize, told the weather representatives to stop sending so many messages! In the end, though the voyage seemed to be going well, the Titanic workers simply stopped checking in with the voice that mattered most. Due to their negligence, they failed to prepare for the massive iceberg ahead of them and caused both crewmembers and passengers to lose their lives.

Many “good times” in the Christian life can be this way. In seasons of “smooth sailing,” we often forget to consistently check in with, or pray to, the one voice that matters most, the Lord's voice. We simply think calm seas will last forever, and we forget that “icebergs” are inevitably ahead of us. Like the operators of the Titanic, our failure to pray during seasons of fair weather ends up negatively impacting not just ourselves, but our fellow church members (the crew), as well as the lost world around us (the passengers). In 1 Kings 8, we will watch as King Solomon chooses to check in with the Lord during a very prosperous moment in Israel's history. His example will show us how to pray in life's “good times,” how to avoid future icebergs, and how to value God's people as well as non-believers in the process.

**Q:** *What type of “icebergs” end up crashing a good season with the Lord?*

**Q:** *What do you think “checking in” with God looks like during pleasant spiritual seasons in your life?*

## || UNDERSTANDING THE TEXT

In this series, we are asking God to teach us how to pray in various seasons of life. To learn, we will explore several passages in His Word that record crucial prayers. To start, we come to 1 Kings 8 and learn from the example of Solomon. At this point in Israel’s history, the people are doing very well, and many things are in place for them to enjoy a prosperous season with God, one of which is the completion of the beautiful temple Israel will use to worship God. Though they are enjoying the “good times,” Solomon offers up a prayer of dedication for the temple that teaches them (and us) what praying realistically in prosperous moments should look like. As we study his prayer, God teaches us to do these three things in our prayers during our own seasons of “good times”:

**1. EXALT GOD FOR HIS CHARACTER**

**2. ASK GOD TO HEAR AND ACT FOR HIS PEOPLE**

**3. ASK GOD TO HEAR AND ACT FOR THE LOST**

### GOING DEEPER

+ *This next section will help show what God’s Word says about this week’s particular focus. Read through the Scripture passages and connect the text to this week’s biblical truth.*

## EXALT GOD FOR HIS CHARACTER

### || 1 KINGS 8:22–24

**Q:** *Who is Solomon praying in front of as he dedicates the temple? Why do you think he chooses to pray publicly instead of privately?*

**Q:** *Though he speaks in front of “all the assembly of Israel,” where does he ultimately direct his attention and words? What does this mean and why does it matter?*

This portion of 1 Kings 8 begins immediately after Solomon has encouraged his people by highlighting God’s saving acts among them. Things are going well for both Israel and its ruler. They are enjoying a bright and shining season after long and painstaking past events. Solomon has finally become king, the temple has finally been built, and the ark (where God chooses to enthrone Himself and also where the Ten Commandments are kept) has finally been returned to the temple. All in all, the people finally have everything they need to worship God and enjoy His presence among them, according to the Lord’s specific instructions. Given how well their circumstances are going, there is great joy as the temple is dedicated by Solomon. Indeed, for one glimmering moment of Israel’s history, all is as it should be. In our day and age, we would put this moment in the category of the “good times.”

At the start of this grand moment, Solomon does not simply dedicate the temple in his own power and prestige, but publicly prays as a means of dedication. This is his way of saying that the temple isn’t about the king or the people as much as it is about God. This temple is God’s house; its beauty and construction represent His character and value.

By bathing the season of “good times” in prayer, Solomon is communicating something vital. First, he does this in front of all of Israel. Prayer in the good times should happen privately in our life. However, it also should happen corporately. Often, the people of God gather only in crisis, but Solomon’s example teaches us that gathering together during the good times is crucial for us as well. Second, though Solomon is in front of a large crowd, his hands reach to heaven and his words address the “Lord, God of Israel.” A multitude is gathered, but this is not simply a celebratory social event. Israel is gathered to talk with and petition the Lord. By starting this way, Solomon offers a huge example to the people, namely, that all seasons, even seasons of prosperity, should inspire us to gather together, reach our hands to heaven as one people, and pray to God.

**Q:** *Why do you sometimes forget to pray in seasons of prosperity?*

**Q:** *Which qualities of God’s character does Solomon highlight? Why do you think he chooses these particular qualities as he dedicates the temple?*

At this point, we’ve seen that we should pray during the good times. Now we must go a step further and notice what

we should be praying. When we engage with God during seasons of prosperity, what exactly should be on our lips? Solomon begins by exalting God for His divine character. Before he gets to any specific type of request, he simply adores God for who He is, and spells out some specific qualities of God's character.

Solomon starts by praising God for His uniqueness. He says that there's no one like God. In Solomon's eyes, as he scans all he knows of earth and heaven, God is unmatched. What stands out most in this moment is that Solomon's eyes are not on his prosperous situation. He does not look at his pleasant circumstance and say, "Wow, there's nothing like this." Instead, he looks at God and says that. While we are all sometimes tempted to consider the "good times" unmatched, the truth is, the only One who can fit that bill is God Himself!

Next, Solomon praises God for what makes Him so unique: His unchanging faithfulness. Solomon identifies this quality of God based on His loyalty to the covenant He made with His people, especially David, Solomon's father. All God said He would do in the past, He's done. He keeps His promises. He is trustworthy and loving. He is a blessing of those who walk with Him. Solomon banks on these qualities of God's character as he starts his prayer, and he teaches us to stand on God's character in our own "good times" too. Like Solomon, we must look backward to all the ways God has kept His word to us, and adore Him for His character as we pray.

**Q:** *If you are honest, though you know that God is unmatched, who do you treat as equal to God? Who or what do you consider totally unique, unlike anyone else. What or whom do you think is worthy of all your attention, praise, or petitions?*

## ASK GOD TO HEAR AND ACT FOR HIS PEOPLE

■ ■ **1 KINGS 8:25-40, 44-53**

**Q:** *What themes or phrases do you see repeated often in these verses? Why do you think they are important?*

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After encouraging the people with God's past saving acts (in previous chapters) and exalting the Lord's character, Solomon now petitions God to save Israel in the future. Solomon envisions the entire scope of Israelite life: its

leadership (v.25–26), its interpersonal relationships (v. 31), its wartime experiences (v. 33, 44), its agricultural work (v. 35, 37), and even its potential time in captivity (v. 46). Throughout his prayer over each aspect of Israelite life, his language is dripping with the covenant terms God set up for His people. Solomon knows the deal. If they follow and obey God, the Lord will bless their efforts and their land. If they deny and rebel against God, there will be negative consequences for them on a national scale (Lev. 26; Deut. 27–28). Solomon also knows that God is compassionate and moved by repentance, and much of his prayer banks on the fact that God will respond with blessing to those broken with godly sorrow over their sin.

But why is Solomon talking about sin in such a celebratory occasion? Isn't he right in the middle of the "good times?" Given the joyous nature of this historic moment, it is striking that Solomon not only speaks of the future situations God's people may face, he anticipates they will sometimes fail miserably! In other words, while he enjoys this incredible moment for Israel, Solomon is not blinded by the current prosperity. He knows full well that "good times" are not a given, and he is sober-minded about the future perils that may be waiting for Israel. Borrowing from our introductory analogy, He knows that "icebergs" are sure to be in the waters ahead. He prays on behalf of God's people with his realistic eyes open, and preemptively invites the Lord into every aspect of their lives. He doesn't coast in the good season. He fully invites God to move in the seasons ahead!

❏: *Why is it hard to envision difficulty ahead when we are enjoying a prosperous season?*

❏: *What would inviting God into every aspect of your life include?*

❏: *Recall some past seasons of "good times" that were followed by hardship. Looking back, though you were in a season of prosperity, how could you have prepared better for the upcoming season of difficulty?*

In each of the future situations Israel will face (leadership issues, interpersonal relationships, war, agricultural work, and potential captivity), Solomon asks for the same type of involvement from God. His request is a consistent three-fold theme throughout this entire passage that beats like a steady drum, that God would hear from heaven, forgive, and act on behalf of His repentant people (v. 29, 32, 34, 36, 39, 52). Whether it's trusting their leadership, dealing with hurtful neighbors, losing in battle, harvesting parched crops covered in locusts, or even facing enslavement in a foreign land, the people's prayer should be for God to give His ear to those who repentantly call to Him, cover their sins, and move on their behalf.

The same type of prayer should be on our lips in good times. We, too, should enjoy pleasant circumstances when they

come our way, yet also look to the future with realistic eyes, assuming that our sin (or even general suffering that isn't due to our sin) could hinder our relationship with God at any turn. We could lose personal battles. Our efforts could end up wasted in the workplace. We could experience drought or sickness. We could even be tempted to go back to former bondage to sin. As we look forward to the potential for these situations, our prayers, like Solomon's, should be marked with an invitational attitude, one that asks God to hear our prayers when we fall, forgive us when we have sinned in the matter, and move in your life and His church due to His great love for us.

All the while, we must remember that we are not under the Old Covenant that Israel was under in 1 Kings. Instead, we are under a New Covenant in Christ. He has already paid for our current and future failures, and guarantees that God will work in all our circumstances, good or bad, for our spiritual benefit (Romans 8:28). If this is true for us in a way that was not true yet for Israel, we should not only pray in a way that matches them, but moves beyond them! As we look at all God has done for us in Christ, we should trust the Lord's character at an even deeper level, and pray all the more boldly for Him to move in His church, given that He has already extended full forgiveness to us and has already proven in the greatest way possible to act on our behalf!

- ♀: *Why do you think Solomon keeps requesting God's forgiveness? Why does Israel keep having to secure forgiveness time after time?*
- ♀: *Do New Testament Christians have to secure new payment for sin for each new sin they commit? Why or why not? What does the New Testament church now have that Israel did not at the time? How does this inspire the way we pray and repent?*
- ♀: *In "good time" seasons, do you preemptively pray for the next season, asking God to hear, forgive, and act on your or the church's behalf? Why or why not?*

## ASK GOD TO HEAR AND ACT FOR THE LOST

### ☐ 1 KINGS 8: 41-43

- ♀: *Given the primary function of the temple at the time, what strikes you as unexpected in these verses?*
- ♀: *What does Solomon want for the foreigner that comes to visit Israel's land and temple?*

Though his people are in the middle of the “good times,” Solomon’s mind is still focused on others, which we see in his prayers for his people. We might expect him to focus on others who are among the people of God. After all, those are the people who will be around the temple and ark on a daily basis. But in verses 41–43, moving past his own people, Solomon goes beyond what we would expect and adds in a prayer for those outside the people of God. He prays clearly for a distant foreigner, one “who is not of your people Israel” who might come to explore the God of Israel. Solomon has a specific prayer for foreign non-believers, and it’s the same as the prayer for believers, that God would hear their petition and act on their behalf. The purpose is so “all the peoples of the earth may know your name and fear you, as do your people Israel” (v. 43). What selflessness we see in Solomon on this blessed occasion! Even in a sacred family moment, where the people of God are celebrating their own place of worship finally completed, Solomon desires that outside foreigners be added to their number as worshippers of Yahweh. In other words, he doesn’t want God to simply move in the midst of Israel, but also among the lost souls around them! While many assume “missions” is a thing of the New Testament, this passage (and many others in the Old Testament) show us that God has wanted those outside of His chosen people to come to know Him all along. The nations have always been on God’s heart and mind, and so should be on ours as well.

We learn a valuable principle here. The good times should never lull us into complacency, where we no longer concern ourselves with the fate of the lost. Like Solomon, our prayers in seasons of prosperity should be filled with the names of non-Christian friends and family we want to enjoy Christ with us. In the “good times” may we, too, pray often that the lost around us would come to know Jesus’ name and revere Him, just as we do.

Q: *When you are in seasons of prosperity, do your prayers usually make the request for your lost friends and family to be saved?*

Q: *What obstacles prevent you from keeping your mind on the lost during the “good times” in life?*

## NEXT STEPS

+ *Connect the truths from God’s Word to your daily life. Process how what you’ve learned this week will impact the way you live beyond today and into the future.*

Q: *What part of God’s character do you struggle to believe—that there’s nothing else like Him (no one/thing else worthy of your attention and petitions), or that He’s*



*faithful to His promises to you? List some specific Scripture passages you can use this week to remind you of God's character.*

- Q: In what areas of your own life have you not asked God to hear and act? What future issues may your church go through that you can preemptively pray for now? Take some time to identify these and spend some time in prayer over them.*
- Q: If you struggle to pray for non-Christians during seasons of prosperity, identify specific lost people in your life who are not getting the benefit of your prayers. Create a prayer plan that incorporates them into the times you regularly pray from here forward.*
- Q: Who in your life seems to be in a season of flourishing, and also clearly prays in the ways this passage instructs? Who exalts God's character in the "good times?" Who always seems to be asking for God to act in the lives of those in the church and among the lost? Approach this person sometime this week and ask to learn from them.*

## PRAY

*+Use these prayer points to connect your time in prayer to this week's focus.*

- God, remind me often of who I once was before knowing Christ so that my thankfulness will be overflowing on a daily basis.
- God, remind me even more often of what you did to remedy my monstrous situation through Christ and who I am now because of his work.
- God, identify any particular believer or any group of believers in my life that I allow to remain separated from me instead of "one" with me. If there is any one I still keep a "wall of hostility" built up against, please tear it down.
- God, bring other believers in my life who will remind me of my new identity in you, and give me those who I may remind as well.

**1 KINGS 8:27** Solomon notes that God indeed dwells everywhere, not just the temple. The temple is a special place. It is where His name is and a place toward which His eyes are open. In it, He especially hears prayers from heaven, as it's the chosen place He has instituted for His people to seek His face. Even then, however, God cannot be limited to any one place or confined by space. For a particular place and time in Israel's history, God chooses to be approachable in the temple, but He does His will throughout the entire world as He pleases. In fact, we see later that God is clearly not confined to a building and is certainly not dependent on it, since He survives its later destruction, and hears His people's prayers when they go into exile, far away from the temple.

**1 KINGS 8:33–40, 44–53** Solomon brings up various situations Israel is likely to encounter with regard to both wartime and farming efforts. Whether they faced defeat, victory, captivity, famine, drought, or pestilence, Solomon has a prayer for it. While we find it odd that he spends so much time praying about these specifics, we must remember that survival via farming and wartime efforts took up a predominant amount of time in ancient civilizations. Simply getting food on the table and protecting boundary lines required most of the people's time and resources, and Solomon was wise to invite God into all these details of life. More than that, the land itself was God's promised gift to His people, and deserved to be stewarded through proper agricultural cultivation as well as protection. Given that the land was part of Israel's national identity, they spent much time and prayer over it.

*\*All exegetical content and commentary resourcing for this lesson was provided by the ESV Study Bible Commentary Notes and The New American Commentary Series (1–2 Kings).*