

“Lord, Teach Us To Pray”

Introduction. Jesus was both a person of prayer and a teacher of prayer (Luke 11:1). I fear that we are not a people who believe and practice prayer (James 4:2). Is our lack of blessings and satisfaction in life attributable to our lack of prayer?

Those who have left the deepest impression on this sin-cursed earth have been men and women of prayer. From its first mention in Genesis 20 until its final one in Revelation 8, over 500 times in the Bible prayer has been the mighty power that has moved not only God, but man. Abraham was a man of prayer, and angels came down to converse with him. Jacob’s prayer was answered in the lovely interview at Penuel that resulted in his having mighty blessings and regaining his brother Esau. Samuel was given in answer to Hannah’s prayer. Elijah’s prayer closed up the heavens for three and a half years. Prayer has power!

It is necessary for all of us to “draw near with confidence to the throne of grace, that we may receive mercy and may find grace to help in time of need” (Hebrews 4:16). True prayer is not just the utterance of words, nor is it the advance of the desires to God; it is not just a mental exercise or vocal performance. Prayer is a spiritual communion with the Creator of heaven and earth. The aim of prayer is to reach God Himself and lay our burdens down before Him that we “may find grace to help in time of need.” It is for this reason that we need to explore four aspects Jesus taught when He taught His disciples to pray.

I. Jesus Taught Forgiveness In Prayer (Mark 11:25-26)

- A. Our God forgives (Daniel 9:9; Nehemiah 9:17). When God pardons our sins, He is satisfied that nothing else is needed. Under the Old Law, continual sacrifices meant remembrance of sin, but the blood of Christ (Ephesians 1:7; Hebrews 9:22) washed away sins so where God would remember them no more (Hebrews 8:12; 10:17-18) to all who will have faith, repent of their sins, confess Jesus to be the Christ, and be baptized for the remission of sins. With this forgiveness from God, we can learn to forgive others.
- B. While forgiveness begins with God, it must continue with man (Proverbs 19:11; 2 Corinthians 2:7). How can we expect God to forgive the one with strife and revenge in his heart? How can he expect God to show mercy when he will not show mercy (Matthew 6:12, 15; cp. 18:28)? If we cannot forgive those who injure us, we are assured God will never forgive us.
- C. Whatever else the cross says to us, it says that Christ’s bearing our sins in His body reflects what God had been bearing on His heart from creation. It might be that for some, the only way God’s forgiveness will become real is through our forgiving them. Who understands forgiveness best, a well-read scholar who harbors bitterness toward his brethren, or someone who barely understands the scriptures but has joyfully forgiven a stream of terrible injuries?

II. Jesus Taught Persistence In Prayer (Luke 18:1-8)

- A. We should not grow weary of prayer. The poor widow, by her perseverance only, obtained from the unjust judge what otherwise she would not have received.

Also, if the poor widow received justice from the unjust judge, how much more will children of God receive from a God who is merciful, caring, and wants to fulfill His children's desires?

- B. God has a deep interest in our welfare; He is willing to come to our aid. The judge felt no special interest in the widow, yet he heard her. God feels a particular tender love for His children and He will hear us. The key is to persevere in prayer. At the end of the parable, the Lord promises those who are listening that God will vindicate the ones who ask in faith. When the Son of Man comes, will He find faith on earth? The trouble is not with God — He will be faithful. The danger is in finding children of God who are discouraged and have lost confidence in God.
- C. Can we patiently and intently believe that He will answer us, even if that answer is different than we expect (cp. 2 Corinthians 12:9-10)? Can we keep watching and praying (Matthew 26:41)? When is the last time you persistently prayed for a certain event, such as the conversion of a loved one (Romans 10:1) or for our government to support your ability to serve God (1 Timothy 2:1-2)? The result of constant and persistent communication is a friendship with God. Much like our relationships on earth, they can only exist by repeated contact.

III. Jesus Taught Humility In Prayer (Luke 18:9-14)

- A. The Pharisees trusted in their outward conformity to the rites and rituals of the Law. They considered anyone who did not do this as sinners. This was the stamp of self-righteousness.
- B. In the prayer of the Pharisee, there was only an appearance of true religion. In the Pharisees' prayer, he mentioned two elements.
 - 1. The first element consisted of abstaining from the injustice of others in pretending to live a harmless, innocent, and upright life.
 - 2. The second element consisted of his recital of the regular observances of all the external duties of religion. His fault consisted in relying on this kind of righteousness; in not feeling and acknowledging that he was a sinner; in not seeking a religion that would dwell in his heart; and in making public and ostentatious professions of his own goodness.
- C. In the prayer of the publican, there was true humility. The publican trusted in Christ for his righteousness and was truly conscious of his guilt, shame, and sorrow because of his sin. He was ready to admit that others may be more righteous than he. This was a man who would not come near to the temple, nor would he lift up his own head. When we are willing to confess and forsake our sins, we will find mercy.
- D. One of these men went home having gained the favor and forgiveness of God. Humility toward God is expected (James 4:10). The benefit is that the humble heart can then cast its cares on God (1 Peter 5:7).
 - 1. Our petitions (1 John 5:14-15) and intercessions (1 Timothy 2:1-2) should include praise (Isaiah 25:1), thanksgiving (2 Chronicles 6:14), and confession of sin (Psalm 32:5).

2. Our prayers, especially our public prayers, are deserving of more than just rote statements that are said over and over again. Let's put some feeling into them because we acknowledge our humble position before God.

IV. Jesus Taught Reward In Prayer (Matthew 7:7-11)

- A. One of the most encouraging features of the Lord's teaching on prayer is the assurance it will be heard. If we go to God in prayer with the proper spirit, He will answer our prayers. It is also implied that we ask what is consistent for God to give (1 John 5:14). It is entirely consistent for the Lord to give what is promised and what is best for us. Our prayers should never be for selfish ends, but always for the glory of God's kingdom.
- B. In the sermon on the mount, Jesus told His followers that He expected righteousness, sincerity, humility, purity, and love from them. He then guaranteed them that those gifts were theirs if they would only ask.
 1. Jesus mentions three actions: 1) asking, which is a simple use of the voice which represents prayer; 2) seeking, which is a motion of the body which represents earnest sincerity; and, 3) knocking, which is an effort to open and pass through obstacles which represents an active pursuit of God's will.
 2. Like a human father, the heavenly Father uses these means to teach His children courtesy, persistence, and diligence. If a child prevails with a thoughtful father, it is because the father has molded the child to do his will.
- C. The Lord then finishes His teaching with the example of the bread and fish. Both of these were common food supplies of the peasants of Galilee. If those who are evil will give good gifts to their children, how much more will God give good gifts to His children who will pray?
- D. Jesus presented a wonderful example of a life of work and prayer (Mark 1:35; John 11:41-42). Although we pray confidently according to God's will, and He is glad to listen and answer, remember that this does not remove the need for effort. "The best place to pray for a good crop is at the end of a hoe handle."

Conclusion. In Ephesians 3:20, Paul said that our God was able "to do exceeding abundantly beyond all that we ask or think." During Christ's personal ministry, He painted a picture of God which said God loves us even to the point that the very hairs on our head are numbered, and that He does not want any of us to perish. Given that character of God, it is easy for us to say, "Thy will be done." We pray in the childlike and Christ-given confidence that our highest good resides in the will of God. We know the day is coming when we will say, "He hath done all things well" (Mark 7:37). How wonderful it is to know that we can approach the throne of grace!