

## CHAPTER 8 LET'S LEARN TO PRAY

Some time ago, one of our young people returned from a Christian college and asked me plainly, "Pastor, why do we need to pray? "God knows all things, and He knows what I need before I ask Him. In fact, He knows my needs better than I know them. So why pray?"

Frankly, I had never given this question consideration even though I had been to Bible College and later had three years of graduate work in my preparation for the ministry. Why do we pray when God knows better than we do our needs? Is it simply to be a mere spiritual gymnastic? Is it an effort to lift ourselves from the ground by tugging at our own boot straps? No!

The disciples of the New Testament times spent time in prayer. Even before the Holy Spirit came in His power on the day of Pentecost, the one hundred and twenty believers gathered together in prayer. Later, it was this group that was originally filled with the Holy Spirit and first declared to the Jewish community and the world, that Jesus Christ of Nazareth was indeed the Messiah. He had been crucified, but God raised Him up, to give to all who would believe, everlasting life.

After a miracle of healing in the name of Jesus of Nazareth, the disciples were arrested and brought before the chief religious rulers of Judaism to be examined. Peter and John boldly gave a defense for the Gospel of Christ. The rulers then threatened them and commanded them not to preach or teach in the name of Christ. But when Peter and John returned to the company of believers, the first thing they did was to lift their voices in prayer to God. So mighty was the direct and simple prayer they prayed that the place was shaken where they were gathered together. They were given anew the boldness they needed to speak the Word of God.

Throughout the New Testament, we find the believers praying for the various ministries and needs that they had. Is it any wonder there has never been another generation of believers that has exerted more influence on their world than did these early believers?

Although there may be other reasons for prayer, I believe there are at least three that are essential.

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First of all, God commands us to pray. If there was no other reason that could be listed, this would of itself be reason enough. We are to be submissive to God and obedient to His commands.

Look up Reference Group Number 1

Matthew 7:7

Luke 18:1

Luke 21:36

John 16:23-24

Colossians 4:2

1 Thessalonians 5:17

1 Timothy 2:8

Hebrews 4:16

Another reason for prayer is that God desires to have fellowship with us. Fellowship is a two-way street. There must be inter-action between two personalities. God communicates to us through His Word. His Spirit applies the truths of His Word to our lives; causing us to change into the image of His Son. We communicate with God through prayer. He tells us of His love through the Word. We are to tell him of our love through prayer. He manifests His grace to us through His Word. We are to thank Him for His grace through prayer. He promises to guide us by His Word. We are to seek His guidance through prayerful consideration of His Word.

Man was created a free moral agent. God wanted man to fellowship with Him because he chose to do so. The stars and planets, plant life and animals all follow the dictates of God they have no choice. They must do that for which they were created. But when God created man, it was His desire to have one creature that would be given the opportunity to fellowship with Him or to not fellowship with Him. Of course, he wants all men to be in fellowship with Him, but he gave to man the right to choose his own way. One has said, "Prayer is not the reflex action of my will upon itself, but rather the communion of two wills, in which the finite comes into connection with the Infinite, and like the trolley, appropriates its purpose and power."

The Lord wants us to acknowledge Him in all of the details of our life. In Proverbs 3:6, the promise is given that if we acknowledge Him in all our ways, "He shall direct" our paths. When it states He shall direct our paths, it means He will arrange the events in our lives so that it will be for our best and His glory,. Romans 8:28 is found in the context of prayer. The promise is given that we don't always know what we should pray for as we ought, but the Holy Spirit is making intercession for us. He interprets our prayers so

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they will be changed to be the very best thing that happens to us. Then the 28th verse says "We know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are called according to his purpose." God will turn even seeming tragedies into circumstances which will ultimately be for our good.

All too often we presume upon God's goodness. We go ahead and make our plans without asking for His approval or direction. I made this same mistake when I was a teen-ager with my earthly father. Our family had only one car. It was the family car. Everyone had to use it. We lived thirteen miles from the high school where most of my activities took place. All too often, I made my plans with my friends at school before I would check with Dad about the car. Then, after my plans were completed and commitments were made, at the supper table about one-half hour before I was to leave, I would ask Dad if I could have the car. Often, there was a hassle and strong words before I would either accept the "no" or get a half commitment of "Go ahead and take the car, I don't care."

How much better it would have been if I had acknowledged my father and asked him about my desires before I made my plans. Had I simply acknowledged him and the rest of the family and their desires, I would have saved myself many an hour of anxiety when I needed their permission to have the car.

Our Heavenly Father wants us to acknowledge Him before we make our plans. Study the Word of God to see if there are directions for your life's decisions. If there is no answer there, then seek the Lord's will through prayer. If you acknowledge Him, He has promised to guide you.

This brings us to a third reason for prayer. God is concerned with what concerns us. He desires to answer our prayers.

### Look up Reference Group Number 2

Mark 11:24

1 John 3:22

1 John 5:15

John 14:13 &14

John 15:7 and 16

John 16:23-24

In these verses, you saw that God desires us to ask of Him our petitions. He wants us to bring not just our urgent needs but even the desires

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of our heart. The fact is evident from these verses that God does not merely listen to our prayers, but He is desirous of granting our petitions. The phrases, "I will do it," "It shall be done," "he may give it," "we know that we have the petitions that we desired of Him," should be a source of great encouragement to the believer as he brings his petitions to God.

It is evident throughout Scripture that God acts upon the requests of His children. When Elijah prayed for rain, it rained. When Elisha prayed that the Syrians would be blinded, they became blind. When Hezekiah prayed for deliverance from the Assyrians they were delivered. God is still concerned about answering the prayers of His children. The Deacon Board of our church was desirous to help one of the widows in our congregation, but they did not know what her needs were. However, they made out a check in the amount of \$50.00 and delivered it to her. On that very same day she received a bill for \$47.95 unexpectedly!

In my church I had decided to go ahead with taped Bible studies knowing, however, that I would need a couple hundred dollars to pay for the tapes and equipment. I simply uttered a silent prayer to my heavenly Father. That very day, the church received a check in the mail with \$350.00 designated for the "tape ministry." The person involved knew nothing of my intent. He had never mailed in a check to the church even though he was a regular contributor. He had received a large year-end bonus from his company and wanted to help get out the gospel so he sent the money by mail and designated it to be used in some sort of tape ministry. God knew before I asked what my needs would be and laid it upon the heart of another brother to meet that need. This is according to His promise in Matthew 6:8, "Your Father (speaking of our heavenly Father) knows what things you have need of before you ask Him." Testimonies of this nature could be multiplied.

God is desirous of acting upon the requests of His children,. Most of us know we should pray, and we do pray. But often our hearts cry out with the apostle "...we know not what we should pray for as we ought..." (Roman 8:26) In this passage, the promise is given that the Holy Spirit will intercede for us before the throne of God on our behalf. Yet, we should pray as intelligently as we possibly can.

In Matthew's gospel, we are given specific instructions as to prayer. Two things are listed that we are not to do when we pray. One, we are not to pray to be seen of men. Some of the religious leaders of Jesus' day were

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doing this. He stated that they had received their reward. They wanted the praise of men, and that is what they received. We are not to seek the praise of men when we pray, but rather we should quietly and in secret make our request to God and let God reward us openly. He is not teaching against public prayer or public gatherings for prayer, but He is simply teaching against praying to be seen of men and seeking to be recognized of men as pious people. Peter and John are found going up to the temple to pray publicly, and we find the church praying together on more than one occasion.

Two, we are not to use "meaningless repetition" as the pagans do who think they shall be heard for their much praying. The most striking illustration of this is found in the Old Testament. The people of Israel were giving some allegiance to Jehovah and yet they were following many of the practices of the false god Baal. Elijah challenged them to worship and follow one or the other. If they felt Jehovah was God, they should follow Him; but if they felt Baal was god, then follow him. The people did not answer, so Elijah challenged the prophets of Baal to call upon their god, and he would call upon Jehovah. The one that answered by fire, "let him be God." The prophets of Baal then cried out from morning until noon. They even got so excited that they leaped upon the altar and cried louder and cut themselves with "swords and lances until the blood gushed out upon them." Yet there was no answer! Elijah repaired the altar and poured twelve barrels of water upon it. Then he prayed a very simple prayer, and Jehovah as God answered immediately by fire.

In a positive way, we learn then, that we are to pray in earnest to the Father; not looking for the praise of men. We are to pray specifically and directly to the point and not simply say a lot of words to be heard.

### Read Reference Group Number 3

2. We are to pray in earnest to the Father Matthew 6:5 & 6
  - (a) Public prayers Acts 3:1
  - (b) United prayers Acts 2:12-14, Acts 4:24-3  
Acts 12:5
3. Pray specifically. Matthew 6:7
  - (a) Illustration of worshippers of Baal. 1 Kings 17:26-29
  - (b) Illustration of Elijah. I Kings 17:36-38

Do the Model Prayer Analysis

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Read Matthew 6:9-13

1. To whom is the prayer addressed? \_\_\_\_\_
  
2. State in your own words the phrase "Hallowed by thy name." \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
  
3. What are the two desires we should want to see upon earth? (v. 10)
  - a. \_\_\_\_\_
  - b. \_\_\_\_\_
  
4. List four personal requests in the prayer. (v. 11-13)
  - a. \_\_\_\_\_
  - b. \_\_\_\_\_
  - c. \_\_\_\_\_
  - d. \_\_\_\_\_
  
5. What is the standard whereby we are forgiven and a relationship of fellowship is maintained with our heavenly Father?  
(cf. v. 12 with vs. 14-15)

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

The phrase in Matthew 6, "after this manner" indicates this is to be a model prayer. It does not mean that we need to pray this prayer every time we pray, but it does provide a pattern after which we should model our prayers.

Let us analyze this prayer a little more. Notice first of all the personal relationship that is mentioned -- "Our Father." We became children of God

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by the new birth. This was made possible through the Lord Jesus Christ who died for us to take away the penalty for our sin. He was the One who rose again from the dead and is now seated on the right hand of God the Father in heaven; making intercession for us. Therefore, we are to come to God our Father through the name and merit of Jesus Christ.

Next, honor is ascribed to the Father, and His will is put first. The term "hallowed" means "to be holy," "to be set apart," or "to sanctify." God's name is to be praised and we are to be conscious that His name is to be set apart from all others.

In Old Testament times, blasphemy of God's name was punishable by death. Even though we would not go that far today, yet God's attitude regarding His name has not changed. We need to comply with the Psalmist, "Oh, magnify the Lord with me, and let us exalt His name together." We need to honor God's name with our lips and with our lives. We should want His will to be performed upon the earth above all else. We should work toward that end with our own lives.

Then we need to include petitions about our daily needs. First of all, we are taught to bring to the Lord our needs for our daily subsistence. Some people feel guilty to ask about their jobs, or clothes or food. Yet, the Lord teaches us to ask for these items. "Give us this day our daily bread." Nothing that is needed for our daily care is too small to bring to Him. We are to acknowledge Him in all our ways. Even the little things of our life are important.

Next, we are to bring before Him our failures: "Forgive us our debts." We dealt with this at length in our third lesson entitled "Let's Get Rid of Sin." We need to simply confess the sin of which we are conscious, and He has promised to forgive us our sin.

Thirdly, we are not to desire testing. The Greek word for "temptation" can be translated either temptation or testing and does not always have the connotation of temptation to evil. The context of any given passage of Scripture decides whether the testing is from an evil source or not. In the light of the fact that the next phrase particularly singles out that which is of evil origin, it might best to assume the testing the first phrase has to do with those events which come into our lives that are beyond our control; such as an accident, illness, death in the family, or financial reverse. These

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may come into our life, and God has promised to give strength during these times. However, it would be foolish for us to desire to have these hardships. To the contrary, we should pray that our daily life might not have challenges that could hurt our spiritual effectiveness.

Last of all, we should pray for deliverance from those things which are of an evil origin. Of course, these things Satan would bring to us would be evil, and we know from Scripture that he would like to be able to accuse us of wrong doing. There are some temptations which arise out of our world system that would destroy us if it were possible. We are admonished elsewhere not to get caught up on this world's system for it shall pass away. Then there are some temptations that arise from our own heart. Because of our sinful nature, we must be on guard. Certainly we should pray for daily deliverance from the evil that can so quickly destroy the witness and effectiveness of the believer.

Look up Reference Group Number 4

4. Further Model Prayer Analysis. See Matthew 6:9-13
  - a. There must be a personal relationship. (v. 9)
    - (1) This is a result of the new birth.
    - (2) We come through the merit of Christ  
John 14:13-14  
John 16:23-24
  - b. Honor is to be ascribed to God. (v. 9b)
    - (1) "Hallowed" means "to be holy."
    - (2) Blasphemy was punishable by death in the Old Testament. Leviticus 24:11-16
    - (3) Praise His name. Psalms 34:3
  - c. Desire God's will. (v. 10)
  - d. Desire daily needs. (v. 11) cf. Proverbs 3:6
  - e. Desire daily cleansing (v. 12) cf. 1 John 1:9
  - f. Desire daily deliverance (v. 13)
    - (1) Satan is the accuser of believers.  
Revelation 12:10
    - (2) World will pass away. 1 John 2:5-17
    - (3) Sin arises from the heart. Matthew 15:18-20  
Jeremiah 17:9

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In the model prayer given by Jesus to His disciples, we see these five things: (1) Praise to God, (2) desire for God's will, (3) desire for daily sustenance, (4) desire for daily cleansing, and (5) desire for daily deliverance. There are at least two more elements that should be included in our prayers.

First of all, we are to have a thankful heart. Realizing God has a purpose for us in the body of Christ, there is nothing which can really be for our harm if we walk in conformity to His will. Romans 8:28 is true, for "we know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to His purpose." Even death itself would not be to harm us for in death the believer moves from this earthly scene to glory. The apostle Paul affirmed "to die is gain." Therefore, we are not to be anxious about anything. When we bring our petitions before Him, let us do it with thankfulness. When Paul and Silas were arrested for ministering the Word of God at Philippi, they were beaten and thrown into an underground prison cell with their feet in stocks. They could not sleep because of the pain, but they could pray and praise God for His goodness in the salvation of Lydia, a woman of Thyatira, and the deliverance of a little girl from demonism. They realized God even has His purpose in this, and their prayers were seasoned with thanksgiving. In answer to their prayers, the place was shaken so violently that the prison doors were swung open and the stocks which fastened their feet fell off. The jailer then pleaded with Paul and Silas as to what he might do to be saved. They explained that he must believe on the Lord Jesus Christ to be saved. Subsequently, he committed his life to Christ along with his entire family. Through a prayer of thankfulness and gratitude, God turned seemingly adverse conditions into that which advanced the cause of Christ in that community and provided for the personal comfort of his servants.

The second additional necessity that must accompany prayer is faith. In Romans 14:23, the scripture states "for whatever is not of faith is sin." Again in Hebrews 11:6, we are told that "without faith it is impossible to please Him; for he that comes to God must believe that He is, and the He is a rewarder of them that diligently seek Him."

Faith is a conviction based upon hearing. The word in the Greek is akin to the word meaning to persuade. Thus, we might say one who has faith, is one who has been persuaded of the truth of a matter. We can exercise faith in God because He will keep His promises that are revealed in

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His Word. At this time, look up the prayer promises God has given to us in the Reference Group Number 5. Then read the chapter on the heroes of faith in Hebrews and list the accomplishments of these men of faith.

### Reference Group Number 5.

- B. We must pray with a grateful heart. Philippians 4:6  
1 Thessalonians 5:17-18, Colossians 3:17
1. God has a good purpose for us. Romans 8:28
  2. Even death cannot harm the believer,. Philipians 1:21  
Illustration of Paul and Silas Acts 16:22-34
- C. We must pray in faith.  
Romans 14:23; Hebrews 11:6; James 1:5-7

### Prayer Promises:

Matthew 7:7-8; Matthew 18: 19, 20; Matthew 21:22;  
John 14:13-14; John 16: 23-24; 1 John 3:22  
1 John 5:14-15; John 15:7 & 16

### Heroes of Faith: Hebrews 11:1-40

List at least one thing each of the men of God were able to accomplish through faith.

When should we pray? First of all, the Scriptures admonish us to pray at all times. This means we are to be able to utter up a prayer at any time throughout the day even if we are on the job, driving the car, washing dishes, or working in the yard. Where we are and what we are doing should not interfere with the petitions we offer up to our heavenly Father.

We should also have a time set apart for prayer. Daniel set aside three times a day when he met alone with the Lord in worship and prayer. Even though we may utter up prayers throughout the day, we need to have a time set apart without interruptions when we can carefully bring our petitions to Him. It would be the most practical to make your time of prayer following your time of meditation upon the Word of God. First, read the Scripture and then bow in humble prayer before God.

One of the difficulties many people face is that their prayer life falls into such a daily routine that it loses its effectiveness and spiritual benefit for

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their lives. There are several ways to overcome this difficulty. One would be to become actively involved in the work of the Lord in your local church. When you get involved in His work, there will be many challenges that you must bring to the Lord for daily direction and wisdom. Another way would be to outline a daily prayer calendar for each day of the week. I personally follow this pattern in my own life along with the challenges I face daily. I would encourage you to work out a schedule that fits your own needs.

Yet another way to make your prayer time meaningful would be to make a list of your petitions and the date you first made the request. Then list the date of the answer in a separate column. This will help you to see God's activity in your life. Of course, this assumes two things: One, you will pray about specific requests, and two, you may get a definite "no" from God at times. Don't be discouraged over that for as a loving Heavenly Father, He knows what is best for us.

You need to pray with other believers. Your church provides the time for you to get together with other believers and share with them your common concerns. This will increase your vision beyond your personal needs. It will also provide a source of encouragement as you hear of God working to answer prayers in the lives of other believers.

Last of all, let me remind you that all prayer should be to glorify God. We do not pray to get what we want. We pray that we might fulfill God's purposes through our lives. This will bring glory to God.

As we conclude this study, look up the verses in the rest of the outline and work out a schedule you could follow in your daily prayer time.

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