



Foundations of

FAITH

Prayer

Lesson 27

The inspired writer has said, "Draw near to God, and he will draw near to you." (James 4:8) There is no better way to draw near to the Father than through the medium of prayer. In prayer we talk with God, pouring out our hearts as a child does in the presence of his earthly father. We should not consider prayer a speech to inform God of our needs because Jesus teaches, "Your father knows what things you have need of, before you ask him." (Matt. 6:8) However, even though he knows our needs, he expects us to ask for those things which we desire.

THE POWER OF PRAYER. It has been truly said, "Prayer can change the night to day." The things wrought by prayer cannot be measured. However, a few Biblical examples should impress us with its power. James writes, "Elijah was a man of like passions with us, and he prayed fervently that it might not rain; and it rained not on the earth for three years and six months. And he prayed again: and the heaven gave rain, and the earth brought forth her fruit." (James 5:17, 18 – A.S.V.) If a fervent prayer of Elijah could stop the rain for three and a half years, and if another prayer from his lips could cause the heavens to open up, surely James is correct when he says in the same chapter, "The effectual prayer of a righteous man availeth much." (James 5:16)

The Bible abounds in accounts of fulfilled prayers. Hannah prayed that she might be given a child and God answered her petition. (I Samuel 1) Nehemiah prayed for the Jews in Jerusalem, and through God's providence he was sent to that city to rebuild its walls. (Neh. 1) Solomon prayed for wisdom,

and God gave him not only wisdom, but also riches and honour. (I Kings 3)

HOW TO PRAY. On one occasion the disciples said to Jesus, "Lord, teach us to pray." (Luke 11:1) The prayer which followed is usually called the Lord's prayer, but it might more appropriately be termed the model prayer since in giving it Jesus said, "After this manner therefore pray you." (Matt. 6:9) The prayer was offered as a means of teaching the disciples how to pray. It was never intended to be used as a memorised prayer. Notice carefully the language of Jesus, "Our Father which art in heaven, Hallowed be thy name. Thy kingdom come. Thy will be done on earth, as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread. And forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors. And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil: For thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory, for ever. Amen." (Matt. 6:9-13) This prayer is to the point and very brief, yet it contains most of the parts which might properly be included in a more lengthy prayer.

There are at least six parts to prayer. They are (1) **address**, (2) **praise**, (3) **thanksgiving**, (4) **confession**, (5) **petition**, and (6) **closing**. The individual occasion will determine the length and emphasis to be placed on each of these. Some prayers, such as those offered for the bread and fruit of the vine in the Lord's supper, may omit one or more of these parts.

Address. All prayers should be addressed to God the Father, rather than Christ. We pray **through** Jesus as our mediator, but are not told to pray to him. Jesus appropriately began the model prayer with the words,

“Our Father which art in heaven.” There are many other ways in which we may address God as we approach the throne of mercy.

Praise. After Jesus in the model prayer addressed the Father, he continued, “Hallowed be thy name.” This is an expression of praise which we too often neglect in prayer. A study of the Psalms of David reveals his continual praise of God for his mercy, love and justice. This appreciation of the greatness of the Almighty partly explains why David is called a man after God’s own heart.

Thanksgiving. James tells us, “Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, and cometh down from the Father of lights.” (James 1:17) There are many things for which we may thank God. There are the material blessings – food, clothing, shelter and protection. And there are the wonderful spiritual blessings of Christ, the Bible, the Church and the hope of life eternal. Our thanksgiving should be sincere, not simply a catalogue of items which we mechanically enumerate.

Confession. In the parable of the Pharisee and the publican who went into the temple to pray (Luke 18), Jesus states that the publican was justified rather than the Pharisee because he humbled himself before God while the Pharisee did not. The Pharisee commended himself: the publican confessed his sinfulness. In approaching God, we must strip ourselves of every vestige of pride by acknowledging our mistakes. Therefore we read, “If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.” (1 John 1:9)

Petition. While the Father knows our needs, he expects us to ask him to fill them. We are instructed, “Ask, and it shall be given you; seek, and ye shall find; knock, and it shall be opened unto you; for every one that asketh receiveth; and he that seeketh findeth; and to him that knocketh it shall be opened.” (Matt. 7:7, 8) Since we are to confess our sins, we should not forget to ask God to forgive us, as “we forgive our debtors.”

Our petitions should include requests for a continuation of God’s material and spiritual blessings. In the model prayer Jesus asked for “our daily bread”, literally, our bread, not for tomorrow or next week, but for this very day. We are to live one day at a time. Our prayers should be as specific as possible rather than being expressed in vague generalities. And since “we know not what we should pray for as we ought” (Romans 8:26), we should always ask that the will of

God might be done. “If we ask anything **according to his will**, he heareth us.” (1 John 5:14) Sometimes we pray for things which are not best for us. We should be willing to let God in his infinite wisdom fill our requests as he sees fit.

Prayers should never be selfish. This does not mean that we should not pray for the Father to fill our needs, but we should not neglect to pray for others. We ought to pray for those in authority, for the sick, for the lost, and for the church. We are even to pray for our enemies as Jesus teaches. “Pray for them which despitefully use you, and persecute you.” (Matt. 5:44)

Closing. No prayer should be ended without its being offered in the name of Jesus. “And whatsoever ye do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God and the Father by him.” (Col. 3:17) This is usually expressed at the close of a prayer, although it may be properly stated elsewhere. The word “amen” which is used to terminate prayers means “so be it.” It may be thought of as the exclamation point of a prayer and should never be uttered without thinking what it means.

WHEN TO PRAY. Paul admonishes, “Pray without ceasing.” (1 Thess. 5:17) Obviously he does not mean that we should be engaged in prayer every waking hour. Rather we gain the thought that we should always be of prayerful mind and that our prayer life should be constant. We ought to pray to the Father whenever we feel the need of communing with him. Nehemiah prayed while in the presence of the king. (Neh. 2:4) Probably he offered a brief silent prayer, and it is likely that the king did not even know that he prayed. But as he was about to make an important request of the king, he invoked divine aid that he might receive a favourable answer.

Daniel had a pattern of prayer. Thrice each day he prayed facing Jerusalem. We are not told that we must face Jerusalem as we pray, nor are we told how often we should pray. Yet the example of Daniel in establishing a habit of prayer ought to be followed by all. It is most difficult to be constant in prayer without having a definite time each day to approach the heavenly throne. If we limit our prayers to those special moments in which we feel a strong urge to pray, too often we will fail to pray altogether. Let it also be noted here that the practice of giving thanks for our food should be followed by every Christian. In this we follow the example of Jesus who never ate a meal

without first giving thanks to the one who gives us all things.

WHERE TO PRAY. “But thou, when thou prayest, enter into thy closet, and when thou hast shut thy door, pray to thy Father which is in secret; and thy Father, which seeth in secret shall reward thee openly.” (Matt. 6:6) The Pharisees in the time of Jesus often prayed in the open that they might receive the praises of men for their holy living. Jesus enjoins us to pray in secret because we do not pray for the benefit of others. But private prayer has another important advantage. It enables us to shut the world out of our minds in order that we may give our thoughts undivided to the Lord. We cannot pray successfully if we are praying with our lips and listening to a conversation with our ears.

PUBLIC PRAYER. While individually we should pray in secret, in the assemblies of the saints we pray jointly. When Peter was released from prison he found the Christians gathered in a prayer meeting in the home of the mother of John Mark. (Acts 12:12) Though only one should speak at a time in public prayer, the minds of all should follow the prayer that it might be theirs as well as that of the speaker. Of course, the one directing the prayer ought to express

thoughts which can be shared by all, and should speak distinctly so that they can truly make it their prayer.

OBSTACLES TO EFFECTIVE PRAYER. Many prayers go unanswered. Here are some reasons. (1) **Selfish requests.** James explains, “Ye ask, and receive not, because ye ask amiss, that you may consume it upon your lusts.” (James 4:3) (2) **Failure to pray according to God’s will.** “If we ask anything according to his will, he heareth us.” (I John 5:14) (3) **Vain repetitions.** “But when ye pray, use not vain repetitions, as the heathen do.” (Matt. 6:7) Phrases that are repeated over and over again in prayers soon become trite and without meaning. When they do they will not reach God. (4) **Lack of faith.** “But let him ask in faith, nothing wavering. For he that wavereth is like a wave of the sea driven with the wind and tossed. For let not that man think that he shall receive anything of the Lord.” (James 1:6, 7) Don’t ask for anything doubting the ability of the Lord to fill the request. (5) **Lack of constancy.** In the parable of the persistent widow (Luke 18:1-8) Jesus teaches us to continue to ask for our wants rather than to ask once and then forget about it. (6) **A dishonest heart.** This was the mistake of the Pharisee in the parable previously noted. The heart must be in tune with God if we expect him to hear us.

TEST ON LESSON 27

Write true or false after the following statements:

1. The prayer usually called the Lord’s prayer was intended to teach the disciples how to pray.
2. There are no more than four parts of prayer.
3. In the model prayer, Jesus did not offer thanksgiving.
4. In the parable of the Pharisee and the publican, the Pharisee confessed his sinfulness.
5. Our prayers should be offered subject to the will of God.
6. Jesus gave thanks before eating a meal.
7. We should not pray for our enemies.

- 8. We should pray without ceasing.
- 9. Repetition of memorised phrases is an effective way to reach God with prayer.

Underline the phrase which correctly completes each sentence:

- 1. The one who prayed that it might not rain was: (a) Nehemiah; (b) Elisha; (c) Elijah.
- 2. Solomon prayed for: (a) riches; (b) wisdom; (c) honour.
- 3. We are to pray to: (a) the Father; (b) Christ; (c) the Holy Spirit.
- 4. The expression "Hallowed be thy name" is: (a) praise; (b) petition; (c) address.
- 5. "Amen" means: (a) "the prayer has ended"; (b) "open your eyes"; (c) "so be it".
- 6. Private prayers should be offered: (a) on the street corners; (b) in public places; (c) in secret.

In the blank after each scripture reference write the person or persons FOR WHOM prayer is requested, commended, or said to be offered:

- 1. Romans 10:1
- 2. I Timothy 2:1
- 3. I Timothy 2:2
- and
- 4. II Timothy 1:3
- 5. Colossians 1:3
- 6. Ephesians 6:18
- 7. Luke 22:31, 32.
- 8. Matthew 5:44
- 9. Luke 23:34

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Answers

These lessons are based on the King James Version, so if you are using another translation the words employed may vary slightly. Sometimes an alternative answer is possible. The following is a useful guide.

Section 1 – T, F, T, F, T, T, F, T, F.

Section 2 –
1. (c)
2. (b)
3. (a)
4. (a)
5. (c)
6. (c)

Section 3 –
1. Israel
2. All men
3. Kings, all in authority
4. Timothy
5. Colossian brethren
6. Saints
7. Si on or Peter
8. Those who despitefully use us or our enemies
9. Those who crucified Jesus.

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