

“Teach Us to Pray”

Lessons on Prayer



Prepared by Doy Moyer

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Lesson One

How to Pray

Introduction: Luke 11:1: *It happened that while Jesus was praying in a certain place, after He had finished, one of His disciples said to Him, “Lord, teach us to pray just as John also taught his disciples.”*

1. Prayer is something that can be taught and learned. Who better to learn from than the Master Himself?
2. Jesus’ disciples wanted to learn how they could improve their ability to pray. This is an attitude that should characterize all disciples of Jesus. What can we do to learn more about how to pray effectively?
3. Lesson Objective: to understand what prayer is by focusing on the teachings of Jesus and His prayer life.

I. What is Prayer?

A. The Bible teaches us that we are to be people who “pray without ceasing” (1 Thess. 5:17). We are to be devoted to prayer (Col. 4:2). So it is something we need to know about, and learn how to effectively do it.

B. Basically, prayer is our way of communicating to God. It is a humble act that recognizes that we depend upon Him in every way. It is our way of talking to God.

C. “Prayer (*proseuche*) emphasizes the element of communion with God, devotion and worship, though it may be a petition to the Lord concerning personal needs. In prayer one may simply talk with God about his problems and necessities, seeking divine counsel. Prayer should not be intended to give information to God, to free us from responsibilities divinely imposed upon us, or to ask God to do what we are to do for ourselves. In prayer we make our wishes known to our Father and leave them before Him to be responded to as He pleases” (Hailey 7).

D. The very nature of prayer means that we are recognizing our dependence upon God. We are calling upon Him by faith. Though we do not see Him, we know by faith that He is there, that He hears, and that He will respond in a way that is best for us.

E. Other terms to be familiar with in these studies include (these ideas will be explored in more depth in subsequent lessons):

1. Intercession (*enteuxis*): to ask for God’s attention and help on behalf of others. It is an expression of concern for others. 1 Tim. 2:1

2. Thanksgiving (*eucharistia*): expression of gratitude and praise to God for the blessings He has given to us. Col. 3:15

3. Supplication (*deesis*): a prayer request growing out of a need. Eph. 6:18; Phil. 4:6

F. Prayer should have priority in the life of a Christian. It is the privilege of one who can address God as “Father.” To cease to pray

Lesson One Theme

Jesus teaches us how to pray.

- *Jesus Shows it:* Jesus said to the little children come to Him, and prayed for them. Matt. 19:13
- *Main Story Example:* the model prayer gives us details on attitude and content. Matt. 6:9-13
- *Objectives:* Jesus teaches us all we need. God listens to us. God loves us. Attitudes of humility and forgiveness.

Notes

is to cease relying upon God as our Father. Matt. 7:7-8; Rom. 12:12; Acts 2:42

II. Elements of the Lord's Prayer

A. Jesus is our primary example of prayer. He shows what it means to be in constant communion and communication with the Father. And He taught His disciples about prayer. Recall our first text in Luke 11:1. Jesus responded with what we often call a "model" prayer. In verses 2-4, this prayer is recorded, along with additional teaching in vv. 5-13 about how God answers prayer. For our purposes, we will consider the "model" prayer as stated in Matthew 6 because of its fuller treatment.

B. An analysis of Matthew 6:9-13.

1. **Pray, then, in this way.** Jesus was not giving a formula in the sense of wanting us to repeat only these exact words. He was giving a pattern, a "way" in which we can pray that will effectively communicate to God. It is a "manner" of prayer He is teaching.

2. **Our Father who is in heaven.** Prayer is addressed to God. It is the right of those who can call upon Him as our Father. It is our relationship to Him that we acknowledge, and through faith we see our dependence upon Him. Heb. 11:6; 13:5-6

3. **Hallowed be Your name.** "Hallowed" basically means "holy." We are to serve God with "reverence and awe" (Heb. 12:28). This emphasizes the respect in which the name of God must be held. God's name stands for all that He is (cf. Exod. 3:13-16). By calling on the name of God, we are acknowledging that He is all powerful, all glorious, and majestic in every way. He is worthy of our worship and praise. "Holy and awesome (reverend) is His name" (Psalm 111:9). Though we have a "family" relationship with God and others, we must never forget who God is, and we must always approach Him with the reverence and respect that only He deserves.

4. **Your kingdom come.** When we think of God's kingdom, we should think of His reign or rule. We are the subjects of His rule. He rules in our hearts. So this phrase tells us that we as His subjects need to be concerned about His rule in our lives. We should not pray for the kingdom to come into existence (in the sense prophesied before the cross). In this sense, the kingdom came into existence in the days of the apostles (Acts 2). When we become Christians, we are transferred from the domain of darkness into the kingdom of God (Col. 1:13). So, though we should not pray for it to "come" into existence, we should still pray for the kingdom of God and all that it encompasses. We are to seek first His kingdom and righteousness (Matt. 6:33), and this includes our prayers also. We can pray for the success of the kingdom, the faithfulness of the citizens, and its victory over Satan and his forces.

5. **Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven.** Jesus' life is characterized by a desire to do the will of the Father (John 5:30; 6:38). Prior to the cross, His prayer was "not as I will, but as You will" (Matt. 26:39). Our prayers need to be done "according to His will" (1 John 5:14). But this also means that we need to know the will of God. God's will is first in His mind, but He has revealed His will to us in the New Testament (1 Cor. 2:9-16). It is in response to

God's will that we become His people (Matt. 12:50). This shows us that prayer is not intended to persuade God to do our will, whatever we want (see this illustrated in Mark 10:35-40). It is a recognition that our desires are to come under submission to the desires of God. "Doing God's will on earth, 'as in heaven,' gives to life on earth a heavenly aura of beauty, righteousness, peace, and glory" (Hailey 21).

6. ***Give us this day our daily bread.*** Recognition of God's greatness, and our submission to Him, has already been stated. Now this comes out in a practical way by stating our reliance upon Him for daily physical provisions. We depend on God for our material provisions as well. We are told elsewhere not to be anxious about life, "what you will eat or what you will drink; nor for your body, as to what you will put on" (Matt. 6:25). God cares for us both physically and spiritually, if we will rely upon Him. God tells us that we can pray about anything that might cause some anxiety (Phil. 4:6-7). God's peace will guard our hearts; and freedom from such anxiety is surely in answer to our prayers regarding the material things of life. But always remember that the material matters are subordinate to spiritual matters.

7. ***And forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors.*** "Debts" here would stand for "transgressions," as stated in vv. 14-15. First, it is right to seek forgiveness from God for our sins. This is the will of God. Praying for forgiveness is the privilege of one who has already entered into a relationship with Him (already having been baptized into Christ). If we sin, we are to confess that before God, and "He is faithful and righteous to forgive us our sins" (1 John 1:9; cf. Also Acts 8:14-24). To forgive is to send away or remit so that they are no longer held against us. God promises to do this so they are remembered no more (Heb. 8:12). However, there is more in this phrase. Second, then, we must be willing to forgive others. If we are not willing to forgive others, then our sins will not be forgiven. This is explained in vv. 14-15. We are not to hold grudges against others, or refuse to forgive them. We cannot harbor ill will or malice toward one who has offended us.

8. ***And do not lead us into temptation, but deliver us from the evil one.*** "Temptation" can be variously translated as trial, testing, proving, or it can have the connotation of being tempted to do evil. The context must determine this. Though God does "test" or "prove" His own (e.g., Abraham in Gen. 22), He does not tempt anyone to do evil (Jas. 1:13-18). We may use the trials of life to grow (Jas. 1:2-4), but God will provide a way of escape so that we do not have to commit sin against Him (Jas. 1:12; 1 Cor. 10:13). He will deliver us from evil if we look to Him for our way out. Nothing will happen to us that would force us into sin. This, too, is part of God's will. And we should pray for such deliverance.

C. These elements of prayer incorporate for us the need to praise God, pray for others, and pray for our own physical and spiritual blessings. All of this is to be done in the name of Jesus, which is not a "phrase" we must say, but rather a recognition that all we do and say is because of everything the Lord is to us (Col. 3:17). What a privilege we have to talk to our Creator!!

III. The Prayer Life of Jesus

A. Jesus' life on earth is filled with prayer. The examples provided by Jesus Himself "teach us" how to pray. He taught His disciples that "at all times they ought to pray and not to lose heart" (Luke 18:1). Jesus' life is the epitome of this teaching.

B. A listing of Jesus' prayers and examples (Simpson 47):

1. *At His baptism* (Luke 3:21). Keep in mind that this was the beginning of His public ministry. Hailey suggests that, based upon the comparison to Matthew 3, Jesus was praying when he came up out of the water (32). As one is dedicating himself to the Lord, prayer is most appropriate.

2. *Early in the morning, preparing to preach* (Mark 1:35). Jesus began His day with prayer, and in preparation for His daily activities. Do we find time to begin our days with prayer? By praying first thing, we know that God is on our minds. We may just rush to get up, get dressed, and get about our activities for the day without thinking of God. Instead, we should take some extra time (get up earlier?), and start our days with prayer, as did Jesus.

3. *Often Alone* (Luke 5:16; cf. Matt. 14:22-23). When pressures from others were bearing down on Him, He would go away by Himself to pray. Once again, He took time to do this, in the midst of a "full schedule." Though He was "alone," He was never "alone" truly, for God was always with Him.

4. *All Night* (Luke 6:12). Again, He went away by Himself, but this prayer lasted through the night. There were some crucial decisions to be made. He was about to choose the apostles. It is entirely appropriate to spend long periods in prayer to God prior to making important decisions in life.

5. *After rejection* (Matt. 11:25-26; cf. Luke 10:21-22). Though this occurs after being rejected, Jesus praised God on this occasion that His revelation would be understandable to "infants." People did not repent after seeing His miracles, but those who were not blinded by their own "intelligence" would be able to come to Him. When you are tempted to feel "down and out" because you feel like people have rejected you, do you go to God and praise Him for His will?

6. *At the feeding of the 5,000* (Luke 9:16). This is an example of His thankfulness before eating. Even though a great miracle occurred, He still gave thanks for the food. How much more should we, who do not have the ability to miraculously produce food, give thanks for what we have?

7. *Before Peter's Confession* (Luke 9:18). He was praying alone when the disciples came to Him, and He then asked them who men say that He is. Just another example of His prayer life.

8. *The Transfiguration* (Luke 9:28-29). This event was significant in that it pointed to Jesus as the One through whom God was now speaking (in contrast to the Law and the prophets, represented here by Moses and Elijah). Once again, prayer was involved in this event. Jesus would not let such a powerful moment pass without communion with the Father.

9. *"Teach us to pray"* (Luke 11:1-4). This was in response to their request that He teach them to pray. The prayer is like that of Matthew 6, as we have studied.

10. *Little children brought to Him* (Matt. 19:13). They were brought to Him so He could “lay His hands on them and pray.” Surely our children deserve our prayers on their behalf! Being the right examples for children is a great responsibility. We should pray for them.

11. *Predicting His death* (John 12:27-28). He was closing in on His prime purpose for coming to the earth: His death on the cross. While the temptation might have been to cry out “save Me from this hour,” instead He praised God: “Father, glorify Your name.” We should praise God for His plan to save us from sins through Jesus Christ. Praise Him for what Jesus did on our behalf. “And I, if I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all men to Myself” (vs. 32).

12. *Instructions pertaining to the Lord’s Supper* (Luke 22:17, 19; Matt. 26:26-29). This was at His last passover. He gave instructions concerning His desire for the disciples to partake of the Lord’s Supper. In doing so, He gave thanks for the bread and fruit of the vine. Once again, we should always be thankful for what God has done for us through Jesus. In particular, when we partake of the Lord’s Supper every first day of the week, we should give thanks to God, showing gratitude in our hearts for His grace toward us.

13. *For His disciples* (John 17). The entire chapter is a wonderful prayer recorded for us. Jesus prays for His chosen apostles first, that they might be able to overcome the world. Then, by extension, He prays for all believers who would come to believe through the teachings of the apostles. He prayed for unity and fellowship. This is a great example of intercession on behalf of others. It was a completely unselfish prayer. Keep in mind that this was prayed the night He was betrayed by Judas.

14. *That Peter’s faith fail not* (Luke 22:31-32). Jesus showed much concern for His disciples. He did not want to see them fail. Though He knew Peter would deny Him, He also knew that Peter would regain his sense of strength and become a powerful proclaimer of the gospel. It is appropriate that we pray for others, that they have courage to remain faithful.

15. *In Gethsemane* (Matt. 26:36-39; Luke 22:44-45). His hour had come to accomplish His purpose in death. Jesus was deeply grieved, and He wanted to spend the last few moments before the cross in communion with God. Luke tells us: “being in agony He was praying very fervently; and His sweat became like drops of blood falling down upon the ground.” Possibly referring to this occasion, the Hebrew writer says, “In the days of His flesh, He offered up both prayers and supplications with loud crying and tears to the One able to save Him from death, and He was heard because of His piety” (Heb. 5:7). Note that Jesus’ focus was upon the will of God. Even though He was not relishing the idea of dying for sins, He knew it was God’s will, and He showed complete submission to this.

16. On the cross (Matt. 27:46; Luke 23:34, 41). Three items are recorded that are spoken to the Father:

a. “My God, My God, why have you forsaken Me.” It is my view that this is a reference to Psalm 22, in which you find a chapter devoted in prophecy to the death of Christ. I do not believe

that this teaches that the Father literally forsook Jesus, as the Psalm itself does not lend toward that view (He was forsaken in appearance, just as Isa. 53 says, “we esteemed Him smitten of God”). Verse 24 asserts that God has not “hidden His face.” So the context of the psalm does not mean literal forsaking (I have more studies of this for those interested). Thus, I take it as Jesus quoting the reference to show the fulfillment of the Psalm, to show that He is the One to whom it referred. In any case, it is a cry of despair that calls upon the Father in time of need. God hears our cries.

b. Jesus prays that the Father forgive those who are putting Him to death (Luke 23:34). What a prayer of compassion and love! After all that He was being put through, yet He was willing to forgive those who had committed such an injustice toward Him. This is the same attitude Stephen exemplified in Acts 7:60. We, too, should have such willingness to forgive those who sin against us. Remember the Lord’s model prayer in this respect.

c. Jesus said, “Father, into Your hands I commit My spirit.” At the last, Jesus showed His complete trust and reliance upon the Father. He knew what He was doing and where He was going (cf. John 13:3). There was no doubt in His mind. This, then, was a prayer of victory! Though it appeared as though Satan won (bruised the heel, Gen. 3:15), Jesus was the true victor, for death, the gates of Hades, could not keep Him from His purpose in saving mankind from sin. He would be raised up!!

17. After the resurrection, He gave thanks (Luke 24:30). Once again, here is an example of His giving thanks. Even though He had already been raised, He still took time to thank God.

Conclusion: When asking, “Teach us to pray,” we need to first look to Jesus as our great example. By learning from Him, we can learn about appropriate occasions and words in which to pray to our Father in heaven. By looking to the Lord, we can learn that we ought to always pray and never lose heart.

Discussion Questions:

1. Why and how is a prayer a learned activity?
2. What is prayer? Discuss the various terms associated with it.
3. Why is prayer such an important part of a Christian’s life?
4. Why is the model prayer of Jesus so ideal for learning prayer?
5. What are the occasions in which Jesus prayed? What can be learned from His prayer life?

What Can We Learn About God? He is:

- The Master Teacher
- In Control
- Love

Lesson Two

Praise and Thanksgiving

Introduction: The beginning of Jesus’ model prayer was, “Our Father who is in heaven, hallowed by Your name” (Matt. 6:9-13). He began with praising the name of God. We are told elsewhere to always give thanks to God through Jesus Christ (Eph. 5:20). Praise and thanksgiving are vital aspects of communication with God. This lesson will focus on these two needs.

As we begin, think back again to Jesus as He gave thanks to God before feeding the five thousand (John 6:11). Let’s begin to think in terms of gratefulness for who God is and what He has done for us.

I. What it Means to Praise God

A. Review the story of the children of Israel: how they were brought to Egypt by Joseph, enslaved by the Egyptians, and God called Moses to deliver them.

1. Moses gave excuses, but would finally do it. Ex. 3 (note especially how God identifies Himself in vv. 13-16, and why that is important for understanding why God is worthy of praise. He is the infinite, all-powerful One. He deserves our praise.)

2. With Aaron’s help, Moses stood before Pharaoh to demand that God’s people be let go. Pharaoh’s attitude was defiant: “Who is the LORD that I should obey His voice...? (Ex. 5:1-2). Who is the LORD? We must know this if we will praise Him properly.

3. Plagues followed, to the last one in which the firstborn of each house would die, including Pharaoh’s. Israel was driven out, but then shortly was pursued by the Egyptian army. Their backs were to the Red Sea, and it looked as though they would be easily overtaken by Egypt again. But Moses stood for God: “Do not fear! Stand by and see the salvation of the LORD which He will accomplish for you today...” (Ex. 14:13). God would fight for Israel (vs. 14).

4. By God’s command, Moses lifted up his staff and stretched out his hand over the sea. The waters divided, providing dry ground Israel to cross. God held the Egyptians back for Israel. Then, He allowed them to pursue. They went down between the walls of water, where God would cause the waters to engulf them. God saved Israel! This miracle caused them to fear God.

5. Exodus 15 then records the song that Moses and the children of Israel sang in response to what the Lord did for them. It begins: “I will sing to the LORD, for He is highly exalted; the horse and its rider He has hurled into the sea. The LORD is my strength and song, and He has become my salvation; This is my God, and I will praise Him; My father’s God, and I will extol Him” (vv. 1-2).

Lesson Two Theme

Praise and Thanks to God!

- *Jesus Shows it:* Jesus gives thanks before feeding the five thousand. Luke 9:6-16; John 6:11. Also see John 17:4
- *Main Story Example:* After the Exodus from Egypt Moses leads the people in thanks. Exodus 15
- *Objectives:* Gratitude is essential. God is powerful. God delivers His people.

Notes

What a great example for us in praising God.

6. In this story we see some of the elements of praise:
 - a. An understanding of who God is: the Great I AM.
 - b. A knowledge of God so that we know He is to be

obeyed.

- c. A recognition of God's power and greatness.
- d. Acknowledgement of God as the Savior.
- e. A sense of awe and reverence because He alone is

worthy of this praise.

B. What is praise?

1. To magnify, worship, and express approval of someone.

2. "I like the simple thought that praise is the expression of approval regarding a superior quality or excellence of a person, action, or thing. The one being praised is always one who is per se, or has done, something worthy of note. It may not have any direct bearing on me, but I recognize the beneficencies or achievements of the person praised" (Cope 19).

3. Praise is to be directed toward God. He is the object of our worship and praise. He is worthy of our praise, and we must learn to revere and bow before Him. Praise is, therefore, in essence, talking (or singing) to God about Himself. Until we can recognize His greatness and majesty, in comparison to our own insufficiencies, we will be unable to praise Him as we ought. See this illustrated in Isaiah 6:1-8

- a. Isaiah saw the glorious vision of God.

b. He was overwhelmed, recognized his own sinfulness, and the sinfulness of others in comparison to God.

- c. He then received forgiveness from God.

- d. Then he was ready to serve: "here am I, send me."

4. "Praise can be defined as the act of relating to our Father (and secondarily to ourselves and to others) the wonder, delight and gratitude which His character and acts generate in us. God is wonderful and we respond with wonder; He is delightful and we delight in Him; He is generous and we are grateful. It is the word, 'Praises!' which is written across the top of the book of Psalms; God revealed Himself to Israel and those who loved Him burst into song!" (Simpson 83). This is well illustrated in the song of Moses.

5. Praise opens up our thoughts to the nature of God; we are recognizing who God really is, instead of thinking that He is just like us (cf. Psalm 50:21b). It fixes our eyes on God and His magnificence. And it awakens our minds so that we will desire even more to be what He calls upon us to be as His people. As "living stones" in His spiritual house, and as a "holy priesthood," we are to "offer up spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ" (1 Pet. 2:5). As God's special people, we are to "proclaim the excellencies of Him who has called you out of darkness into His marvelous light" (1 Pet. 2:9).

II. Always Giving Thanks

A. Why was the generation that came out of Egypt unsuccessful in entering the promised land? We could boil it down to this: they failed to be thankful for what God had done for them. The fact that they grumbled, worshipped idols, and acted immorally speaks to

their lack of gratitude for what God had done for them (see 1 Cor. 10:6-12).

1. This is also illustrated in Romans 1:18-32. Note how these gentiles “did not honor Him as God or *give thanks*” (vs. 21). Because of this failure, God gave them up to their wicked ways.

2. Failure to give thanks is failure to honor God as the Giver of all good things (Jas. 1:17; Acts 14:17).

3. The consequences are that we will end up exchanging the truth of God for a lie, and serve the creatures rather than the Creator. Being thankful to God is no small matter.

B. The New Testament teaches us to be continually thankful: 1 Thess. 5:17-18; Eph. 5:19-20; Col. 3:15-17; 4:2; Phil. 4:6-7; 1 Tim. 2:1

1. Note Paul’s attitude of thanksgiving: Eph. 1:15-16; Phil. 1:3; Col. 1:3; 1 Thess. 1:2; 2 Tim. 1:2; Phile. 1:4

2. “Gratitude is an attitude that should permeate life” (Simpson 104). It is an expression of our appreciation for all that God has done.

C. What does thanksgiving do?

1. *It fulfills obedience.* Giving thanks is not an option. It is what God desires. Ingratitude is a sin.

2. *It keeps our focus upon the right priorities.* It is an affirmation of our dependence upon God. It reminds us again of who He is, and how He blesses us in so many ways. Cf. Psa. 103:1-5.

3. *It aids us in other aspects of prayer.* It helps us to count our blessings, pray for others, and confess our sins to God. It is connected to praise, supplication, and intercession. See again Phil. 4:6-7. Our supplication is to be “with thanksgiving.”

4. *It keeps before us the fact that we are not alone here.* God is faithful; He is our helper. And this world is not all there is. Heb. 13:5-6; 2 Cor. 4:16-18.

D. Practicing Thanksgiving.

1. We must develop proper attitudes: gratitude and humility.

a. We can choose humility. Luke 17:7-10

b. We can choose to be grateful. Luke 17:11-19

2. Think of specific items you can be thankful for: people, physical blessings, spiritual blessings. Talk about specifics: what are blessings for which we can thank God?

3. The words “think” and “thank” are from a common root. If we learn to “think” on the right things (Phil. 4:8), we will probably be more thankful. Think, then thank.

III. Focus on the Psalms

A. The Psalms give us an insight into praise and thanksgiving. “The book of Psalms is understood as the expression of the heart of Israel’s prayers” (Jung 35).

B. The Psalms contain several types of prayers, including intercession, petition, confession, and even imprecatory (those asking for vengeance). But here we will just pick out a few psalms as examples of praise and thanksgiving. These can serve as models of how we can praise God and give Him thanksgiving for everything.

C. Examples of Psalms of Praise:

1. Psalm 66: praising God for His mighty deeds.
2. Psalm 111: praising God for His goodness.
3. Psalm 113: praising God for His glory.
4. Psalm 117: praising God for His lovingkindness.
5. Psalm 146: praising God as a Helper.
6. Psalm 147: praising God for restoration and prosperity.
7. Psalm 148: praising God for creation.

D. Examples of Thanksgiving in the Psalms:

1. Psalm 9:1-2
2. Psalm 75
3. Psalm 92
4. Psalm 100: note esp. vv. 4-5
5. Psalm 107:1-3
6. Psalm 116: note esp. vv. 1, 12-17.
7. Psalm 118: thanksgiving for salvation (see vv. 1, 19, 28-29).

E. Note that in these and other psalms, and added to what we find in the New Testament, there is virtually nothing that we cannot thank God or praise Him for. If we think well enough, we will find much to give thanks and praise for.

Conclusion: Praise and thanksgiving takes the focus off of us and puts it on God. He is worthy of our praise and thanksgiving. Close with the great throne scene in Revelation 4-5. “Worthy are You.” “Holy, Holy, Holy...”

Discussion Questions

1. What does it mean to praise and give thanks? Why are these appropriate responses to God? What are some things for which we can be thankful?

2. What are some things about God that should cause us to praise Him? What characteristics of God elicit praise? Why is He worthy of our praise?

3. Why are praise and thanksgiving so vital for us to give to God? What do these show on our part?

4. What happens when people cease to be thankful to God? Are there any connections between this and behavior? If so, what are they?

5. Why are the Psalms so significant in this regard? Discuss some of them and how they can help us to improve in our praise and thanksgiving.

What Can We Learn About God? He is:

- Glorious
- Awesome
- Without Weakness

Lesson Three

Prayer in Time of Need

Introduction: “Deliver us from the evil one.” This statement in the model prayer of Jesus shows a need to rely upon God, especially in time of need. This lesson will focus on prayer (supplication) during time of need. We will begin by looking at Daniel as an example of one whose dedication to God kept him in constant communion with Him.

As a beginning focus on Jesus, think about His agony in the garden of Gethsemane: “And being in Agony He was praying very fervently; and His sweat became like great drops of blood, falling down upon the ground” (Luke 22:44).

I. Daniel: A Man who Relied on God.

A. Daniel’s dedication to God. Dan. 1

1. He “made up his mind” he would not allow himself to be defiled. V. 8 (see Lev. 11:46-47).

2. Daniel’s prayer life was based upon his commitment to God.

3. God watched over Daniel and granted him favor. V. 9

4. He was given ability to understand dreams. V. 17

5. These factors help shape the rest of the story about Daniel.

Daniel.

B. Daniel’s Prayer Life.

1. Daniel was called to interpret Nebuchadnezzar’s dream.

a. Neb. Had declared that if his wise men could not tell the dream and the interpretation, they would be destroyed. Because of his fury, Neb. ordered that all wise men be killed, which included Daniel and his three friends. Daniel asked for time to be able to tell the dream and interpretation. Then he went to his three friends and told them “so that they might request compassion from the God of heaven concerning this mystery, so that Daniel and his friends would not be destroyed with the rest of the wise men of Babylon” (2:18)

b. Here was a real crisis for Daniel. Daniel and his friends prayed to God (“request compassion”) for His help. They went to God in this time of trouble.

c. God gave him the interpretation, and Daniel “blessed the God of heaven” (2:19). His prayer of thanksgiving is recorded in 2:20-23.

2. After Darius became king, he was planning to put Daniel over the entire kingdom. Other officials in the kingdom plotted to find an accusation against Daniel, but knew that they could only do it “with regard to the law of his God” (6:5). So they persuaded Darius to write a law to punish anyone who would make “a petition” to any god or man besides the king.

a. The nature of this law plotted by the officials shows

Lesson Three Theme

Prayer in times of need.

- *Jesus Shows it:* In the Garden of Gethsemane. Matt. 26:36-39; Also see John 12:27-28; Matt. 27:46
- *Main Story Example:* Daniel and/or Jonah
- *Objectives:* Trust in God. Do not worry. God will deliver. (Note: if Jonah is stressed, additional points may be made about

Notes

that they knew Daniel was a man of prayer. They put it in the context of making “petitions” to a god or man.

b. When Daniel heard the news of this decree, “he entered his house ... and he continued kneeling on his knees three times a day, praying and giving thanks before his God, as he had been doing previously” (6:10). He would not change his habits because of the threat of this law which was meant to trap him.

c. The plotters “came by agreement and found Daniel making petition and supplication before his God.” (vs. 11). Remember that the idea of “supplication” carries with it a request that would grow out of a need.

d. Daniel was thrown into the den of lions. The text here does not specifically tell us that Daniel was praying, but it does tell us that he was delivered “because he had trusted in his God” (6:23). It would seem a safe assumption that Daniel spent time in prayer while in the den, as this would be consistent with his life and character, and the fact that he put his trust in God in a situation that was less than ideal.

C. God’s people were in captivity because of their sins. They were told they would be 70 years in captivity. The time was drawing to a close. Daniel knew this, and turned to God once again in prayer (9:1-3). Daniel said, “So I gave my attention to the Lord God to seek Him by prayer and supplications, with fasting, sackcloth and ashes” (vs. 3). He acknowledged God’s greatness and the sin of the people. This was a nation in trouble, and Daniel was pleading with God for His mercy. This prayer, recorded in 9:4-19, is a great example of “supplication.” God responded by sending Gabriel with a Messianic vision. God would take care of His people.

D. Daniel’s Example.

1. Daniel was taken from his own homeland and put into the service of the king of Babylon. God was with Daniel, and Daniel’s dedication to God was unflappable. Even in the face of losing his life, he would not quit praying and trusting in God.

2. In a great time of need, Daniel trusted in God. He showed his trust by praying to God, even though his praying would get him in trouble. In fact, prayer was his first response upon hearing of the decree that would prohibit him from doing that very thing.

3. When times are tough, when it seems as though others are opposed to you, the proper response is to take it to God. As Daniel, we can “make up our minds” to do right, trust in God, and pray without ceasing.

Alternate Character: Jonah

I. Jonah’s Cry for Help.

A. Jonah told to go preach to Ninevah. Jonah 1

1. He disobeyed and ran the opposite direction. Boarded ship for Tarshish.

2. Great storm from God. Sailors afraid, cried to their gods. Jonah wakened.

3. Realized it was his fault, so he had them throw him overboard.

4. Swallowed by great fish prepared by God.

B. Jonah’s Prayer. Jonah 2

1. "I called out of my distress to the LORD." Takes the form of a psalm.
 2. Jonah realized he had sinned against God. Cried for help. Knew salvation was from God. So God commanded the fish to throw out Jonah onto dry ground.
- C. Jonah repented. Jonah 3-4
1. Next time God told him to go preach, he did.
 2. Jonah's attitude still needed some work, but this is a good example of one who cried to God in a desperate time, was heard, and repented.

II. Be Anxious For Nothing.

A. Trouble is a part of life. It is something that we cannot escape. While we may like to be trouble free, the reality is that "God does not save us *from* trouble but *through* trouble; He does not save us *from* the cross but *through* the cross" (Hailey 63).

1. We should not expect that we will get through life without the hurdles and problems that are a part of this sin-cursed world.
2. So the question is not, "will we be without trouble?" But, "how do we deal with the trouble that we face?"

B. God's desire when we face trouble is this: "Call upon Me in the day of trouble; I shall rescue you, and you will honor Me" (Psalm 50:15).

1. It takes faith for us to call upon God in time of trouble. It is a statement of trust that we believe God hears and answers our prayers. He is the One who can truly comfort us.
2. He has given us the tools for dealing with trouble. Prayer is a vital part of this.

C. Don't worry.

1. Jesus taught about worry (Matt. 6:24-24). In this passage, Jesus makes it clear that worry is not to be something that should keep popping up into our lives. It does no good to worry about things. Instead, if we have the faith we need, and seek first God's kingdom and righteousness, we have God's promise that the necessary things of life will be there for us.

2. Paul's instructions: "Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. And the peace of God, which surpasses all comprehension, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus" (Phil. 4:6-7). Note the emphatic command: "be anxious for nothing." God does not want us to worry. Period. Now the contrast. Instead of worrying, we are told to pray. In other words, replace worry with prayer and supplication. In difficult times, whatever it is that would cause us to worry, we can pray about it. The result is that God's peace will guard our hearts. We will be relieved.

3. Peter's instructions: "Therefore humble yourselves under the mighty hand of God, that He may exalt you at the proper time, casting all your anxiety on Him, because He cares for you" (1 Pet. 5:6-7). It takes humility to submit to God. See how He wants us to cast our cares on Him. Again, anything that is troubling to us, anything that can cause us to worry, is to be cast upon Him in

prayer. We must trust God and the fact that He cares for us.

4. “So instead of worrying in time of trouble, pray; and in response one will find God’s ear open to hear and His hand near to help. This should answer the question in the mind of each. What should I do in time of trouble, pray or fret; cast all my anxiety on the Lord, or worry? To fret and worry is to sin; to pray and look to God is to trust in faith. And further, when God does answer, do I glorify Him, or do I fail to give Him praise and thanksgiving for His wonderful response? It is something to ponder, isn’t it?” (Hailey 73)

III. More Examples of Prayer in Time of Need.

A. Old Testament.

1. David. As author of many of the Psalms, we have an insight into how he approached God in time of trouble. For example:

a. Psalm 138. Note esp. vs. 3: “On the day I called, You answered me; You made me bold with strength in my soul.” Then vs. 7: “Though I walk in the midst of trouble, You will revive me; You will stretch forth Your hand against the wrath of my enemies. And Your right hand will save me.”

b. Psalm 142. This was written at the time when Saul was pursuing David to try to take his life. Here was trouble brought on by another person, opposition and persecution because of jealousy. In this psalm you can hear David’s sense of loneliness and despondency. Yet, he expresses confidence in God who deals bountifully with His people.

c. Psalm 51 is David’s cry for forgiveness and help after he had sinned with Bathsheba. This was trouble he brought on himself, yet he cries to God when he realized his sin.

2. Hannah (1 Sam. 1). She desperately wanted a child, and she was driven by her “rival” to fret. She prayed to God when she in great distress, and God blessed her with a son, she named Samuel. Then, she glorified God for blessing her.

3. Jonah. He fled when God told him to go preach to Ninevah. While on board a ship, a terrible storm arose, and he took the blame for it. He was thrown overboard, then swallowed by a great fish. It was then, during this trouble, that Jonah cried out to God (ch. 2). When he was delivered, he went to preach as God told him to again.

4. Hezekiah. Judah was being invaded by Assyria. The message was given to Judah not to listen to Hezekiah. The Assyrians were defying God and trying to humiliate Hezekiah. This was a time of great distress. Hezekiah sent word to Isaiah informing him of the situation and requesting that he “offer a prayer for the remnant that is left” (Isa. 37:1-4). When he received a letter from Sennacherib, he “spread it out before the Lord” and prayed for deliverance (vv. 14-20). God did save the people from the Assyrians. During this same time-frame, Hezekiah became sick unto death. He was told he would not live, but he “turned his face to the wall and prayed to the Lord” (Isa. 38:1-6). God extended his life.

B. The New Testament.

1. Saul of Tarsus. He was a persecutor and blasphemer,

even though he thought he was doing what was right in fighting against Jesus and the disciples. When Jesus confronted Saul, one can only imagine what he would have felt, knowing how wrong he had been. He was in trouble with God Himself. He was blinded and taken in Damascus. What could he do? He could pray! (Acts 9:11). In response, the Lord sent Ananias to tell him what he must do, and to tell him how God would use him from then on. Saul, who became the apostle Paul, became a great servant of God and an example for us. Other examples in Paul's life could be cited (cf. 2 Cor. 12:7-10).

2. Peter. King Herod had killed James, John's brother, and was intending to kill Peter (Acts 12). He was imprisoned. This was a troubling time, "but prayer for him was being made fervently by the church to God" (vs. 5). God sent an angel and Peter was released. Peter went to Mary's house, where brethren were continuing to pray (vs. 12). These brethren learned first hand the power of prayer in time of trouble.

Conclusion: God desires our prayers at all times. In time of trouble, especially, prayer is a blessing God desires for us to utilize. Because of what the Lord has done for us, now we can approach Him with confidence, "so that we may receive mercy and grace to help in time of need" (Heb. 4:16).

Discussion Questions

1. Why is it appropriate to pray to God when we are having trouble or anxieties?
2. What kind of attitude did Daniel have toward God? Why was he willing to get into trouble over his prayer life? What lessons does he teach us about prayer?
3. What is worry? Why does this demonstrate a lack of faith in God?
4. Is there anything that might cause us to worry that we cannot pray about? Discuss some of these matters that might cause worry, and how we can go to God with them.
5. How can we draw strength from the characters mentioned in the lesson? What do they teach us about faith and prayer in time of need?

What Can We Learn About God? He is:

- Merciful
- One who Delivers
- Faithful

Lesson Four

Prayer for Others

Introduction: Prayer for others is called “intercession.” “Intercession is the act of carrying another person (or persons) before your Father to be blessed in His will” (Simpson 182). It is an act of love on our part that we recognize the needs of others and go before God on their behalf. Prayer is not selfish. “We pray for others because we care for them and we believe they need the help which God can will give them” (*ibid*). In this lesson we want to discuss the need for, and benefits of, talking to God on behalf of others.

Focus on Jesus to start: Think of His intercession on behalf of His apostles and for all who would believe through their word (John 17). He was thinking of others as He was about to go to the cross.

I. Prayer for Peter, an Apostle in Prison.

A. Who was Peter? One of the chosen apostles of Jesus.

B. Jesus promised that His disciples would not be liked by the world. John 15:18-20

C. Though Peter had denied Jesus before the crucifixion, he repented and became a powerful preacher of Jesus. Acts 2-3.

D. Opposition to their preaching.

1. Certain Jews (Sadducees) first opposed the apostles because of their preaching of the resurrection. They arrested Peter and John, and sternly warned them not to preach Jesus. Upon release, Peter and John went to other disciples and they prayed for boldness. Acts 4:23-31.

2. They kept on preaching, and next all of the apostles were arrested, then beaten and released. Acts 5:17ff.

3. Still, they kept preaching, and the number of Christians kept increasing. A wider-spread persecution began with the stoning of Stephen in Acts 7, who himself died praying for his killers. Saul began “ravaging the church” (Acts 8:3). After Saul’s conversion, they enjoyed some peace, but opposition from King Herod would soon come. “Now about that time Herod the king laid hands on some who belonged to the church in order to mistreat them” (Acts 12:1).

4. James, the brother of John, was killed at this time. Herod saw that it made some of the Jews happy, so “he proceeded to arrest Peter also” (vs. 3).

5. Now note this significant statement: “So Peter was kept in the prison, but prayer for him was being made fervently by the church to God” (Acts 4:5).

a. Peter’s life was in danger. James was already killed, and now Herod intended to harm Peter also. It looked like a terrible time for the church.

b. “but prayer” is an important concept. No matter how bad things looked for Peter, prayer is something that could change

Lesson Four Theme

Praying for Others

- *Jesus Shows it:* Jesus prayed for His apostles and for all believers. John 17
- *Main Story Example:* the disciples pray for Peter in prison. Acts 12:6-19
- *Objectives:* Thinking of others. (Considering their best interests.)

Notes

it. Other Christians were “fervently” praying for Peter in this situation. It is a great example of prayer being made on behalf of another (intercession).

E. Answered Prayer. Acts 12:6-19

1. God heard the prayers. He sent an angel to release Peter, and Peter knew the angel was sent from God. When he was free, he went to the house of Mary, “where many were gathered together and were praying” (Acts 12:12).

2. He knocked at the door, and Rhoda came to answer. She told the others about it, and they thought she was out of her mind at first. Finally, they let him in and they were amazed. Peter described how the Lord had “led him out of the prison.”

3. The brethren were praying for Peter, and God answered by sending Peter back to them. This demonstrates that prayer on behalf of others can have a strong impact.

II. Other Examples of Intercession.

A. Old Testament.

1. Abraham’s intercession on behalf of Sodom and Gomorrah (Gen. 18:22-33).

2. Abraham’s prayer for Abimelech (Gen. 20:17-18).

3. Job’s prayer for his friends. Job 42:7-10

4. Moses’ prayer on behalf of the people after making the golden calf. Exod. 32:30-33.

5. Elisha and the Shunamite son. 2 Kings 4:18-37

B. New Testament.

1. Jesus’ prayer in John 17: for the apostles and for all believers.

2. Jesus’ prayer on the cross: for forgiveness for others (Luke 23:34).

3. Stephen’s prayer for his killers. Acts 7:60

4. John’s prayer for Gaius. 3 John 2. “Beloved, I pray that in all respects you may prosper and be in good health, just as your soul prospers.”

a. Note how personal this prayer was. It was prayer for a friend.

b. He prayed for Gaius’ prosperity in both physical and spiritual matters. It is appropriate to pray for the health of others, just as we should pray for their spiritual health.

C. Paul Regularly Prayed for Others

1. Paul’s concern for others is seen in statements like those found in the following passages: Rom. 9:2-3; 10:1; 2 Cor. 11:28; Acts 20:36-38; 1 Thess. 2:7-8

2. Paul kept other brethren in his prayers regularly:

a. Romans 1:8-10; 1 Cor. 1:4-9; Eph. 1:15-23; Phil. 1:3-11; Col. 1:3-12; 1 Thess. 1:2-3; 2 Thess. 1:3-4; 2 Tim. 1:3-4; Philemon 4-7

b. Note how he often thanked God for the brethren at these places, and prayed for their spiritual well-being.

3. “These earnest prayers of Paul on behalf of the spiritual well-being of the saints should encourage us to consider the needs of fellow-saints and articulate more clearly and distinctly our petitions. So often prayers are speeches said to God rather than

sincere petitions which we would like to have answered” (Hailey 56).

III. The Need and Benefits of Intercession

A. Why pray for others?

1. God commands it. 1 Tim. 2:1-2. It pleases God when we do what He says by faith. If we know it is God’s will, then we should be eager to do it.

2. It would be wrong not to. Note Samuel’s attitude in 2 Sam. 12: after the people asked for a king, they realized they had done wrong. They asked for Samuel to pray for them. Samuel assured them that God would not abandon His people, then added, “as for me, far be it from me that I should sin against the Lord by ceasing to pray for you” (vs. 23). Samuel understood that it would be wrong for him not to pray for the people.

3. It opens us up to others and their needs. Instead of focusing only upon ourselves, intercession is focusing upon the needs of others. When we are aware of their hurts, their trials, and difficulties, we can ask God’s help on their behalf.

4. It empowers us against sin and temptation. Jesus model prayer included, “lead us not into temptation.” “Us” is intercessory, including others as well. Then James says, “confess your sins to one another, and pray for one another so that you may be healed. The effective prayer of a righteous man can accomplish much” (5:16). Jesus’ prayer also included, “deliver us from the evil one.” God is faithful, and will provide ways of escape (1 Cor. 10:13).

5. It keeps us looking for opportunities for evangelism. If we pray that the Lord send out workers into His harvest, and we pray for opportunities, then we should also be looking for those opportunities to teach others.

B. For Whom or What We Should Pray.

1. All people. 1 Tim. 2:1-2. This includes those in positions of authority. The purpose is:

a. That we may lead a quiet life in godliness and dignity, and
b. because of God’s desire that all come to a knowledge of truth and be saved. vs. 4

2. Our enemies. Matt. 5:44-45; Luke 6:28.

a. Pray for those who try to hurt you or talk badly about you.

b. Jesus prayer on the cross (Luke 23:34), and Stephen’s prayer (Acts 7:60), are great examples of this very thing.

3. Open Doors. Col. 4:2-4.

a. “Door” indicates opportunity. This is prayer that opportunities to teach others may be available. Cf. 2 Thess. 3:1-2

b. For others to be able to teach. “Therefore beseech the Lord of the harvest to send out workers into His harvest” (Matt. 9:38).

4. For All Christians. Eph. 6:18-20

a. We are in a battle for the mind. Therefore, we need to pray for others as they fight in this battle also. Eph. 6:10-18.

b. We can pray for their spiritual strength to overcome sin and temptation. We can pray for unity of the body, for victory in

life, and for love to prevail.

5. For the fallen.

a. If we sin, we have advocate with the Father (1 John 1:8-2:2).

b. But for brethren who have sinned, we are told to “ask God” (1 John 5:16). Note: sin “not leading to death” would be one of which the brother will repent. This prayer is not to override the brother’s free will, for he must do his part as well (James 5:19-20). We must work and pray for an erring brother to return, and that brother must do his part as well in returning. Otherwise, prayer will do no good if he is unwilling to repent. For one unwilling to repent, John says, “I do not say that he should make request for this.”

C. How we can pray for others:

1. See the need and respond to it. “Weep with those who weep” (Rom. 12:15). Be aware of the needs of others. If you want others to pray for you, let them know your needs.

2. Carry those needs to God in prayer. Cast the cares upon God. 1 Pet. 5:5-6.

3. Offer yourself as a servant, as God’s tool. If you can help alleviate the need, then offer up yourself to help bear the burdens (Gal. 6:2). Perhaps God will use you to help answer those prayers.

Conclusion: Prayer is a selfless act that not only petitions God for our own sake, but also for the benefit of others -- even if we don’t understand how it all works. “We may not know how our praying for another helps or aids that one, but our faith in God’s plan and word leads us to believe that it does; so we pray” (Hailey 60).

Discussion Questions

1. Why were the Christians so concerned about Peter? What do you think they were praying for?

2. When is it appropriate to pray for others (besides “any time”)? What specific occasions can you think of?

3. Why is prayer for others so needed? What does it show when we do pray for others?

4. How does praying for others help us also? What benefits are there for us as well as for those for whom we pray?

5. For whom shall we pray? Be specific as to what types of people, and why prayer for them is important (e.g., 1 Tim. 2:1-2; Matt. 5:44-45, etc.).

What Can We Learn About God? He is:

- Concerned about others
- Desiring for all to submit to Him
- Compassionate

Lesson Five

God Answers Prayer

Introduction: Prayer is an act of faith predicated upon this one thing: God hears us. If God does not hear or desire to answer, then prayer becomes a meaningless activity. However, the fact that God desires for us to pray indicates that He wants to hear from us; and the Bible shows that, in fact, He wants to answer our prayers.

When Jesus stood at the tomb of Lazarus, ready to bring him out alive, He prayed, “Father, I thank You that You have heard Me. I knew that You always hear” (John 11:41-42). Jesus’ confidence was strong enough to be able to say, “I know You hear.” Our goal is to have this same kind of confidence. It is based upon the faithfulness of God Himself.

I. Elijah: God Answers Prayer. 1 Kings 17-18

A. Elijah was God’s prophet during the reigns of Ahab (874-953 BC) and Ahaziah (853-852 BC) of Israel.

1. Politically, Israel was in strong shape. Ahab had married Jezebel, daughter of the king of Tyre.
2. Spiritually, there was major trouble. Jezebel brought Baal worship with her; and with her influence, Ahab was corrupt.
3. Elijah was sent to turn the nation and its leaders back to the Lord.

B. Elijah began his work as a prophet by predicting a drought in Israel. This came to pass, and Elijah followed God’s instructions for his own provisions. He was told to go to a widow, who would care for him. Her care was rewarded by a miraculous supply of meal and oil that would not deplete.

1. While Elijah was there, the widow’s son became ill and died. Elijah took the child and prayed to God: “O LORD my God, I pray You, let this child’s life return to him” (1 Kgs 17:21).
2. “The LORD heard the voice of Elijah, and the life of the child returned to him and he revived” (vs. 22). This convinced the widow that Elijah was from God. God heard and answered the prayer.

C. The Prophets of Baal.

1. Ahab, upon meeting Elijah, called him the “troubler of Israel.” Elijah pointed out that it was really Ahab causing the problems, “because you have forsaken the commandments of the LORD and you have followed the Baals” (18:18).
2. Then Elijah gave a challenge. He told Ahab to gather together the 450 prophets of Baal, along with the 400 prophets of the Asherah (Jezebel’s prophets). They were to meet on Mt. Carmel.
3. They gathered together and Elijah issued the challenge. They were to build an altar and offer a sacrifice. They would call upon their god (Baal), and Elijah would do the same, calling upon Jehovah. The “God who answers by fire, He is God” (vs. 24). They

Lesson Five Theme

God Hears and Answers our Prayers

- *Jesus Shows it:* “Father, I thank You that You have heard Me.” He said before raising up Lazarus. John 11.
- *Main Story Example:* Elijah’s prayer life exemplifies how God answers.
- *Objectives:* God hears. God works. God loves us. Obedience is a natural response.

Notes

all agreed to the challenge. The prophets of Baal did this, and called upon Baal to answer, but received no reply. Idols cannot answer prayer.

4. Elijah then built an altar and put the sacrifice on it. He drenched all of it with water, filling a trench he had made around it. Then he prayed to God (18:36-37). God answered by sending fire down upon the altar and consuming it. There was no question about who the true and living God was.

5. The prophets of Baal tried to confess God, but it was too late. They were seized and put to death.

D. These events powerfully demonstrate God's ability and desire to answer prayer. Though we should not expect miraculous answers today (see later in lesson), we still pray to the same God Elijah prayed to.

1. James speaks of Elijah's prayer life. "The effective prayer of a righteous man can accomplish much" (Jas. 5:16). To illustrate this point, James refers to Elijah and his prayer with reference to the drought (Jas. 5:17-18).

2. Note that Elijah "prayed earnestly." He was a great man of faith who did not doubt God's ability to hear and answer his prayers. What a great example for us today.

Alternate Character Study for Adults

I. Hannah: Prayer for a Child. 1 Sam. 1

A. Elkanah, man from Ephraim, has two wives: Hannah, who had no children, and Peninnah, who had children. When he would go to sacrifice, he would give portions to Peninnah and her children, then give a double portion to Hannah because he loved her. However, she was not able to have children up to this point.

1. Peninnah, her "rival," would "provoke her bitterly to irritate her" (vs. 6).

2. Hannah was hurt by this; she would weep and not eat. Elkanah would ask her why.

3. Eli was the priest at this time, and Hannah went to the tabernacle. "She, greatly distressed, prayed to the LORD and wept bitterly" (vs. 9). She made a vow in her prayer, saying that if God would give her a son, "then I will give him to the LORD all the days of his life" (vs. 11). Eli, who was watching her, thought she was drunk.

4. Hannah told Eli she was not drunk, but "I have poured out my soul before the LORD" (vs. 15). Here is another expression that tells us about prayer.

5. Eli told her to go in peace, "and may the God of Israel grant your petition that you have asked of Him" (vs. 17). She left, ate, and was no longer sad. Pouring out our souls to God can have this kind of effect.

B. Samuel is born.

1. God heard Hannah's prayer. He "remembered her" (vs. 19). So, the answer is given: "It came about in due time, after Hannah had conceived, that she gave birth to a son; and she named him Samuel, saying, "Because I have asked him of the LORD" (vs. 20). God's answer to her was a resounding "yes."

2. But remember that Hannah had also made a vow. She

remembered this vow and brought him to Eli and dedicated him to the Lord. She told Eli, “For this boy I prayed, and the LORD has given me my petition which I asked of Him. So I have also dedicated him to the LORD” (vv. 27-28). She fulfilled her vow.

3. This child then grew up to become a great judge of Israel. He was the last of the judges, anointing both Saul and David as kings. And he remained faithful to God.

II. The God Who Hears and Answers.

A. Whose Prayer Does God Hear? We know that God hears. He desires our prayers (Jer. 33:3; Matt. 7:7; 1 Thess. 5:16-18). He will “give what is good to those who ask Him” (Matt. 7:11). But does He hear just any prayer, or anyone’s prayer?

1. *He hears His children.* It is the privilege and right of one who can truly address God as “Father” (Matt. 6:9). Those who have been born into this new spiritual relationship have the right to call Him “Father.” All the spiritual blessings associated with being His children are found in Christ (Eph. 1:3). This is why we pray “in the name of Jesus.” That phrase is not a formula, but it is an expression of everything that Jesus is to us (Col. 3:16-17). It is through Him we have all our spiritual blessings, and it is through Him we can approach the Father.

2. *He hears the holy ones.* Stated negatively, “He who turns away his ear from listening to the law, even his prayer is an abomination” (Prov. 28:9). Positively: “For the eyes of the LORD are toward the righteous, and His ears attend to their prayer, but the face of the LORD is against those who do evil” (1 Pet. 3:12). Paul wrote that wherever men pray, they are to lift up “holy hands” (1 Tim. 2:8). This indicates a life of holiness and purity that stands in contrast to “wrath and dissension.” It is the prayer of a “righteous man” that can “accomplish much” (Jas. 5:16). Refusal to repent of sins will result in God not listening to our prayers (Isa. 59:1-2).

3. *He hears those who are persistent.* Jesus taught that people always “ought to pray and not to lose heart” (Luke 18:1). The following parable (vv. 2-8) illustrates persistence in prayer. A widow kept coming to a judge asking for protection. Because of her persistence, he gave her the request. Then Jesus said of God, “will not God bring about justice for His elect who cry to Him day and night, and will He delay long over them?” This does not teach that we afford to be impatient with God, or even be demanding of Him. But it does show that we need to be persistent in coming to Him as His children.

4. *He hears those who are searching.* Jesus taught, “Ask, and it will be given to you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you. For everyone who asks receives, and he who seeks finds, and to him who knocks it will be opened” (Matt. 7:7-8). This teaching coincides with the one on persistence, as the idea of “ask,” “seek,” and “knock” is persistent. In other words, “keep on asking, seeking, and knocking.” But it also shows the attitude of one who is searching for what is right. This appears to be why God heard the prayers of Cornelius (Acts 10). Though Cornelius was not yet a Christian, he was devoutly seeking for help about the truth. God will hear these prayers.

5. *He hears those who ask according to His will.* Prayer is not to be compared to a spoiled child being able to demand and get anything and everything he wants. James rebuked some who “ask and do not receive, because you ask with wrong motives, so that you may spend it on your pleasures” (Jas. 4:3). Instead, our prayers need to be according to God’s will: “if we ask anything according to His will, He hears us” (1 John 5:14). Like Jesus, our prayers need to be “Your will be done.”

6. *He hears those who ask in faith.* James said that one who asks for wisdom “must ask in faith, without any doubting, for the one who doubts is like the surf of the sea, driven and tossed by the wind. For that man ought not to expect that he will receive anything from the Lord” (Jas. 1:6-7). We must not approach God with a “if you are there” attitude. God is faithful. He will do His part, and we must trust that if our prayers will be effective.

7. *He hears those who keep His commandments:* “whatever we ask we receive from Him, because we keep His commandments and do the things that are pleasing in His sight” (1 Jn. 3:22).

B. God is Able.

1. The God to whom we pray is the Creator (Gen. 1:1). He has the power and ability to answer the prayers of His saints.

2. God is often referred to as “Almighty.” He is the “great, the mighty God” (Jer. 32:18). He has ultimate control over the heavens and earth, so certainly He can respond to His creation.

3. “In His providence, and according to His power and grace, anything coming within the scope of His will is possible; He can do what man cannot do” (Hailey 102). With God, “all things are possible” (Matt. 19:26; note context in vv. 16-26).

4. We must not doubt God’s power and strength to do His will. Ephesians 3:20 says it all: “Now to Him who is able to do far more abundantly beyond all that we ask or think, according to the power that works within us.” Read that again carefully. What is God unable to do for us? In this connection, read Romans 8:28-39.

5. Paul told the Philippians: “And my God will supply all your needs according to His riches in glory in Christ Jesus” (4:20). So not only is He able, He is willing and ready to bless us. Our prayers are based upon God’s ability, desire, and faithfulness in answering prayer. “Surely, such a wonderful, all-glorious and all-powerful God can answer the prayers of His saints!” (Hailey 109). It is God’s nature. Read Psalm 145:18-19.

C. When God Says “No.”

1. Though we can understand God’s ability to answer prayer, does it not at times seem like he is either saying “no” or at least putting off His answer? Perhaps.

2. We need to keep in mind this question, “what are we expecting when we pray?”

a. Remember, our prayers must be within the boundaries of His will.

b. Our prayers are through Jesus (in His name); in other words, everything I am asking for is still within the authority of God and my relationship to Him and Jesus as our High Priest and advocate.

c. Our prayers should seek the glory of God and His

purposes. They are not to be selfish, for ambitious ends.

3. Remember that God is God and we are not. Practically, what this means is that God knows what is best for us. Like a parent who tells a child “no” because of the knowledge that it is not good for the child, or knowledge that something better is coming, God may essentially say “no” because He has something better for us, or because it is not good for us.

4. In these cases, we need to trust God that His answer is best.

D. Sometimes God says “wait.” Perhaps what we take to be a “no” could essentially be “wait a while.” God does things in His own time, since He is not on our time-frame (2 Pet. 3:9). Job is a good example of this. He did not have all the facts, and He needed to wait on the Lord and His time. Habakkuk, also, was told the same when he cried for God to take action against the wicked in his day.

III. How Does God Answer Today? Providence!

A. What is meant by “providence”? The idea is that God is in control of His universe and He can “carry out His purpose to its ultimate consummation” (Hailey 115). In other words, God can, with His omniscience and omnipotence, change what happens in this world. This does not mean that He will interfere with man’s free will, or that everything He does is miraculous. But, with His guidance and oversight, He can see to it that things operate the way He wills it.

1. It involves His foresight and forethought, with proper management over His creation. It is God’s continuing activity of preserving and governing the whole world by His wisdom, goodness, and power for the fulfillment of His eternal purpose and for the glory of His name.

2. Illustrated in the story of Joseph. Gen. 37-47. God aided Joseph in his rise of power in Egypt, even though he often had to deal with unfavorable circumstances due to the sin and abuse of others. God was still with him.

B. Some considerations about providence.

1. God does not act providentially in any way that would conflict with His nature or will. He will not lie, or become faithless, or influence anyone to do something that is wrong (Jas. 1:13-14). His activities will always be in harmony with who He is.

2. God does not interfere with or override man’s free will. We always have the choice of obeying or rejecting God’s commands. God can use others to accomplish His purposes, but we are still responsible for the choices we make. For example, Assyria in Isa. 10:5-7 and the Chaldeans in Hab. 1:5-11. God may open doors of opportunity through circumstances, but He doesn’t change our freedom to choose right and wrong.

3. Providence is to be distinguished from the miraculous.

a. Though some answers to prayer are miraculous in Scripture, not all are.

b. A miracle is a work of God that is above natural law; it suspends or supercedes the laws of nature (walking on water, instant healing of the lame, etc.).

c. Providence uses the laws of nature to accomplish the

ends. Note the contrast:

d. Note the contrast between the miraculous and the providential:

1. The virgin conception of Jesus was miraculous (Matt. 1:18-25). The conception and birth of Samuel was providential (1 Sam. 1).

2. Jesus controlled the raging sea miraculously (Matt. 8:23-27); but God providentially sends rain (Acts 14:17; Jas. 5:16-18).

3. When Paul received a vision from Macedonia (Acts 16:9-10), getting there involved several days and taking natural courses. Yet God was with them through it all.

e. In the miraculous, God worked directly by suspending or interfering with the natural. In providence, He uses the natural to fulfill His purposes.

f. Miracles, as we see in Scripture, are not to be expected today (cf. 1 Cor. 13:8-12). But God still works providentially. Our faith in His ability to answer our prayers is based in the fact that He is still at work in this world. We may not understand exactly how He does everything He does, but we don't have to. All we need to do is trust Him, to know that He will always do what is right and best for us. God will take care of us. Matthew 6:25-34.

Conclusion: Prayer is a privilege. It is something that can be taught and learned. It is what we do by faith in communicating with our God. Our God is a kind, loving, powerful, and omniscient God. We pray to Him because we believe He hears us and answers our prayers. We are dependent upon Him for this life and it's necessities. Let's learn all we can about how we can better our prayer life.

Discussion Questions

1. Why is Hannah such a fine example of how God can answer prayers? What is her attitude displayed in prayer? How does God answer this prayer?

2. Whose prayers does God hear? Discuss the various "conditions" given in scripture concerning those whom God hears.

3. Why would God sometimes say "no" to a request?

4. Why is patience such an important attitude for us to have when it comes to prayer?

5. What is "providence"? What is the difference between providence and the miraculous? How does God answer prayer today?

What Can We Learn About God? He is:

- All-Powerful
- All-Knowing
- All-Loving
- All-Wise

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