

Lesson 5

The Simplicity of Petition

I. INTRODUCTION

- A. Prayer is essentially asking God for our needs and the needs of others (James 4:2-3). Every word for prayer in the Old Testament and New Testament has as its basic concept “to ask.” The Bible states that it is not fighting, or warring, or desiring, or worrying; it is asking that gets things from God.
1. “Ask, and it shall be given you.” (Matt. 7:7)
 2. “For every one that asketh receiveth.” (Matt. 7:8)
 3. “Ask, and ye shall receive.” (John 16:24)
 4. “How much more shall your Father which is in heaven give good things to them that ask him?” (Matt. 7:11)
 5. “And all things, whatsoever ye shall ask in prayer, believing, ye shall receive.” (Matt. 21:22)
 6. “If ye shall ask any thing in my name, I will do it.” (John 14:14)
- B. Prayer is not primarily meditation; it is petition. Modern day liberals, who deny the supernatural, teach that prayer is primarily an inner experience of communion with self as one meditates upon life. In other words, prayer does something for the one praying, but it really does not move an infinite God to work in a supernatural way. John R. Rice comments,

And many Bible believers fall into this snare, this doctrine that prayer is merely spiritual fellowship, that we do not really get things from God but that after we pray we feel stronger to get them for ourselves, or are perhaps resigned to do without them! How far this is from the Bible teaching on prayer! (*Prayer—Asking and Receiving*)

NOTE: It should be pointed out that prayer often does change the attitude of the one praying, but prayer is much more than just an inner existential feeling. Christians are commanded to ask for things in prayer. Surely we will never know if it is God’s will to give us something until we ask Him for it. Let us remember, “We have not because we ask not!” NOTE: Asking is a fixed, eternal and spiritual law and God will not change His program for men. NOTE: People who say, “I don’t feel right asking God for things,” do not understand biblical prayer.

II. ASKING IS BASED ON ONE’S POSITION

- A. A Christian has the right to approach God in prayer because every Christian is a priest (1 Pet. 2:5, 9; Rev. 1:6; 5:10; 20:6). In the Old Testament a priest represented man before God, and God was primarily approached through the priesthood. But, since Christ has come, the Christian is his own believer-priest and represents himself before God on the merits of his great High Priest, Jesus Christ. Now the Christian can come boldly before God in prayer (Heb. 4:16).

- B. Each Christian is to be a self—sustaining believer-priest. He is to mature in spiritual things and learn to use the marvelous rights and privileges that are his because of his priesthood. NOTE: Each Christian can now approach God with the same authority as every other Christian. The pastor, evangelist, or Christian worker has no special line with God in prayer.

III. ASKING INVOLVES PETITION AND DESIRE

- A. Introduction: All prayers in the Bible and in our own lives involve a petition and a desire. When we ask the Lord for something, we also have a desire behind that specific petition. For example, we might ask the Lord for money, but our desire is for happiness. Or our desire might be to give more money to missions. Whatever it is, there is always some desire behind the petition. The desire is not always stated, but the petition is. Breaking down all prayer into petition and desire, there are four categories.

C. Petition Answered and Desire Unanswered

2. The children of Israel were tired of manna and wept before God and Moses for meat (Num. 11:4-6, 13, 18-20, 31-32). Their desire was for happiness and contentment even though the petition was for meat. God granted their petition in that He gave them quail, but their desire was denied, for God brought them leanness of soul (Psa. 106:15). They were a miserable people even with the meat. NOTE: A person may pray for a mate in order to be happy but may get that mate and be miserable. A preacher may pray for a bigger church in order to be famous. God may answer the prayer but bring him misery.
3. Israel's petition was to have a good king reign over them and their desire was to be like other nations (1 Sam. 8:5-9, 19-20). God answered their petition and gave them a king, but they got Saul who brought the nation nothing but disgrace. Their desire for a good king and national pride was not answered. Later, however, God gave the nation David to be king, which was a pure act of grace.
4. NOTE: We should analyze our prayers, so that we can know what the real desire behind a certain petition is. Many times our petitions will be answered, but our desires will not.

D. Petition Not Answered and Desire Answered

1. Introduction: This is the most important category in this problem of prayer. There are always people who are going to ask specific things from the Lord, who will say, "Well, I stood on the promises that you gave me and the Lord didn't answer me." Remember, behind every specific petition there is a desire. It may be that the desire is answered, but the petition is not. Often God does not answer a petition because He knows that it is not good for us. We are wise if we allow God's sovereignty to overrule in these matters. God knows the big picture, and when we allow His sovereignty to overrule, often we find He met our desire.
2. Abraham desired that Lot would be saved and petitioned God to spare Sodom and Gomorrah. God destroyed the cities, but saved Lot. Abraham's desire was met (Gen. 18:23-33).
3. Paul prayed for God to remove his infirmity that he might have relief. God met his desire by granting special grace to endure suffering. But the petition was refused, for his infirmity was never removed (2 Cor. 12:7-10). NOTE: You may pray for money and desire happiness. God may not give you money but will make you happy in your circumstances.

E. Petition and Desire Answered

1. The dying thief petitioned God to remember him and his desire was to be saved. Both were granted (Luke 23:42-43).
 2. Jesus asked the Father for the resurrection of Lazarus and His desire was that people might believe on Him (John 11:41-42, 45). Both were granted.
- F. Petition Unanswered and Desire Unanswered: This occurs when there is rebellion and unconfessed sin in the Christian's life.

IV. ASKING IS TO BE SPECIFIC

- A. Christians are to make their requests to God (Phil. 4:6). There is to be a specific asking for things. Many Christians pray "around Robin's barn" and never get down to specific petitions. This is so very true in public prayer and is often true in private prayer.
- B. We must be careful not to try to impress people or God with our eloquence or position. So much praying today is ritualistic rather than asking the Father for specific needs. John R. Rice says,

Too much of our prayers are like the incantation of a witchdoctor or the rites of some modern cult. That is, they may have rhythm, or eloquence, or beauty and aesthetic form; but they are not genuine prayers when they do not ask for things. The modern tendency to have pipe organ music during prayer is because we are not really praying at all. We say we seek reverence, but actually we are seeking some form of aesthetic beauty, some appeal to the senses.

When a lady orders groceries she does not quote poetry.

When the dispatcher gives orders to a trainman, they are not written on engraved stationery. He does not use classic illustrations or ponderous words.

When a beggar asks for a dime for a cup of coffee and a "hot dog" he does not talk about the glowing sunset.

V. ASKING FOR BIG AND LITTLE THINGS

- A. It is fairly well agreed upon by men that when something big comes into the life there needs to be prayer. Remember, there is nothing too big for an omnipotent God. If God wills something for us, He can do it for us. There is nothing impossible with God. Abraham Lincoln said,

I have been driven many times to my knees by the overwhelming conviction that I had nowhere else to go. My own wisdom, and that of all about me, seemed insufficient for the day.

Do not be afraid to ask God for anything. The sky's the limit if God thinks we should have it. William Carey said, "Ask great things of God; expect great things from God; undertake great things for God."

- B. The infinite God is also vitally concerned for our smallest problems. He wants

us to trust Him for the minutest details of life. There is no situation or problem that God thinks is insignificant. Sometimes there is more joy in seeing God answer the little things than the big ones. Perhaps God answers many more prayers than we realize, but because we are not thinking in terms of small answers to prayers we overlook them. NOTE: George Mueller was a man who trusted God for millions of dollars, but he was also a man of earnest prayer, even about little things.

One day A. T. Pierson, Bible teacher extraordinary, sat with Mueller, who was relating to him some of the marvelous things God had done for the Faith Orphanage at Bristol. As Mueller talked he also wrote, and Dr. Pierson noticed he was having difficulty with his pen point. In the midst of the conversation, seeming oblivious to his visitor, Mueller bowed his head for a moment or two in prayer and then began writing again. Dr. Pierson asked what he was praying about. "Oh," said Mr. Mueller, "perhaps you didn't notice that I was having trouble with this pen point. I haven't another and this is an important letter, so I was asking the Lord to help me so that I could write it clearly."

"Dear me," said Dr. Pierson, "a man who trusts God for millions of pounds also prays about a scratchy pen point."

VI. CONCLUSION

- A. Prayer is a mystery and no one really understands it, but we do know that prayer works. We do not need to understand all there is about prayer before we pray. We just need to pray and expect God to work.
- B. Prayer is so simple that often complicated, adult minds cannot grasp it. It takes the uncomplicated faith of a little child to be an effective prayer warrior.