

Lesson 2

The Mechanics of Prayer

I. INTRODUCTION

- A. Prayer is not a “hit and miss” proposition. Definite steps are necessary to make prayer effective. While there are mechanics of prayer, prayer is not to be mechanical, for it must always spring from a human heart that loves God. NOTE: Many Christians may waste valuable prayer time by not knowing how to pray effectively.
- B. The Devil would like nothing better than to get Christians away from prayer or to get them praying in an ineffective manner. R. A. Torrey said,

“We live in a day characterized by the multiplication of man’s machinery, and the diminution of God’s power. The great cry of our day is work, work, work, new organizations, new methods, new machinery; the great need of our day is prayer. It was a masterstroke of the Devil when he got the church to generally lay aside this mighty weapon of prayer. The Devil is perfectly willing that the church should multiply its organizations, and deftly contrive machinery for the conquest of the world for Christ if it will only give up praying. He laughs as he looks at the church today and says to himself, “You can have your Sunday schools and your Young People’s Societies, your Young Men’s Christian Associations and your Women’s Christian Temperance Unions, your Institutional Churches and your Industrial Schools, and your Boy’s Brigades, your grand choirs and your fine organs, your brilliant preachers and your revival efforts too, if you don’t bring the power of Almighty God into them by earnest, persistent, believing, mighty prayer.”

NOTE: The Devil attacks when we take prayer seriously. Since beginning this series on prayer, I have been praying more and one crisis after another has hit me.

- C. The disciples themselves confessed that they did not know how to pray and asked Christ, “Lord, teach us to pray” (Luke 11:1). They felt that they were inadequate in praying effectively. NOTE: Our Lord, as far as we know, never taught his disciples to preach, but He did teach them to pray. Why? Because only prayer moves God to move men.

II. DEFINITION OF PRAYER

- A. There really is no way to define prayer because one can only experience the subjective, not write about it. John Bunyan defined prayer as “a sincere, sensible journey out of the soul to God, through Christ, and in the strength and assistance of the Holy Spirit, for such things as God has promised.”
- B. The Westminster Shorter Catechism gives this definition: “Prayer is an offering up of our desires unto God for things agreeable to His will, in the name of Christ,

- with confession of our sins and thankful acknowledgement of our mercies.”
- C. Perhaps the simplest definition of prayer is “just talking with God,” or “the soul’s converse with God,” and the best description of prayer is “the soul’s approach to God.” James Montgomery attempts to define prayer through poetry:

Prayer is the soul’s sincere desire,

Uttered or unexpressed;

The motion of a hidden fire

That trembles in the breast.

Prayer is the burden of a sigh,

The falling of a tear,

The upward glancing of an eye,

When none but God is near.

Prayer is the simplest form of speech

That infant lips can try;

Prayer the sublimest strains that reach

The Majesty on high.

Prayer is the contrite sinner’s voice,

Returning from his ways;

While angels in their songs rejoice,

And cry, “Behold, he prays!”

Prayer is the Christian’s vital breath,

The Christian’s native air,

His watchword at the gates of death;

He enters heaven with prayer.

O Thou, by whom we come to God,

The Life, the Truth, the Way;
The path of prayer thyself hast trod;
Lord, teach us how to pray!

III. THE OBJECT, AGENT, AND EXECUTOR OF PRAYER

- A. The accepted, formal method of prayer is to approach the Father, through the Son, by means of the Holy Spirit.
- B. The Objects:
 - 1. The Father: Most of the prayers in the Scriptures are directed to God, the Father (Eph. 1:17; 3:14).
 - 2. The Son: Occasionally prayers are directed to God, the Son (Acts 7:59; 9:14; 22:16; 2 Cor. 12:8; 2 Tim. 2:22).
 - 3. NOTE: Theoretically it would be possible to pray to the Holy Spirit because all three members of the Trinity are of equal essence. However, the Bible never records an incident of the Spirit being addressed in prayer.
- C. The Agent: The agent of prayer is the Holy Spirit (Eph. 6:18; Jude 20) who prompts, motivates and empowers us to pray. We are to pray in the sphere of the Spirit.
- D. The Executor: The Christian must execute his will and exercise faith in the person of God. Prayer itself changes nothing, but God changes things according to His will. Our faith is not in prayer but in God who can answer prayer. Faith is complete trust in God's faithfulness (Heb. 11:6).

IV. LOGICAL ORDER FOR PRAYER

- A. Confession: Whenever we approach God, we should be clean vessels before Him, for known, unconfessed sin hinders our fellowship with God. It is not until we see the sinfulness of the sin in our own lives that we will desire to confess and forsake it. We must honestly face up to the vileness of our own hearts and the deceitfulness of our flesh. Confession is nothing more than honesty before God (Psa. 66:18; Isa. 59:1-2; Psa. 139:23-24). Discovering the sin or sins that are breaking communion is quite painful, but once discovered, confession sets it right with God (I John 1:9).
- B. Adoration: Adoration is giving God the honor and respect that is due His person. It is worshiping God for who He is and not for what He can do for us (Psa. 45:1-8; Isa. 6:1-4; Matt. 14:33; 15:25; 28:9; Rev. 4:11).
- C. Thanksgiving: Thanksgiving involves giving God praise for past blessings received as well as future blessings anticipated. It is thanking Him for the blessings of today, for each day is His hidden will for us (1 Thes. 5:18). Thanksgiving shows our gratefulness for God's blessings, which results in great peace of mind (Acts 2:47; Phil. 4:6-7). NOTE: When you get depressed and think that the world is coming to an end, just start counting your blessings and thanking God for His goodness and mercy.
- D. Intercession:
 - 1. God has appointed that Christians should pray for others. The responsibility of prayer has been laid upon those who really know Jesus Christ (Eph. 6:18). We must learn the art of intercession on behalf of others (Isa. 59:16; 1 Sam. 12:23; Job 42:8; 1 Tim. 2:1; Acts 12:5). NOTE: When was the last time you prayed for missionaries?

Have you prayed for your loved ones who are lost? Have you come before the throne of grace for students on the college and high school campus? For Christians in the military? For the young men entering the ministry? Do we know other Christians well enough to get down to specifics in prayer, to know their problems and needs and lay them before the Lord? What better place to get to know other believers than at the throne of grace!

2. We can share in the future of others through prayer. We simply do not understand the importance of intercessory prayer or we would practice it more. Robert Thieme, Jr. catches the value of prayer for others when he says,

No one has ever been successful in a tactical situation in battle without a barrage of artillery fire out in front of him as he advances. Many times in American history we have had unnecessary losses of life and even lost the victory simply because that barrage was not out in front keeping the enemy from firing on the advancing troops. One of the great tragedies in American history was Pickett's charge on the third day of Gettysburg. Many soldiers were killed unnecessarily. The Confederate cannons, which should have laid down a continuous protection of fire, had only a few rounds of shot at the critical moment. After the ammunition was exhausted, the advancing troops were completely vulnerable. Men died because of the lack of artillery to support the advance. Our subject deals with that tremendous spiritual barrage which is necessary to uphold every servant of the Lord—for the missionary, the minister, for evangelists, for ones in so-called "Christian service," and for the one who has the privilege, the pleasure and the opportunity of using his full time in studying and teaching God's Word. There is a tremendous need for a barrage out in front. And this barrage is in the area of prayer.

3. We must never give up in the area of praying for those who are lost, for we never know when God might move to save them. No one is ever going to be saved without prayer being offered up first. R. A. Torrey shows the importance of prayer in his own conversion,

There are few converted in this world unless in connections with someone's prayers. I formerly thought that no human being had anything to do with my own conversion, for I was not converted in church or Sunday school, or in personal conversation with anyone. I was awakened in the middle of the night and converted. As far as I can remember I had not the slightest thought of being converted, or of anything of that character, when I went to bed and fell asleep; but I was awakened in the middle of the night and converted probably inside of five minutes. A few minutes before I was about as near eternal perdition as one gets. I had one foot over the brink and was trying to get the other one over. I say I thought no human being had

anything to do with it, but I had forgotten my mother's prayers, and I afterwards learned that one of my college classmates had chosen me as one to pray for until I was saved.

- E. Petition: Every word for prayer in the Old Testament and New Testament has as its basic concept "to ask." Petition is simply asking God to meet our requests and needs. We have not because we ask not (James 4:2; Luke 11:13)! NOTE: Surely we will never know if it is God's will to give us something until we ask Him for it.

V. PRAYING IN CHRIST'S NAME

- A. Jesus Christ commanded his disciples to pray in His name (John 16:23-24). To pray in Christ's name is to pray in His authority and to pray on the basis of His merit. To pray in Christ's name is to renounce the thought that we have any claims on God whatever, and approach Him on the grounds of Christ's claims.
- B. NOTE: If I go to a bank and hand in a check with my name signed to it, I ask of that bank in my own name. If I have money deposited in that bank, the check will be cashed; if not, it will not be cashed. If, however, I go to a bank with somebody else's name signed to the check, I am asking in his name, and it does not matter whether I have money in that bank or any other, if the person whose name is signed to the check has money there, the check will be cashed. Thus, to pray in the name of Christ is to pray on the ground of Christ's credit and not our own.

VI. CONCLUSION

- A. While there are mechanics to prayer, prayer is not mechanical. God honors a heart attitude, not necessarily our logic or eloquence. If someone does not pray just right or just like we do, that is quite all right. The important thing is that he is praying.
 - B. Our basic problem today is not so much one of mechanics but one of the human will which does not want to pray. The problem boils down to obedience.
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