

Lesson 10

Helpful Hints on Prayer

I. INTRODUCTION

- A. Prayer is not easy to perform. The Devil would keep us from learning the real secret of prayer. Have you ever noticed how often you have set aside a time for prayer and after a few minutes your mind wanders to a household chore that has to be done, a business deal coming up, or a football game?
- B. There are some simple and helpful hints to prayer that make the art of praying more enjoyable and successful. These are merely suggestions and all of them do not necessarily work for all people.

II. TIPS ON PRAYER

- A. Prayer is hard work (Col. 4:12). The real prayer warrior has to struggle to find time to pray and struggle in prayer to tap the throne of God.
- B. Prayer is not a substitute for human effort (Acts 12:8-10). It should never be a substitute or excuse for not doing what God has already commanded us to do. NOTE: We sometimes pray for a person's salvation without witnessing to him. NOTE: I have heard the story of an old preacher who was convalescing from a severe illness, and as his appetite returned he wanted some chicken. So he prayed, "O Lord, please send me some chicken." But no chicken came. Then the preacher changed the form of his prayer and said, "Lord, please send me after the chicken." Needless to say, the man had chicken that night for dinner.
- C. Prayer is not to be repetitious (Matt. 6:7). Ritualistic and repetitious prayer in no way impresses God. He desires to have prayer from the heart.
- D. Prayer should include praise, worship and thanksgiving as well as petition.
- E. Public prayer should be short (Matt. 6:5). Long prayers in public often give an air of super-piousness and are difficult for those who have to listen. NOTE: Sometimes we have prayer meetings where one person does almost all the praying.
- F. Private prayer should be longer and in secret (Matt. 6:6). We can see the carnality of one's heart when private prayers are short and public prayers are long.
- G. The length of the prayer should be consistent with the greatness of the need and the seriousness of the situation. The longest prayer in the Bible takes three minutes to read (in Daniel). Nehemiah prayed a very short prayer (Neh. 2:4). Our Lord taught His disciples a simple, short prayer. The actual time spent in prayer depends upon the situation and the personality of the person praying.

Charles Simeon devoted four hours each morning to prayer. Mr. Wesley spent two hours daily in prayer. It is said that John Fletcher stained the walls with the breath of his prayers. Sometimes he would pray all night. His whole life was a life of prayer. Said he, "I would not rise from my seat without lifting my heart to God." Martin Luther said. "If I fail to spend three hours in prayer each morning, the devil gets the victory through the day. I have so much business I cannot get along without spending three hours daily in prayer." David Brainerd,

the mighty missionary to the Indians, said, "I love to be alone in my cottage where I can spend much time in prayer." Adoniram Judson said, "Arrange thy affairs, if possible, so that thou canst leisurely devote two hours every day, not merely to devotional exercise, but to the very act of secret prayer and communion with God ... to be resolute in His cause. Make all practical sacrifices to maintain it." You may not have hours to devote to prayer. D. L. Moody never spent more than fifteen minutes in prayer. But he prayed often and about everything. (E. M. Bounds, Power Through Prayer)

- H. There is the spiritual gift of faith (1 Cor. 12:9), which with some includes the ability to pray with great effectiveness. All men should pray (Luke 18:1) but some may have the special gift. We should recognize this gift in some and not try to copy them. This will only lead to frustration.
- I. The position of prayer is unimportant. It is the attitude of prayer that counts. However, the position of prayer in the Bible is usually that of kneeling (Eph. 3:14). Kneeling is an external act that should portray submission and dependence upon God.

*“The proper way for a man to pray,’
Said Deacon Lemuel Keys,
‘And the only proper attitude
Is down upon his knees.’*

*‘No, I should say the way to pray,’
Said Reverend Doctor Wise,
‘Is standing straight with outstretched arms
And rapt and upturned eyes.’*

*‘Oh, no, no, no,’ said Elder Slow,
‘Such posture is too proud.
A man should pray with eyes fast closed
And head contritely bowed.’*

*‘It seems to me his hands should be
Austerely clasped in front
With both thumbs pointing toward the ground,’
Said Reverend Doctor Blunt.*

*'Last year I fell in Hidgekin's well
Headfirst,' said Cyrus Brown,
'With both my heels a-stickin' up
And my head a-pointing down.'*

*'And I made a prayer right then and there,
The best prayer I ever said,
The prayingest prayer I ever prayed,
A-standing on my head.'"*

- J. Christians should have a constant attitude of prayer and a moment by moment walk with Jesus (1 Thes. 5:17). NOTE: Once several theologians were discussing the deep meanings of 1 Thes. 5:17. As the discussion became somewhat heated, a scrub woman about her work overheard them and said, "Excuse me, gentlemen. It is all very simple." She then gave her interpretation of the verse like this: "I always pray. When I go to bed at night I thank God for the joy of resting on His everlasting arms. When I awaken the next morning, I ask Him to open my eyes that I may behold new and wondrous things out of His Word. When I bathe, I ask Him to cleanse me from secret faults. When I dress, I ask Him to clothe me with humility and love. When building a fire, I ask Him to build the fire of love for souls in my heart. When I eat, I ask Him to cause me to grow on the bread of His Word." The theologians had no more to say!
- K. Prayer should be spontaneous and not forced; that is, one should always be ready to praise God for what He is doing in and through us as believers. We need to loosen up in our praise.
- L. Pray even if you do not feel like it. You may not get anything out of the time of prayer, but God does, for He is continually seeking worshipers and desires and craves our fellowship (John 4:23).
- M. Christians must keep on asking and keep on believing and God will produce the desired results according to His own will (Luke 11:9-10).
- N. It is not a necessity that one be constantly talking when in private prayer. Sometimes it is good to be silent and let God speak to us.
- O. Do not be a clock-watcher. Pray as long or as little as the occasion calls for. Learn to pray just to spend time with Jesus.
- P. Meet regularly with friends and pray with them. There is real power in group prayer (Matt. 18:19-20).
- Q. Be honest with God. If you come to prayer with wrong motives, tell Him about it. Do not pretend or cover up. If you feel lousy, complain to God (Ps. 142:2).
- R. Prayer is not a time to inform God as though He were ignorant (Matt. 6:8), nor is it a time to inform people.
- S. A prayer list or book may be helpful. Record God's answers to prayer.
- T. If one does not feel he can spend great amounts of time in prayer, it is better to pray a little each day than to become discouraged and not pray at all.
- U. If a day or two passes without a definite prayer time, do not let yourself get defeated unless there has been sin. If there has been sin, conviction will come from the Spirit of God, not from your own feelings. Your life is Jesus Christ, not

the prayer time.

- V. Let your prayer experience develop from the Spirit's instructions in the Word. This will involve dependence and receiving. We have nothing of ourselves (John 15:7).
- W. The Holy Spirit is making intercession for all believers because they do not know how to pray as they ought (Rom. 8:26). He takes our puny prayers and makes them eloquent before the Father.
- X. David, the Lord Jesus Christ, and the disciples rose early for prayer. It was something they did right off. This is a good way to begin the day. However, these biblical characters did not have to contend with the progressive society and electric lights that we do (Mk. 1:35).