

PRAYER

One of the most profound statements about prayer is found in Luke 18:1: “*They (men) should always pray and not give up.*” This is exactly what happens in our daily lives. We either learn to pray or we get discouraged and give up. Christ confronts us with two inescapable choices: either we learn to cry out to an unseen Father who is ever present with us, or else we must lose heart and give up. The only positive direction is to learn to pray.

Prayer is almost a forgotten art in most of our churches. We have substituted emotionalism, flashy preaching, organizational techniques, church growth success methods and busyness for real spirituality in prayer. Methods move men to busyness but prayer moves God to move men to spiritual activity.

“We are constantly straining to devise new methods, new plans, new organizations to advance the Church and secure enlargement and efficiency for the gospel.

This trend of the day has a tendency to lose sight of the man or sink the man in the plan or organization. God’s plan is to make much of the man, far more of him than of anything else. Men are God’s method.

What the Church needs today is not more machinery or better, not new organizations or more and novel methods, but men whom the Holy Ghost can use—men of prayer, men mighty in prayer. The Holy Ghost does not flow through methods, but through men. He does not come on machinery, but on men. He does not anoint plans, but men—men of prayer” (E.M. Bounds, *Power Through Prayer*).

The mark of declining religion is that men are deep in theological discussion about God but do not know him personally. They are great with words but have no action in the life. Martin Luther said to the colleagues of his day, “You that manifest a concern about religion, why don’t you pray?” Someone has said, “When everything else fails, try prayer.” Martin Luther said, “Prayer is the most important thing in my life. If I should neglect prayer for a single day, I should lose a great deal of the fire of faith.”

DEFINITION OF PRAYER

It is very difficult to determine what prayer is because one can only experience the subjective or personal aspects of it, not define or write about it.

John Bunyan. Prayer is “a sincere sensible journey out of the soul, through Christ, and in the strength and assistance of the Holy Spirit, for such things as God promised.”

Westminster Shorter Catechism. “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 acknowledgment of his mercies” (#98).

Other definitions are: 1) Praying is bringing into being that which does not exist but for which God has promised; 2) Prayer is a means God uses to give us what He wants; 3) Prayer is talking with God.

EXCUSES FOR NOT PRAYING

Lack of Time. We acknowledge prayer is necessary but we cannot find time to commune with God. We often forfeit the best thing for other good things. Part of our spiritual warfare is to make time to pray. Martin Luther said, “I have so much business I cannot get along without spending three hours daily in prayer.”

Lack of Knowledge. It takes a minimal amount of knowledge to pray. Real prayer is as natural as breathing for the Christian, for it is simply talking with God. We need to talk less about prayer and pray more.

Lack of Results. A person may pray and not see immediate results so he becomes discouraged. Yet, we are told to keep on asking. “*Ask and it shall be given do you; seek and you shall find; knock and the door shall be open to you* (Matt. 7:7-8). The Greek present tense means, “Keep on asking and seeking and you shall find.”

Lack of Faith. This is the most prominent reason for not praying. We simply do not believe an omnipotent God can meet our needs. The Lord’s words, “*O you of little faith,*” still haunt men even today.

WHY WE ARE TO PRAY

Because We are God’s Children. As God’s children we have the right to come to the Father in prayer and He expects us to come to Him (John 1:12).

Because God has Commanded Us to Pray. “*Pray continually (without ceasing).*” This command is not meant to be a burden but to keep us from procrastination or hesitating to pray.

Because God has Given Us Prayer Promises. There are hundreds of prayer promises and they are ours for the asking.

Because Prayer Teaches Us Dependence on God. Without Christ, we can do nothing. “*If a man remains in me and I in him, he will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing*” (John 15:5). Our strength lies in childlike helplessness and dependence.

Because Prayer is the Only Means a Christian has to Commune with God. God speaks to man through His Word and through the quietness of prayer, but the Christian can only commune with God by prayer.

Because Prayer is a Primary Means to Accomplish God’s Ends. Prayer is bringing into existence what God has already planned. Without prayer, we will not experience God’s plan.

QUALIFICATIONS FOR A PRAYER WARRIOR

A Man Right Before God . “*The prayer of a righteous man is powerful and effective*” (James 5:16b). A person must be born again so as to have a perfect positional righteousness before God, and he must be experiencing progressive practical righteousness to get prayer answered.

A Man in the Spirit. *“And pray in the Spirit on all occasions”* (Eph. 6:18). He is to be praying in the Spirit; that is, in the sphere and under the control of the Holy Spirit (Jude 19). Submission to the Spirit prompts, motivates and guides one to pray according to God’s will.

A Man Who Understands Spiritual Warfare. *“Finally, be strong in the Lord and in his mighty power. Put on the full armor of God so that you can take your stand against the devil’s schemes. For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms”* (Eph. 6 10-12).

HINDRANCES TO EFFECTIVE PRAYER

Sin in the Life. *“If I had cherished sin in my heart, the Lord would not have listened; but God surely listened and heard my voice in prayer”* (Psa. 66:18). Until a Christian sees his sin, admits to it, confesses it and seeks to forsake it, he will never have an effective prayer life. Anyone who would have power in prayer must be merciless in dealing with his own sins (Isa. 59:1-2).

Selfishness. *“When you ask, you do not receive, because you ask with wrong motives, that you may spend what you get on your pleasures”* (James 4:3).

Tension or Strain with Another Christian. *“Therefore I tell you, whatever you ask for in prayer, believe that you have received it, and it will be yours. And when you stand praying, if you hold anything against anyone, forgive him, so that our Father in heaven may forgive you your sins”* (Mark 11:24-25). Harboring hatred and grudges towards others, hinders our prayer life.

Stinginess Towards the Poor. *“If a man shuts his ears to the cry of the poor, he too will cry out and not be answered”* (Prov. 21:13). Those who have been given much material blessing are to share it with others.

Poor Marital Relationship. *“Husbands, in the same way be considerate as you live with your wives, and treat them with respect as the weaker partner and as heirs with you of the gracious gift of life, so that nothing will hinder your prayers”* (1 Pet. 3:7).

Idolatry. *“Son of man, these men have set up idols in their hearts and put wicked stumbling blocks before their faces. Should I let them inquire of me at all”* (Ezek. 14:3)? An idol is anything that takes the place of God in one’s heart (1 John 5:21).

Turning from the Law of God. *“If anyone turns a deaf ear to the law, even his prayers are detestable”* (Prov. 28:9). Those who choose not to listen to God’s Word will not get their prayers answered.

POSITIVE CONDITIONS FOR ANSWERED PRAYER

A Christian Must Pray According to God’s Will. *“This is the confidence we have in approaching God: that if we ask anything according to his will, he hears us. And if we know that he hears us—whatever we ask—we know that we have what we asked of him”* (1 John 5:14-15). A sovereign God has a perfect plan that will come to pass, and this plan brings the most glory to Him. God is sovereign at all times, and our prayers, in order to be effective, must be in accordance with His sovereign will for us. If what we ask of the Father is not what He intended us to have from the

foundation of the world, He will not give it to us. This is why we must pray “in the Spirit” so our prayers will be energized and empowered by God and according to His will.

A Christian Must be Abiding in Christ and His Word. *“If you remain in me and my words remain in you, ask whatever you wish and it will be given to you”* (John 15:7). Remaining or abiding in Christ is directly related to the Christian believing and obeying the Word. One cannot pray according to God’s will until he knows what God’s will is. God’s moral and directive will is found in the Bible.

A Christian Must be Obedient to the Word. *“And receive from him anything we ask, because we obey his commands and do what pleases him”* (1 John 3:22). Answers to prayer will come in direct proportion to the Christian’s willingness to do God’s will as it is revealed in the Bible.

A Christian Must Act in Faith. *“If any of you lacks wisdom he should ask God, who gives generously to all without finding fault, and it will be given to him. But when he asks, he must believe and not doubt, because he who doubts is like a wave of the sea, blown and tossed by the wind”* (James 1:5-6).

PRAYER AND ASKING

Prayer is Essentially Asking. *“You want something but don’t get it. You kill and covet, but you cannot have what you want. You quarrel and fight. You do not have, because you do not ask God.”* (James 4:2-3). Every word for prayer in the Old and New Testaments means to ask. It is not fighting, warring, struggling, desiring or worrying that gets things from God but asking (Matt. 7:7-8; John 16:24; Matt. 7:11; Matt.21:22; John 14:14). Prayer is not primarily meditation but asking.

Asking is to be Specific. *“Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God”* (Phil. 4:6). We are to take specific requests to God. Many Christians pray generally about everything and never pray about anything specifically. We must not pray to impress people with our eloquence or fancy words, but just to ask with believing faith.

Asking for Big and Little Things. We would all agree that when something big comes into the life there is a need for prayer. There is nothing too big for an omnipotent God. Ask for anything, you never know whether God will do it for you. The sky is the limit if God thinks it should happen. 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.”

We should also pray about the small things. There is no situation or problem that God thinks is insignificant. God answers more prayer than we realize but because we are not looking for small answers we overlook them.

Asking and Expectation. The Christian must pray with expectation and anticipation as he waits on God to solve a problem that is humanly impossible. When praying the Christian is to believe he has already received the answer to his prayer. *“Therefore I tell you whatever you ask in prayer, believe that you have received it, and it will be yours”* (Mark 11:24).

Asking is Always Answered. Every time we ask God we will get an answer. It may not be the answer we want however. Every prayer has three basic answers: yes, no or wait awhile.

PETITION AND DESIRE

All prayers involve a petition and a desire. When we ask for something, we also have a desire behind that specific petition. For example, we might ask the Lord for money, but our desire might be happiness or to give more money to the Lord's work. The desire is not always stated but the petition is.

Petition Answered and Desire Unanswered. Israel was tired of manna and wept before God for meat (Num. 11:4-6,13, 18-20, 31-32). Their desire was for happiness and contentment even though their petition was for meat. God granted their petition and gave them quail meat but brought them "leanness of soul" or "a wasting disease upon them" (Psa. 106:15). A preacher may pray for a bigger church in order to be famous. He may get the church and be miserable in his fame.

Petition Not Answered and the Desire Answered. Abraham desired Lot would be saved and petitioned God to spare Sodom and Gomorrah. God destroyed the cities, but spared Lot. Abraham's desire was met (Gen. 18:23-33).

Petition and Desire Answered. The dying thief petitioned Christ to remember him and his desire was to be spiritually saved. Both were granted (Luke 23:42-43).

Petition Unanswered and Desire Unanswered. This occurs when there is rebellion and unconfessed sin in a Christian's life.

PRACTICAL TIPS ON PRAYER

1. Prayer is hard work. *"Epaphras, who is one of you and a servant of Christ Jesus, send greetings. He is always wrestling in prayer for you, that you may stand firm in all the will of God, mature and fully assured"* (Col. 4:12).
2. Prayer is not to be a substitute for not doing what God has already commanded. A person may pray for people for years to be saved but never make any attempt to speak to them about Christ.
3. Prayer that is repetitious (ritualistic) does not impress God. *"And when you pray, do not keep on babbling like pagans, for they think they will be heard because of their many words"* (Matt. 6:7).
4. Prayer should include confession, praise and thanksgiving as well as asking.
5. Public prayer should be short and private prayer should be long. *"And when you pray, do not be like the hypocrites, for they love to pray standing in the synagogues and on the street corners to be seen by men. I tell you the truth; they have received their reward in full. But when you pray, go into your room, close the door and pray to your Father, who is unseen. Then your Father, who sees what is done in secret, will reward you"* (Matt. 6:5-6)
6. 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 (Book of Daniel). Nehemiah prayed the shortest prayer (Neh. 2:4). Our Lord taught His disciples a simple, short prayer (Matt. 6).

Charles Simeon devoted four hours each morning to prayer. John 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. He whole life was a life of prayer. He said, “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 American 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. 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.

7. The position of prayer is not important. However, the Bible often speaks of kneeling to pray. *“For this reason I kneel before the Father from whom his whole family in heaven and earth derives its name”* (Eph. 3:14). The only position not mentioned is the head bowed and eyes closed.
8. There is a spiritual gift of faith (1 Cor. 12:9). Those who have this gift are often very strong prayer warriors.
9. Prayer should be spontaneous and not forced, although there is a place for formal, written prayers.
10. Pray even when you do not feel like it. You may not get anything out of the prayer time but God does.
11. Christians must learn to persevere in prayer, for we are told to “keep on asking” (Luke 11:9-10).
12. One does not have to talk all the time in prayer. Sometimes it is good to be silent, listen and let God speak to us. Don’t watch the clock but just enjoy spending time with Jesus.
13. Meet regularly with other Christians to pray.
14. Be honest with God. If you feel bad or bitter, tell Him. If you have demonstrated poor motives, share them with Him. If you feel you must complain, complain to God. *“I pour out my complaint before him; before him I tell my trouble”* (Psa. 142:2).
15. Prayer is not a time to inform God as if He were ignorant, nor is it a time to inform people.
16. Keep a prayer list and record answers to prayer.
17. It is better to spend a little time each day in private prayer, than to pray long prayers every once in a while.
18. If a day passes without a time of private prayer, do not let yourself get defeated unless there is sin. Your life is Christ, not the prayer time.
19. David, the Lord Jesus, and the disciples rose early for prayer. This is a good way to begin the day. *“Very early in the morning, while it was still dark, Jesus got up, left the house and went off to a solitary place, where he prayed”* (Mark 1:35).
20. While any person of the Trinity may be addressed in prayer, the Trinitarian formula for prayer usually is to the Father, through the Son, in the power of the Holy Spirit.