



“Ask, and it shall be given you; seek, and ye shall find; knock, and it shall be opened unto you,” Matthew 7:7.

### **Jesus Teaches About Prayer**

**Lesson Subject:** To equip the believer to pray more intelligently and effectively by observing the principles of prayer that Jesus taught.

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**Topic:** Jesus: Teachings of; Prayer.

Prayer is the center of religion because it is communion with God. There can no more be a true relationship with God without prayer than there can be life without breath.

As in other areas of religious life, Jesus is our example in prayer. He knew how to pray. The disciples were as impressed by His prayers as they were by His miracles. It is no wonder, therefore, that on certain occasion His disciples came to Him with the request, “. . . **Lord, teach us to pray, as John also taught his disciples,**” Luke 11:1. In response to their request, Jesus gave them the instruction which they sought. His reply, along with other passages, is the subject for study in this lesson.

Believers need to pray. They need to pray with greater power than ever before. Today's study aims “to equip the believer to pray more intelligently and effectively by observing the principles of prayer that Jesus taught.” Observe that the aim is to enable you to pray more intelligently — an intellectual aim by which you learn how to pray — and more effectively — a practical aim by which you actually pray.

Through this study, keep your heart open to be taught of God. What you learn, do. To conclude this study merely knowing more about how to pray is not enough. From today's lesson time onward, be a warrior in prayer. Pray more. Pray much more. Apart from prayer, there is no spiritual victory.

“If we depend on money, we get what money can do. If we depend on organization, we get what organization can do. If we depend on education,

we get what education can do. But if we depend on prayer, we get what God can do”—A. C. Dixon.

## I. PERSON

You can pray. You can pray effectively. You can pray as effectively as any other Christian. All that God teaches about prayer applies to you as much as to any other believer. Each believer is prone to think that he knows someone whose prayers God hears more readily than his. The Bible assures that you can have as meaningful a prayer life as any other Christian. You, too, can pray.

Read Matthew 6:5-13, noting the personal application of prayer principles to “you.” Five different times Jesus refers to “when thou prayest” as if He expected you to pray the same as all other Christians. If you respond, “I do not know how to pray,” the Lord Jesus gives this instruction, “After this manner therefore pray ye . . .”

God is a Father. We who believe in Christ Jesus are His dear children. He wants us to pray. He never infers that we pray too much, ask for things too hard for Him to provide, nor stay too long in prayer. His only complaint is that we do not ask at all. Read Matthew 7:7-8, taking special notice of the personal pronouns which Jesus used. **“Ask, and it shall be given YOU; seek, and YE shall find; knock, and it shall be opened unto YOU. For every one that asketh receiveth; and HE that seeketh findeth; and to HIM that knocketh it shall be opened.”** God is no respecter of persons. He plays no favorites in spiritual things. You can have as meaningful a prayer life as any other Christian. Each prayer promise is equally applicable to each believer. Claim it as your own, and pray!

## II. PRINCIPLES

Why does the Bible set forth no specific set of rules which we should follow in praying? Could it be that prayer is such a personal exchange between the Heavenly Father and His dear child that no rules are needed? Very probably. On the other hand, the precept and practice of Jesus afford some guidelines which aid the believer in prayer. Examine the following suggestions for help in how to pray effectively.

**Pray unceasingly.** “**And he spake a parable unto them to this end, that men ought always to pray, and not to faint,**” Luke 18:1. The parable tells of a widow who, by her insistence, gained legal help from an unjust judge. Jesus pointed out that God is not like that crooked official; He is a

Father who delights to give to His children. His children should ask much more than they do. The Apostle Paul understood that teaching. He wrote, **“Pray without ceasing.”** I Thessalonians 5:17. That simply means, “Pray about everything.” Jesus taught us to pray much more than we do. Do you feel the need?

**Pray privately.** Public prayer is permissible and advisable in public worship assembly, but it is no substitute for private periods of prayer, Matthew 6:5-6. Never pray in public as a display of religion. Such may gain the praise of men, but it does not gain an answer from God. Make the private place your primary place of prayer. Enter into your “closet” (your bedroom, dressing room, or other place of privacy) rather than praying “in the synagogues and in the corner of the streets.” God knows what happens in private. Prayers offered there are as effective as those offered in church. God will perform in public what you have asked of Him in private. If you limit your prayers to public worship, you do not pray enough.

**Pray briefly.** Examine the recorded prayers of Jesus. Observe how brief they are. Most of His prayers are made up of one sentence. Only the Lord's priestly prayer, recorded in John 17, is of any particular length. The Model Prayer which He gave has only six sentences of sixty-six words. It may be read in the English language in fewer than thirty seconds. No one is heard for his “much speaking” in prayer, Matthew 6:7. There is no need to catalog needs or to present arguments. God knows what we have need of before we ask, Matthew 6:32. Learn to speak directly to the point in prayer to God. The only times that you might want to continue long in prayer is during periods of deep intercession and exalted praise. Otherwise, pray briefly.

**Pray simply.** Address God as “Father.” Do not try to impress Him with laudatory introductions nor flattering words. Speak to Him simply as a loving child could speak to his father. Examine the Model Prayer which Jesus gave. See how brief and simple are the sentences: **“Thy Kingdom come . . . Give us this day our daily bread,”** Matthew 6:10, 11. Examine the words used in the prayer. Only two have as many as three syllables; only fifteen have as many as two syllables; forty-nine have but a single syllable. Those are words which are at home on the lips of a child. What was Jesus saying to you about prayer? He was saying, “Pray simply.”

**Pray insistently.** Prayer should never be a passing concern as if it were but an affair of the moment. Prayer should be constant and insistent. Jesus told two parables which underscore the importance of persistence in prayer, Luke 11:5-10; 18:3-5. One recounts the insistence of a man in asking bread for an unexpected guest. The other tells of the insistence of a widow in

seeking certain legal transactions. The word used to describe that kind of praying is “importunate.” It means to be urgent and insistent in asking; refusing to be denied; annoyingly urgent or persistent. Does that mark your prayers or do you pray a time or two about a matter and give up, if the answer is not immediately seen? Jesus taught us to pray insistently.

**Pray humbly.** Prayer is asking God, not commanding Him. It should be offered with that spirit of humility which makes one willing for God's will to be done whether it is his own will or not. Even Jesus prayed, **“Father, if thou be willing, remove this cup from me: nevertheless not my will, but thine, be done,”** Luke 22:42. God's will is always best. Do not fear it. Pray for it, saying, **“Thy will be done in earth, as it is in heaven,”** Matthew 6:10.

**Pray believingly.** Do not doubt when you pray. Instead reach out your hand in expectancy when you ask God for something, Mark 11:24. It is not always easy to trust. Jesus knew of our propensity to doubt and encouraged us to believe for an answer to prayer. He has promised to give what we ask, John 14:13-14; 15:7; 16:24. **“And this is confidence that we have in him, that, if we ask anything according to his will, he heareth us: And if we know that he hear us, whatsoever we ask, we know that we have the petitions that we desired of him,”** I John 5:14-15. Is that the kind of assurance, that you have when you pray? God's promises can raise your confidence in answer to prayer. Read His promises in Matthew 7:7-11; 21:22; 18:19. Pray believingly.

Pray forgivingly. In the Model Prayer, Jesus gave a petition which says, **“And forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors,”** Matthew 6:12. Of the seven petitions in the prayer, He chose that one for further comment, saying **“For if ye forgive men their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you: but if ye forgive not men their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses,”** Matthew 6:14-15. What does that mean?

Jesus taught that an unforgiving spirit is sin. No prayer is answer so long as one clings to sin. Only when one is willing to have all his sins forgiven (including any bitter spirit toward another) will his prayers be heard. It is that simple. Be forgiving, if you want to be forgiven.

**Pray in private and public.** Prayer is a personal exchange with God. It should be exercised much in private, but public prayer is also proper. Jesus promised to hear when “two or three” join in prayer because **“where two or three are gathered together, there am I in the midst of them,”** Matthew 18:19-20. It is proper to pray in groups as well as to pray alone. The Model Prayer was evidently given with use in public assembly in mind. Eight times

the plural personal pronouns are used — “we, our, us.” God is addressed as “our Father.” Prayer should be offered in private, but not to the exclusion of public prayer. Prayer should be offered in public, but not to the exclusion of private prayer.

## II. EXAMPLE

Jesus is our example in prayer. By precept and by example, Jesus taught us how to pray. Prayer held a large place in the life of Jesus. No person mentioned in the entire Bible spent so much time in prayer as did He.

**Example of when to pray** — Jesus prayed in the morning before others rose for the day, Mark 1:35. He prayed after the work for the day had ended, Mark 6:46. He prayed in the crisis experiences of His life, Mark 14:32. He prayed during the great religious experiences, Luke 3:21. He prayed in times when great decisions were to be made, Luke 6:12. He prayed when death was approaching and He was going to God, Luke 23:46. Jesus taught that “men ought always to pray, and not to faint,” Luke 18:1. He taught us to pray without ceasing.

**Example of the meaning of prayer** — Jesus did not look upon prayer as being a mere ritual of religion. To Him, prayer was actual and personal communion with God. When He took the disciples apart into the desert place to rest awhile, it meant that He was going to pray to the Father. Even with His wisdom, power, and spiritual nature, He seemed to feel it imperative that He spend much time with the Father. Since Jesus needed to pray, how much more do you and I need it! We should learn to make prayer the spontaneous outreach of our hearts to God and not a mere religious ritual. Such a spirit will add a new dimension and meaning to prayer for you.

Example of the form of prayer — Examine once more the Model Prayer, Matthew 6:9-13. Observe that it is made up of sixty-six words formed into six sentences. There are seven petitions in the prayer — three relate to God, and four relate to man. The prayer begins with recognition that in prayer we deal with God who is our Father. It is first concerned with His glory, His kingdom, and His will. Only after that does it turn to the affairs of man. Then, having presented petition for his needs, man turns to a great doxology of praise to conclude the prayer.

Examine the seven petition of the prayer; (1) The glory of God — “Hallowed be thy name;” (2) The government of God — “Thy Kingdom come;” (3) The will of God — “Thy will be done . . .” (4) The needs of man — “Give us this day our daily bread;” (5) The sins of man — “Forgive us . . .” (6) The trials of man — “Lead us not into temptation;” (7)

The perils of man — “but deliver us from evil.” How amazingly complete are those petitions. They deal with the totality of concerns in heaven and upon the earth. That is a worthy pattern for you to follow in prayer.

Do not forget to praise God in prayer, too. **“For thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory, for ever. Amen.”**

#### IV. SUBJECTS

What are the proper things about which to talk to God when you pray? It depends upon the type of prayer you offer. Prayers may be classified in two general groups. (1) There are prayers of giving—praise, thanks, worship. (2) There are prayers of asking—petition, supplication, intercession. The former is called **“the sacrifice of praise to God . . . the fruit of our lips,”** Hebrews 13:5. The prayer of praise is always appropriate. How long has it been since you prayed for the sole purpose of thanking and praising God? The latter kind of prayer is also appropriate. Jesus said, **“Ask, and ye shall receive, that your joy may be full,”** John 16:24b.

What are the proper petitions to present in prayer? The Model Prayer has set forth a list of seven things. It is also proper to ask for things not mentioned in the Model Prayer. Consider these suggestions. (1) Ask aid for those who are in need as Jesus prayed for Simon Peter when he was approaching a testing by Satan, Luke 22:31-32. (2) Ask for more workers in the kingdom of God, praying that the Lord of the harvest will thrust forth laborers, Matthew 9:36-38. (3) Ask for the spiritual growth of your fellow Christians as Paul prayed for the saints in Ephesus, Ephesians 1:15. From those suggestions, you add to the list of proper subjects for prayer.

God is concerned about all the details of the believer’s life. Therefore, each detail of life is a proper subject for prayer. Listen to the wide range of subjects suggested by Jesus when He told us to pray about **“all things”** (Matthew 21:22), **“what things soever ye desire”** (Mark 11:24), **“anything that they shall ask”** (Matthew 18:19), **“what ye will”** (John 15:7), **“whatsoever ye shall ask the Father”** (John 15:16), **“anything in my name”** (John 14:14). You may feel free to talk to God about everything which concerns you. He is concerned, too.

**“Lord, teach us to pray.”** Is that the concern of your heart upon a survey of the teaching of Jesus on prayer? If so, the lesson has been profitable to you. Whatever else you may have learned from the study, you should be impressed with the words of Jesus, **“. . . men ought always to pray, and not to faint,”** Luke 18:1. Jesus said that you should pray much

more than you do, **“For every one that asketh receiveth; and he that seeketh findeth; and to him that knocketh it shall be opened,”** Matthew 7:8. Those who have served the Lord for any length of time will testify that prayer is essential to all spiritual victory. A preaching victory is first a prayer victory. A witnessing victory is first a prayer victory. A victory over temptation is dependent upon victory in prayer before the testing came. Let us pray more, much more.

### **Questions**

1. What is prayer?
2. Why is prayer essential to a Christian?
3. Why did the disciples ask Jesus to teach them to pray?
4. How does Matthew 7:7-8 encourage you to pray?
5. Why does the Bible give no “rules’ for prayer?