



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

### **Jesus Speaks on Prayer**

**Lesson Aim:** To enrich the Christian's prayer life.

**L87. Date:** November 1970. **Text:** Matthew 6:5-13; 7:7-11. **Topic:** Prayer.

#### INTRODUCTION

On a certain occasion as Jesus was praying, when He ceased, His disciples came with the request, “. . . **Lord, teach us to pray, as John also taught his disciples,**” Luke 11:1. Then follows one of the most wonderful passages on prayer to be found in all the Bible. It is recorded also in the portions of Matthew 6 and 7 which are printed above.

Underlying the teachings of the Bible on the subject of prayer are these interesting principles. (1) Prayer makes a difference with God and men. (2) All believing men should pray often. (3) Man does not naturally know how to pray effectively. (4) John the Baptist taught his disciples how to pray. (5) Jesus taught His disciples how to pray. (6) We need to be taught how to pray. (7) In the teachings of Jesus there is sufficient instruction that we may become men and women of prayer. Upon these principles the following comments are based.

A certain aged minister who had enjoyed a long and profitable ministry had retired. In an interview he was asked, “If you had your ministry to live over again, knowing what you know now, what change would be made?” He replied, “Oh, sir, I would pray more. I would pray much more.”

Those who have been long in Christian service know that prayer is essential to victory. A preaching victory is first a prayer victory. A witnessing victory is first a prayer victory. A teaching victory is first a prayer victory. And he who has already won the battle in the prayer closet can go forth to face the hosts of hell with all confident boldness.

It was A C. Dixon who said, “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!” Oh, let us pray more; let us pray much more!

## EXPOSITION

### I. EXAMPLE OF PRAYER

Jesus knew how to pray. And there is no person in all the Bible record who is said to have spent as much time in prayer as did He. We can learn much from Him. He is our best example of what a prayer life is really like.

Jesus made everything an object of prayer. He prayed in the morning before others awoke for the day, Mark 1:35. He prayed after a day of work was closed, Mark 6:46. He prayed in every crisis experience as in the hours before His arrest, Mark 14:32. He prayed at His baptism and was praying when the heavens were opened to Him and He received the testimony of the Father and the Holy Spirit, Luke 3:21. He prayed in each time of decision as before choosing the Twelve, Luke 6:12. The transfiguration occurred when He was at prayer, Luke 9:28. His very last hour on the cross, His last words before His death, was the prayer, “**. . . Father, into thy hands I commend my spirit. . .**” Luke 23:46.

If we wish to be instructed in prayer, therefore, it is natural that we come to Jesus. He was a man of prayer. And from the above survey it is evident that He practiced praying much more than He preached it.

Prayer is the center of religion since it is communion with God. Jesus believed in prayer, told men to pray, and prayed Himself. It becomes evident that, for Jesus, prayer was a refreshing experience. For Him to “come apart into a desert place and rest awhile” meant to go alone in solitude to commune with God in prayer.

Jesus did not look upon prayer as being a mere devotional ritual. It was actual communication with God. Even with His wisdom, power, and message as the Son of God, He seemed to feel it necessary to spend time with the Father. And if He felt the need to pray, how much more do you and I need it! Learn to make prayer a spontaneous outreach of your heart to God (not a religious tradition to be observed at set hours) and observe how it will intensify your devotion to God. And now, with Jesus as the example, let us learn how to pray.

## II. PRINCIPLES OF PRAYER

It is surprising that the Bible sets forth no set rules on how to pray. The principles which may be found there are evident only by inference. Prayer is so personal and intimate an exchange with God that no rules are needed. But by placing the precept and practice of Jesus side by side, we can learn how men should pray.

1. Men ought to pray more. In Luke 18 one reads a parable Jesus gave teaching “that men ought always to pray, and not to faint.” The parable tells of a widow who, by her insistence, gained the legal help of an unjust judge. He pointed out that God is a Father who delights to help His children. Therefore, the children should ask much more than they do. Persistence is indicated in the admonitions to “ask, seek, knock” in Matthew 7:7-11. I feel in my heart the need to be more and more a man of prayer. Do you feel it too?

2. Prayer is a purely private and personal exchange with God, Matthew 6:5-6. No one should pray in public places “that they may be seen of men.” To pray for display before men gains the praise of men, but that is all. It does not gain an answer from God. Rather than display, prayer should be private. Enter into your “closet,” or bedchamber, or dressing room—to any place of privacy—and there, open your heart to God. He sees in private. He hears your prayer. And He will work in the open to perform that which you asked of Him in private.

3. Prayer should be brief and to the point, Matthew 6:7. No man is heard for “much speaking” in prayer. Look how short are Jesus' personal prayers. Except for the Lord's priestly prayer (John 17), only one of them is longer than a single sentence. In the Model Prayer which He gave us (Matthew 6:9-13), there are only six sentences. There are only sixty-six words in the entire prayer. It can be recited in less than thirty seconds. Behold the brevity of prayer!

And look at the simplicity of it also. Jesus never catalogues His needs. He does not describe His situation to God. He does not discuss all that is involved for Himself. He simply speaks to the Father and hears the Father's voice in response. The sixty-six words Jesus gave in the Model Prayer are very simple. Only two have three syllables; only fifteen have two syllables; and forty-nine have one syllable. Speak simply when you talk to God in prayer.

4. Prayer should be simple. The prayers of Jesus contain no laudatory introductions nor flattering addresses. He addresses God as “Father.” He

teaches us to call Him, “Our Father which art in heaven.” On the other hand, He warns us against thinking that we shall be heard for our “much speaking.” Speak to God as a loving child to his Father and your prayer will be simple and sincere.

5. Prayer should be insistent. Luke 11:5-10 and 18:3-5 records two parables given by Jesus which underscore this truth. One tells of the insistence of a man asking bread for a friend. The other recounts the persistence of a widow seeking a legal transaction. Both teach that prayer should not be perfunctory. It is never the affair of a moment. Prayer should be constant and continued. To such petitions God gives answers. How importunate are you when you pray?

6. Prayers should be according to the will of God. In the Garden of Gethsemane, Jesus set the example by praying, “. . . **Father, if thou be willing, remove this cup from me: nevertheless not my will, but thine, be done,**” Luke 22:42. Even if the flesh draws back from the will of God, prayer should be according to His will. For His will is always best.

7. Prayer should be accompanied by faith in God that He will answer. Because He knew our tendency to doubt, Jesus underscored the importance of faith when we pray. His promises that God would do whatsoever we ask (John 14:13-14; 15:7, 16; 16:24) is contingent upon our believing Him. Jesus expressed it best in Mark 11:24. He pictures our asking and reaching out the hand to receive at the same moment as a sign of our assurance that we do receive what we ask. And to assure our faith, He gives repeated promises that He will answer prayer. Read the remarkable words of Matthew 7:7-8, 9-11; 21:22; 18:19.

8. Prayer should be accompanied by a forgiving spirit. “**And when ye stand praying, forgive, if ye have ought against any: that your Father also which is in heaven may forgive you your trespasses,**” Mark 11:25. Jesus did not teach that a forgiving spirit is an act of merit which obligates God to forgive our sins. But He taught that unforgiveness is such a dreadful sin that so long as one harbors that spirit and refuses to confess it as sin and forsake it, that he will not receive the forgiveness of God. There is no question that Jesus said we must be forgiving if we would be forgiven. Read Matthew 6:13, 14-15.

9. Prayer is primarily a private exchange with God and should be exercised alone. But it is equally true that there are times when prayers should be offered in public. Matthew 18:19 recount a promise to hear and answer the prayer of “two or three” who pray about one matter. The Model Prayer (Matthew 6:9-13) contains eight pronouns which are first person plural: “we, our, us.” This means it is a prayer to be offered in public. He

who leads a public prayer is praying in behalf of the entire congregation and should pray in the plural as Jesus taught us.

### III. SUBJECTS OF PRAYER

Prayers may be classified in two general areas. There are prayers of giving—worship, praise, thanks. This type of prayer is called “the sacrifice of praise to God . . . the fruit of our lips,” Hebrews 13:15. Jesus offered prayers of praise and thanksgiving. Such a prayer is recorded in Matthew 11:25-26, “. . . **I thank thee, O Father, Lord of heaven and earth, because thou hast hid these things from the wise and prudent, and hast revealed them unto babes. Even so, Father: for so it seemed good in thy sight.**” The prayer of praise is always appropriate. How long has it been since you prayed asking nothing of God but presenting praises to Him?

But the great emphasis which Jesus placed on prayer centered in our asking. We call this prayers of petition, supplication, intercession. Petition means to present a request. Supplication is a stronger term and means to petition earnestly. Intercession means to ask (petition) in behalf of another rather than for one's self. But in all three words the emphasis is on man asking and God giving. This is how Jesus taught us to pray. **“Ask, and ye shall receive, that your joy may be full,”** John 16:24.

But what are the proper petitions which we may present in prayer? For what is it proper to ask? In general, the believer may feel free to ask for anything he needs. Unless God convicts him otherwise, he can ask and expect to receive.

(1) Ask for the necessities of life. **“Give us this day our daily bread,”** Matthew 6:11; Luke 11:3.

(2) Ask for forgiveness. **“And forgive us our debts, as we debtors,”** Matthew 6:12.

(3) Ask for moral deliverance. **“And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil,”** Matthew 6:13.

(4) Ask for others who are in need. **“Simon, Simon, behold, Satan hath desired to have you, that he may sift you as wheat: But I have prayed for thee. . .”** Luke 22:31-32.

(5) Ask for help and guidance in times of perplexity and despair. **“Father, all things are possible unto thee; take away this cup from me: nevertheless not what I will, but what thou wilt,”** Mark 14:36.

(6) Ask for the coming of the kingdom of God. **“Thy kingdom come. Thy will be done in earth, as it is in heaven,”** Matthew 6:10.

(7) Ask for more workers in the kingdom of God. **“. . . The harvest**

**truly is great, but the labourers are few: pray ye therefore the Lord of the harvest, that he would send forth labourers into his harvest,”** Luke 10:2. See Matthew 9:36-38.

This list of proper subjects for prayer is incomplete. Your private study of the New Testament will reveal many more. But this list is sufficient to show that whatever is of concern to the Christian (whether it is material or spiritual) is a proper subject for prayer. Anything you cannot talk to God about had better be kept out of your life. Like a loving Father, He delights to hear us pray when we open our hearts and give Him free access therein.

## CONCLUSION

No wonder the disciples came to Jesus with the request, “Lord, teach us to pray.” With what wonderful words and example Jesus heeded that entreaty. This study should encourage your heart to pray much more knowing, **“For every one that asketh receiveth; and he that seeketh findeth; and to him that knocketh it shall be opened,”** Matthew 7:8. Jesus promises that God will answer your prayer.

If you know not where nor how to begin, let the Lord's prayer guide you. Indeed, the Lord's Prayer (Matthew 6) is a fitting summary of Jesus' teaching on the subject. God, to whom we pray, is a Father who, dwelling in heaven, receives our adoration. The true aim in prayer is not the imposition of our wills upon God but the hallowing of his sacred name, the extension of his kingdom, our submission to his will. Only then does Christ direct us to petition the Father. Then the prayer ends, not with our needs and desires, but with God, with whom it began; with His kingdom, His power, His glory. Truly, 'When we pray rightly and properly, we ask for nothing else than what is contained in the Lord's prayer (Augustine).’—**Baker's Dictionary of Theology.**

**“And it came to pass, that . . . one of his disciples said unto him, Lord, teach us to pray . . . And he spake a parable unto them to this end, that men ought always to pray, and not to faint,”** Luke 11:1; 18:1.

## QUESTIONS

1. Why is prayer so important to a Christian?
2. Why did the disciples ask Jesus to teach them to pray?
3. What prayer example did Jesus give us?
4. Why are there no “rules” for prayer in the Bible?
5. Why should most prayer be private?

6. When should prayer be offered in public?
7. How can you pray in the will of God?
8. What are the proper subjects for prayer?
9. Why is persistence in prayer so necessary?
10. How has this study helped you personally?