

Prayer According to the Master:

What Jesus Said

Prayer, Part 1

Open

- Ask the group: How many of you enjoy praying? For those that like it, what makes you do it? For those that don't, what keeps you from praying?
- Prayer is to be a huge part of a Christian's life, but it is an often neglected part of everyday Christian life. It does not have to be a boring chore, consist of endless repetitions, or include long lists of desired things. Prayer comes in many forms, volumes, and lengths. To start this series, we'll begin with what the ultimate Master of prayer, Jesus, said about it.

Matthew 6:5-15

“And when thou prayest, thou shalt not be as the hypocrites are: for they love to pray standing in the synagogues and in the corners of the streets, that they may be seen of men. Verily I say unto you, They have their reward. But thou, when thou prayest, enter into thy closet, and when thou hast shut thy door, pray to thy Father which is in secret; and thy Father which seeth in secret shall reward thee openly. But when ye pray, use not vain repetitions, as the heathen do: for they think that they shall be heard for their much speaking. Be not ye therefore like unto them: for your Father knoweth what things ye have need of, before ye ask him. After this manner therefore pray ye:

Our Father which art in heaven, Hallowed be thy name.

Thy kingdom come. Thy will be done in earth, as it is in heaven.

Give us this day our daily bread.

And forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors.

And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil: For thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory, for ever. Amen.

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.”

- To sum up what Jesus said about prayer in His Sermon on the Mount: don't be loud and obnoxious trying to get others to notice you praying; don't drone on saying the same things over and over; praise God; seek His will; ask for your needs; repent and forgive; and pray for protection from Satan.
- Jesus said much more than this simple message about prayer, but He laid a foundation here by telling us to go before God in trust and pour out your heart before Him alone with repentance for your wrongs and forgiveness for others' wrongs.

HOW SHOULD WE PRAY?

In Humility

“And the publican, standing afar off, would not lift up so much as his eyes unto heaven, but smote upon his breast, saying, God be merciful to me a sinner.” Luke 18:13

- This verse is part of a parable that Jesus told comparing a Pharisee’s prayer to a Tax Collector’s prayer. The Pharisee had prayed by thanking God that *he* wasn’t like all those “sinners” out there and by boasting about his religious practices. However, the tax collector acknowledged his sinfulness before God and begged for His mercy, which he knew he didn’t deserve.

The Pharisee stood and prayed thus with himself, God, I thank thee, that I am not as other men are, extortioners, unjust, adulterers, or even as this publican. I fast twice in the week, I give tithes of all that I possess.

- What is the difference between these two prayers? What was the attitude of each man praying?
- We come before God in humility, knowing that we do not deserve the mercy He grants us and in realization of the justice we deserve. We come before Him in thankfulness for His mercy and for Jesus who made it possible for us even to approach the living God.

In Faith

“Therefore I say unto you, What things soever ye desire, when ye pray, believe that ye receive them, and ye shall have them.” Mark 11:24

- To come before God in faith means that we believe He has the power to answer our prayers and that He wants to answer them.
- If we doubt God’s power to answer our prayers, we don’t have faith and need to repent and **simply believe**.
- Hebrews 11:6 says, “And without faith, it is impossible to please God, because anyone who comes to him must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who earnestly seek him.”

In His Name

“Verily, verily, I say unto you, Whatsoever ye shall ask the Father in my name, he will give it you.” John 16:23

- Jesus taught that we can pray directly to God, that we no longer needed priests to go before Him for us. We can come to God because of Jesus’ atoning sacrifice, and we are cleansed by His blood and covered in it.
- Since we can come to God because of Jesus, we can ask Him for things directly in the name of Jesus; without Jesus we could never come before God because of our sinfulness.

In Persistence

And he spake a parable unto them to this end, that men ought always to pray, and not to faint; Saying, There was in a city a judge, which feared not God, neither regarded man:

And there was a widow in that city; and she came unto him, saying, Avenge me of mine adversary. And he would not for a while: but afterward he said within himself, Though I fear not God, nor regard man; Yet because this widow troubleth me, I will avenge her, lest by her continual coming she weary me. And the Lord said, Hear what the unjust judge saith. And shall not God avenge his own elect, which cry day and night unto him, though he bear long with them? I tell you that he will avenge them speedily. Nevertheless when the Son of man cometh, shall he find faith on the earth?. Luke 18:1-8

- The parable that Jesus told was of a widow who had been wronged. She presented her case frequently before the judge who cared nothing for her or for God. Finally, to get her off his back, he gave her what she asked for.
- Jesus said God is infinitely more just and compassionate than this judge and will answer those who cry out to Him day and night because He loves them.
- When we pray, we cannot ask only once and then assume that if God does not answer us He must not want to or must not care. There are many forces in this world working against God trying to steal away His glory and discourage His followers; prayer is entering into that battle, and we must be willing to persevere.

In Groups

“if two of you shall agree on earth as touching any thing that they shall ask, it shall be done for them of my Father which is in heaven. For where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them.” Matthew 18:19-20

- This is a famous promise made by Jesus to His disciples. If there are two or more of us praying in His name, He will give us whatever we ask for! And when we gather, He’s right there with us!
- What an awesome promise God gives us and a great encouragement to seek God with our friends and family.

In Seclusion

“But thou, when thou prayest, enter into thy closet, and when thou hast shut thy door, pray to thy Father which is in secret; and thy Father which seeth in secret shall reward thee openly.” Matthew 6:6

- Not meant to contradict the previous teaching on how to pray, Jesus also taught that we are not to make a showy display of our prayerfulness in order to gain praise and respect from other people. Instead, we are to seek Him in a secret, quiet place (sometimes referred to by Christians as the “prayer closet”).
- In this quiet place we can be still before God and hear His voice speaking to us without distraction. We can pour out our hearts before Him without worrying about interruptions or being judged or having to *do* anything but seek Him.
- Even if no one else sees us or knows we’re praying, God sees and hears and answers us in this secret place.

In the Spirit

“Howbeit when he, the Spirit of truth, is come, he will guide you into all truth: for he shall not speak of himself; but whatsoever he shall hear, that shall he speak: and he will shew you things to come.” John 16:13

- After Jesus left, he sent the Holy Spirit to us to teach us and to remind us of all His teachings and promises. The Holy Spirit helps us to pray when we are weak and teaches us how to pray effectively.
- Praying in the Spirit means praying what you feel like God's Spirit is leading you to pray. Sometimes, if you don't have words to pray or are unsure of what to pray for, the Spirit can pray through you in new languages that you don't even know. This is from God and is a very powerful tool to bring about God's will here on earth. It also builds us up in spirit.

SPECIFIC THINGS TO PRAY

For Enemies

“But I say unto you, Love your enemies, bless them that curse you, do good to them that hate you, and pray for them which despitefully use you, and persecute you...” Matthew 5:44

- Christianity goes against what most other religions and most of the world teaches in that it teaches us to love and pray for our enemies and those who do us harm.
- Rather than seek revenge or become consumed with bitterness and envy, we are to pray for the salvation and for the knowledge of God for those who attack or hurt us.
- Jesus set an example of forgiveness and love when He was on the cross. He asked God to forgive those who hanged, mocked, and rejected Him, and He even died for them though they did not understand it. To lay down His life was the ultimate act of love, especially for people who rejected Him.

For Harvest Workers

“Therefore said he unto them, 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

- The harvest field is people and those who belong to God are workers that are to go out into the world of people and harvest them into the kingdom of God.
- Jesus said that the harvest is great—there are many, many people who do not know Him yet and are longing for something greater from life—but there are few harvest workers to go out and bring those people to Him. We are to pray for more evangelists and bearers of the gospel. **God may even raise you up for this very task.**

For Deliverance

“And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil.” Matthew 6:13

- Jesus came to set the captives free, to deliver people from their imprisonment and bondage. Sin entangles us and keeps us bound and in subjection, but the knowledge of Jesus brings freedom.
- In the prayer that Jesus taught us, He told us to ask God for deliverance from all the snares and entanglements of the “evil one,” or Satan. God will never deliberately tempt us to sin, but He will provide a way out of every temptation to

sin we encounter. We must seek Him and His way in order to avoid the entanglement and destruction of sin in our lives.

- We can also pray for those we know to be delivered from the sins which trap them and keep them in bondage.

For Christians

“Neither pray I for these alone, but for them also which shall believe on me through their word; That they all may be one; as thou, Father, art in me, and I in thee, that they also may be one in us: that the world may believe that thou hast sent me.” John 17:20-21

- In John 17, Jesus prays for himself, for His disciples, and for all those who will know Him and belong to Him. Since we are to follow His example, we also should pray not only for ourselves and our needs, but for our brothers and sisters in Christ and for everyone whom they might lead to the knowledge of God.
- Jesus prayed for unity among believers, and He prayed that the world might come to know Him because of the love among the people of God. Unity within the church is so important that Jesus prayed earnestly that the body of Christ might be as one as Jesus and the Father are one. This demonstrates to the world that we stand together in love and are sustained by the love of God in Jesus Christ. We, too, must pray for this unity to become fully realized in the world.

Close

John 15:4-8

“Abide in me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself, except it abide in the vine; no more can ye, except ye abide in me. I am the vine, ye are the branches: He that abideth in me, and I in him, the same bringeth forth much fruit: for without me ye can do nothing. If a man abide not in me, he is cast forth as a branch, and is withered; and men gather them, and cast them into the fire, and they are burned. If ye abide in me, and my words abide in you, ye shall ask what ye will, and it shall be done unto you. Herein is my Father glorified, that ye bear much fruit; so shall ye be my disciples.”

- For our prayers to be fruitful and effective, **we must remain in Jesus**, who is the Word Made Flesh. **We remain in Him by reading and meditating upon the Word, by fixing our eyes upon Jesus, and by obeying what He teaches us through the Word and the Spirit.**
- Without Jesus in our lives, our prayers are meaningless, for no one can come to the Father except through Jesus.
- When God answers our prayers, we bear fruit that brings glory to His name!

Next week's lesson - The Necessity of Prayer