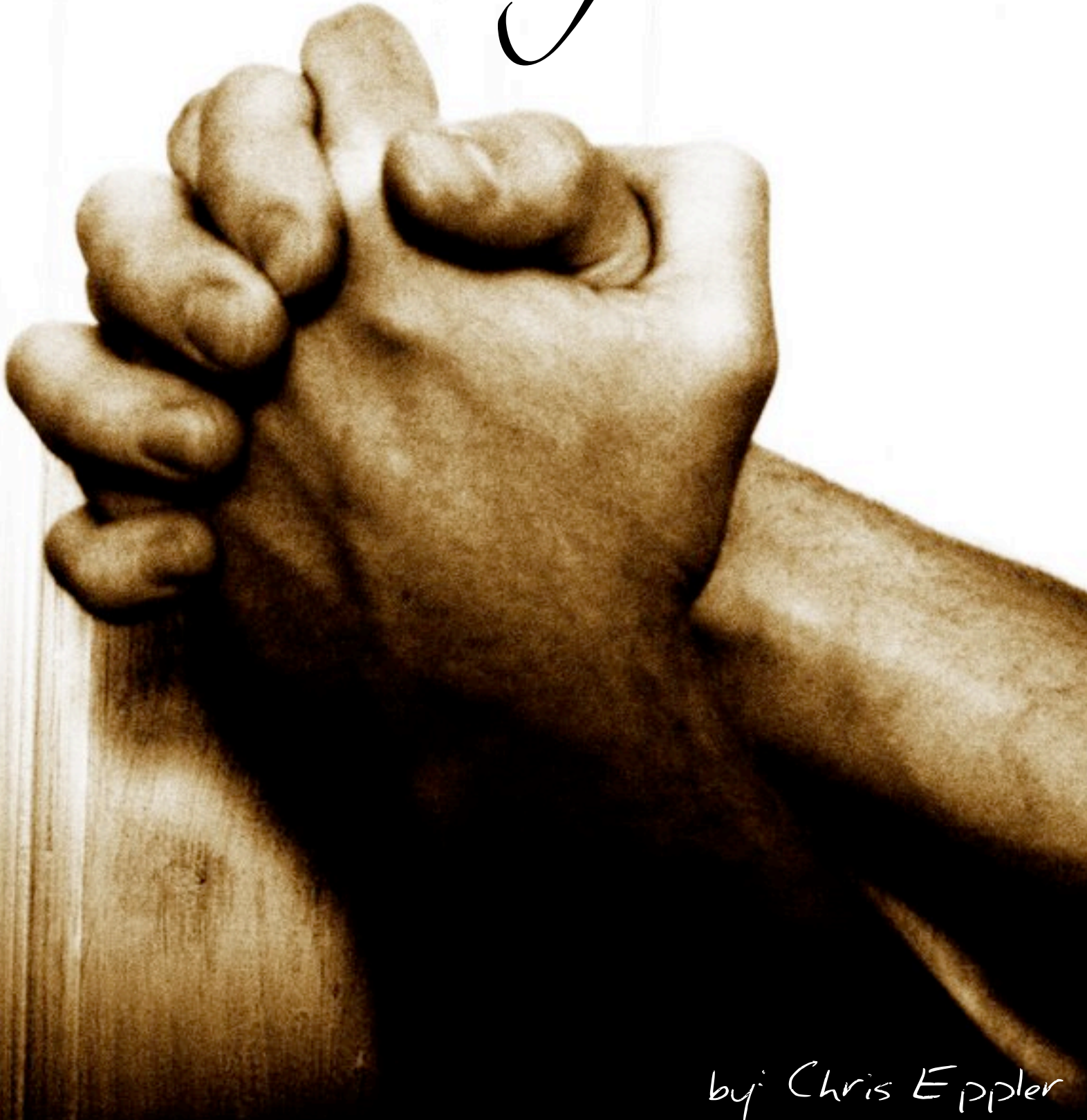
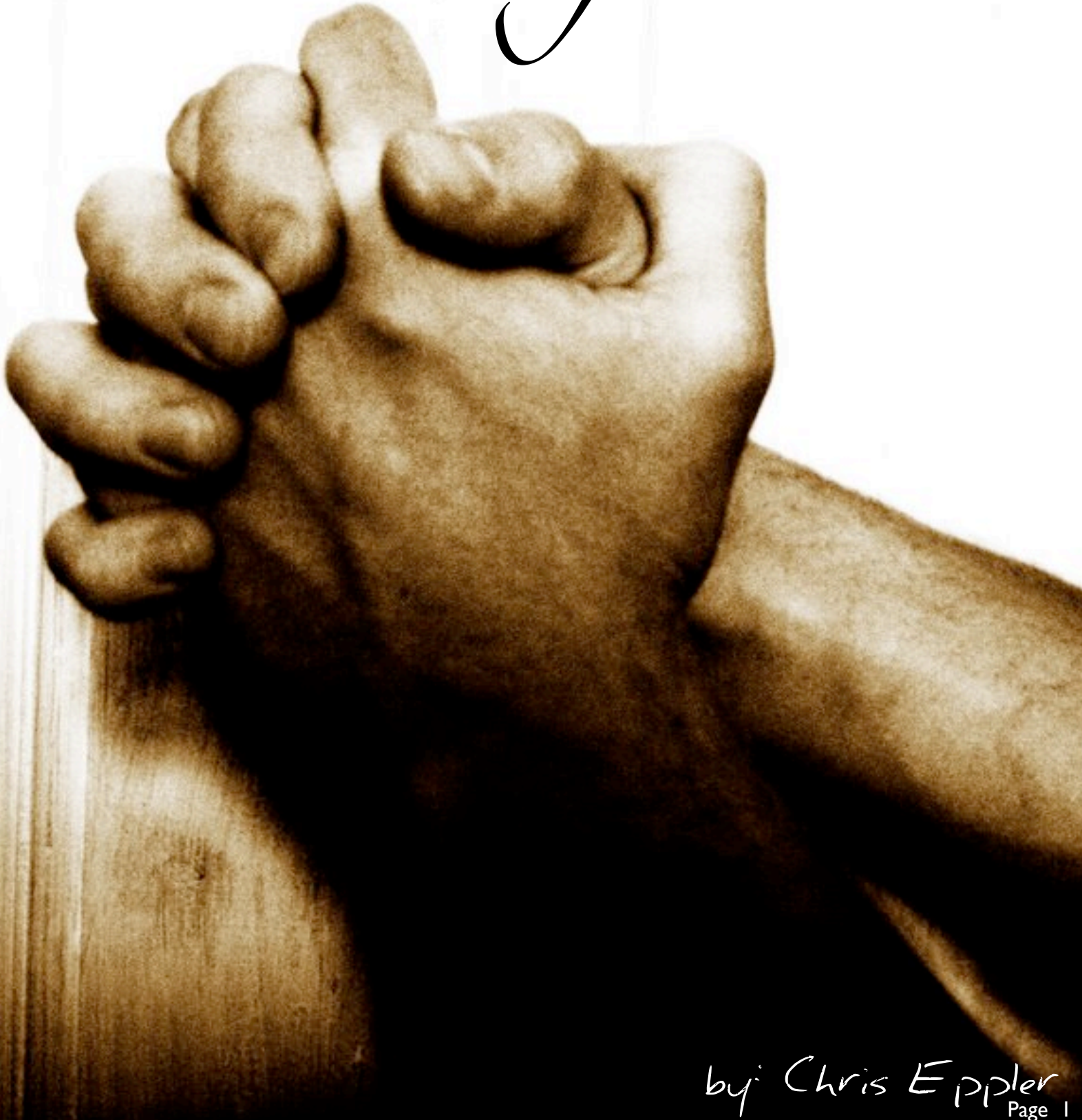


Drawing Near with *Confidence*



by Chris Eppler

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Page 1





Table of Contents

Lesson One - Teach Us To Pray.....	Page 5
Lesson Two - What Is Prayer?.....	Page 9
Lesson Three - Prayer Is Not... ..	Page 13
Lesson Four - Prerequisites.....	Page 17
Lesson Five - Why Pray?.....	Page 21
Lesson Six - Hindrances.....	Page 25
Lesson Seven - Hindrances (part 2).....	Page 29
Lesson Eight - Elements of Prayer.....	Page 33
Lesson Nine - Improving Our Prayer.....	Page 37
Lesson Ten - Improving Our Prayer (part 2).....	Page 41
Lesson Eleven - Fasting and Meditation.....	Page 45
Lesson Twelve - Examples of Prayer.....	Page 49
Lesson Thirteen - The Lord's Prayer.....	Page 53



This work has been made with the hope that together we can search the scripture and develop a greater understanding of it. Hopefully, it will make your study of this topic more edifying, more profitable, and more enjoyable. It is not intended to take the place of your responsibility to prepare for the studies. Please devote adequate time to the material before our study, so we can all be edified by one another (Hebrews 10:24-25).

The picture on the front of this book was taken from http://static.wix.com/media/43b7263fc9fc9ce8937c643bb8d22f83.wix_mp.

Source material includes: "Teach Us To Pray" by Albert G. Lemmons, Prayer: A Special Study by Mark Copeland, Special Studies: Prayer by Jeff Smith, Prayer and Providence by Homer Hailey, and "Facts About Prayer" from June 2010 Preceptor, pg 12(152).

All verse references are taken from the New American Standard Bible 1995 unless otherwise noted.



Teach Us To Pray

IN PREPARATION

READ MATTHEW 6:1-15
AND LUKE 11:1-13.

QUESTIONS

THE MODEL PRAYER
WAS GIVEN IN THE
SETTING OF WHAT
SERMON?

HAVE YOU PRAYED
TODAY?

HOW MANY TIMES A
DAY DO YOU
GENERALLY PRAY?

DO YOU THINK THAT
YOUR PRAYER LIFE
MAY BE LACKING IN
SOME WAY? IF SO, IN
WHAT WAY?

Teach Us To Pray

The “Sermon on the Mount” is recorded for us in Matthew 5-7. During the course of this discourse, Jesus spent some time teaching the disciples to pray. Luke 11 records that this was prompted by a question from the disciples. This was a simple, sweet, pointed question, “Lord, teach us to pray just as John also taught his disciples.” John the Baptist is being referenced here by this disciple. John indeed had been diligently preparing the way in fine detail, right down to prayer instruction. What did Jesus do upon this request? He got busy teaching them how to do it!

There are a few things that we see from this. The first being that prayer is not something that we inherently know. The ability to pray is developed by instruction and by practice. While it is something that may feel awkward at first, it is something that is essential for the Christian to be able to do and to do regularly.

This brings us to the second point, Jesus sees prayer as something that is critical. He was in the middle of discussing weighty things with the people. Chapter five of Matthew records Jesus’ speech about the difference in the law of the Kingdom versus the law of Moses. Important things indeed! However, in the middle of this discussion, Jesus answered a question about prayer! May we always place the same importance in it that our Savior did!

Lastly, we see that there is a correct way to pray. If prayer was something that is natural that you do just like when you are speaking to a friend upon earth, then surely the Savior would have simply answered their request with this. However, He did



Teach Us To Pray

not. He began teaching them in the form of a model prayer. There is indeed a right way and a wrong way to address the Creator of the Universe! While there is danger in excessive formality which results in vain repetitions, there is also danger in excessive informality which degrades God in the mind of the one praying! We approach the King and must see it as such!

The Model Prayer

Upon the request of the disciples, the Lord demonstrated a prayer for them. The text of that prayer is as follows:

“Pray, then, in this way: ‘Our Father who is in heaven, Hallowed be Your name. ‘Your kingdom come. Your will be done, On earth as it is in heaven. ‘Give us this day our daily bread. ‘And forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors. ‘And do not lead us into temptation, but deliver us from evil. [For Yours is the kingdom and the power and the glory forever. Amen.’”

It is important that we note the very first phrase. While Luke records a more emphatic “When you pray, say...”, Matthew uses the words “Pray, then, in this way...”. Since it is clear that there are other prayers in our New Testament that in no way use this format such as Revelation 22:20 where John’s prayer is a simple “Come, Lord Jesus.”, we come to the conclusion that Jesus was not giving some universal prayer to repeat, but a simple model to use and expound upon. The ironic thing is that in the very discourse where Jesus gave this prayer and spoke against vain repetitions, a vain repetition is exactly what this prayer has become to many!

Questions:

What benefit do you think this prayer has for Christians today?

Are there any elements of this prayer that you feel are no longer of use to us?



Teach Us To Pray

Our Father who is in heaven, Hallowed be Your name

Our Father is a designation that we find a number of times in our New Testament as it was a favorite of Paul, but we do not find often in our Old Testament. It was used by Isaiah a couple of times. (Isaiah 63:16; 64:8) The passage in Isaiah 64:8 is telling of the way “Father” is to be understood. Isaiah records that “You are our Father, We are the clay, and You our potter; And all of us are the work of Your hand.” Isaiah does not call God our “Father” in the sense of progenitor but rather in the sense of Creator!

What is the definition of “hallowed”? What is to be hallowed?

How would you describe the purpose of this statement in the prayer?

What are some other ways of opening a prayer that you use or that you find in your Bible?

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

This statement fits right in with the purpose of the “Sermon on the Mount”. Jesus is giving this discourse to speak of the coming kingdom for which He was to die. It is only natural that He would include a statement in this model prayer that requests that God’s kingdom come. Time and again we see examples in our Bible of prayers noting that God’s will is to be accomplished. Jesus teaches the request here, He prays it Himself in the garden in Matthew 26, and John instructs that prayer **MUST** be according to His will. (1 John 5:14) Our prayer should always be that the One in control get His way, for that is best for Him and me!

Do you think we can pray for the kingdom to come today? Why or why not?



Teach Us To Pray

Give us this day our daily bread.

We see here that the Lord allows for physical requests to be part of our prayers. However, it is important to note that in this prayer, this is the only thing that is truly physical. This is not to say that this is the only physical thing for which we can ask, but it should certainly help us see that our prayers should be mostly about the spiritual!

What did Jesus promise about daily bread at Matthew 6:25 - 30?

Based upon your previous answer, why then does Jesus instruct us to pray for this?

Forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors.

What a wonderful blessing to be able to go to the Father and request forgiveness. Men of faith have always seen the importance and the blessing of this. Daniel 9 records Daniel's prayer asking for forgiveness for any of his trespasses and the nation's! In imitation of the Savior, Stephen's last request was for the Father to forgive those who killed him! However, the Lord's forgiveness of us is conditional!

Compare this statement with Mt 6:14-15. What must we first do before we are forgiven?

Does the clarification at 6:14-15 show us that He is speaking of spiritual "debt", a.k.a. sin?

And do not lead us into temptation, but deliver us from evil.

After reading James 1:13-15, what do you think this part of the prayer means?

For Yours is the kingdom and the power and the glory forever. Amen

This bracketed phrase is disputed as being in the original. It is reminiscent of 1 Chr 29:11. If translations dating back to the American Standard have omitted it. It is still, however, a Biblical thought, regardless!



What Is Prayer?

IN PREPARATION

READ ACTS 10 AND PHILIPPIANS 4.

QUESTIONS

HOW DO YOU DEFINE PRAYER?

AFTER READING THE ACCOUNT OF CORNELIUS' CONVERSION IN ACTS 10, WHAT DO YOU THINK HE WAS PRAYING FOR?

TO WHOM WAS HE PRAYING?

WHAT DOES PAUL SAY PRAYER COMBATS IN PHILIPPIANS 4:6?

AFTER READING PHILIPPIANS 4:8, 11, WHAT ARE A COUPLE WAYS THAT PRAYER WARDS OFF ANXIETY?

Communication

How often I have thought, "It sure would be nice if I had the Lord here. I have a few questions I would like to ask Him that would sure clear up a lot of problems I have." Yet, the fact that escapes our notice is that God is with us. While we do not speak with Him face to face (that is a blessing reserved for the future), we certainly have been given a form of communication. Prayer combined with God's Word.

It is imperative that we see that both of these are necessary. Many in the denominations today preach a gospel of prayer alone. All we have to do is ask God and it will be supernaturally handed to us. Our New Testament does not present communication with the Almighty in such a way. Think of Cornelius in Acts 10. This man lived a good life and spoke with the Lord. However, his prayer was insufficient. Peter had to be sent to speak words to Cornelius. He had to hear the words of the Lord in order for his prayer to be answered. Such is still the case with us. Expecting prayer apart from God's word to accomplish all in our life is not proper.

Sadly, many even among our brethren have ended up at the exact opposite end of the spectrum. That is an attempt to communicate with God by hearing His word and neglecting prayer. This is just as misdirected and ineffective! Men of faith adhered to the word of God, yet they maintained an active prayer life. We think of Daniel. Here was a man who received the word of God directly on a number of occasions, yet we find him diligently praying. Daniel 6:10 records that he spoke with the Father three times a day according to plan. This does not take into account the doubtless other times he approached the Creator in prayer. If even men who received



What Is Prayer?

the word straight from God continually prayed, certainly I can see the need as a 21st century person who relies on the written word of God alone!

Simply put, prayer is half of the picture of how we communicate with God. We speak to Him in prayer; He speaks to us through the Word. Both are necessary to effectively communicate with God and both are necessary to be righteous in His sight.

What do you think Cornelius had been praying for in Acts 10?

How did God answer Cornelius' prayer?

...With God

Prayer is not communication with a good friend. It is not communication with a close family member. Prayer is communication with God! That alone is an amazing statement that deserves some consideration.

God has given us a method of directly communicating with Him. That is not a privilege that most of us have here upon this earth with worldly leaders. Just try and call the President up when you wish and see how far you get in that endeavor! For that matter, even lower officers such as senators and the like are beyond the reach of most people. Yet, the Creator of the universe has seen to it that His creation can contact Him whenever we wish!

What did Paul tell the Thessalonians at I Thessalonians 5:17?

God expects us to speak with. He is not bothered by it, nor are all the prayers that are offered at any given time a problem for Him. He can and does hear each and every one



What Is Prayer?

and gives answer.

Let's take some time and consider some of the different titles that the scripture gives our magnificent God!

Revelation 1:8 _____

1 Timothy 6:15 _____

Hebrews 12:2 _____

James 1:17 _____

Jude 25 _____

John 8:58 _____

Psalm 3:3 _____

Are there any titles that have special meaning to you? What are they?

Obviously we could spend an entire quarter just looking up and considering the meaning of the various ways that our God is referenced in the Bible. However, these are sufficient to illustrate the fact that God is a god of splendor and His word ascribes that glory to Him in many ways.

The King James Version uses a word repeatedly in reference to God, "manifold". This word brings to mind the fact that the Lord operates for the good in many ways and areas. Nehemiah 9:19 records that His mercies are manifold. Psalm 104:24 records that His works are manifold. Ephesians 3:10 says that His wisdom is manifold. 1 Peter 4:10 says



What Is Prayer?

that His grace is manifold. When we consider how all His qualities and actions are manifold, it should be no surprise that there are so many titles of honor that the Bible places upon Him!

Clearly we can see the magnitude of the statement that we are communicating with God!

Our Requests

Paul records at Philippians 4:6 that we should not be anxious, but rather we should through prayer and supplication let our request be made known to God. Not only does our magnificent God allow us to communicate with Him, He is interested in our needs and desires!

Sometimes we feel that our thoughts and prayers are trivial. While that may very well be the case, God knows and understands us. He knows that those matters that are trivial in relation to Him are not trivial in relation to us! He cares about them for our sake. Indeed it is wonderful to have such a caring Father who allows us to cast all our cares upon Him!

Worship

Prayer is worship. Actually, prayer can be worship or more correctly, every prayer should include worship. Worship is the expression of reverence and adoration for deity. (Oxford American) Some elements of prayer are definitely considered worship. As in the Lord's prayer, when I say "Our Father in heaven, hallowed by Your name", I am offering worship to my master. When I say "for Yours is the kingdom and the power and the glory forever" I am worshipping God.

Some elements of a prayer may not be worship in and of themselves. For instance, when I make a request of God, that is not necessarily worship. However, the fact that I recognize God as my sustainer and the only one with the ability to answer my requests, that is worship! The action of going to Him in prayer along expresses reverence and adoration for Him.



Prayer Is Not...

IN PREPARATION

MALACHI 1-2

QUESTIONS

WHY DO YOU THINK THAT IT IS IMPORTANT TO NOT ONLY IDENTIFY WHAT SOMETHING IS BUT WHAT IT IS NOT?

CAN YOU THINK OF ANY EXAMPLES THAT YOU HAVE WITNESSED WHERE YOU ARE CONVINCED SOMEONE WAS MISUSING PRAYER?

DO YOU THINK THAT MISUNDERSTANDING PRAYER IS NOT ONLY A WIDESPREAD PROBLEM IN THE DENOMINATIONAL WORLD, BUT ALSO IN THE LORD'S CHURCH? IF YES, HOW SO?

Misconceptions Abound

People have many misconceptions about prayer. Some of them are held by unbelievers, some are held by denominations, and there are even some held by members of the Lord's church. Just as it is important to understand what prayer is, so we must know what it is not.

Dangers

There are several dangers that can be identified with misusing prayer. The first of which being the greatest, we may anger our Lord! We remember from our first lesson that there is a right way and a wrong way to pray. The wrong way is wrong because it displeases our Lord. Just as approaching Him disrespectfully is wrong in His sight, so is the misuse of prayer.

How can the Lord react to our words? (Malachi 2:17)

We offer to God the fruit of our lips. (Hebrews 13:15) What can happen if our offering is not proper? (Malachi 1:9)

A second danger is that He simply might not hear us. It is important to understand that it is not being said that God does not physically hear our prayers. Rather, it is possible to make a wall between ourselves and the Lord. Not that He cannot physically hear, but He will not answer the cries of those that disrespect and misuse our means of contact with Him!



Prayer Is Not...

What does Isaiah say about the Lord's hand and ears? (Isaiah 59:1)

Thirdly, He may send us a strong delusion. Paul writes at II Thessalonians 2:11 that those that do not receive a love for the truth may receive a deluding influence! This passage certainly does not teach that God will cause us to sin and believe a lie. Paul is speaking about men who have heard the truth and rejected it. These men would be allowed to follow after the false teachings that they prefer over the message of Jesus Christ. Paul presents false teachers being slain by the word of the Lord. When we reject His word, we have shown we do not love the truth. Many people, in wanting to believe that prayer is one thing, when the scripture plainly teaches it is something else have gone away into various worldly ideas wholeheartedly!

Of what was Hymenaeus and Philetus guilty? (I Timothy 1:18-20)

What had happened to them as a result of their words?

A Blank Check

The blank check mentality permeates our society. Likely it is due to the materialism that also abounds. Some men believe and many teach that all I must do to have all my wants filled is to go to God in prayer. The doctrine has even become more insidious in that people are no longer told to go to God and ASK for what they want. They are rather instructed to go to God and TELL Him to give them their wants. All we need to do is claim it. After all, God has promised it, we just need to claim it!

One question stands out in my mind. Where did He promise any such thing?

Did the apostles and first century Christians not get the memo? The godly men and



Prayer Is Not...

women that fill the pages of our New Testament suffered many things.

Name some things Paul suffered as he recounts at II Corinthians 11:23-28.

What did Paul say he was and we should be at Philippians 4:11-13 and I Timothy 6:5-8?

What has the Lord promised His followers at I Timothy 6:8 and Matthew 6:33?

Why did the people to whom James was writing not receive? (James 4:1-3)

A Fire-Extinguisher

What young person has ever taken a test for which they were not prepared and broken out the fire-extinguisher? What exactly does that child expect that God will do? Plant the knowledge in their head maybe. Or possibly break that teacher's grading hand? Even more comical are the prayers said as the teacher is passing the graded tests back out! Is God going to change that F into an A on the paper and the grade book while giving the teacher amnesia?!

This is obviously silly. Yet, we understand why a child would do this. Ignorance. However, we are not to be ignorant as baptized believers in the Lord's church. Yet, people use the Lord just as much a fire-extinguisher when adults as they may have as a child! The Lord never hears from His child until the alarm bells go off and something is needed. Then that



Prayer Is Not...

“believer” goes to God in prayer to help alleviate the situation. Sadly, most of the time when people turn to God only in a time of crisis, their “prayer life” is back where it started when the crisis is over.

Have you ever known an adult with which you were disgusted because you could spot a mile away that they were simply using their aged parents. They only came around when they wanted something. May we never be such with our Heavenly Father. Make no mistake, if a crisis exposes a faulty prayer life, that is as good a time as any to turn back to God and He will accept you back. However, we must produce fruit in keeping with repentance. True penitence will exist after the crisis is gone and peace has been restored!

Does God hear us when a crisis has caused us to turn to Him? (Luke 23:39-43)

Leverage Against God

Some have decided that prayer is a good way to impose their will upon God. The purpose of prayer is not to go to our Master and convince Him that my way is the best way. My vision and understanding, even my memory, is limited. God is entirely unlimited. He sees and knows all. He is in a position to make a proper judgment every time because of His unlimited qualities.

What does Isaiah 55:9 say about God’s position?

All prayer should be made with the thought in mind at least, preferably with it stated in the prayer, that God’s will be done, not my own. God is going to do His will and it will be the best. The statement in the prayer “Your will be done” is more for our benefit than His. It is a reminder to us that this is what we really want. Can you think of a time in your life when you prayed for something and if it had of been granted it really would have messed things up?



Prerequisites

IN PREPARATION

READ 1 JOHN 5 AND JAMES 5

QUESTIONS

CAN YOU THINK OF ANYTHING IN LIFE THAT DOES NOT REQUIRE SOME PREPARATION?

DO YOU THINK THAT MANY PEOPLE GO TO GOD IN PRAYER WITHOUT FIRST CONSIDERING WHAT HE EXPECTS FROM US?

WHY DO YOU THINK PEOPLE WOULD IGNORE THE THINGS THAT GOD SAYS MUST BE IN ORDER FOR OUR PRAYERS TO BE EFFECTIVE?

DO YOU THINK THERE ARE SOME THINGS THAT MUST BE IN ORDER AND SOME THAT WILL COME LATER?

Ducks and Horses

We use the expressions “get our ducks in row” and “getting the cart before the horse” to indicate that we need to prioritize. First things first! This is certainly true with prayer. If we are going to pray as we should, then we must have things in proper order before we start. There is a number of things that we must first do before our prayers will be effective.

We are limited.

Before we even begin, we need to think about our end goal. One thing is for sure, we will never be able to pray perfectly. Even when we have our prerequisites in order and have meditated on good things and are frequently praying, we still will not know how to pray as we should. Consider Paul’s statement at Romans 8:26:

“In the same way the Spirit also helps our weakness; for we do not know how to pray as we should, but the Spirit Himself intercedes for us with groanings too deep for words...”

This passage seems to leave more questions than it answers. What Spirit is under consideration, our spirit or the Holy Spirit? What are these groanings? How exactly does he intercede for us? While there are many questions, which, by the way, I cannot answer, there is certainly something plain and easy to see here. Paul is speaking and the “we” includes him. If a man such as Paul who had seen the things he had seen firsthand and was as dedicated to the Lord as he was still did not know how to pray as he should, there is certainly limitation to where I can get! Yet, there is help for us! Though we may not know how to say things like they need to be said, we have an intercessor that can help. However, Paul did not quit praying because of this. He recognized he was limited, yet he did the best he could with what he could discern. We must



Prerequisites

do likewise!

Believe

We must be careful with blanket statements. It has been said that God does not hear the prayer of a sinner. However, there are some problems with that blanket statement.

John 9:31 does indeed say that God does not hear sinners. However, who is speaking here? Is this person inspired?

Consider John 9:31 in conjunction with Job 2:9. The passage here clearly says to “curse God and die!” Who is speaking here? Is this person inspired?

We have read Acts 10 regarding Cornelius. Did God hear his prayer? How do you know?

Consider 1 John 1:8-9. If God does not hear sinners, why would He command that we, as Christians, go to Him to confess them?

What we learn from these passages is that God hears prayers if we believe and our prayer is according to His will. God heard Cornelius’ prayer though he was an alien sinner because that prayer was on task and according to God’s will. God wanted Cornelius to come to the truth! (II Peter 3:9) Thus, God answered his prayer which was apparently to come to the truth by sending Peter to preach to him. If Cornelius had been praying for a new Cadillac chariot, God certainly would not have heard that prayer.

We must believe in the Lord’s will for our prayers to be heard. Hebrews 11:6 says it best, we must believe that He is and that He rewards those that seek Him, regardless!



Prerequisites

Know the truth!

For our prayers to be heard we need to know the truth. I John 5:14 records that if we ask anything according to His _____, He hears us. How exactly do we know what that is?

Firstly, there are times when we are not blessed with knowing that. We may encounter difficult times in our lives, difficult decisions, and the answer is to go to the Lord. James 1 records that if we ask for wisdom, the Lord will grant it. God will give us the ability to come through difficulties in a righteous manner if we will but go to Him and ask for the help.

However, there are times when God has plainly revealed His will on a subject in His word. More often than not, this is the case. How then can we know his will? We must study His word. If we are going to pray according to His will, then we must have a knowledge of His word. Many prayers that people offer are useless because they have not first studied His word.

Even more disturbing is that sometimes people pray things that His word has clearly outlined as against His will. People pray for miracles and the like, when God's word has plainly demonstrated that those things were to confirm men as from God at a time when the word was not yet complete. People pray for wants when the Lord has declared that He provides our needs and we must be content with that! I must be a student of God's word. How can I expect Him to hear me when I have not first heard Him? We must stop talking over God!

Righteous

I must be righteous. As has already been mentioned, this can be a dangerous blanket statement. We have demonstrated that a sinner and an alien sinner can go to God for limited reasons, i.e. to ask for forgiveness if an erring Christian or to ask for assistance coming to the truth if an alien. Righteous means that we desire to live right before God and are trying to do so. The alien is trying to be righteous when they ask God to help them with what they lack. The erring Christian is trying to be righteous when they go to



Prerequisites

God and confess their sin to receive forgiveness.

The point regarding righteousness is that this must be the intent of the individual. If I think for one second that I can go to God and ask anything while ignoring sin that is in my life, I am sorely mistaken.

What does Matthew 5:23-24 say I must do before approaching God?

What does Peter record at 1 Peter 3:12 about the righteous man?

What does the same passage record about the evil man?

Believe In Prayer

Not only must I believe in the Lord's word to pray, I must also believe in the power of prayer. Many people have faith in the Lord. They believe He is the Son of God, that He came to this earth, that He died and was resurrected to take away our sin. They believe that He established His church and we must be a part of it to be saved. Yet, they do not believe that this magnificent God can answer our prayers! We must believe in the power of prayer. James tells us that we must be sincere in our prayers!

What will the prayer offered in faith do as recorded in James 5:15-16?

Who does James then give as an example of effectual prayer and what did he do? (vs 17ff)



Why Pray?

IN PREPARATION

READ JOHN 17 AND MATTHEW 26.

QUESTIONS

WHAT ARE SOME REASONS THAT YOU PRAY?

WHAT DO YOU THINK WAS JESUS' REASON FOR PRAYING IN THE GARDEN IN MATTHEW 26?

WHAT ARE SOME OTHER REASONS THAT GODLY PEOPLE IN YOUR BIBLE HAVE PRAYED?

HOW HAVE YOU SEEN PRAYER WORK IN YOUR LIFE OR THE LIVES OF OTHERS?

The Power of Prayer

Prayer is certainly a powerful thing. James 5 records Elijah praying that the rains be stopped and they were. There was no rain on the land for a period of 3.5 years! Then, upon another prayer the Lord opened up the sky! We also know of Elijah's contest on Mount Carmel with the prophets of Baal. (1 Kings 18) Here Elijah prayed to God after making preparation and the Lord answered his prayer in a magnificent way. He answered in a way that far exceeded Elijah's expectations. Not only did the Lord consume the offering, He also consumed all the water that drenched the offering and surrounded it, along with the stones and dust upon which the offering rested!

To what extent does Paul say God can answer us? (Ephesians 3:20)

Is it then possible to ask something too great for God? _____

What did the Lord ask Abraham at Genesis 18:14?

What is the answer to that question? _____

Recognizing the unfathomable power of prayer alone should make us look forward to our time in prayer with Him. Yet, the Lord gives us a number of other reasons for why we should go to Him in prayer. Certainly there are more reasons than the ones we will enumerate here, but these are sufficient to demonstrate that God demands prayer, and so should we!



Why Pray?

Jesus Prayed

We wear the name of Christian to indicate that we are followers of Him. He set a perfect example of godliness for us to follow. (1 Peter 2:21) One thing that Jesus did was pray. A common problem that “leaders” have today is that they are busy telling people what they should do, but do not do it themselves. This was the problem with the Pharisees. They had the truth, yet they did not practice it. Jesus repeatedly called them hypocrites. This was not the case with the Savior. He taught the disciples to pray in Matthew 6 and He also set an example of prayer for the apostles. Though He was God, He demonstrated the prayer was a priority!

What does Luke 6:12 record about the Savior?

What comprises the entirety of John 17? What are some things He said?

What does Matthew 26:36-46 record? What did He ask?

It Is Commanded

Any discussion can simply be ended with this phrase. The Bible says we must do it and that settles it! We have many examples of godly men and women praying. These examples are given to make us want to emulate them that we might have a similar relationship with the Father. Not only do we have these examples, we are plainly told that we must do this.

What does Paul say at 1 Thessalonians 5:17? _____



Why Pray?

What did Paul tell the brethren to do at I Thessalonians 5:25?

What does James command at 5:16? _____

To Have Peace

Peace is a wonderful thing. Who does not desire it? Proverbs 17:1 says “Better is a dry morsel and _____ with it than a house full of feasting with _____.”

We all do and should desire peace!

One of the greatest tools in achieving peace that has been given us is that of prayer. There are a number of ways that this is achieved. Just the act of prayer alone takes us away from the problem and gives us some time to mediate on solutions. That is before we even consider the fact that a powerful God is going to give answer!

How does Paul say prayer can lead to a quiet life in I Timothy 2:1-2?

How can prayer help anxiety? (Matthew 6:25-34; Philippians 4:4-14)

We Need Help!

Mankind is limited as has already been mentioned. We are limited by power, by sight, by wisdom, and by time. From the moment we are born we begin a race against the clock. Our first 20 years is spent mostly in learning how to function on this earth, the basics. When we get a solid foundation, then we can begin to really increase in wisdom. However, there is only so much wisdom that can be gained in a short 50 - 60 year period!



Why Pray?

To take care of where we are lacking, we need the help of our God. We encounter difficult times that cause us to feel as though we are buried under trouble and there is no way of escape. How terrible if we looked up from under the pile of trouble to see an empty sky?! Yet, heaven is not empty! Our Creator is there looking down upon us and willing to aid us.

Hebrews 4:16 records two things the Lord will give. What are they?

James discusses bearing up under persecution in chapter one. What does he say the Lord will give to those that ask? How will this be helpful in times of trial?

Satan

How terrible it is that people have come to the conclusion that Satan is merely a myth. People see him as the cartoonish, bumbling character dressed in red with a pointy tail and pitchfork. This could not be further from the truth. Satan is a real being who is actively working against us. Although we know that he will be destroyed by God in the end (Revelation 20), we also know that he is actively working to take as many with him as he can get to go! He is not a bumbling fool, but rather a cold, calculating individual. He has schemes. They are effective schemes that lead many to destruction along with him daily! We need to go to God to ask for assistance in spotting his schemes and avoiding them!

Read Ephesians 6:12-18. What is your impression of Satan from this passage? Does he have weapons? Is he organized? Does he have a plan?

How can we counter him?



Hindrances

IN PREPARATION

READ PHILIPPIANS 2
AND MALACHI 2.

QUESTIONS

WHAT DO YOU HAVE
TO DO TO PREVENT
DIFFERENT THINGS
YOU WANT TO DO
FROM BEING
HINDERED?

WHAT ARE SOME
THINGS THAT SATAN
DOES TO CAUSE US
HARM?

WHAT ARE SOME
INSTANCES YOU
RECALL IN YOUR BIBLE
WHEN SATAN WAS
DEFEATED PRIMARILY
THROUGH PRAYER?

CAN YOU THINK OF
INSTANCES IN YOUR
PERSONAL LIFE THAT
YOU HAVE WITNESSED
WHERE SATAN HAS
BEEN DEFEATED
THROUGH PRAYER?

In the way

We are all quite familiar with things that get in our way. We all have them. Candy bars can get in the way of weight loss. An unorganized approach to working out can get in the way of getting in shape. Distractions tend to get in the way of work. Can anyone say Facebook? The truth is that there are hindrances to anything that is good to do. Things we should not do seem to happen rather effortlessly, but anything worth doing requires overcoming obstacles.

Prayer is no different. It is something good to do as God has commanded it. It is also so something that must be worked at. Thus, there are a number of things that can hinder prayer. There are things that can hinder us from offering prayer and there are things that can hinder the effectiveness of my prayer. There are even things that can hinder my prayer being heard at all! We all will do well to identify these hindrances and set a plan for overcoming them or avoiding them altogether.

Satan

As we begin to consider hindrances, we need to consider the greatest source of hindrances, Satan. Dr. Albert G. Lemmons wrote the following in his book, "Teach Us To Pray" that I thought summed up Satan's role quite nicely.

"With the greatest power source of eternity, and of the universe, involved with man in the role of prayer, one might wonder why anybody would allow anything to hinder this sort of ability. Well, of course the devil is more frightened by a Christian on his knees than any other thing. He will grant any truth in the Bible if he can keep you off your knees. I'm convinced of that. The devil will concede the establishment of the kingdom on the day of Pentecost, God's law of pardon, leadership in the church,



Hindrances

the work and worship of the church if he can keep Christians from becoming involved with fervent prayer.”

Satan well knows that power that prayer has. He has seen godly men defeat him time and again throughout history. Imagine the surprise when Elijah defeated over 450 of Satan’s servants on Mount Carmel through prayer! Satan does not want us talking to God. When we allow his hindrances or some of our own to keep us off our knees, we give Satan the victory.

Sin

One of the great hindrances of prayer is sin. Sin can affect our prayer life in a number of ways. Sometimes when people sin, pride prevents them from going to God for forgiveness. How terrible to be lost on the last day simply because we were too proud to take advantage of the marvelous blessings the Jesus made available.

What did Jesus do according to Philippians 2:3-8?

In light of Jesus doing this, how difficult should it be to swallow our pride? Certainly it can not be as degrading as what the Savior left and came to!

Sometimes sin prevents people from praying because they have decided that there is no way that the Lord can forgive what they have done. However, this thought is tantamount to blasphemy! Not only do we have examples of men such as Paul being forgiven horrendous things, his list included murdering Christians (Acts 26:10), but the idea basically says that the sacrifice of Jesus was not enough! There is no sin that cannot be removed by the blood of Jesus Christ except the one that I will not admit and ask to be forgiven!

What does Hebrews 9:12 tell us about the power of Jesus’ sacrifice?



Hindrances

Not only can sin hinder me from praying to have it removed, it can also hinder my prayers until I have it removed. How can I expect God to listen to anything I have to say when I am ignoring something that He has told me to do? When I have sin in my life that I will do nothing about, God will not hear my prayers!

What does I John 3:21-22 say we must do to receive what we ask?

What does Proverbs 28:9 say we must do in order for the Lord to hear our prayers?

Lust

James wrote his letter primarily to Jewish Christians. There was a number of problems that his audience was having that he addresses in the brief letter. One was the problem of lust.

Of what is lust the root cause? (James 4:1)

What is the second thing that lust causes? (James 4:2) How could this happen?

Why were they not receiving that for which they asked according to James 4:3?

They loved the present world. Praying for things to spend on our own lust will not be answered by God. Prayer is not to serve physical desires! These brethren were guilty of



Hindrances

the same problem that landed the Israelites into captivity, spiritual adultery! They were trying to serve God and idols. James writes to Christians who were still trying to do the same thing. They wanted to meld the spiritual and prayer with their physical lusts. God would not permit nor grant it!

This is all to say that our spirit must be right. We cannot have a spirit that longs for the things of this world. This desire will of necessity pour over into the spiritual. If our hope is here, then our worship will be with this in mind and our prayer will be with this in mind! We must say goodbye to this world and focus on the spiritual!

Literal Adultery

Following with the theme of sin as hindrance we come to literal adultery. Lust as James discusses amounts to, as he puts it, adultery. Yet, there is also the actual sin of adultery. The scripture makes clear that adultery hinders, actually stops, our prayers from having any effect whatsoever!

What does Peter say will hinder our prayers at 1 Peter 3:7?

Peter makes clear here that dysfunction in the marriage relationship will hinder prayers. What about dysfunction to the point of adultery? Consider Malachi 2.

What does Malachi 2:14 say had caused a separation between them and God?

How is this sin plainly stated at Malachi 2:16? _____

What had this sin done to their offering according to Malachi 2:13?



Hindrances (pt 2)

IN PREPARATION

READ MATTHEW 6

QUESTIONS

WHAT ARE THE VARIOUS PRAYER PROBLEMS THAT THE SAVIOR IDENTIFIES IN MATTHEW 6?

WHAT DO WE COMMONLY CALL THE SECTION OF SCRIPTURE, MATTHEW 5-7?

DO YOU THINK THE DISCIPLES HAD BEEN WITNESSING A GOOD OR BAD EXAMPLE OF PRAYER FROM THEIR LEADERS?

WHAT DOES THIS INFORMATION TELL YOU ABOUT THEIR DESIRE TO BE TAUGHT TO PRAY?

Two Lessons

How nice it would be if we could cover the hindrances to prayer in a single lesson. It would be nice to know that there are but a few things that can keep our Master from answering the prayers that we offer. However, this is not the case. We will spend two lessons looking over various things that can hinder our prayers and will likely have barely scratched the surface!

We need to constantly be on the lookout for things that harm our prayer life. Some come from without and some from within, but all wreak the same devastation upon our relationship with the Lord. Let's consider a few more that are clearly spelled out for us in God's word.

Unwilling to Forgive

It is amazing the things that our Father in Heaven has promised us and continually does for us. It is equally amazing the expectation we have of Him and our neighbor, but that often does not carry over to ourselves! While easy to spot every little flaw with our neighbor, we tend to gloss over instances where we act and react the exact same way. Our Father makes clear to us that if we expect to receive from Him, we must be willing to give Him what He has requested. What does God want from us? Our heart!

The greatest blessing that God has made available to us is the forgiveness of sin. If He did not meet our daily needs and we perished but had forgiveness of sin, we would be fine! If He did not give us beauty to behold upon the earth and help-meets, yet we had forgiveness of sin, we would be fine! The fact is that the forgiveness of sin is what it all hinges on. No



Hindrances (pt 2)

amount of suffering on this earth can in any way diminish the glory of the life to come if we have forgiveness of sin and are able to go to Heaven.

Jesus has made forgiveness available, but it is conditional. We all know and preach that it is conditional on obedience. This is absolutely correct. We do not have forgiveness if we have not heard the word (Romans 10:17), believed it (John 3:16), turned from our sin (Acts 2:38), confessed His name (Romans 10:10) and been baptized for the forgiveness of sins (Acts 2:38). However, this is not the whole duty we have. We must also be faithful until death. (Revelation 2:10) We must also go to Him in prayer to ask for forgiveness of sins.

You may be finding this redundant or unnecessary. However, it is to show a point. We can all quote the aforementioned passages no doubt. We hear them over and over. However, there is another condition that is placed on our forgiveness of equal importance. We must forgive others! So often we have seen brethren who have done all of the above, yet are unwilling to forgive their brethren. Major trespasses for sure, but even minor ones also. Some look to find fault with others! We cannot be this way and reach Heaven!

What does Jesus tell us to do at Mark 11:25?

What will happen if we do not according to Mark 11:26?

Is there ever a point that we are allowed to hold a grudge against someone? (Luke 17:3ff)

Doubt

Another terrible hindrance to our prayers being heard is doubt. There are indeed many



Hindrances (pt 2)

false teachers in the world today. Some tell us that we came from monkeys. Some tell us that the things in our Bible are myth. The book is a good code for morals, but the supernatural “stuff” is just an ancient person’s imagination. Still there are others who believe in God, yet do not believe that He works for us today.

Our Bible makes it clear that God hears and God answers! There should be no doubt in our minds that this is the case. When we doubt God’s answer, it speaks to our belief that He cannot answer, and He will not hear us!

What examples of God hearing prayer do the following passages give?

1 Samuel 1:10-28 _____

1 Kings 3:6-14 _____

1 Kings 17 and 18:15-31 _____

John 12:27-28 _____

What will happen if we doubt the Lord’s ability to answer? (James 1:5-8)

What does James say the doubter is like? Explain that word picture.

To Be Seen

We are not to do anything spiritual to be seen of men. If we are living godly lives as we should, men will take notice and good will be done. However, if our purpose is so people will see and reward our holiness, then we have missed the point and already have our reward, the praise of men.



Hindrances (pt 2)

Jesus wrote at a time when doing the spiritual to be seen by men was rampant. This was the Jewish way of operating. Thus we have strong warnings against such.

However, this has produced a problem in some brethren. It is a problem of misunderstanding and over-reaction. Some have decided that this means we should not offer a prayer from the front of the building. While it is noble to not want to be seen of men, this is not the Lord's point. The problem was not that men saw, the problem was that their actions were solely for the purpose of men seeing!

How does Jesus word the problem at Matthew 6:1?

What does Matthew 6:2-6 say the hypocrites were doing? How do we avoid it?

Vain Repetitions

Another hindrance that is closely related to a desire to be seen by men is vain repetitions. Vain is when we do or say something that is of no purpose or value. This was a major problem during the day of Jesus, and is something we still witness today. People have even taking the model prayer that the Lord gave to combat vain repetitions and turned it into a vain repetition! Some prayers, especially in a public setting, are elongated to fill a time slot. This should not be. If I have 5 minutes of things to talk to the Lord about, then so be it. If I only have 30 seconds have things to discuss, then that is fine also! The Lord does not desire filling air; He desires our heart! Quality over quantity!

What were the Gentiles doing according to Matthew 6:7? Why?

Compare Matthew 6:7 with the contest on Mount Carmel. (1 Kings 18) Similarities?



Elements of Prayer

IN PREPARATION

READ 1 CHRONICLES
29 AND HEBREWS 7

QUESTIONS

WHICH OF THE THREE
MAIN CATEGORIES OF
PRAYER WOULD YOU
SAY YOU USE MOST
OFTEN?

HAVE YOU EVER TRIED
TO OFFER A PRAYER
THAT WAS SOLELY
FOCUSED ON ONE
CATEGORY OR THE
OTHER?

WHAT DO YOU THINK
IS MEANT WHEN WE
SAY "IN JESUS NAME"
AT THE END OF OUR
PRAYERS?

Nuts and Bolts

At this point we have examined many things about prayer. What it is and what it is not along with things to get in order and things to get out of the way. Effective prayer is essential. Here we will examine some of the nuts and bolts of prayer.

There are various pieces that make up a prayer. Most prayers are actually a combination of these elements, but there are times when a prayer is solely or primarily one or the other. For instance, most prayers have an introduction and closing that give praise to God, they include some thanksgiving for a few of the many things that He does for us, and the prayer will usually include some requests that we may have. Often the prayer will then end with another statement of adoration.

To God

Prayers in our Bible are mostly directed to God the Father. There are certainly some prayers that are directed to Jesus, such as Revelation 22:20 when John prays, "Amen. Come, Lord Jesus." However, it is evident that the vast majority of prayer is directed to the Father and so should our prayers be.

Jesus gave us a model for prayer in Matthew 6:9 as we have already examined. You will recall that the prayer began in this way:

"Our _____ who is in heaven, _____ be your name."

We begin our letters with a greeting. The Biblical pattern of prayer is almost exclusively the same. Each prayer is addressed to God. Just as we begin a letter with Dear, prayers essentially begin the same way. Directed to God with a term of endearment or adoration attached.



Elements of Prayer

Notice David's prayer in I Chronicles 29:10-13. The prayer begins:

"Blessed are You, O Lord _____ our father, forever and ever."

In Jesus' Name

Prayer is to be offered in the name of Jesus. Jesus has been given all authority in Heaven and on Earth. (Matthew 28:18-20)

What does John 14:15 say we will do if we love Jesus?

We can see that Jesus has given us commands to follow. We have already examined many of those commands with regard to prayer. Many are found in Matthew 6 while others come to us through the apostles. When we pray as He has told us for the things that He has told us according to His will as revealed to us, we pray in His name, or by His authority. Sadly, many people attach the words "in Jesus name" to the end of their prayer thinking that it is like a stamp. If I don't put it on there, it won't get to where it is going! This is not the meaning of that statement. Praying in the name of Jesus simply means that we are submitting this prayer by the authority that Jesus has given us to do so! Jews did not pray through the high priest. They prayed to God. The high priest did intercessory sacrifices to remedy sin. The same is true today. Jesus is not the stamp that gets our prayer to God. Jesus died as our high priest to intercede for us. By His work on this earth we have the right and authority to approach the Father and call on that sacrifice. Jesus and the Spirit both intercede for us when we pray. (Romans 8:26, 34; Hebrews 7:25)

What does Colossians 3:17 tell us about our word and deed?

How does letting the word of Christ dwell in me richly (3:16) enable me to do all in the name of the Lord Jesus?



Elements of Prayer

Types of Prayer

There are basically three types of prayer. There are prayers of adoration or praise, prayers of thanksgiving, and prayers of supplication or petition. The last category, petition, has a few subcategories that we will likewise consider. As aforementioned, there are few prayers that are exclusively one or the other. Most are and should be a combination of all types.

Praise

A prayer of praise or adoration is certainly a beautiful thing. There are many phrases that the psalmist uses in praise to the almighty that convey the majesty of our God wonderfully. Men with such wonderful talent as David had are amazing. I am certainly not gifted with the ability to express myself in such exquisite ways. Thankfully we have many examples and a psaltery filled with the inspired praise of David and other psalmists. Let's revisit David's prayer at 1 Chronicles 29:10-13. This is one of the closest psalms we have to being purely adoration, though there is some thanksgiving sprinkled within.

How long did David wish the Lord to be blessed in verse 10? What quality of God does this indicate?

What does David say belongs to God in verse 11? How does this statement compare with James 1:17?

What does David acknowledge in verse 12?

Would this be a fitting prayer to use verbatim today? Why or why not? _____



Elements of Prayer

Thanksgiving

We have already considered some of the wondrous things that God has done for us. Mainly, John 3:16 says that the Father sent us the Son and Philipians 2 records that Jesus was willing to come to earth for us. If we decided to do nothing but thank God for this astounding gift, that alone would fill our thanksgiving time for the rest of our time upon this earth. David ended his prayer of praise in I Chronicles 29:10 by simply thanking God for being all the things for which he had just praised Him.

List some things that the Father does for us on a regular basis for which we can and should give thanks. List scripture when one applies.

_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____

Petition

The other category of prayer is one of petition or supplication. In plain speech, it is when we ask God for something. As we have already noted, David prayed whole prayers simply praising God for who He is and thanking Him for the same. How often have we prayed a prayer that did not make a request? Probably not very often. Try it sometime.

However, asking God for things is also an important part of what we do in prayer. It is important to note that the vast majority of petitions made in God's word are for spiritual things. We must be careful not to slip into misusing prayer as a blank check. God is much less concerned about this physical world than we tend to be. He is greatly concerned with us getting to Heaven. Remember, He is not willing that any perish, but that all come to repentance. (II Peter 3:9) Within the category of petition, there are some sub-categories. We ask for forgiveness, we ask for other things such as daily bread and help bearing loads, and we also can intercede for others. What did Paul ask at II Thessalonians 3:1? _____ Would you classify this as spiritual or physical? _____



Improving Our Prayer

IN PREPARATION

READ DANIEL 6

QUESTIONS

HOW WOULD YOU RATE YOUR PRAYER LIFE?

DO YOU SEE A NEED TO IMPROVE IT OR DO YOU FEEL THAT IT IS WHERE IT NEEDS TO BE?

IF YOU HAVE WORKED AT IMPROVING IT IN THE PAST, WHAT METHODS DID YOU USE?

CAN YOU THINK OF ANYTHING THAT OTHERS HAVE DONE THAT THEY SAY HAS GREATLY HELPED THEIR PRAYER LIFE?

We've already begun!

There is some good news. We have already spent eight weeks working on this very topic. That is, trying to improve our prayer lives! At this point we should have a deeper understanding of what prayer is and what it is not. Improving our prayer takes study. As I think back over the years that I have been a Christian, I cannot remember a single time when we spent any length of time more than one or two sermons on the topic of prayer. Improving our prayer takes study. We need to have a deep understanding of who we are communicating with and what we are trying to communicate. Just spending time focused on learning more about prayer will improve our prayer life, as I am sure you have discovered, as have I!

Dedication

Another key element to improving my prayer life is also a key element to many other things. If I want to lose weight, it takes dedication. If I want to get in shape, it takes dedication. If I want to learn a new trade, it takes dedication. I will not likely lose a single pound if I try one day and forget about it for the next five. It take daily effort. I will never get my body into shape if I lift a pound or two or do a couple sit-ups on occasion. Though it may sooth my conscience, it does little to tone my muscles. Sadly, many times we find that we care just enough about prayer to soothe our conscience, but not enough to truly tone our "prayer muscles"! We must decide that I am going to do better in prayer regardless of what it costs me!

What does Daniel 6:10 show us about Daniel's dedication?



Improving Our Prayer

Have A Plan

To continue our weight loss and muscle tone metaphors, if we are to succeed at those endeavors we must have a plan. Have you ever known someone that really wants to lose weight with all their heart, but just does not go about it in a logical way? How successful were they at it? Certainly in different areas we have all done that. Some with regard to care for their bodies, some with regard to finances, and others with regard to household chores. This is the reason most New Year's Resolutions fail within a week. Though there are good intentions there, there was never a solid plan to see it through and make it happen.

If we are going to improve our prayer life, we need to have a plan. Daniel had a plan!

What was Daniel's plan? (Daniel 6:10) _____

Daniel was not going to let anything, even the threat of death, get in his way of that plan! Though we often look in disdain at the idea of scheduled prayers as something that is antiquated or Old Testament, it should not escape our notice that these were men of faith! While they existed under different rules than we, we would do well to adopt some of their practices. Maybe part of my plan should be that at certain times of the day I will stop what I am doing and go to God in prayer regardless. Maybe I can set an alarm on my phone to remind me. This is something I would do as a person who appreciates regimen!

However, this is not for everyone. Maybe you are better with a looser plan such as, "I prayed one time yesterday. That was unacceptable! Today I will pray twice. My goal for next week is to pray three times daily." Whatever the plan, sit down and decide upon it. Even better than that, write your goals down. It is well known that the majority of people who say they have accomplished their goals wrote them down. An old adage says that "Goals that are not written down are only dreams". Though it may seem weird or unnecessary, write down your prayer goals. You will be more likely to achieve them!

So, whatever method you take, sit down and come up with a plan to improve your prayer. You will be glad that you did!



Improving Our Prayer

Ask for Help

Another cliché that we often hear is that there are no guarantees in life. This is basically true. However, with regard to spiritual things, we do have some guarantees. Consider a couple guarantees that the Lord has made to us.

What is guaranteed at 1 Corinthians 10:13?

What is guaranteed at James 1:5?

What is guaranteed at 1 John 5:14?

All these guarantees relate to things for which we can ask of God. We know for a fact that prayer is good and that our ability, desire, and effort in prayer is according to God's will. Therefore, we can confidently go to the Lord asking for help in prayer. We can not go to Him and ask to teach us to pray, for that question was long ago asked and answered. The answer has not changed. However, we can go to our Father and ask for the wisdom to pray as we should. We can go to Him and ask for the strength to improve in prayer. We can certainly ask for wisdom in studying His word that we might properly discern His will as I approach in prayer.

Not only can we ask God for help, we can also ask our older wiser brethren. Many lessons in prayer and how it works come from hard knocks. It is wise to go to older brethren who have already experienced these and learn what they have. How did they come to have a good prayer life? Did they make a concerted effort to improve? What have they studied to improve? Are there any favorite passages that have helped in that journey? There is much we can learn if we are willing to ask the questions!



Improving Our Prayer

Increase Frequency

We all know the phrase “practice makes perfect”. This is true in most things that we do. While there are some things that are mostly reliant upon talent, prayer is not one of them. The disciples asked to be taught how to pray and Jesus responded by teaching them. This demonstrates to us that prayer is a learned behavior.

Since prayer is a learned behavior, the more I do it, the better I will become at it. If my anemic prayer life consists of praying before dinner and that is the extent of it, I will never become proficient at it. I will always feel guilty for not doing more. I will always struggle for the words. I will always feel awkward about approaching the Father. Friends, that is no way to live! Prayer is an amazing blessing that the Lord has given to His people. How sad for me to miss out on that blessing simply because I do not practice it often enough.

What did Paul tell the Thessalonians at 1 Thessalonians 5:17?

If I pray in that manner, is it conceivable that after 1 time I still am where I started? Of course not! There is but one instance that I can contemplate where a person might do such and that is to practice often doing it wrong. There are certainly people who do this. I know of many, especially in the denominational world, that pray constantly. However, their prayer is a misuse of prayer. They are constantly praying for health and wealth or they are praying as the Mormons do for God to reveal a lie as truth. No amount of practicing the wrong thing is ever going to make it right. I need to study enough about prayer to know what it is and what I should be requesting so that I will be practicing the proper things!

Once I know the basics of prayer, mainly that it is primarily for the spiritual, I am set to practice often. Go to God when you wake up, as you drive down the road, before you eat, and before bed. Whenever you have opportunity, take it!



Improving Our Prayer (pt 2)

IN PREPARATION

READ PSALM 51.

QUESTIONS

SINCE THE WRITINGS IN OUR BIBLE ARE INSPIRED, DO YOU THINK IT STANDS TO REASON THAT SOME OF THE PRAYERS HAVE BEEN SAID IN THE BEST WAY POSSIBLE?

IF THAT IS THE CASE, HOW CAN THEY BE USED TO MY BENEFIT?

SINCE LAST WEEK, HAVE YOU THOUGHT OF ANY OTHER WAYS THAT WE MAY IMPROVE OUR PRAYER LIVES THAT IS NOT COVERED IN THESE TWO LESSONS?

Always More Can Be Done

Have you ever known someone that has retired from Christianity? I certainly do. People who get to a certain point in their life where they think that it is okay to glide by on the work of other men. They know all they need to know about being a Christian and are set to coast through the gates.

The truth is that we never get to a point where there is no longer any work to be done, no longer anything to be learned, and no longer any improvement to be made. I know an older gentleman who had studied his Bible diligently for decades. The truth is, he probably knew very well all he needed to know to get to Heaven. However, that thirst for the word had never abated. He told me that he enjoyed listening to sermons. 99% of the time it was something that he had always known or heard. Yet, every now and then a piece that fell into the 1% category would be spoken. He lived for that 1%. Always wanting to learn a little more than he knew before. Sometimes upon closer examination that 1% was not really God's word, but sometimes it was. You could rest assured that he would closely examine it! May we all have that same attitude!

This is certainly true of prayer. There is always more that can be done and improvement in what we are doing. The only question that really remains is, "Are we willing to invest the effort in improvement?" Let's continue our examination of methods for improving our prayer.

Study the Bible

We have alluded to this a number of times, yet now we will examine it. We must study our Bible to improve our prayers.



Improving Our Prayer (pt 2)

God's word is full of examples of godly men and women offering acceptable prayers to our Master. God's word is full of tidbits of advice about praying as we should. God's word is full of commands that help us see the purpose and importance of prayer. How will we ever know these things if we do not invest time and effort in studying God's word. Many times when we someone despairs over an anemic prayer life, it goes hand in hand with an anemic study life!

What did Paul tell Timothy at II Timothy 2:15?

Don't we want our prayers to be approved and acceptable before God? Sure we do! Paul's words inform us that we must study to be approved by God. Newer translations say instead of "Study" to "Be diligent". It is my understanding from various helps that the word can be translated either way. However, they are both useful. Diligent supplies the manner in which study must happen. We must be diligent at it. It is not something to approach haphazardly. I will read some today and then not go to it again for a month. How can I expect to be approved by God if I approach study in this manner? I cannot! If we diligently study God's word, one of the areas that will be approved is our prayers.

An excellent place to study to improve my prayers is the psalms. There we find prayers that thank God, praise Him and make petitions known. They are poetic and beautiful. Just spending time daily considering the different ways that these men addressed God can do nothing but help me in my endeavor to pray as I should.

For example, have you ever felt inadequate in addressing your sin before God. Why not take some time to read Psalm 51? David well understood the position that sin had placed him in before God. After reading this psalm, do you think you could explain your feeling and confess your sin before God any better way? I certainly don't think I could! This psalm is beautiful. It helps me understand why my sin puts me in such a precarious place and it helps me understand how a godly person reacts to it. There is no better way to pray than to study and make these godly men's words your words!



Improving Our Prayer (pt 2)

Study the song book

My ability to express sentiments in a beautiful way is very limited. I am not a sentimental kind of person and I would venture a guess that many of us here today are like me! Thankfully there are people in this world that are. We have many extremely talented people who have written some of the songs that are found in our hymnal. Some of these men and women are still with us today and some have passed from this life. Yet their words are here with us in our laps every time we gather! Why not study a song that expresses a sentiment you appreciate. Verify its accuracy with God's word and if it is so, pray it. Make their words your words. There is no shame in this, just a touch of awkwardness at first. That feeling will subside with practice.

One song that we are all familiar with is song 2 in Hymns For Worship, "Hallelujah! Praise Jehovah!" This song is an example of a psalm that has been poetically reworded to fit our English way of speech and rhyme. The song is taken from Psalm 148.

Hallelujah, praise Jehovah! From the heavens praise His name; Praise Jehovah in the highest; All His angels praise proclaim. All His hosts together praise Him, Sun and moon and stars on high; Praise Him, O ye heav'n of heavens, And ye floods above the sky. Let them praises give Jehovah, For His name along is high, And His glory is exalted Far above the earth and sky.

This song is beautiful. It speaks of the praise that our Creator deserves. Everything from the Heavenly host to the things that creep upon the earth praise Jehovah for only His name is above all!

While it is not hard for us to think of things to request of God, it may be a little more difficult to think of ways to praise Him. Our song book can alleviate that problem rather quickly! It will not take long paging through to find a song that says just what you were thinking. You can even use the topical index in the back to find songs that are in the category of what you would like to say to the Master to hurry things along. After all, we are excited to pray to God and want to get to it as quickly as possible!

What did David request of God in Psalm 51:15?



Improving Our Prayer (pt 2)

Read Books

Thankfully we have a number of brethren who have seen a need to help us through our prayer difficulties. There are number of good books written on the subject. Brother Hailey has a good book on the topic as does brother Edwin Crozier. Look for men of the faith whom you trust and get their book. We must always understand that these books were written by men, but it is tantamount to asking for help. Sometimes other brethren have thought of things that you have not and have experienced things that you have not. The beauty of the book is that they have thought through the things well as indicated by writing a book and you can take it home and learn from it at your leisure.

Any time spent on trying to improve your prayer life will be well spent. Considering other's struggles and victories in the area will more than likely prove profitable. We must just be careful to not take the "struggles" and "victories" of even our brethren and equate them with or use them above God's word! Yet, brotherhood books are useful.

Pray With Your Family

Praying with your family does a few things. For one, it forces us to try harder at praying because there will be others listening. We may be afraid of saying something wrong or just plain sounding ill-prepared or dumb! When we take time to speak to God with our family, that practice before others can be a great thing! It will often force us to work on doing better for the sake of ourselves and our loved ones. That can be a strong motivator.

Not only does it help me due to self-awareness, it also helps place future generations further down the road of prayer ability than I began. If I am modeling good and proper prayer for my children, that is what they will learn. When they begin to pray on their own and one day have families and responsibilities of their own, they will better know how to pray than I did at their age. Taking time to pray with the family helps all involved improve their prayer.

Where all did God command household leaders to teach their families? (Deut 6:7)



Fasting & Meditation

IN PREPARATION

READ MATTHEW 6.

QUESTIONS

HAVE YOU EVER FASTED?

IF SO, WHY?

WHAT SPIRITUAL PURPOSES DO YOU THINK FASTING WOULD SERVE?

DO YOU MEDITATE?

IF SO, HOW AND WHY?

WHAT ARE SOME THINGS THAT YOU MEDITATE UPON?

A Bad Reputation

Fasting and meditation are two words that have somewhat of a bad reputation amongst the Lord's churches. There are several reasons why that may be the case. One of which is that fasting at least has been at the center of some controversy throughout the years. However, there is no reason that that be the case. Our information in God's word on fasting is fairly limited, but we do see that godly people did it.

A second reason why fasting and meditation have been looked upon as suspect is due to the influence of the world. These practices that were once well-known and common to God's people have been harmed by false religions. Islam imposes a fast on people during Ramadan. This fast is from sun-up to sun-down. When done correctly the observer is not to even swallow their spit! Meditation is seen as something that Hindus and monks do in an effort to transcend this life and reach another state of consciousness. Due to these false ways, the practices have been largely abandoned amongst those of the Lord's church.

I am convinced that these two things serve important purposes in our lives as Christians. It is important that we see how they are used and possibly how we could incorporate them into our Christian lives.

Jesus Approved Fasting

One thing is certain, there is no place in our New Testament where the practice of fasting is condemned or looked down upon. Actually, in the section of scripture that we have considered where Jesus gave the model prayer, we find Jesus'



Fasting & Meditation

instructions regarding fasting.

Do you think that Matthew 6:16 presupposes that Christians would fast? If yes, what part of that verse makes you think that?

What two commands does the Lord give the person fasting in Matthew 6:17-18?

Would this indicate that it is to be a private thing to you? _____

This passage makes it clear that Jesus had no problem with fasting. Not only this, He gave commands to Christians about how to do it when they did it.

Why Fast?

To begin to answer this question, we must look in God's word for why followers of God fasted. Consider the following instances.

Why did Jesus say His disciples did not fast in Luke 5:33-34?

Who fasted and for what purpose in Acts 13:1-3?

Who fasted and for what purpose in Acts 14:23?



Fasting = Meditation

From looking at these occasions we learn a few things about fasting. Fasting was often a natural response of a difficult situation. As indicated by Jesus' disciples, fasting happened at the loss of a loved one. The passages in Acts show us that the men who were appointing others to various works also fasted. These stressful situations brought about fasting. Many times our natural response to stress is loss of appetite. While these situations would include this motivation, that was not all there was to it. The word indicated in the Acts passages that these fasts were done to demonstrate humility before the Lord.

When we examine Old Testament passages in conjunction with the New, the picture becomes clearer still. Fasting occurred during stressful situation. I Samuel 7:6 records men fasting before the Lord due to sin. I Samuel 12:6 records David fasting to show remorse for his sin and piety before God in hopes to intercede for the child born to him by Bathsheba. II Samuel 1:12 records a fast that took place to mourn the loss of Saul and Jonathan. The common thread that ties all the passages together is distress. When godly men encountered times of trial, they laid aside the physical (food) and focused wholly on the spiritual.

It is obvious that this was not a requirement. There were fasts that the Jews had put into effect and even times when leaders, such as the ruler of Ninevah in the book of Jonah commanded fasts. However, a fast was something that men decided themselves to do before God so they could focus on the spiritual. Within that context, fasting is something good and proper to do. We are given light instruction on the matter by Jesus, but are nowhere commanded to do it, nor are we specifically given a purpose for it. It is not something we must do, but obviously is something that godly men and women did when difficult times required greater focus upon the spiritual. The eating of food is something that is generally enjoyable and distracting. Therefore, at times it is out of place. Men and women in our Bible abandoned eating for a time when the situation dictated it.

Meditation

How sad that something so important has been corrupted in the eyes of men. Meditation is an important part of serving the Lord. There are several things that the scripture tells us we should meditate upon.



Fasting & Meditation

Meditation goes way back in our Bible. Genesis 24:63 records that “Issac went out to meditate in the field toward evening”. Men in our Bible took time to think. However, what were they thinking about?

They were certainly not thinking about leaving their body and becoming one with the universe. They were certainly not trying to achieve a state of nirvana. No, these men were thinking about other things indeed!

What does Joshua say that the children of Israel should meditate upon? (Joshua 1:8)

Where does Psalm 4:4 say we should meditate?

What does the Psalmist say we should meditate upon at 77:12 and then at 119:15?

What did Paul tell the Philippians to think upon? (Philippians 4:8-9)

The Bible paints a clear picture. We should take time out of our busy day to meditate upon God’s word, His mighty works, and good things in general. It does not require crossing my legs or sitting upon a special mat or holding a hand above my head. Meditation just requires me devoting some uninterrupted time to think upon the good things that God has done and made for His people. We all need to do ourselves a favor and find some time to just stop and think about our Maker!



Examples of Prayer

IN PREPARATION

READ LUKE 11:5-8,
DEUTERONOMY 9,
AND LUKE 1:46-55.

QUESTIONS

WHAT HAVE BIBLE
EXAMPLES OF PRAYER
TAUGHT YOU?

WHAT KIND OF
WOMAN WAS JESUS'
MOTHER? HOW
WOULD YOU
DESCRIBE HER?

WHAT INFORMATION
ABOUT MARY DO YOU
THINK THAT THEIR
PRAYER THAT IS
RECORDED OF HER IN
LUKE 1 REVEALS?

IF YOU WERE TO READ
A RECORD OF ONE
OF YOUR PRAYERS IN
YEARS TO COME,
WHAT DO YOU THINK
IT WOULD SAY ABOUT
YOU? WHAT KIND OF
EXAMPLE WOULD IT
SET?

Examples Teach Us Much!

Our Bible is filled with instances of God's people going to Him in prayer. This fact alone should indicate how important godly men and women have viewed prayer and how important our Creator views prayer!

Persistence

One thing that examples of prayer in our Bible teach us is persistence in prayer. Often we see in God's word that godly men and women persisted in their prayers. Consider Jesus.

What was the Lord's prayer in Matthew 26?

How many times did He pray? Why do you think He repeated the same prayer?

Jesus taught persistence in the sermon on the mount discourse. What did He teach the disciples about persistence in Luke 11:5-8? What does this parable teach us?

Position

There are a number of positions in which people prayed in our Bible. The tax-collector was on the ground and would not look up when he prayed. Moses entreated the Lord for the people's sin prostrate upon the ground. (Deuteronomy 9:18) Jesus lifted His eyes to Heaven when he prayed in John 17:1.



Examples of Prayer

Why do you think there are different positions taken by various people praying to God?

Do you think there is value in conforming our body language to our message when we approach the Lord?

Miracle and Providence

Another thing that Bible examples illustrate for me is the difference between miracle and providence. A miracle is when God acts outside the laws of the universe. Providence is when God acts within normal channels. We have Bible examples of both happening. A great problem occurs when people misuse the word “miracle” when in religious discussion. A baby being born is an amazing thing. It is not a miracle. Adam being created from the dust of the ground is a miracle! Surely we can see the difference. God chose to set up things my miracle and maintain them through providence.

The same is true with regard to healing. We have examples of healing taking place in our Bible. Jesus miraculously cured the lame, blind, and deaf. He miraculously cast out demons. Of course, this is not the only way God worked in our Bible. Consider Hezekiah. In II Kings 20 God told Hezekiah that he was going to die. However, after praying to God requesting an extension, God granted him 15 more years. He began to get better and regained his health. Here we have insight into providence. Though there were supernatural events surrounding the healing, the healing itself was through providence. It was so much through providence that Hezekiah asked for a sign to show that it would happen!

God works the same way with His word. He set His spiritual law up by miracle, spiritual gifts, but when the word was complete in written form, He maintained it through His providence!



Examples of Prayer

God's Answer

Examples also teach us how God answers. Many have come to think of God as reactionary. While He does react in some ways to our prayers, we also must remember that He has a plan, His will, that is set in motion and we must align ourselves with it. A great example of this is death. It is not God's will for us to live forever. We all have an appointment with death. (Hebrews 9:27) We can pray for someone to be healed, but we must also remember that God does not will for that person to live forever.

Going back to Hezekiah, God granted him more life. It fit with God's will and He allowed it. However, in II Corinthians 12:7ff Paul requested that the thorn in his side, whatever it was, be removed. God's answer was no. His grace was sufficient. It was God's will that Paul learned that lesson and he obviously did! When God's answer is no, hopefully we have learned from Paul that God still loves us as His children and is doing what is best for us and, more importantly, His purposes.

Mary's Prayer

One of my favorite examples of prayer in the Bible is Mary's prayer that is found at Luke 1:46-55. The prayer of this woman underscores the wise choice the Lord made in her. At this point she has been told that she is with child as a virgin. "How could this be?", she asked. The Spirit would overshadow her and she would be with child. After coming to the house of Elizabeth, John leapt in her womb at the sight of Mary!

Here is Mary, in a time of tribulation for her. She had a lot of explaining to do that was going to depend on the godliness and understanding of her husband to be. What would others think? A time of many questions, yet Mary's attitude was one of trust in the Lord.

What does Mary say her reaction to the news was at Luke 1:46-47?

Do you think Mary understood the promised God made to Abraham in Genesis 15 based upon her words at Luke 1:48, 54-55?



Examples of Prayer

What does Paul say about rulers and authorities in Ephesians 6:12?

What does Paul say about rulers at Romans 13:1?

Do you think based on Mary's words at Luke 1:52 that she already understood the things that Paul would teach years later?

Compare Luke 1:52 with Matthew 6:25-33. How do these two passages relate? Did Mary already understand the lesson that her Son would teach thirty years later?

What does Mary acknowledge that the Lord had done at Luke 1:54?

How long does Mary say the mercies of the Lord endure after He had promised them?

Indeed Mary was a godly woman. After all these years her name is still blessed just as she predicted. Her prayer gives us much of the information we have about the kind of woman that she was. This prayer makes it apparent that she well understood God's word and made a habit out of prayer. May we all be like her!



The Lord's Prayer

IN PREPARATION

READ JOHN 17.

QUESTIONS

WHAT IS A
BENEDICTION?

AFTER READING JOHN
17, WHO ARE THE
DIFFERENT PEOPLE
FOR WHOM HE MAKES
REQUESTS?

WHAT LESSONS DO
YOU THINK WE CAN
LEARN FROM THE
LORD'S PRAYER?

WHAT DID THE LORD
VALUE AS SHOWN BY
HIS PRAYER?

WOULD WE DO WELL
TO STRIVE AFTER AND
PRAY FOR SOME OF
THE SAME THINGS?

Redundant?

No doubt you are asking yourself, "Haven't we already studied this?" The answer to that query is no. You will recall that the first lesson was on the Lord's model prayer in Matthew 6. Though that is commonly called the Lord's Prayer, it is more correctly called the model prayer. John 17 records a prayer of Jesus that could more appropriately be called the Lord's prayer. Rest assured, this material is new!

Like Mother, Like Son

We have just examined Mary prayer in response to the news about being the one chosen to bring Immanuel into the world. The prayer is beautiful. It demonstrates the abiding faith and godliness that this woman of God possessed. It should not be surprising then to see that Jesus who was raised by this godly woman prayed so beautifully also. Of course, Jesus was not only her son, but God!

Let's examine the different elements of Jesus' prayer. This prayer was largely for the benefit of the disciples and as such there is much that we can learn from this prayer!

For the Father

Jesus begins His prayer at verse one by praying for what for the Father?

Jesus' asked that He be glorified. However, that glorification was not self-serving. It was for the benefit of the Father and His children! By the glorification of Jesus, the Father would be glorified and we would receive eternal life!



The Lord's Prayer

How does Jesus say at verse three that we will have eternal life?

Jesus glorified God in life and death according to verses 4-5. How?

Jesus says at verse 5 that He was before the world was. How does Philippians 2 describe the state of Jesus before coming to the earth?

What did Paul wish to do for Jesus in life and in death? (Philippians 1:20)

For the Apostles

The next section of the prayer centers around the Lord interceding on behalf of His disciples. The Father had given them to the Lord and He worked hard to teach them the things that the Father had given and to have them hold fast to those teachings. Yet, the Lord knows that His time in this world is not long. He will soon be leaving and the apostles will be dependent on the things that He has been able to teach them and the help of the Helper.

The disciples had a hard time coming to terms with exactly who Jesus was and what He had come to do. What does John 17:8 record as Jesus gives the status of the disciples?

Who is the “son of perdition” mentioned at John 17:12?



The Lord's Prayer

What had happened to the disciples as a result of following the Lord? (John 17:14)

The apostles had a mission. Jesus did not want them to leave the world, but was asking the Father to do what? (John 17:15)

Compare John 17:15 with the model prayer in Matthew 6. What similar thing does the Lord instruct us to ask in prayer?

For All Believers

The focus of the prayer shifts again at verse 20. Now the Lord has moved from His prayer for the apostles to His requests for all believers. The Lord is desirous of protecting and helping all believers. It is for their benefit, but it is also for the benefit of the world. If the believers functioned as they should, He says at verse 21 that “the world may believe that You sent me.” Paul told Timothy at 1 Timothy 3:15 that the church is the pillar and support of the truth. Jesus is praying here for that to work as it should. The church would testify to the world that Jesus came to earth as sent by the Father.

There is one main thing that is needed for believers to be the pillar and support of the truth. Jesus identifies it and requests it at verse 21. What is it?

If believers did not have this quality, how would it hurt their ability to proclaim the message to the world?



The Lord's Prayer

Do you think that a lack of this quality still plagues the church today? If yes, how so?

What example of unity does Jesus give in the prayer?

In what ways are They one?

What other great blessing does the Savior request at verse 24 for all believers?

Benediction

What title does Jesus ascribe to the Father at verse 25?

How had the world not known the Father?

The Lord shifts the prayer back to the apostles. What main thing did He want them to know and make known?

What quality does Jesus want the apostles to possess? (John 17:26) _____

This book belongs to:
