

Spiritual Growth Lessons

LESSON 26 of 32

THE MINISTRY OF PRAYER

WHAT IS PRAYER?

First, let us look at what prayer is not. Prayer is not just a lot of "hocus-pocus" to bring us the things that we desire. It is not words uttered in order to put a curse upon those who have wronged us. It is not a set form of words, which, if we repeat them enough times, will undo any harm that we have done, and ensure a place for us in the heaven of our God. If we have the wrong idea and the wrong attitude concerning what prayer is, we will just waste time speaking insincere words into the air.

True prayer is the privilege of entering into the presence of God, and communicating with Him. It is feeling after Him, seeking His face, seeking to know what is pleasing to Him, and what is not. It is sincerely confessing our failures to Him, and expressing how weak we are without His divine power filling our lives. It is thanking Him for the abundance of blessings that He has bestowed upon us. It is bowing before Him in loving adoration, and offering high praises to Him because of what He is! Prayer is making known our needs to Him, and interceding for the needs of others. Prayer is all this and much, much more!



THE IMPORTANCE OF PRAYER

Prayer is as real as God is real. There is absolutely nothing that God cannot do if it will advance His kingdom, and is in accordance with His will. It is prayer that releases God's power. Wesley L. Duwel, in his book, *Touching the World Through Prayer*, wrote: "Prayer is the master strategy that God gives for the defeat and rout of Satan. Through prayer the Holy Spirit can so empower us that Satan's hold on lives is broken, Satan's hindrances to the kingdom are removed, and Satan's work is destroyed. Christ came to destroy the work of the devil (I John 3:8). He did this potentially at Calvary, and Christ enforces Calvary's victory through the prayers of His bride, the church. That is why the people of God are also the army of God."

Prayer is the opportunity to bask in the presence of God. It is the brightest spot of every day. If we really know and believe that, we will spend more time in prayer. We were created to love, serve, and have fellowship with our Creator. David wrote: "*As the hart panteth after the water brooks, so panteth my soul after thee, O God. My soul thirsteth for God, for the living God: when shall I come and appear before God* (Psalm 42:1-2).

O God, thou art my God: early will I seek thee: my soul thirsteth for thee, my flesh longeth for thee in a dry and thirsty land, where no water is; To see thy power and thy glory, so as I have seen thee in the sanctuary" (Psalm 63:1-2).

Man was created body, soul, and spirit. The spirit gives life to the body. Food and drink can satisfy the cravings of the body, but the soul was created to hunger and thirst after God. It is the inner yearning for communication with God, and a closer relationship with Him. If we understand this, it will help us to be faithful to God, and approach His throne by prayer every day! This holiest and highest of all privileges are open to every true believer. You don't have to have an appointment. You don't have to wait for Him. He is waiting for you!

THE MODEL PRAYER

"And it came to pass, that, as he was praying in a certain place, when he ceased, one of his disciples said unto him, Lord, teach us to pray, as John also taught his disciples" (Luke 11:1).

"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" (Matthew 6:9-13).

We often refer to this prayer as "the Lord's Prayer," but we have no Biblical reference that He ever prayed these words as a formal prayer. It is all right to pray this prayer just as it is, but notice that Jesus said *"After this manner therefore pray ye."* It is meant to be a guide for us to enlarge upon. With this in mind, let us learn from it the elements that are necessary to pray effectively:

1. Worship. Jesus' model prayer begins with the words, *"Our Father which art in heaven, Hallowed be thy name."*

a. The deepest form of worship is when we praise God for what He is. We should start and end our prayer time with this kind of praise.

b. Thanksgiving is praising God for what He has given us and done for us. We should offer thanks to God every day for all of the many spiritual, physical, and material blessings He bestows upon us.

2. Kingdom Praying: *"Thy kingdom come. Thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven."*

This phase of the kingdom has already come. However, we should daily pray for our leaders (civil and spiritual), our brothers and sisters in Christ, for the lost, for all mankind (I Timothy 2:1; James 5:16). All of the occupants of heaven do the will of God. We are to pray that all of the occupants of the earth will do the same.

3. Petitions: *"Give us this day our daily bread, lead us not into temptation."*

These are examples of petitions. A petition is something we request or ask God for. The Lord does want us to ask (Matthew 21:22; James 4:2). We should not ask "amiss," but according to His will (I John 5:14).

4. Confession: *"Forgive us our debts (sins) as we forgive our debtors (those who have sinned against us)."* This prayer has two parts: repentance (requesting forgiveness), and forgiving others.

a. All have sinned and have come short of the glory of God (Romans 3:23). Try hard not to fail God, but at times you will stumble and fall. When that happens, do not become discouraged and give up. Confess your sins to Jesus. He has promised to forgive you and cleanse you (I John 1:9). Psalm 51 is a model prayer for the sincere confession of sins.

b. To be forgiven, however, we must forgive others (Matthew 6:12). He has told us that He will not forgive us if we will not forgive others (Matthew 6:14-15; Ephesians 4:32; Colossians 3:13).

5. End your prayer with praise and worship. *"For thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory, for ever. Amen."*

The more you communicate with God, the more you will learn to pray sincerely and effectively. And the more you seek His face through earnest, believing prayer, the greater will be your relationship with Jesus Christ! *ds*