

LESSON EIGHT

PRAYER

Throughout the gospels we find Jesus walking, talking, eating and living life with His disciples, but always with an eye to teaching them and equipping them. Jesus' disciples came from diverse backgrounds, which meant that in order for them to minister with one heart and mind, they were going to need instruction in the ways of His kingdom. One of those essential lessons concerned the subject of prayer.

Prayer is a necessity of our spiritual life, and in its simplest form, it is candidly and sincerely talking to God. This expression of our personal relationship with the Lord should be at the heart of every disciple of Christ. As you begin this week's lesson, ask the Lord to deepen your understanding of prayer so that you might communicate with Him in a more intimate way.

Day One – The Heart of Prayer

Read Matthew 6:5-8

1. We might think that prayer is simple and needs no instructions or warnings, but we learn otherwise from Jesus as we see in Matthew 6 verses 5 and 7. Jesus taught that both method and motive are important when we pray. He begins by negatively describing the prayer of two types of people in these verses. What does He call them?

a. How does He describe their methods of praying?

b. What is wrong with their prayers?

2. Ecclesiastes 5:1-2 gives a warning concerning when we gather to pray with others. What does it say?

a. How does this relate to what Jesus stated in Matthew 6:7?

3. In Matthew 6:6, how does Jesus describe what we are to do when we pray?

a. In what ways can you personally apply His admonition?

4. When you see the word “therefore” in scripture it always gives a conclusion based on previous verses. What is the conclusion given in Matthew 6:8?

a. What does it reveal about God?

b. How does this change your thinking about prayer?

5. From Romans 8:26-27 we learn that we can have weaknesses when it comes to prayer, but we can also have confidence in prayer, even when we don't know what to pray or how to articulate our needs. Share what you learn from these verses.

a. Why is this comforting?

"In prayer, it is better to have a heart without words, than words without heart."

John Bunyan

Day Two – The How To's of Prayer

Read Matthew 6:9-13 and Luke 11:1

In Matthew 6, we'll take a brief, but careful look at Jesus' model for prayer, which is often referred to as the Lord's Prayer. You may be familiar with its words, but like other well-known things in our lives, we may miss its meaning. Truly, if the disciples needed instruction, so do we!

1. What request do they make of Jesus in Luke 11:1?

a. The disciples made this request after observing Jesus in prayer; they saw something in His prayer that led them to want to pray like He did. Sometimes we may find it difficult to pray or desire to pray differently than we do. Take a moment to write your own request below as you prepare to study Jesus' instruction.

In Matthew 6:9, Jesus said, "*In this manner, therefore, pray.*" This doesn't mean to pray only using these words, but to pray *in this way*, to pray *like this*.

2. Matthew 6:9 shows us how to begin our prayers. What does it say?

a. Why do you think it is important for us to begin this way?

3. The word "hallowed" means to make holy, to sanctify. The following verses give us some reasons why we should bless His name as we start praying. Record what you learn.

Psalm 8:1

Psalm 72:17-19

Luke 1:49

Acts 4:12

Philippians 2:9-11

a. Which of these spoke to you personally? Why?

4. What was Jesus' main point and instruction in Matthew 6:10?

a. Praying for God's will to be done, especially in difficult situations, can be challenging, but nevertheless is important. Is this how you usually pray? Explain.

5. Prayer is not a matter of manipulating God, but of expressing our requests and submitting to His will in them. Jesus gives us a perfect example of how to pray in this manner. How does Matthew 26:39-42 help you adopt a right attitude and perspective so that you too can pray according to His will?

We have seen Jesus emphasize the importance of beginning our prayers with worship and acknowledgement of God; next we move to our requests.

6. Matthew 6:11 is brief and to the point. What does it say and what does it imply?

7. What do you learn from the following verses that illuminate Matthew 6:11?

Psalm 23:1

Proverbs 30:8b-9

Philippians 4:19

a. Are you daily satisfied with how God supplies your needs? Explain.

b. How could actively cultivating these attitudes change your prayer life?

Day Three — Effective Prayer

Read Matthew 6:9-13

1. Prayer goes beyond just asking for our needs to be met; it touches every area of our life, both past and present. Matthew 6:12 teaches that our relationship with others is connected to our requests. What does it say?

a. Jesus gives further explanation of this in verses 14-15. What important truth do you learn?

b. Read Matthew 18:21-22 and share your thoughts on forgiveness below.

c. Why do Ephesians 4:32 and Colossians 3:13 say this is necessary?

2. Lack of forgiveness is a sin. How does Isaiah 59:1-2 say this will affect your prayers?

3. Jesus introduces another aspect of our life that needs to be covered by prayer. Matthew 6:13 says, “*And do not lead us into temptation...*” We know that God does not tempt us to sin (James 1:13) but we often find ourselves being tempted. Why do think it’s important to include this in our prayers?

4. What do you learn about temptation from Galatians 5:17 and James 1:13-15?

a. What comforting promise does 2 Peter 2:9a give to believers?

b. List what methods are found in these scriptures to help us combat and overcome temptation.

Matthew 26:41

2 Corinthians 10:5

5. God does not tempt anyone, but the “evil one” does. 1 Peter 5:8 uses a vivid word picture to describe his method of attack. What do you learn about him?

6. Peter admonishes us to be sober and vigilant in 1 Peter 5:8. Read the definitions of the words sober and vigilant and then answer the question below.

Sober: to be self-disciplined, to think rationally.

Vigilant: to be alert to pitfalls; to take steps to not stumble.

- a. How can you combine Peter's admonishment to be sober and vigilant in prayer to effectively ward off any temptations that might come your way?

7. In each of our lives and in varying degrees, there are three issues that can be problems for us: our personal need for forgiveness, unforgiveness toward others and temptation. Sometimes they flood in all at the same time! End today's lesson by bringing these and any other concerns before the Lord. Journal your prayer below.

Day Four – Active Prayer Life

1. As Jesus walked along roads and through villages, it's easy to imagine Him in free-flowing conversations with His disciples as He instructed and taught them, answering their questions. While we can't physically speak with Him the way they did, He gave us His Word to answer our questions regarding the topic of prayer. Record what you learn below.

When should I pray?

Psalm 55:17

How often should I pray?

Ephesians 6:18

1 Thessalonians 5:17

Will God hear my prayer?

Psalm 66:19-20

Psalm 138:3

How many times should I pray for a particular need/request?

Luke 18:1-8a

What should I pray about?

Philippians 4:6

Does God always answer prayer?

Psalm 86:7

Will God always answer my prayer according to what I ask?

2 Corinthians 12:8-9a

James 4:3

1 John 5:14

- a. What verse spoke to you the most on the topic of prayer?

It's been said that God answers prayers in one of three ways. He says, "Yes", and you receive what you are asking. He says, "No", and you must accept that and move on. Or He will say, "Not yet", and you learn to be patient and wait.

2. Throughout the Gospels, we see that prayer was a vital part of every aspect of Christ's relationship with the Father. This close connection between the two of them developed through the amount of time that Jesus spent in prayer. Take some time now to reflect on your own personal prayer life and evaluate the time that you spend sharing and talking with your Heavenly Father. Journal your thoughts below.

a. As you consider yourself, what things hinder you from following Jesus' example of time well spent in prayer?

b. What will you do to change at least one of the things you listed so that you will have more opportunity to pray?

3. Choose one of the verses about prayer from this lesson and try to memorize it. Start by writing it here.

Jesus provided a model in Matthew 6, but it was only supposed to be a starting point for heartfelt conversations between Him and His people. To begin your time in prayer with the Lord, you might try what many people enjoy using, the **ACTS** acronym: adoration, confession, thanksgiving, supplication. This is a tool that can help keep you focused on what's most important, as putting Him first is key.

Adoration sets our hearts aright as we extol the attributes of God. Adoration isn't giving Him thanks for what He has done as that comes later, but it's recognizing and praising Him for Who He is as the Bible reveals Him to be. Example: Creator, LORD of Hosts, Alpha and Omega, Redeemer, Savior, Friend and so on!

Confession is where we humbly ask for forgiveness for any attitudes, actions or words that we know are wrong or hurtful. This is a good time to ask the Holy Spirit to reveal any hidden or unknown sin that needs to be repented of.

It is now in a time of **Thanksgiving** that we thank God for all He has done. This is when we can thank Him for the many blessings He has given us from dying on the cross, the externals of life such as the food we eat and the clothes we wear. In other words, thank Him for everything and anything!

Now our hearts are ready for **Supplication** because we have put Him first in our time of prayer. This is when we ask God to help us personally in our own issues at hand as well as interceding on the behalf of others.

Hint: Spend some time reading the Word before praying and then pray any verses that are appropriate. It will add strength and power to your prayer time.

The best way to learn to pray is to just start praying! God desires so much to hear from us and for us to have a close relationship with Him. This happens when we make the spiritual discipline of prayer a priority every day. Use what you have learned throughout this lesson and spend time worshiping, thanking, and speaking to your Heavenly Father.

“In public and private, in sanctuary and home, may my life be steeped in prayer, filled with the spirit of grace and supplication, each prayer perfumed with the incense of atoning blood.”

Excerpt from The Valley of Vision; Puritan Prayers and Devotions

Day 5

Good work! You've completed this study on what it is looks like to be a disciple of Jesus. This week we will add an additional day to our study for a time of reflection and review on what we've learned.

1. At the beginning of this study you were asked to reflect on your life to see whether you or others would be able to consider you a disciple. Now that the study has concluded, how would you answer that question? What have you learned that might change your answer?

2. Look back briefly at the lessons we've studied. Is there a specific one that the Holy Spirit has spoken to you about? If so, share it below.

3. Discipleship is a choice. Living a life dedicated to following Christ is what we should desire. Daniel 5:27 says, "You have been weighed in the balances and found wanting." In his book *Discipleship The Road Less Taken*, Greg Laurie asks these questions concerning this verse: If our life was weighed in the balances what would God say? Would He find a life of substance, a life dedicated to following Christ? Or would He find a life that has been wasted in empty pursuits? Share your thoughts.

4. Alan Redpath, a British evangelist, pastor and author stated that a friend of his made a comment that forever changed his life. He said, "It is possible to have a saved soul and a wasted life." Explain your understanding of that statement. Do you see yourself at all in that?

5. Have you come to the place in your life of total dependence and total surrender to God, thus making it possible for the Holy Spirit to maximize His work in your life for you to be a disciple of Christ? Share your thoughts.

6. You might be thinking that being a disciple is just too hard and that you cannot do it. Yes, it is true, following Jesus as His disciple can be challenging. However, what encouragement do you find in Luke 18:27 that will help you?

One final thought about being a disciple. In the culture of Jesus' day, a disciple's goal was to gain knowledge from his teacher but also to become more like him in character. The teacher would show through their exemplary life how to live it out. The disciple was expected to leave his family and live with the teacher twenty-four

hours a day, walking with him from town to town, working, eating and studying with him. He would also be the teacher's servant, to service his needs and to submit to his authority. Likewise, as a Christian, we are to live out the scriptures, to serve Christ and submit to His authority and to become more like Him in character. While we can't literally walk with Him, work with Him, and eat with Him, He is our model and Teacher and we are His servants. He has given us clear instructions in His Word about being His disciple that we might live this way in our everyday walk. Matthew 28:19a says "*go therefore and make disciples of all nations...*". We can't expect to make disciples of others if we aren't a disciple ourselves.

7. Make a commitment today and write a prayer asking for God's help to truly live as a disciple of Christ.

"Now may the God of peace Himself sanctify you completely; and may your whole spirit, soul, and body be preserved blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ."

1 Thessalonians 5:23

