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Prayers of the Bible

September 2, 2018

FOCUS TEXT: Matthew 6:5-15

How to Pray

Background Scriptures

Matthew 6:5-18; Luke 11:1-13; 18:1-8; 1 Timothy 2:1-8; 1 John 5:14, 15

Key Verse

But thou, when thou prayest . . . pray to thy Father which is in secret; and thy Father which seeth in secret shall reward thee openly.

— Matthew 6:6

Objective

By the end of this lesson my students should be able to identify ways in which prayer can be made more effective in their lives.

Tips for Teachers

During this Sunday school quarter, “Tips for Teachers” will have a different focus. If asked, we would probably all agree that prayer is essential, not just for every Christian, church, and Sunday school class, but also in the preparation of Sunday school lessons, etc.

The problem often is implementation. We say we believe in prayer, and we know we should pray, but do we actually take time to do it? In an attempt to encourage his own prayer life, this writer has found it helpful to use a book of prayers as a prayer starter each day.

With that idea in mind, the “Tips for Teachers” in Lessons 2-12 of this quarter will be written as prayers that you could pray each day of the week for each particular lesson, or you could choose from these prayers one or more to pray for each day of the week.

Heavenly Father, we pray for each teacher reading this text right now. Encourage them in their faith. Bless them in their teaching ministry. Help them to reflect you in everything they do, say, and think, so their students may find in them Christian role models to imitate, and thus grow in their faith. Amen.

Central Truth

Prayer is the earnest expression of our intimate relationship with God.

Devotional Reading

Matthew 7:7-11

Pertinent Principles

- Do not neglect the place of secret prayer. If you do, all other prayer will not take the place of it. — Cornell
- Avoid selfishness in your prayer. Pray for yourself last; and pray especially for your spiritual well-being. — *Portals of Prayer*
- Too many people pray for emergency rations rather than for daily bread.
- Prayer may begin by asking God for what we want. It will end by being more interested in what He wants.

Building Family Faith

Monday	Simplicity of Prayer.	Matthew 6:7-13
Tuesday	Results in Prayer.	Matthew 7:7, 8
Wednesday	Necessary Instruction.	Luke 11:1-4
Thursday	God’s Good Gift.	Luke 11:11-13
Friday	Persistent Praying.	John 4:43-50
Saturday	Humility in Prayer.	Luke 18:9-14
Sunday	The Secret Place.	Matthew 6:5, 6

Suggested Songs

- I Must Tell Jesus
- Tell It to Jesus
- Teach Me to Pray, Lord

WORD FOCUS

There are four Greek words that are used for **prayer**; however, only two of them are used in this lesson. We choose to deal with one.

The one generally used is *proseuche*. This word is the common word for prayer and is never used except for prayers to God. It is used for needs only God can supply (Matt. 21:22). It is used for strength that only God can give (Mark 9:29). It is also used for forgiveness that only God can give (Luke 11:4). It is used at least six times in this passage. We would do well to remember that when we are praying to God for needs that only He can supply, our attitudes and faith will determine whether the prayer is answered.

The key to our attitudes is portrayed in verses 14 and 15. A spirit of forgiveness is a must for the Christian. We cannot get anything from God so long as a spirit of unforgiveness is in our hearts. The word used here has exactly the same meaning for us as it does for God. Our forgiveness must be unconditional, without reserve, no matter how many times we are called upon to forgive. Peter thought seven times would be greathearted (Matt. 18:21). But Jesus multiplied that by seventy times in the next verse. It is our opinion that He was saying, "Get in the **habit** of forgiving." The richness of the blessing of having a forgiving spirit is highlighted by the fact that in return we are assured of God's forgiveness if we ask Him for it.

It is interesting to note that what we are to forgive in this instance is their **offenses**. The word carries with it the idea of a false step or a slip-up in our experience. While this necessitates forgiveness, it is not of the same nature as a deliberate act of sin. This makes it all the more important that our forgiveness is unqualified. Neither depth nor lightness of the sin makes any difference in the nature of our forgiveness. It is reassuring that God's forgiveness is never weighted in favor of the false steps or the horrible sins. All are forgiven when we repent and believe for forgiveness.

Biblical Perspective

I. GUIDELINES FOR PRAYER (Matt. 6:5-8)

Matthew 6:5. And when thou prayest, thou shalt not be as the hypocrites are: for they love to pray standing in the synagogues and in the corners of the streets, that they may be seen of men. Verily I say unto you, They have their reward.

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

7. But when ye pray, use not vain repetitions, as the heathen do: for they think that they shall be heard for their much speaking.

8. Be not ye therefore like unto them: for your Father knoweth what things ye have need of, before ye ask him.

5. While Jesus often taught about prayer using the plural, this command about avoiding hypocrisy is stated in the singular. **Hypocrites** do things to appear to be something or someone other than what they are inwardly. Rather than being motivated by loving compassion or some other noble motive, hypocrites act, hoping to leave a positive, however inaccurate, impression of their character. The hypocrites described in this passage may have been so convincing that they even deceived themselves into believing they were something they were not. How easily these false men could have been viewed as pious because of their public prayers. Yet Jesus, the one whose assessment of us really matters, easily saw through the religious veneer and identified their real character. Jesus saw them as self-righteous, self-centered, and condemned. The hypocrites prayed to **be seen of men**. Their **reward** was that

God's Word for Today

*THE NEED

Prayer is one of the skills most indispensable for Christian living. It is the gateway to growth. Through prayer, problems are resolved, questions are often answered, and needs are met. Simply stated, no believer can function in faith without prayer.

But how much time do we spend **learning** to pray? Our primary method of teaching prayer skills is through example. We hear others praying and follow their pattern. The danger of this method is that we pick up their clichés, which mean little or nothing to us. Our prayer life can become stale.

Formal classroom training on prayer is rare. This may be because we view prayer as a private discipline that is better suited for the laboratory than the lecture hall. But before we practice in the lab of the prayer closet, it would be helpful for us to explore the properties and conditions of prayer.

Discussion: *If you feel comfortable knowing how to pray, how did you learn? Did someone teach you, or did you learn by trying and failing and trying again?

Discussion: What questions do you have about prayer? What would you like to learn about prayer in this lesson and in this quarter?

THE STORY

The disciples of Jesus were simple men overall. With the exception of Matthew, the tax auditor, most of the disciples were common working class men with little or no formal religious training. But Jesus understood that prayer was not a privilege reserved for the professionally religious. Fishermen and farmers needed to know how to pray, too, so Jesus provided some valuable insights into prayer and other holy disciplines.

they were seen. How much better for them and for us to be heard in our praying by one who can and will respond.

6. Significantly, it is **when** you pray, not **IF** you pray. Praying is a natural response of one who is in a right relationship with God. **Enter into thy closet.** Effective prayer is not the eloquent public praying of an orator, but rather the private communication with God of the person who simply believes on Him. People may understand and even admire our words, but God is the one whose attention we desire and need. Yet public praying is not forbidden. The New Testament Church practiced public prayer (Acts 1:24; 3:1; 4:24-30). Whether praying publicly or privately, our motive must always be to gain the attention of Jesus. Pride causes a man to seek to be heard by his fellows, while humility cares not to be heard except by the Lord. Humbleness of heart and attitude helps to open the way to communicate with God. Those who desire to pray publicly rather than privately may need to consider their motives. We would much rather pray in a prayer closet where no one else sees or knows than to gain the approval of men while going unheard and unseen by God.

7. Wordiness is ruled out as a key to effective praying. Repetition of needs does not influence whether those needs will be met. We must understand, however, that Jesus did not rule out long prayers, nor did He forbid all repetition. He prayed long prayers (Luke 6:12) and even repeated Himself in praying (Matt. 26:44). Some of the parables Jesus used in His teaching taught the importance of persistent praying. The lesson here is that repetition for the sake of repetition accomplishes nothing. Instead, the attitude of the heart of the pray-er is what makes the real difference. Those who pray with a sincere and humble heart have reason to expect answers to their petitions.

8. What a comfort this is to believers! He looks beyond our stumbling words, sees the attitude of the heart, and understands the burden we represent before him. "God knows how to interpret a teardrop" (T. M. Anderson). The heavy burden of the heart is known to Him regardless of our fluency or ineptness in putting it into words. God comes to our rescue. He is waiting patiently, His ear tuned toward our cry. He does not need to be convinced of our need. Instead, He waits, knowing before we ask, and often beginning to work out the answer to our petitions before we think to ask. The use of the word **Father** reminds us of the most healthy of relationships. God our Father wants to give good things to us, His children (Luke 11:13).

II. THE FOCUS OF PRAYER (Matt. 6:9, 10)

9. After this manner therefore pray ye: Our Father which art in heaven, Hallowed be thy name.

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

9. Here Jesus began His great pattern for praying. The best prayers come from the heart of God's child and are addressed to the Father. **Our Father which art in heaven.** These words speak to us of our relationship with God. If He is our Father, we must be His children. This great and majestic God is also personal and loving, for He allows mere mortals into a personal relationship with Him. **Hallowed be thy name.** This proclaims God's name to be sacred and holy. Of course, the understanding is that His name is a reflection of His character. How good it is to serve a God who is loving and holy, and who allows

Interestingly, Jesus did not simply expect His disciples to learn how to pray by watching and listening to Him as He prayed. He talked about prayer with them. His style and approach was not prayer theory out of a textbook — step one, step two, step three, and you're done. But Jesus provided valuable guidance for prayer in areas where we struggle. Specifically, He

- Clarified that in God's eyes praying to impress others is a waste of time.
- Advised us on how to prepare our mind and spirit for prayer through solitude and separation from distractions.
- Provided a model prayer to illustrate what our prayers should include.
- Emphasized the necessity of giving mercy to those who offend us so we too can receive the mercy of forgiveness.

Discussion: Is it wrong to be impressed by the prayers of someone else?

Discussion: How can we tell if we are praying to be heard by others?

THE POINT

I. Guidelines for Prayer (Matt. 6:5-8)

The bottom line is that prayer is a personal encounter between God and man. For this reason, Jesus warned us against praying for the praise of men. It is not that Jesus was opposed to public prayer. Jesus himself prayed many times publicly. (See Matt. 27:46; Luke 10:21, 22; 23:34, 46; John 6:11; 11:41, 42; 17:1-26.) Jesus' emphasis was upon attitude rather than location. Prayer should never be used as an advertising tool to market our brand of spirituality or to impress others with our deep spirituality.

Since prayer affords us the privilege of being in God's presence, it is important that we be fully present. Culturally, we have abandoned the courtesies of former times. Eye contact and focus are no longer given. Multitasking has stolen our attentiveness. We argue that as long as we are present in the room and can hear the words being said, we are still connecting to the person we are with. Yet when others engage us in this manner, we quickly feel ignored. It is not just the words that make communication purposeful. God wants to look into our eyes, and for us to look into His eyes.

So God asks for your undivided attention. He wants to get you into a place where there is only room for you and Him. You won't be able to bring your husband or wife or children with you into your closet. There will be a time and place to pray with them, too, but your solitude with God is for you alone. We rob ourselves of one of the richest experiences of relating to God when we neglect our prayer closet. We will return to some practical suggestions in the next section.

Discussion: What does it tell you when you don't have eye contact with the person with whom you are communicating?

Discussion: How do we give eye contact to an invisible God?

us to be His children. We must be careful to maintain a reverent attitude toward God's name and character in prayer as well as in life.

10. The work and progress of God's kingdom is much more important than the personal interests of those who do kingdom work. Indeed those who are most effective in kingdom work are those who willingly forget themselves in the interest of the kingdom. How important it is, then, for us to pray **thy kingdom come** as a personal petition for the authority and spirit of Christ to rule in our own lives. According to Luke 17:21, Christ's kingdom is within believers. Praying **thy will be done** is resigning ourselves in total surrender to the will of God. This prayer is that the perfect will of God would be accomplished in our lives and in our world, as well as in the world to come. Since God's will is perfectly obeyed in heaven, **in earth, as it is in heaven** must include His will being performed on earth, also.

III. PETITIONS IN PRAYER (Matt. 6:11-15)

11. Give us this day our daily bread.

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

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

14. For if ye forgive men their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you:

15. But if ye forgive not men their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses.

11. Then our Lord came to the matter of praying for our personal needs. Notice the emphasis on today's needs. How easy it is for those who live in affluent societies to get sidetracked into worrying over future needs instead of trusting God for both present and future. **Our daily bread.** Here is acknowledgment that God is the source of all our satisfaction. The most basic and necessary things of life are provided by Him. **Bread** includes all of our necessary food. In fact, the spirit of this prayer would seem to indicate that this term includes all the physical needs of humanity. Yet in this prayer, we must distinguish our genuine needs from our wants. Notice that the prayer is for one day at a time — **daily**. With steady jobs and income, present-day Christians may forget the day-by-day nature of our needs, but first-century Christians who were paid at the end of each day's work could easily see where an injury or sickness could take away income and security. They needed **daily** provision.

12. **Forgive us our debts.** The word **debts** means "something owed." It is often correctly understood as "sin" or "transgression," especially as it relates to something owed to God. When we fail to meet the demands of God's law, we are in need of His forgiveness. In truth, we owe God far more than we can ever pay. Yet in love and mercy, He offers forgiveness of the whole debt of sin. **Forgive us . . . as we forgive.** "The one who bears an unforgiving spirit toward another should pause before he offers this prayer" (*Beacon Bible Comm.*). What if God forgives only as we do? Would we find total forgiveness, or would some offenses be kept on our account?

13. **Lead us not into temptation.** The word **temptation** refers to the idea of "trial, affliction, or anything that tests our virtue." **Deliver** has the idea of "come to the aid of" or "rescue." The deliverance called for here is **from evil** or "from the evil

Discussion: *What does it take to close the door and be alone with God?

II. The Focus of Prayer (Matt. 6:9, 10)

Prayer is a personal encounter with God and should include worship, surrender, petition, and confession. In praying, it is important to keep in mind who we are speaking to. God is at once both the Father who loves, cares, and provides for us, and the holy and sovereign Being who is beyond our comprehension. Let worship lead the way in our prayers.

Discussion: In what ways is prayer personal?

III. Petitions in Prayer (Matt. 6:11-15)

True worship will then arouse within us a spirit of surrender so that we seek for the will of God over our own will. Once we have surrendered to God, we are properly positioned to begin asking within His will for the resolutions of our needs. "Give us," "Forgive us," "Lead us," and "Deliver us" express the petitions we are invited to include. All petitions fall into one of these four phrases.

Confession is included in the model prayer. "Forgive us our [sins, trespasses, failures]." Jesus knew we would not be perfect and invited us to own up to our failures and find mercy from God.

But He made it clear that if we expect mercy and forgiveness from Him, we cannot withhold the same from others. God has endowed every human being with the sacred privilege of either absolving or retaining the offenses others perpetrate against us. When we forgive, we are most like God.

Discussion: Is confession a regular part of your prayer habit? Why or why not?

*THE DIFFERENCE

In light of the teachings of Christ on prayer, what are the next steps you need to take to improve your prayer life?

Step one: **Reject the lie that image equals reality.** Others may be impressed by your spiritual oratory, but God knows your real state of spirituality.

Step two: **Establish a secret place and time where you can meet with God in solitude.** Carve out fifteen minutes a day to spend time with God. Get away from other people and the noisy world. Power down your electronic devices so you are not distracted. Once God has your full and undivided attention, He will be able to minister to you. Adore Him. Meditate on a verse of Scripture. Open your heart to God. Here is where it pays to be alone and away from others. Do not suppress your emotions. Allow yourself to cry or sing. You may benefit from taking notes or keeping a journal about your discoveries.

This one habit has the potential to transform your life. If you are unfamiliar or uneasy with solitude with God, research solitude and intimacy with God. Get answers. Then get alone and quiet with God.

Step three: **Guard against unforgiveness.** It is impossible to

one.” It can mean either “spare us from” or “deliver us out of.” We can always be certain that God will not let us be tempted beyond our ability to endure the temptation. God always will provide a means to escape (1 Cor. 10:13). The prayer ends with a very fitting note of worship. **For thine is the kingdom.** God, and God alone, has the authority to provide answers to the above petitions. **And the power.** Never will we find our needs too great for Him. We are insufficient and cannot adequately meet our own needs. He is all-sufficient. “With God all things are possible” (Matt. 19:26). **And the glory.** All the honor for any goodness that comes in our lives belongs to Him.

14. Forgiveness is within the reach of everyone. Those who experience forgiveness ought to be the more ready to forgive.

15. An unforgiving spirit has no place in the Christian life. Those who continue to carry bitterness and animosity toward others soon discover that they have lost their sense of forgiveness from God as well as security in Him. Forgiveness is Christlikeness. Harboring malice, ill will, or unkind attitudes is evidence of an inner lack. The command of Scripture is **forgive**. Jesus set the example. Our responsibility is to follow His example by forgiving as well. Yet all of us have been offended by someone who has not bothered to ask forgiveness. What should we do in this case? The answer is always, “Forgive.”

go through life without being scarred by the offenses of others. Expect people to hurt you. But when they do, forgive as Christ has forgiven you. In so doing, you will keep the waters of mercy flowing over your life.

Discussion: *Are you comfortable with solitude? Do you have an established daily routine of solitude? What questions do you have about solitude and stillness before God?

Discussion: What are the distractions which rob God of your full attention? What do you need to do to eliminate them and close the door of your prayer closet?

Discussion: Who in your life needs your grace of forgiveness? What results if you withhold your forgiveness?



Doctrinal Discussion

It is interesting to notice that Jesus ruled out the reason most people use for praying. He told us, “Your Father knoweth what things ye have need of, before ye ask him” (Matt. 6:8). The purpose of prayer is not to inform God about our

needs. He knows those already.

If God already knows what I am going to tell Him, why bother? Doesn't that make prayer just a useless exercise? Clearly not! Jesus himself engaged often in prayer. The Holy Spirit helps us pray. Therefore, it must be meaningful. So let us look at some of the purposes for prayer.

In the first place prayer has a significant effect upon the one praying. Prayer is a means of becoming conscious of the presence of God. In prayer we turn our attention toward Him and away from other things, thus allowing ourselves to contemplate Him.

This contemplation, this gazing of our souls upon God, suggests another purpose for prayer. Prayer clears our vision to see God. Prayer then inspires us to be more like God. It lifts the level of our lives. In that way prayer is a means of grace.

Prayer is also an expression of our dependence upon God; of our submission to His will. As such, it is a denial of self.

Further, prayer promotes our relationship with God. Our Christian walk is not a belief in a creed or philosophy, but a belief in, and a friendship with, a Person. Throughout Scripture, growth in grace is spoken of as a better knowledge of God.

Prayer is more than just an exercise in self-improvement, for prayer does bring a response from God. Later in the Sermon on the Mount Jesus said, “Ask, and it shall be given you” (Matt. 7:7). Why God should restrict Himself to our asking is a mystery only eternity will fully reveal. But we know that our coming in prayer is the key that unlocks the storehouse of God to give, at His appointed time, what we need.

Let us turn from the purpose of prayer to the content of prayer. The petition Jesus made in verse 12 comes as a shock to most holiness people. Jesus directed us to pray, “Forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors.” Luke put it even more bluntly by using the word “sins” in place of “debts” (11:4). How are holiness people who teach that we are to live “above sin” to deal with this petition?



Point of Special Interest

I cannot say, “Our,” if I live in a watertight spiritual compartment.

I cannot say, “Father,” if I do not demonstrate the relationship in daily life.

I cannot say, “Which art in heaven,” if I am so occupied with the earth that I am laying up no treasure there.

I cannot say, “Hallowed be thy name,” if I, who am called by His name, am not holy.

I cannot say, “Thy kingdom come,” if I am not doing all in my power to hasten its coming.

I cannot say, “Thy will be done,” if I am questioning, resentful of, or disobedient to His will for me.

I cannot say, “In earth, as it is in heaven,” if I am not prepared to devote my life here to His service.

I cannot say, “Give us this day our daily bread,” if I live on past experience or am an under-the-counter shopper.

I cannot say, “Forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors,” if I harbor a grudge.

I cannot say, “Lead us not into temptation,” if I deliberately place myself in a position to be tempted.

I cannot say, “Deliver us from evil,” if

A significant amount of help can be found by looking at Romans 3:23. There Paul stated, "All have sinned, and come short of the glory of God."

When we talk about living "above sin," we generally mean that we have not knowingly violated God's law. There has been no rebellion in our hearts against God's law. That is as it should be. It will be granted, I think, that as we walk with God, we see His will and law more perfectly. God shows us new light to walk in. Now God has not just changed the truth when He shows us something new. It was His will all the time, and we did not do His will because we were ignorant of it. Does that mean there is no penalty attached to our violation?

There are many times that we fail, through ignorance, to come up to God's perfect standard. However unwittingly done, that action still incurs a penalty, a penalty that we are unable to pay. Our only recourse is to plead for forgiveness through the blood of Jesus.

Jesus proceeded to tie our constant need for forgiveness in with our constant need to forgive. It is not that He was establishing some arbitrary criteria for forgiveness. Instead Jesus was saying that the spirit which cannot forgive cannot be forgiven. To forgive requires the same quality of humility that is required to be forgiven.

I am not prepared to fight evil with the weapon of prayer.

I cannot say, "Thine is the kingdom," if I do not accord the King the disciplined obedience of a loyal subject.

I cannot say, "Thine is . . . the power," if I fear what men may do or what my neighbor may think.

I cannot say, "Thine is . . . the glory," if I am seeking glory for myself.

I cannot say, "Forever," if my horizon is bounded by the things of time.