



My Bible School Lessons

Exploring the Word of God

Lesson #20: "Pathway to God's Throne"

SCRIPTURE READING: MATTHEW 6:5-15; 18:21-35 Luke 18:1-14

Memory Verse: "And all things, whatsoever ye shall ask in prayer, believing, ye shall receive." Matthew 21:22.

Napoleon once asked, "Do you wish to find out the really sublime?" He answered his own question by saying, "Repeat the Lord's Prayer." And apparently repeating it was all he did. But those who live that prayer have spiritual power.

It would be well for all of us to memorize the Lord's prayer and pray this prayer from the heart every day. (*Matthew 6:9-13*)

All our prayers need not be memorized, however. Prayer is really communion with God and therefore a personal and intimate experience with the Lord. Let us see if we cannot find the secret to this great power.

1: WHAT IS PRAYER?

One well-known Christian described prayer as "the key in the hand of faith to unlock heaven's storehouse." This is true. Think of it in two ways:

1. The cry of a soul in need.

Psalm 31:9: "Have mercy upon me, O Lord, for I am in trouble: mine eye is consumed with grief, yea, my soul and my belly."

Psalm 46:1: "God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble."

A lifeguard on a bathing beach was asked how he could determine the cry of one really in distress, when there was so much babel and confusion. He said, "I can always tell that distinctive cry of real distress." God can also.

Many years ago, Sir John Gayre, Lord Mayor of London, was shipwrecked. Finding himself on a dangerous shore, he knelt in prayer. Then a lion approached him. Fervently the Christian prayed for help. The lion sniffed at him and then walked off. God had saved the mayor. However, such prayers, after the danger passes, generally fade away, and men forget God. Prayer is the cry of a soul in need, but it is much more than that.

2. The opening of the heart to God.

Real prayer is "the opening of the heart to God as to a friend." It is not just asking for things. It isn't all talking on man's part or on God's part. It is some of each, and more. It may be communion in utter silence at times; just a sacred sense of His holy, presence. "Be still, and know that I am God" (*Psalm 46: 10*).

Lesson 20: Pathway to God's Throne

"As a boy," relates a minister, "I worked side by side with my father—my friend. I used to walk long distances with him. There were no words, but just the silent symphony of the souls of a man and a boy timed by the tramp of feet and the kindly swish of trouser legs. The man, mayhap, was thinking of what the boy one day might be; the boy was holding the man a hero for what he already was. Silent prayer, I think, is something like that." God asks us to call Him Father; therefore we may freely come to Him with our problems and our joys.

Luke 11:2: "He said unto them. When ye pray, say, Our Father which art in heaven,"

And since Jesus is the friend of sinners, He invites the most sinful to come to God through Him.

Matthew 11:19: "The Son of man came eating and drinking, and they say. Behold a man gluttonous, and a winebibber, a friend of publicans and sinners."

Hebrews 4:15-16: "For we have not an high priest which cannot be touched with the feeling of our infirmities; but was in all points tempted like as we are, yet without sin. Let us therefore come boldly unto the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy, and find grace to help in time of need."

2: WHAT PRAYER IS NOT

Prayer is not an act of merit that earns God's favor. Jesus said:

Matthew 5:45: "He. . . sendeth rain on the just and on the unjust."

Prayer is not ostentation and show (*Matthew 6:1-8*). It is not a set form of words for a set occasion recited to the accompaniment of spinning prayer wheels or moving beads. Prayer is communion with God, and may take place whenever and wherever the soul of man reaches out sincerely for his Creator.

3: WHY DO WE PRAY?

Four questions will help to find the answer:

1. Is it to give God information?

Psalm 139:1-4: "O Lord. Thou hast searched me, and known me. Thou knowest my downsitting and mine uprising. Thou understandest my thought afar off. Thou compassest my path and my lying down, and art acquainted with all my ways. For there is not a word in my tongue, but, lo, O Lord, thou knowest it altogether."

Does God need information? No! "Your Father knowest what things ye have need of, before ye ask Him" (*Matthew 6:8*). Still He never wearies of our coming to Him in sincere prayer. Unburden your heart. Take all the time you need. Don't rush. Think when you pray. If you were talking to the president of the United States, you would be alert, wouldn't you? Be alert and reverent when you talk to God, and your prayers will be heard in heaven.

2. Is it to make God willing?

Luke 11:13: "If ye then, being evil, know how to give good gifts unto your children: how much more shall your heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to them that ask Him?"

Prayer is not overcoming God's reluctance; it is taking hold of God's willingness: Prayer does not make Him willing, for He is always willing to help us.

3. Is it to change God?

Malachi 3:6: "I am the Lord, I change not,"

Do we pray to change God? No! With Him "is no variableness, neither shadow of turning" (*James 1:17*). God's promises are conditional; therefore answers vary. But God never changes. Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, and today, and for ever (*Hebrews 13:8*). His invitation is, "Come now, and let us reason together" (*Isaiah 1:18*).

4. Is it to change us?

Prayer is the greatest unused force in the universe to change what most needs to be changed—men. We pray "in order to enable us to receive Him. Prayer does not bring God down to us, but brings us up to Him." Read Paul's experience in Acts 9:10-18.

4: WHAT IS OUR PART IN GETTING OUR PRAYERS ANSWERED?

Before you go one step further, read the story of the Pharisee and the publican in the Temple (*Luke 18:10-14*). This will help you to see that sincerity of purpose means much with God. Now go and note carefully these eight points:

1. Recognize your need of God.

Isaiah 44:3: "I will pour water upon him that is thirsty."

Matthew 5:6: "Blessed are they which do hunger and thirst after righteousness: for they shall be filled."

We must recognize our need. That's what the publican did and what the Pharisee did not do. A French nobleman said, "God would think twice before damning a person of my quality." Such conceit short-circuits prayer.

2. Recognize God as your indispensable helper.

John 15:5: "I am the vine, ye are the branches: He that abideth in Me, and I in him, the same bringeth forth much fruit: for without Me ye can do nothing."

James 1:17: "Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, and cometh down from the Father of lights."

As a man sentenced to death by the highest court looks to the governor as his only hope, so should we in all things look to God. It is only at the altar of God that we can kindle our tapers with divine fire (*Isaiah 50:10-11*).

3. Pray in faith.

James 1:5-6: "If any of you lack wisdom, let him ask of God, that giveth to all men liberally, and upbraideth not; and it shall be given him. But let him ask in faith, nothing wavering" (verses 7-8).

Prayer without faith is like a key with no hand to turn it in the lock. "Ask in faith" (*Hebrews 11:6*).

4. Confess and forsake all your sins.

Proverbs 28:13: "He that covereth his sins shall not prosper: but whoso confesseth and forsaketh them shall have mercy."

Psalms 66:18: "If I regard iniquity in my heart, the Lord will not hear me" (Proverbs 28:9).

Confess and forsake. We must not wait for feeling. We must act. Be specific with God. Israel found peace only when they said, "We have added unto all our sins this evil, to ask us a king" (1 Samuel 12: 19).

"Sin is the transgression of the law" (1 John 3:4). We must forsake sin, which is lawlessness. Obedience must be the rule of our lives. It is the fruit of true faith. "Faith without works is dead" (James 2:20).

5. Pray according to God's will.

Matthew 26:39: "He went a little farther, and fell on his face, and prayed, saying, O my Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from Me: nevertheless not as I will, but as Thou wilt" (verse 42).

"We know not what we should pray for as we ought" (Romans 8:26). If it was fitting for Jesus to pray, Thy will be done," how much more appropriate for us. No wise parent will give a child everything he asks for. The answer sometimes is No; sometimes it is a substitute, as a rubber ball instead of scissors. And sometimes the answer may be, Not now; this is a postponement. Thus we must trust God.

6. Persevere with God.

Read Luke 18:1-8 the story of the importunate widow.

So many times we rush through the circle of prayer and scarcely remember what we prayed for. Perseverance in prayer is not so much urging our wills upon God as it is being "instant in prayer" keeping an attitude of prayer. Yet it does mean earnestness, as in the case of Elijah's praying for rain and sending his servant seven times to the hilltop to look for signs of rain.

7. Pray in Jesus' name.

John 14:13: " whatsoever ye shall ask in My name, that will I do, that the Father may be glorified in the Son."

To pray in the name of Jesus is to pray in the mind and spirit of Jesus while we believe His promises, rely upon His grace, and work His works.

8. Listen as well as talk.

Habakkuk 2:1: "I will stand upon my watch, and set me upon the tower, and will watch to see what He will say unto me, and what I shall answer when I am reproved."

Some preacher has said, "The prayer room is not so much the oratory room as the observatory room. Waiting for God to speak in prayer sometimes provides the only answer we need to our petitions."

5: WHY ARE SOME PRAYERS NOT ANSWERED?

In order to have our prayers answered, we should remove all the obstacles that block the prayer channel. Think of these four things:

1. We must forgive others.

Matthew 6:14-15: *"If ye forgive men their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you: but if ye forgive not men their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses" (Matthew 18:21-35).*

2. We must pray for others.

Job 42:10: *"The Lord turned the captivity of Job, when he prayed for his friends" (Matthew 5:44).*

A man whose prayer is always, "O Lord bless me," can never become like God in character. We must have not only the inward look, but the outlook. John Knox prayed, "Lord, give me Scotland or I die." He prayed for his enemies.

If we do not pray for those who spitefully use us, we shall surely despise them. Sincere prayer for them is essential for our own sakes.

3. We must confess our faults one to another.

James 5:16: *"Confess your faults one to another, and pray for one another, that ye may be healed" (Matthew 5:23-24).*

We must confess faults to others we have injured. This is simple decency. If you break a man's leg, do your best to fix it. If you break his heart, you are the only human being who can help patch it up. Do this now with kindness and words of sincerity.

4. We must restore anything taken by fraud or robbery.

Ezekiel 33:15: *"If the wicked restore the pledge, give again that he had robbed, walk in the statutes of life, without committing iniquity; he shall surely live, he shall not die" (the example of Zacchaeus, in Luke 19:1-9).*

Billy Sunday worked as a fourteen-year-old janitor boy for \$25 a month. With check in hand, he stood in line. At the bank window he received, by mistake, \$40 instead of the \$25. With the extra \$15 he bought a suit of clothes. When he became a Christian, according to his story, the Lord said, "Bill, you owe the Farmers Bank of Nevada County, Iowa, \$15 with interest." He paid it, and found peace. So should we make restitution to all whom we have defrauded.

6: WHAT EXAMPLE OF PRAYER DID JESUS GIVE?

Mark 1:35: *"In the morning, rising up a great while before day, He went out, and departed into a solitary place, and there prayed" (Luke 6:12).*

Jesus prayed early in the morning. He prayed in the evening and, at times, all night. He doubtless prayed almost incessantly during the forty days in the wilderness of temptation. He prayed in public; He prayed in private-mostly the latter. He prayed for Peter. He prayed for His disciples. He prayed for His enemies. He prayed for all who would ever believe. He prayed for you and me. He prayed through to victory in Gethsemane; and, in heaven, He "ever liveth to make intercession" for us. Shall weak mortals neglect to pray when we have available to us, through Christ, our divine Mediator, all power in heaven and earth (Matthew 28:18)?

7: WHY ARE WE ESPECIALLY ADMONISHED TO PRAY NOW?

We are in the last days, dear friend, and Jesus is coming soon. Said Peter:

1 Peter 4:7: "The end of all things is at hand; be ye therefore sober, and watch unto prayer."

If we are to stand in the time of trouble that is just ahead, we must get the daily prayer habit, and pray always. Morning, noon, and night we should lift our souls to God. Jesus said:

Luke 21:34, 36: "Take heed to yourselves, lest at any time your hearts be overcharged with surfeiting, and drunkenness, and cares of this life, and so that day come upon you unawares . . . Watch ye therefore and pray always, that ye, may be accounted worthy to escape all these things that shall come to pass, and to stand before the Son of man,"

SUPPLEMENTARY MATERIAL

"Prayer is the opening of the heart to God as to a friend. Not that it is necessary in order to make known to God what we are, but in order to enable us to receive Him. Prayer does not bring God down to us, but brings us up to Him.

"When Jesus was upon the earth, He taught His disciples how to pray. He directed them to present their daily needs before God, and to cast all their care upon Him. And the assurance He gave them that their petitions should be heard, is assurance also to us.

"Jesus Himself, while He dwelt among men, was often, in prayer. Our Saviour identified Himself with our needs and weakness, in that He became a suppliant, a petitioner, seeking from His Father fresh supplies of strength, that He might come forth braced for duty and trial. He is our

example in all things. He is a brother in our infirmities, 'in all points tempted like as we are'; but as the sinless one His nature recoiled from evil; He endured struggles and torture of soul in a world of sin. His humanity made prayer a necessity and a privilege. He found comfort and Joy in communion with His Father. And if the Saviour of men, the Son of God, felt the need of prayer, how much more should feeble, sinful mortals feel the necessity of fervent, constant prayer.

"Our heavenly Father waits to bestow upon us the fullness of His blessing. It is our privilege to drink largely at the fountain of boundless love. What a wonder it is that we pray so little! God is ready and willing to hear the sincere prayer of the humblest of His children, and yet there is much manifest reluctance on our part to make known our wants to God. What can the angels of heaven think of poor helpless human beings, who are subject to temptation, when God's heart of infinite love yearns toward them, ready to give them more than they can ask or think, and yet they pray so little and have so little faith? The angels love to bow before God; they love to be near Him. They regard communion with God as their highest Joy; and yet the children of earth, who need so much the help that God only can give, seem satisfied to walk without the light of His Spirit, the companionship of His presence.

"The darkness of the evil one encloses those who neglect to pray. The whispered temptations of the enemy entice them to sin; and it is all because they do not make use of the privileges that God has given them in the divine appointment of prayer. Why should the sons and daughters of God be reluctant to pray, when prayer is the key in the hand of faith to unlock heaven's storehouse, where are treasured the boundless resources of Omnipotence? Without unceasing prayer and diligent watching we are in danger of growing careless and of deviating from the right path. .

"There are certain conditions upon which we may expect that God will hear and answer our prayers. One of the first of these is that we feel our need of help from Him." *Steps to Christ*, 93-95