

Jesus' Teaching on Prayer

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[Scripture quotations taken from the NASB](#)

In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus instructed His disciples about prayer. He began His teaching saying:

"When you pray, you are not to be like the hypocrites; for they love to stand and pray in the synagogues and on the street corners so that they may be seen by men. Truly I say to you, they have their reward in full. But you, when you pray, go into your inner room, close your door and pray to your Father who is in secret, and your Father who sees what is done in secret will reward you.

"And when you are praying, do not use meaningless repetition as the Gentiles do, for they suppose that they will be heard for their many words. So do not be like them; for your Father knows what you need before you ask Him." (Matthew 6:5-8)

Jesus taught us that we are not to make showy public prayers to be seen by men. Such praying tends to exalt the one praying as one who is very "spiritual" and tends to shift the focus toward the one who is praying instead of where the focus of prayer should be, which is upon God. There may be times when we are called upon to lead a prayer among a group of people. At such times, let our prayers emphasize God's power, love, and mercy, as well as our dependence upon Him for every need of our lives. This was the kind of prayer that Jehoshaphat brought before the Lord in 2 Chronicles 20:6-12, and his prayer was heard.

Jesus also taught us that we should not keep babbling repetitively in our prayers like pagans do, because God our Father knows what we need before we

even ask it. Our Father is aware of the smallest details of our lives, even down to the number of hairs on our head (Matthew 10:30). He knows what is best for us as He fulfills His purpose for our lives, and that purpose will be revealed to us through His answers to our prayers and through the circumstances and events of our lives, which unfold as He has ordained them.

After Jesus taught His disciples how not to pray, He then taught them how they should pray using an example or model prayer, which we all know as the Lord's Prayer. This prayer is recorded in Matthew 6:9-13. A line-by-line examination of the Lord's Prayer shows us what elements should be included in our prayers to God.

In the first line of the prayer, Jesus taught that we are to pray bringing our requests to God, "Our Father who is in heaven". In John 16, Jesus also taught us that we are to bring our requests to the Father, asking "in His name". Jesus said that we would receive whatever we asked in His name (John 16:23-24).

Praying in Jesus' name means that we are to pray in accordance with the word of God as revealed in the Scriptures, in complete obedience and submission to all that is taught in His word. We are to submit our own will to His will, as His sovereign will and plan for each of us is revealed through the circumstances, conditions, and limitations of our lives (Luke 14:27, 33, Philippians 2:5-8, others).

Continuing in Jesus' model prayer, the words "Hallowed be Your name" show us that praise should be given to God the Father in our prayers. Praise is due Him, as is thanksgiving, for the gift that He gave to us when He called us to faith in His Son, whereby we have been given the privilege of praying to Him as "Our Father".

The following lines of Jesus' model prayer read: "Your kingdom come. Your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven.". These words again instruct us that our prayers should include an attitude of submission to, and acceptance of, God's will for our lives.

Jesus demonstrated His acceptance of God's will for His life, even when faced with the burden of overwhelming sorrow to the point of death. In the Garden of Gethsemane, Jesus prayed to His Father knowing that everything was possible for Him, asking Him to take away the cup of suffering and death that He knew He was about to drink at Calvary. However, above all else, Jesus yielded Himself to

His Father's will, even when His Father's will for Him was a painful and humiliating death on a cross (Mark 14:32-36).

Continuing with Jesus' model prayer we read: "Give us this day our daily bread". These words teach us that we should ask God for the things that we need in life, the things that are necessary to sustain our lives such as food, clothing, a place to live, etc. Notice that Jesus taught we are to ask for our "daily bread". We are not to project far out into the future with what we think we might face at that time.

God does not want us to be burdened by the worry of what we imagine might come about in our tomorrows. Therefore, Jesus gave us this promise: if we will seek the kingdom of God and His righteousness as the priority of our lives, then God will give to us all the things that we need to sustain our lives. With this promise, we are told not to worry about our tomorrows or what troubles our tomorrows may bring (Matthew 6:33-34). When we make it our priority to obey God's word and submit ourselves to His plan for our lives and the place of service that He has ordained for us, then He promises to provide for the needs of all our tomorrows, as many tomorrows as He has allotted to us.

Continuing in the Lord's Prayer we read: "And forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors." Forgiving others is required of us as believers. We have sinned against God, and by the wounds of His Son Jesus Christ we have been healed (Isaiah 53:5). Our sins made necessary in the sight of God our Father the painful and humiliating death that Jesus suffered in His crucifixion. His sacrifice was the propitiation for our sins. Just as God forgives our sins, He requires of us that we forgive the transgressions of those who sin against us.

In the last verse of Jesus' model prayer, we read: "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." In this verse Jesus taught us that we are to ask God for His help in the ongoing struggle with temptation and sin that we will experience as long as we live on the earth.

When Jesus taught His disciples how to pray by the example of this "Model Prayer", He taught them that they should pray to God their Father. He also taught that their prayers should include praise to God, and He taught that their prayers should include submission to the will of God. This submission means praying with an attitude and an understanding that the answers to our prayers, whether they are answered "yes" or "no", should be accepted as the answer given by our loving Father, who gives "what is good to those who ask him" (Matthew 7:11).

If some burden is not lifted as we have asked, it is because God has willed that we should endure it, at least for a time, for our eternal good and glory (Romans 8:17-18, 28-30, 2 Corinthians 4:16-18). In such times, we may be reminded again of Jesus' prayer in the Garden of Gethsemane (Matthew 26:36-46). He prayed to His Father three times that the cup of suffering He was about to endure at Calvary might be taken from Him, but His cup of suffering was not taken from Him; it was His Father's will that He would have to endure it. All of us who follow Jesus will be called upon to drink from His cup and be baptized with the baptism of His sufferings in some measure, as God has determined for each of us, and through these sufferings the Scriptures reveal that we will bear fruit to the glory of God (John 12:24-26, Mark 10:35-40).

Even though God will answer our prayers according to His sovereign plan for our lives, Jesus taught that we are to be persistent in our prayers. In Luke's account of the Gospel, right after Jesus instructed His disciples using the Lord's Prayer as an example, He then continued His teaching with the parable of a friend who comes at midnight, as we read in Luke 11:

Then He said to them, "Suppose one of you has a friend, and goes to him at midnight and says to him, 'Friend, lend me three loaves; for a friend of mine has come to me from a journey, and I have nothing to set before him'; and from inside he answers and says, 'Do not bother me; the door has already been shut and my children and I are in bed; I cannot get up and give you anything.' I tell you, even though he will not get up and give him anything because he is his friend, yet because of his persistence he will get up and give him as much as he needs. (Luke 11:5-8)

Jesus used this parable to teach His disciples another lesson about prayer, and that is the need to persist in our requests to God until we get an answer from Him. In the following verses Jesus said: "So I say to you, ask, and it will be given to you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you. For everyone who asks, receives; and he who seeks, finds; and to him who knocks, it will be opened." (Luke 11:9-10).

It is interesting to note that in the original Greek text, the words translated as "ask", "seek", and "find" all have a continuing action to them. A more complete translation to the English language would be "ask and keep on asking", "seek and keep on seeking", and "knock and keep on knocking".

Jesus concluded His teaching by saying: “If you then, being evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to those who ask Him?” (Luke 11:13). The Holy Spirit is referred to as the Comforter or Counselor in several passages of John’s Gospel (John 14:16, 14:26, 15:26, 16:7). In Matthew’s account of this same teaching, we read: “If you then, being evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father who is in heaven give what is good to those who ask Him!” (Matthew 7:11).

From these passages we learn that when we persevere in prayer to God our Father, we are promised the Holy Spirit, who is our Comforter and Counselor. We are also promised “what is good” for us and planned for us according to God’s sovereign purpose for each of our lives.

The need for persistence in prayer is also illustrated in the parable of the persistent widow in Luke 18. Jesus told this parable to teach His disciples that they should always pray and not give up hope of receiving an answer from God.

Jesus began the parable saying that there was an unrighteous judge who did not fear God, and who had no regard for men. There was a widow who kept coming to this judge, asking for justice against an adversary of hers. The judge at first kept putting her off, but she kept returning to him, persisting with her request. Finally, the unrighteous judge said to himself that he would grant this widow the justice she sought, so that she would not keep troubling him with her continual returning and pleas.

Jesus ended the parable with a lesson for His disciples about persistence in prayer when He said: “...Hear what the unrighteous judge said; now, will not God bring about justice for His elect who cry to Him day and night, and will He delay long over them? I tell you that He will bring about justice for them quickly. However, when the Son of Man comes, will He find faith on the earth?” (Luke 18:6-8).

So again, in the parable of the persistent widow, as in the parable of a friend who comes at midnight, Jesus taught about the necessity of persevering in prayer as we bring our requests to God, and He assured us that we will receive God’s answer to our prayers. Jesus’ final words in the passage are: “However, when the Son of Man comes, will He find faith on the earth?” This question that Jesus put forward indicates that at times, some of God’s answers to our prayers may challenge our faith.

When the answer to our prayer is “no”, our faith may indeed be challenged. We may wonder why our God, who can do all things, and who said that He loves His children, will not grant us our request to be freed from some burden that we have brought to Him in prayer.

If God’s answer to our prayer is “no”, then He calls upon us to submit to His answer as part of His plan for our life, at least for the present time (again consider Matthew 26:36-46). If our burden is not lifted, and we find that we must continue to suffer with it for a while longer, then we can take comfort in seeing and understanding the troubles which God has allowed to touch our lives in the light of the teachings that we have seen from the Scriptures before.

These teachings reveal to us that a share in the sufferings of Christ will be experienced in the life of every believer. Just as Jesus bore fruit through the sufferings that the Father had ordained for His life, we must follow Him in that we will bear fruit through sharing in His sufferings, as God has ordained for each of us, and the fruit born through these sufferings will achieve for us a share in Christ’s eternal glory (John 12:24-26, Mark 10:36-39, Romans 8:17).