

The Essentials Of Effective Prayer

Week Five

In our study of prayer last week, we looked at the element of petition, including some possible reasons our request are not granted. While Jesus has promised that the Father will respond when we ask anything in His name, we can't expect an answer when our requests aren't in line with the will of God or if our motivations are selfish. This week, as we cover the last two elements of the Lord's Prayer—confession of sin and request for deliverance—we'll learn how our relationship with God and others impact the effectiveness of our prayers.

Some of this week's lesson will sound familiar, but it is worth the review to be sure we understand God's perspective.

Observe: Immediately following His model prayer, Jesus offered further teaching on the element of confession in prayer. Turn to Matthew 6:12, 14-15.

Discuss:

- In verses 12 and 14, Jesus uses the words *debts* and *transgressions*. These words represent sins, and moral failures. To transgress means to infringe or to violate a law, command or duty. To offend also means to transgress (violate) the moral or divine law, to sin.
- The Greek word for debt, literally, means that which is legally due. Metaphorically, it is used to refer to sin as a debt, because it demands *expiation*—the act of extinguishing the guilt incurred by something. Thus, for sin, payment is by way of punishment.
- Have you ever felt that someone “owed you” after having injured or offended you?
- Jesus is modeling for us asking for forgiveness for what we owe, as we forgive, or erase the debts others owe to us. This forgiveness is a letting go of both the wrong and the resentment.
- According to verses 14-15 if we forgive others of their transgressions, our heavenly Father will forgive us. But if we do not forgive others, God will not forgive us of our transgressions.

Observe: Just how seriously does God take our relationship with others? Let's find out in Matthew 5:23-24.

Insight: *Presenting your offering at the altar* represents the same idea as worshiping for us today.

Discuss:

- Jesus gives as a qualification for worship in this passage, if we remember that our brother has something **against us**, we are to leave our offering at the altar, go and be reconciled to our brother and then come and present our offering.
- These verses show that our relationships with others are just as important as our relationship to God.

Observe: Last week, we learned how a husband treats his wife affects his prayer life. But does the principle apply to other relationships. See Romans 12:10, 14-19, 21.

Discuss:

- These verses show a list of things we are to do toward others as well as a list of things we are not to do. These outline our responsibilities toward society.
- They show that God is serious about conduct toward others and has set a high standard. Our relationships to others matter.

Observe: We have seen that God takes seriously our relationships with others, including our forgiveness of them and our seeking forgiveness when we've caused offense. Failure to do one or the other can negatively affect our prayer life. Now let's see what impact our relationship with God has on our prayers. Turn to Isaiah 59:1-2 and Psalm 66:18.

Discuss:

- God has and will always have the ability to save and to hear us. But our iniquities have made a separation between us and our God. Also, our sins have hidden His face from us so that He does not hear.
- Again, there is no shortage on God's part, our sins cause the separation and for prayers to go unanswered.
- Unconfessed sin has a major effect on our prayers. Each of us need to do a spiritual self-examination.

Observe: So, we've seen that our sin toward God, our poor treatment of others, and our refusal to forgive others will prevent us from gaining an audience with God. When we harbor sin in our hearts, He will not listen to what we have to say. So how can we resolve this problem?

Insight: To *confess our sins* means, "to say the same thing about our violations of God's law and will as God says about them."

Discuss:

- When we confess our sins, God is faithful and righteous (just) to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. It is just that simple. It is costly on God's part.
- Why do you think so many people don't seek God's forgiveness? Some possible reasons are, pride, shame, not knowing what confession means, or not being a believer.
- Sometimes rather than just confessing our sins we try to justify our actions, even when we know deep inside that we have done wrong.

Observe: We've seen how crucial the element of confession is for those who want to pray effectively. Now let's look again at the last verse in Jesus' model prayer as we turn our attention to the final elements: request for deliverance. Let's turn to Matthew 6:13.

Discuss:

- Jesus is asking God to lead us away from situations where we are vulnerable and have opportunity to sin. God does not tempt man to sin (see James 1:13) but does allow man to be tested. Jesus was asking for deliverance from evil.
- Evil and the Evil One do exist in the world today.
- We can pray to God for deliverance and protection from temptation and evil.
- Some other Scriptures to consider are Matthew 26:41 and 1 Corinthians 10:13.

Observe: John 17 contains Jesus' prayer for us as His disciples. The way Jesus intercedes for us should serve as an example for our own prayer life. This prayer occurred at the close of Jesus' life, just before His arrest and crucifixion.

Discuss:

- The timing of this prayer is important because Jesus was about to depart and knew what the disciples would be facing in the world.
- He didn't want the Father to take them or us out of the world, but to "Sanctify" the disciples in the truth, His word. Jesus wanted God to send the disciples into the world as He was sent.
- Jesus left an example, His praying for us should lead us to pray for others.
- This prayer also lets us know that warfare in the life of a Christian is real and that we need the Word of God and for God to keep us from evil.

The last section of this study points out a few of the countless passages in God's Word that give further insight on praying in accordance with God's will and in ways that draw us closer to His Heart:

- **2 Corinthians 1:20**—speaks of the many promises of God, in Him they are yes, and through Him is our Amen, to the glory of God through us.
- **Exodus 32:9-14**—Moses intercedes for the people of God after they had seen all the miracles and experienced His mercy, yet they worshipped a golden calf. Moses reminded God of His promise to Abraham, Isaac and Israel (Jacob).
- **Genesis 18:22-33**—Abraham pleads with God on behalf of the citizens of Sodom and Gomorrah, among whom live Abraham's nephew, Lot and his family.
- **Nehemiah 1:5-11**— We see the effective prayer of Nehemiah as he sought God's help as he prepared to approach the king of Persia to ask permission to rebuild the walls of Jerusalem. He even rehearsed God's Words back to Him (v. 8-9).
- Moses, Abraham and Nehemiah prayed not only for themselves, but they interceded for others.
- Paul also prayed for believers in the New Testament: **Ephesians 1:15-19, 3:14-21; Colossians 1:9-12**, just to name a few.

Wrap It Up

We've examined prayer from many angles to answer the questions of what prayer is and how we're to pray if we truly want God to hear us. Only one question remains: *Do you pray?*

Prayer is the most normal activity of a child of God. Regardless of denomination or church affiliation, we hold this in common—yet some have not made prayer a priority. *Do you pray?*

By prayer the sick have been healed, the wicked have been converted. By prayer the hurting are comforted, the depressed are encouraged, the confused see clearly. *Do you pray?*

Sometimes we wonder where our lives are headed. Sometimes we wish things were different. Instead of wondering and wishing, *why don't we pray?*

God moves when we ask, but it seems He often chooses not to move until we ask. Whatever decision you're facing, whatever worry weighs on your heart, all you need to do is draw near to God, cry out to Him. *Will you pray?*

*The Lord bless you, and keep you;
The Lord make His face shine on you, and be gracious to you:
The Lord lift up His countenance on you, and give you peace.
Numbers 6:24-26*