

Lord Teach Us To Pray

A Heart Set On God

Lesson 1

INTRODUCTION:

- I. In the eleventh chapter of Luke we have a very touching scene – Jesus is praying to His Father in heaven.
 - A. As He pours out His heart and soul to God, His disciples are nearby, watching.
 1. In fact, Luke records the event with these words.
 - a. **Luke 11:1** -- *Now it came to pass, as He was praying in a certain place, when He ceased, that one of His disciples said to Him, "Lord, teach us to pray, as John also taught his disciples."*
 - b. It seems strange that the disciples would ask Jesus to teach them to pray – these men were faithful Jews, well acquainted with prayer. They had been taught to pray from their youth up.
 - c. But when we realize that prayers in those days had become formal and ritualistic – genuine heartfelt devotion was often missing – then we understand why they asked Jesus this.

- d. As the disciples watched Jesus pray, they must have seen something different – something that was missing from their prayers.
 - e. They saw a heart that was set on God.
 - f. Their prayers weren't like that. And so, they asked Jesus, *"Lord, teach us to pray, as John also taught his disciples."*
- B. We don't know the SPECIFICS of what John taught his disciples about prayer, but based on what we DO know about John, we have a few clues.
- 1. John was an uncompromising preacher of righteousness, and rebuked the scribes and Pharisees for their vain and empty religious devotion.
 - 2. And yet, John was also a man of great humility – he even felt unworthy to unloose the sandal straps of Jesus.
 - 3. So it seems only natural that John would have taught his disciples to pray REVERENTLY out of deep respect and devotion to the God of heaven.
 - 4. They would have been taught to avoid the empty, stiff, formalized prayers of the scribes and Pharisees.
- C. In his book, *Studies in the Sermon on the Mount*, Martyn Lloyd-Jones wrote: *"Prayer is beyond any question the highest activity of the human*

soul. Man is at his greatest and highest when, upon his knees, he comes face to face with God.”

1. It doesn't really matter whether a prayer is coming from the lips of a young child, or from the mouth of the greatest philosopher or head of state, prayer brings us into the very presence of the Creator.
 2. For one brief moment in eternity, prayer allows us to capture the attention of God.
- II. However, depending on the level of our spiritual growth, prayer means different things to different people.
- A. In other words, there are several ways many of us look at prayer:
1. For some, prayer is simply talking to God as you would to a good friend – without trying to impress Him with holy, high-sounding words, and certainly without being so casual that our attitude becomes flippant.
 - a. And yet, this is where so many of us have problems.
 - b. Because communion with God is so vital, and because prayer is key in communing with God, Satan constantly tries to confuse our understanding about prayer, and ultimately, our commitment to prayer.

- c. I've even read articles where our prayers should be worded as if we were speaking to a great king, or a person of high position and status.
 - d. Some have even gone so far as to call it an offense to God for us to pray to our Father in heaven as if He were our friend.
 - e. I completely disagree. God is NOT impressed with the sophistication of our vocabulary, nor does He stand in awe with our ability to sound holy and sanctimonious!
 - f. God listens to the words of our HEART, not the words from our LIPS.
2. For others, they go to the OPPOSITE extreme – their prayers are SO casual that they completely lack a sense of awe and respect.
- a. Their prayers are flippant, disrespectful, and irreverent.
3. For still others, prayer has become more or less a matter of DUTY.
- a. They're more concerned with making prayer a formal ceremony rather than an opportunity to fellowship with God.
 - b. Their prayers have become a matter of routine ritual – they say the same things all the time, often using archaic phrases they've heard others use for years.

- c. In fact, some have the routine down so pat, that their prayers are the same every time – word for word, just like a recording.
 - 4. Then there are those who believe the whole purpose of prayer is to MAKE DEMANDS on God.
 - a. They attempt to force God to do what THEY believe He should do for them.
 - b. They treat the throne of God as if it were some kind of cosmic vending machine – put in your prayer, punch the right button, and out comes the result you prayed for.

- III. You may be someone who holds prayer with the utmost respect, yet you may find that your prayers are lacking real purpose and vitality – so, as a result, you don't spend as much time with God like you know you should.
 - A. So, how do we overcome this obstacle?
 - 1. While there are many reasons Christians struggle to pray, I believe there is ONE OVERRIDING FACTOR.
 - a. When we pray, we're forced to come face to face with our own TRUE spiritual condition.
 - b. We see the REAL us when we are alone with God – we see the real condition of our spiritual life.

c. We know exactly where we stand in a spiritual sense when we come to the throne of God in prayer.

d. And for many of us, that experience is, at the least, embarrassing, and at the worst filled with shame and deep remorse.

2. And yet, having the opportunity to be alone with God should be the Christian's greatest desire.

a. It's sad to know that so many of us spend such little time with God, or don't go to Him at all, because we see ourselves as we really are.

IV. Over the next twelve weeks, I want to talk about prayer and examine the attitude we should ALL have regarding this wonderful opportunity to communicate with God.

A. We'll begin by examining the need for us to do as Paul said in his admonition to the church at Thessalonica, "*Pray without ceasing.*" (1 Thessalonians 5:17)

1. We will learn how have our hearts SO FOCUSED ON GOD that prayer becomes an everyday, natural part of our life.

2. At the same time, we will learn how to guard against praying with the wrong attitude.

- a. That's what plagued the Pharisees – they saw prayer as a means to show off their spirituality, rather than as a humble opportunity to glorify God.
- B. We will also spend time closely examining the GREATEST PRAYER in the Bible, and also look at the pattern of prayer that Jesus taught his disciples.
1. In the Bible we have a record of the greatest prayer ever prayed.
 - a. If I were to ask you what prayer that might be, almost everyone would say it's the prayer that is often called "The Lord's Prayer."
 - b. But that wasn't a prayer. That was a LESSON on prayer. It was an occasion when Jesus was TEACHING His disciples HOW to pray.
 - c. No, it's not the "Lord's Prayer." But it IS a prayer prayed by the Lord. And in that prayer we're going to learn some valuable lessons about the Lord Himself, and about prayer.
- C. We're also going to focus on the lesson Jesus taught on prayer – what we commonly call "The Lord's Prayer."
1. To correct His disciples' misunderstanding about prayer learned from the hypocritical religious leaders, Jesus taught this wonderful lesson on prayer.

- a. He offered a pattern that gave a comprehensive view of ALL THE ESSENTIAL ELEMENTS of righteous prayer – every one of which centers on God.
 - b. From beginning to end of this pattern for prayer, we'll discover that Jesus focuses our attention on God – on His adoration, His worthiness, and His glory.
- D. Finally, we will spend some time examining the specific things we ALL need to know about prayer – such as, HOW we should pray, WHEN we should pray, and WHAT we should pray for.
1. What you learn may surprise you.

BODY:

- I. So, let's begin by examining our attitude toward prayer.
 - A. For the Christian, prayer should come as natural as breathing.
 1. Unfortunately, that's not always the case.
 2. Since we live in such a prosperous society, it's easy for everyone, including Christians, to develop a false sense of security.
 - a. Too many Christians become satisfied with PHYSICAL blessings and have little desire for SPIRITUAL blessings.
 - b. We become SO DEPENDENT on our PHYSICAL resources, we feel little need for SPIRITUAL resources.

- (1). For example, when we suddenly find ourselves achieving GREAT SUCCESS a believer, or even as a church, we tend to attribute that success to our OWN efforts, rather than see it as a work of GOD.
 - (2). When that happens, we end up relying on our OWN strength and stop praying for God to use HIS.
3. This is ONE of the reasons the Apostle Paul urged believers to “*pray at all times*” (**Eph. 6:18**), and to “*devote yourselves to prayer*” (**Col. 4:2**).
- a. CONTINUAL, PERSISTENT PRAYER is essential for Christian living, and it helps us to learn how to depend on God and not on our own resources for success.
- B. When we look at the earthly ministry of Jesus, one thing clearly stands out – it was VERY BRIEF, barely three years long.
1. Yet, in those three years, our Lord spent a GREAT amount of time in prayer.
 - a. The Gospels tell us that Jesus made a habit of rising early in the morning, often before daybreak, to commune with His Father.
 - b. In the evening He would frequently go to the Mount of Olives or some other quiet spot to pray, usually alone.

2. Prayer was the SPIRITUAL AIR that Jesus breathed every day of His life. He practiced an UNENDING COMMUNION between Himself and the Father, and He urged His disciples to do the same.

a. In Luke chapter 21, He said, “*Watch therefore, and pray always that you may be counted worthy to escape all these things that will come to pass, and to stand before the Son of Man.*” **(Luke 21:36)**

C. The early church learned that lesson and carried on Christ’s commitment to continual, unceasing prayer.

1. Before the Day of Pentecost, when the 120 disciples were gathered together, it says, “*These all continued with one accord in prayer and supplication*” **(Acts 1:14)**

a. That didn’t change even when 3,000 were added to their number on the Day of Pentecost: “*And they continued steadfastly in the apostles’ doctrine and fellowship, in the breaking of bread, and in prayers.*” **(Acts 2:42)**

2. When the apostles found it necessary to appoint seven men to handle the daily care of the Grecian widows, the apostles said, “*And we will give ourselves continually to prayer and to the ministry of the word.*” **(Acts 6:4)**

- D. Throughout his life, the Apostle Paul also exemplified this commitment to prayer.
1. Just read the opening to many of his epistles and you'll discover that praying for his fellow believers was a daily practice. **(cf. 1 Cor. 1:4; Eph. 5:20; Phil. 1:4; Col. 1:3; 1 Thes. 1:2; 2 Thes. 1:3, 11; Phil. 4)**
 - a. In fact, to the Christians in Rome, Paul said, *“For God is my witness, whom I serve with my spirit in the gospel of His Son, that without ceasing I make mention of you always in my prayers...”* **(Rom. 1:9–10)**
 - b. His prayers for believers often occupied him both *“night and day.”* **(1 Thes. 3:10; 2 Tim. 1:3)**
 2. Because Paul prayed for his fellow believers CONTINUALLY, he encouraged OTHERS to do the same.
 - a. He urged the Thessalonians to *“pray without ceasing.”* **(1 Thes. 5:17)**
 - b. He commanded the Philippians to stop being anxious and instead, *“In everything by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known to God.”* **(Phil. 4:6)**

- c. He encouraged the Colossians to, “*Continue earnestly in prayer, being vigilant in it with thanksgiving.*” **(Col. 4:2)**
- d. And to help the Ephesians combat the spiritual darkness in the world around them, he said, “*Praying always with all prayer and supplication in the Spirit, being watchful to this end with all perseverance and supplication for all the saints — and for me, that utterance may be given to me, that I may open my mouth boldly to make known the mystery of the gospel.*” **(Eph. 6:18-19)**

E. Unceasing, continual prayer is ALSO essential to our RELATIONSHIP with the Lord, AND to our ability to function in a dark and dangerous world.

- 1. However, to “*pray at all times*” obviously doesn’t mean we’re to pray every waking moment.
 - a. Nor does it mean we’re to devote ourselves to reciting ritualistic patterns and forms of prayer.
- 2. To “*pray without ceasing*” basically refers to RECURRING PRAYER, **not** nonstop talking. So, our way of life should be one where we are CONTINUALLY in an attitude of prayer.

3. Praying at all times is like LIVING IN CONTINUAL AWARENESS OF GOD – where everything we see and experience becomes an opportunity for prayer.
 - a. It means that, when we are TEMPTED, we ask for God's help.
 - b. When we ENCOUNTER TROUBLE, we turn to God as our Deliverer.
 - c. When we experience something GOOD AND BEAUTIFUL, we thank the Lord for it.
 - d. When we see EVIL AROUND US, we ask God to make it right and help us do OUR PART to accomplish that, if it is according to His will.
 - e. And when we meet SOMEONE WHO ISN'T A CHRISTIAN, we pray for God to draw that person to Himself and to use us to help lead them to Christ.

4. When we live our lives like this, life itself becomes a CONTINUALLY ASCENDING PRAYER – because all our thoughts, our deeds, and our circumstances become an opportunity to commune with our Heavenly Father.
 - a. We are constantly setting our minds *“on the things above, not on the things that are on earth.” (Col. 3:2)*

II. Prayer is ALSO a means of ESTABLISHING AND MAINTAINING a close, intimate fellowship with God.

A. The apostle John wrote, *“What we have seen and heard we proclaim to you also, that you also may have fellowship with us; and indeed our fellowship is with the Father, and His Son Jesus Christ.”* **(1 John 1:3)**

1. Imagine what it would be like spending an entire workday with your best friend at your side.

a. You talk with them throughout the day, introduce them to your friends or business associates, and at the end of the day, you take time to sit back and carry on a casual conversation about the events of the day.

b. But how do you think your friend would feel if – all day long – you never talked to them or even acknowledged their presence?

2. And, yet that’s exactly how we treat the Lord when we fail to pray – it’s just like ignoring our best friend.

a. If we talked with our friends as SELDOM as some of us talk with the Lord, it wouldn’t take very long for those friends to simply disappear.

- B. Maybe the best way to say this is: Our fellowship with God is NOT meant to wait until we get to heaven. God's greatest desire, and our greatest need, is to be in constant fellowship with Him NOW, and there is no greater means of doing that than through prayer.
1. Prayer should never be thought of as some duty to be crowded into our busy lives
 2. We're certainly NOT obeying the Lord's command when we give Him the SCRAPs of our time in prayer – when we word a hurried prayer in the morning, or when at the end of a tiring day all we want to do is get some restful sleep.
 - a. God is ALWAYS there. His ear is EVER attentive to the cry of His child.
 - b. But we can never get to know Him if we use prayer like some use the telephone, for a few words of hurried conversation.
 2. Intimacy requires time. There is simply NO WAY we can truly come to know God through some brief and fragmentary contact, or through meaningless repetitions, or through prayers that are requests for personal favors and nothing more.
 - a. That's not the way we need to communicate with Almighty Jehovah – the One true God of heaven and earth.

3. It's been said that "the goal of prayer is to gain access to the ear of God." That goal can only be reached by pouring out our heart to Him.
 - a. This is the only way we can truly expect to know Him – to know Him in an INTIMATE way.
 - (1). It's one thing to know ABOUT God – that's an INTELLECTUAL KNOWLEDGE that comes through reading Scripture.
 - (2). But, it's entirely different to KNOW God in an intimate, personal way (as you would a close friend or companion) – that kind of knowledge only comes through spending time together.
 - b. And the REAL beauty of all this is that the more we come to truly KNOW Him, the MORE TIME we'll spend in His presence, and the more we'll find that presence a constant, ever-increasing joy.

CONCLUSION:

- I. When was the last time you simply opened up your heart to God in prayer with a child-like confidence?

- A. For those of you who pray regularly, I don't need to tell you how richly rewarding it is – you already know.
 - 1. You know how reassuring it is to come to the throne of God and share with Him the deepest needs of your heart.
 - 2. Or to express a heart filled with joy and gratefulness for all He has done for you.
 - 3. Prayer is an integral part of your daily life – in everything you do, and everywhere you go, God is right there, because you're always talking to Him.

- B. But, do you REALLY have a heart set on God? If you will allow me to be painfully honest, the kind of person I've just described probably doesn't apply to the majority of us here right now.
 - 1. The REAL truth is that most of us DON'T have an intimate relationship with God through the avenue of prayer.

- C. Why is this? Why do we spend so little time in prayer?
 - 1. Sadly, some only make a PRETENSE of being a Christian – there is really nothing of substance to your claim of being a child of God.
 - a. You were baptized once, but you've long since stopped living a life that is truly devoted to God and to His Son Jesus Christ.

- b. So no wonder you've stopped praying – you've already shut God out of your heart, so why should you pray?
 - c. You no longer have a heart set on God.
 - 2. For others, you feel guilty every time you try to pray. You feel ashamed to even think about approaching the throne of God, knowing how many times you've failed Him in the past.
 - a. Remember all those promises you made to the Lord – promises you didn't keep, even though you really wanted to keep them.
 - b. Now you just feel ashamed to ask God for forgiveness, or for help in overcoming an area of weakness in your life because you're convinced that He's tired of hearing you make the same old promises.
 - c. You no longer feel worthy to have a heart set on God.
 - 3. Have I touched a sensitive nerve here somewhere? Are you secretly saying, "Yep, that's me! That describes me to a tee."
- D. So, allow me to offer a little help, if I may.
 - 1. To those of you who may be only a step away from leaving the Lord completely, please consider the consequences.
 - a. Try to imagine what it will be like spending eternity separated from God in a place of never-ending torment, knowing all the

while that you once held the hope of eternal life in your hands, but let it go.

- b. Life is too short, and eternity too long to exchange the joy and bliss of heaven for the passing pleasures of this world.
 - c. You're Lord and Savior stands ready to welcome you back into fellowship – all you have to do is take the first step.
2. To those of you who feel too ashamed and guilty to approach the throne of God in prayer, let me give you some REALLY GOOD news:
- a. GOD DOESN'T KEEP SCORE! He doesn't keep a balance sheet with all the debits you've incurred on one side and all the credits you've earned on the other.
 - b. When He forgives sins, they are gone forever! Completely erased, deleted, obliterated, never-to-be remembered again.
 - c. Furthermore, the Lord doesn't ASK us to make ANY promises; in fact, He would much rather we NOT make promises because He already knows we're not always going to be able to keep them anyway.
 - d. All He wants is for us to simply try. And when we fail, He wants us come to Him in humility, confess our failures to Him (He already knows we failed, so we're not telling Him

anything He doesn't already know. He just wants to make sure WE know we've failed). And then, He wants us to simply ask for His grace and mercy in forgiving us of our sins.

e. It's as simple as that.

E. But there's one thing you REALLY need to know. Satan doesn't want you to do ANY of this.

1. He wants YOU to believe you're too UNWORTHY to get God's forgiveness, and he wants YOU to feel too ASHAMED and GUILTY to approach God in prayer.
2. So, which one are you going to listening to – GOD, who pleads with you to come to His throne of grace and mercy, or SATAN who's telling you you're not worthy?
3. You already know what you need to do, don't you – so why don't you DO what you ALREADY know you need to do?
4. Have a heart set on God, and come to Him now!