

Table of Contents

Lesson 1: Terms Associated with Prayer

Lesson 2: Jesus' Teaching on Prayer

Lesson 3: The Prayer of Faith

Lesson 4: The Will of God and the Answering of Prayer

Lesson 5: Prayer in Our Personal Lives

Lesson 6: Prayer in Public Worship

Lesson 7: Intercessory Prayers

Lesson 8: Prayers of Distress

Lesson 9: Questions for the Almighty

Lesson 10: Confession of Sin

Lesson 11: Prayers of Praise

Lesson 12: Expressions of Thanksgiving

Lesson 1: Terms Associated with Prayer

Introduction

Through the ages of human history from the prehistoric to the present, from Mosaic law to the mediation of Christ, God-fearing men and women have had one thing in common: the practice of praying to their Creator. Communication with God is a human yearning which God has not left unfulfilled. Provisions have always been made for man to reach out to God with his needs and anxieties, his hopes and aims, his gratitude and joy. The Scriptures are rich with instructions and examples of this most important connection with heaven. Even so, many of us may feel as inadequate as the apostles to effectively pray. On one occasion, “*as He was praying in a certain place,*” the request came from His disciples, “*Lord teach us to pray ...*” (Lk 11:1). This study is offered in the hope that we will be taught and encouraged to genuinely engage God in prayer.

Question: Who also taught his disciples to pray (Lk 11:1)?

Some Terms Which Define Prayer

1. **Pray/Prayer:**

a) *Proseuche* (n): the most frequent term – Mt 6:5-7, 9ff; 14:23; 26:36, 39, 44; etc.

b) *Erotao* (v): to ask – Jn 14:16; 16:26; 17:9, 15, 20.

2. Supplication: *deesis* (n): primarily, a wanting, a need, then, an asking, entreaty, supplication ... *proseuche* is used of prayer in general; *deesis* stresses the sense of need (Vine, Vol. 3, p. 200). Eph 6:18; Ph 4:6; 1 Tim 2:1; 5:5; Rom 10:1; 2 Cor 1:11; etc.

3. Intercession: *enteuxis* (n): primarily denotes a lighting upon, meeting with; then, a conversation; hence, a petition ... it is a technical term for approaching a king, and so for approaching God in intercession; it is rendered “prayer” in 1 Tim 4:5; in the plural in 2:1 (Vine, Vol. 2, p. 267).

4. Petition: *aitema*, (n): from *aiteo*, to ask, is rendered “petitions” in 1 Jn 5:15.

5. Ask:

a) *Aiteo* (v): more frequently suggests the attitude of a suppliant, the petition of one who is lesser in position than he to whom the petition is made; e.g., in the case of men in asking something from God, Matt 7:7 ... With reference to petitioning God, this verb is found in Paul’s Epistles in Eph. 3:20 and Col. 1:9; in James four times, 1:5, 6; 4:2, 3; in 1 John five times, 3:22; 5:14, 15 (twice), 16 (Vine, Vol. 1, p. 79).

b) *erotao* (v): more frequently suggests that the petitioner is on a footing of equality or familiarity with the person whom he requests. It is used ... of the Pharisee who “desired” Christ that He would eat with him, an indication of the inferior conception he had of Christ, Luke 7:36 (ibid).

c) **Note:** In this respect it is significant that the Lord Jesus never used *aiteo* in the matter of making request to the Father. “The consciousness of His equal dignity, of His potent and prevailing intercession, speaks out in this, that as often as He asks, or declares that He will ask anything of the Father, it is always *erotao*, an asking, that is, upon equal terms, Jn 14:16; 16:26; 17:9, 15, 20, never *aiteo*, that He uses. Martha, on the contrary, plainly reveals her poor unworthy conception of His person, that ... she ascribes that *aiteo* to Him which He never ascribes to Himself, John 11:22” (Trench, Syn. xl)(ibid).

Two points about these words: 1) prayer involves many aspects of communication with God, and 2) prayer is mentioned quite often in the Scriptures. It is a vital activity.

Question: What did Martha believe about the relationship between Jesus and the Father (Jn 11:22)?

The Need for Prayer

Simply, we need to pray because spiritual life is *a relationship with a personal Being* rather than a unilateral exercise in self-discipline, obligation and duty. Temptations are too strong, disappointments too heart-rending, threats too fearsome and failure too pervasive for us to make it through life without God’s mercy and help. At the same time our blessings are so abundant that constant thanksgiving reminds us that every good and perfect gift “*comes down from the Father of lights*” (Jas 1:17).

Jesus says “*For your Father knows the things you have need of before you ask Him*” (see Mt 6:8, 32). Prayer is not to **inform** God; rather, it is to acknowledge our understanding that **He**, not **we**, provides our every need. It is an admission that He sustains us physically and spiritually every day. Without God, life would be filled with evil and chaos.

Question: Will God bless us if we can’t even think of what we should ask? Eph 3:20

Commands to Pray

1 Th 5:17 – Pray without _____.

Col 4:2 – Continue _____ in prayer, being _____ in it with _____.

1 Tim 2:1 – _____, _____, _____, and _____
_____ should be made for all men.

Lesson 2: Jesus' Teaching on Prayer

Introduction

Man's sense of what it takes to make prayer acceptable to the God of heaven is often quite different from Jesus' teaching. Rather than a pompous show, mindless repetition or some formal "prayer lingo," genuine prayer is *conversation with God*. God is not more apt to hear clichés than common speech; His attention is not gained by handling beads or trinkets. Prayer is the humble expression of need and the simple giving of thanks.

Our Motive in Prayer

Jesus drew several negative lessons on prayer from the Pharisees. One had to do with their penchant for turning what should have been a private petition into a public show (Mt 6:5-6; 23:14). We must keep the main thrust of Jesus' observation in view lest we misapply His point. He does not condemn praying in public *per se*, for He, Himself, does it (Jn 11:41-43; Mt 26:26-27), early Christians did it (Ac 4:24ff) and Paul directed it (1 Cor 14:15-17). What Jesus faults is an inner desire to impress others with piousness, to display one's prayers for the praise and adulation of others. What a travesty of heavenly privilege! God does not appreciate so being used.

Question: What reward do men have who pray publicly for human acclaim?

Question: God sees _____ (Mt 6:6). How does He reward genuine prayer?

Proper Expression in Prayer

Jesus drew a lesson from the "hypocrite"; He now draws from the heathen (Mt 6:7-8). Again, while repetition *per se* is not wrong, we must not think that prayer can be reduced to perfunctory phrases repeated over and over by a benumbed mind. Many prayers in denominational gatherings are coldly read from prayer books; Catholics recite the rosary:

"The devotion to the Fifteen Mysteries in which fifteen 'decades' of 'Ave Marias' are recited, each decade being preceded by the Paternoster and followed by the Gloria Patri. Ordinarily only a third part of the Rosary, a so-called chaplet, is said on one occasion. To assist the memory, the prayers are commonly counted on a string of beads" (*Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church*, p. 1202).

God lacks no awareness of anything; He is not like a distracted parent who must be hounded, tugged on and irritated before taking notice. Jesus then gives a prayer which was simply intended to be a sample of appropriate (though not comprehensive) content coupled with simplicity of expression (Mt 6:9-13). This was never intended to be what it has become: a group recitation at formal or ceremonial gatherings.

Our Father in heaven, hallowed be Your name – God must be given due honor and respect in view of all He is and has done. What a shame that God’s name is more often found in the company of profanity than praise.

Your kingdom come – As Jesus gives this sample prayer the kingdom as prophesied in Daniel 2, the re-establishment of the throne of David and universal rule being delegated to Christ by virtue of His atoning work, has not yet been completed. Thus some object to this phrase on that basis. However, the term “kingdom” has application to the final manifestation of the Lord at His second coming and the saints eternal heavenly home (2 Tim 4:1, 18). There is, therefore, a sense in which the kingdom has not yet come.

Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven – This is both acknowledgment of and submission to the omnipotent power of God. As we shall see in this study, bending to the will of God is vital to acceptable prayer and to the strength of our faith.

Give us this day our daily bread – The first three phrases addressed God: His name, kingdom and will. The prayer now turns to human needs, the first being daily sustenance. God has made our bodies dependent upon constant fuel, and it is He who provides the rain and seasons to produce food (Ac 14:17; Mt 5:45). Thus the constant need to eat is designed to keep us aware of and dependent upon the Feeder.

And forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors – Sin is here pictured as spiritual indebtedness to God (see Mt 18:21ff). Man’s only hope for fellowship with God is His willingness and provision for forgiveness. But this is conditional upon several things, one of which mentioned here is our own willingness to forgive those indebted to us via their wrongdoing.

And do not lead us into temptation, but deliver us from the evil one – As God does not tempt us to sin (Jas 1:13), the thought here is that God not *allow* us to be “drawn away by (our) own desires and enticed” (Jas 1:14). Or, the reference could be to trials of various sorts which God certainly employs to build our faith (Heb 11:17). The prayer presents a positive desire: to be delivered from *the* evil one (Satan) or *any* evil one who may seek to do us harm.

For Yours is the kingdom and the power and the glory forever, Amen – This doxology appears to have been added by men later as it is not in the oldest and most reliable manuscripts. Also, various versions of it exist in the later manuscripts. If considered original, the prayer ends with acknowledgment that God is transcendent, a powerful and glorious Being with eternal existence. All must humble themselves at His feet in prayer and personal will to be accepted of Him. To do otherwise is spiritually suicidal.

Question: Which part of the prayer does Jesus single out for emphasis after the prayer?

Question: What must we do even as we “stand praying” (Mk 11:25-26)?

Question: T/F This prayer covers everything that ever needs to be prayed.

Persistence in Prayer

Jesus tells two short parables to illustrate that “*men always ought to pray and not lose heart*” (Lk 11:5-8; 18:1-8). But if God doesn’t need to be cajoled or pestered into hearing our prayers, why is persistence in prayer needed? Mainly, because prayers may not be answered exactly when and how we think they should be. We must always defer to the divine judgment of God. Sometimes a good thing becomes bad if administered at the wrong time. Further, other people’s needs must be considered along with our own. (This becomes sadly comical when two sports teams are both praying for victory when only one of them can win. And the winners say, “God was looking out for us and gave us the victory today.” Does that mean the *morally* superior team won?!) We must not conclude that God doesn’t hear or care if what we ask for is not granted immediately.

Question: Are these two parables comparative or contrasting?

Question: Jesus wonders if He will find _____ on the earth when He comes.

Humility in Prayer

Jesus tells another parable in Lk 18:9-14 which contrasts with the simple prayer of Mt 6:9-13. “*Two men went to the temple to pray ...*”. Again, public prayer *per se* is not forbidden, and Jesus quotes Isaiah’s reference to the temple as a “house of prayer” (Mk 11:17). *Attitude* is the key. One man was overwhelmed with a sense of his own righteousness; the other was overwhelmed with a sense of guilt and shame for his sins. One of these prayers will be rewarded; the other will not.

Question: Where was the tax-collector standing when he prayed?

Question: T/F The Pharisee was not heard because didn’t do any religious things.

Additional Things to Pray For

What does Jesus say men should pray for in ...

Mt 5:44:

Mt 9:38:

Mt 24:20 (in reference to the coming destruction of Jerusalem):

Mt 26:41:

Lesson 3: The Prayer of Faith

Introduction

We have noted that prayer is *conversation* with God which grows out of a living and vibrant *relationship* with God. Prayer, therefore, must be based upon faith in God and our confidence that He is the powerful, benevolent and attentive heavenly Father that He claims to be.

God Hears His Children

1 Jn 5:14 – *“Now this is the confidence that we have in Him, that if we ask anything according to His will, He hears us.”*

Jas 1:5-8 – *“If any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask of God, who gives to all liberally and without reproach, and it will be given to him. But let him ask in faith, with no doubting, for he who doubts is like a wave of the sea driven and tossed by the wind. For let not that man suppose that he will receive anything from the Lord; for he is a double-minded man, unstable in all his ways.”*

Mt 7:11 – *“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 good things to those who ask Him!”*

As we are encouraged by God to seek Him and cast all our cares upon Him, “for He cares for you” (1 Pet 5:7), we are naturally drawn to the question of the **effectiveness** of prayer. What, exactly, does prayer *do*? This question will be explored more fully in our next lesson, but we cannot adequately consider it until first looking at the frame of mind of the petitioner.

As the Christian matures prayer progresses from an occasional cry for help to an ongoing dialog. Our awareness of dependence upon God becomes *daily* rather than only during a crisis. All our thoughts are examined in light of God’s oversight; blessings are received and enjoyed in the acknowledgment that God is responsible for them; our weakness to temptation and faltering in sin is more immediately apparent rather than swept under the rug of obliviousness.

As our faith grows, so does our confidence that God is active in our lives; no, not *miraculously* active, but active nonetheless. Prayer is based upon confidence in that activity. God is not merely a divine “shrink” or sounding board who dispassionately listens to our troubles. Through the ages He has responded to not only the *needs* of His children but their *expressions* of need – and desire. Even the psalmist long ago wrote: “*But certainly God has heard me; He has attended to the voice of my prayer. Blessed be God, who has not turned away my prayer, nor His mercy from me!*” (Ps 66:19-20). We express our needs, and God responds not vocally but actively. We “hear” and “see” answers to our prayers.

There is great blessing alone in being *heard* (1 Jn 5:14). Just knowing that God is *aware* of our situation (though He is aware even *without* prayer) provides great strength and comfort. But it is our faith in God that gives us confidence to make requests with the assurance that they will be granted.

Notes on James 1:5-8:

1) God gives “liberally and without reproach.” God is not stingy, reluctant or resentful in His giving. Note that the object requested – wisdom – is something that God desires for all men to possess. Thus “*it will be given to him.*”

2) The petitioner must “ask in faith, with no doubting.” This man is not seeking blessings which arise from a constant relationship with God but is moved by fleeting urges and occasional perceived needs. God is merely a momentary tool to be used and set aside until needed again. Such a man is “*double-minded ... and unstable in **all** his ways,*” not just prayer.

3) Such people are not promised God’s help in response to prayer as are His dedicated, faithful people (v 7).

Question: Why might some people not ask God for wisdom?

Question: How can a man who prays for wisdom help himself attain it?

The Prayer of a Righteous Man

Our faith in God lies not just in the fact that He exists or even hears; faith understands that God can be reasoned with and influenced within limitations. James added in his epistle, “*The effective, fervent prayer of a righteous man avails much*” (5:16). The NAS translates: “*The effective prayer of a righteous man can accomplish much.*” Faith and righteousness go hand in hand, as the man who is completely devoted to God is striving to attain godly character. This is the type of person that God has regard for and whose petitions He will regard. What great good can be accomplished when righteous and faithful people pray!

Question: Who does James use as an example of effective, powerful prayer?

Question: How is this man compared with us today?

Lesson 4: The Will of God and the Answering of Prayer

Introduction

One principle we must always keep in mind, especially when considering the subject of answered prayer, is that one's belief in and relationship with God does not obligate God to the believer's will. On the contrary, the believer is **always** subordinate to the will of God. God's promise to answer prayer must be balanced with the sovereignty of His will.

The Sovereignty of God's Will

We must learn to make our plans for the future and base our intentions upon the over-arching will of God. God's purposes are supreme and we must seek to match our lives with that purpose as best as we can determine. Note the emphasis on God's will:

Jas 4:15: *"Instead you ought to say, 'If the Lord wills, we shall live and do this or that.'"*

1 Cor 4:19: *"But I will come to you shortly, if the Lord wills ...".* (See also Ac 18:21; Heb 6:3; Rom 1:10; 15:32; 1 Th 3:11; etc.)

1 Pet 3:17; 4:19: God's will may even allow some circumstances of suffering.

Heb 10:7, 9: Prophetic purpose: *"Then I said, 'Behold, I have come – in the volume of the book it is written of Me – to do Your will, O God ...'".*

Some Conditions Placed Upon Prayer

- 1)** God's will: *"... if we ask anything according to His will, He hears us"* (1 Jn 5:14). Jesus recognized and respected this: *"O My Father, if it is possible ... nevertheless, not as I will, but as You will"* (Mt 26:39, 42, 44). The will of God often has set limits, and we cannot effectively pray in violation of those limits. For example, we are not to pray for God to save people who remain rebellious to Him (1 Jn 5:16). Further, our desire and God's will may not mesh, and in such cases we must be content and confident in His judgment.
- 2)** Obedience: *"And whatever we ask we receive from Him, because we keep His commandments and do those things that are pleasing in His sight"* (1 Jn 3:22). "Keep His commandments" equates with "walk in the light" (1:7) and "abides in the light" (2:10). This is called "knowing God" (2:3). John here states our previous observation: those in a covenant relationship with God have the assurance of answered prayer.
- 3)** Proper motives: *"Yet you do not have because you do not ask. You ask and do not receive, because you ask amiss, that you may spend it on your pleasures"* (Jas 4:2b-3). Here we have people who are so consumed with sating their desires that they forfeit

prayer in favor of their own ambition, ingenuity and shrewdness. They “do not ask.” Others asked, but did so for selfish indulgence. Such attitudes make one an enemy of God, a spiritual adulteress (Jas 4:4).

- 4) What is beneficial: The NT emphasizes God giving “good gifts” (Jas 1:17; Mt 7:11). It may very well be that what *we* determine to be beneficial *God* sees as disastrous. As a human father may withhold something dangerous from his child, so God governs what He allows us to have. We must defer to God’s judgment in this matter.

Not all these conditions are stated with every promise of answered prayer, but they are always operative as we make our requests to God.

Promises of Answered Prayer

It is in the above light that the following verses must be understood. To make them unqualified, open-ended promises wherein the will of God is made subject to our will is erroneous. Prayer is not some heavenly credit card for an earthly shopping spree.

Mt 7:7 – “Ask, and it will be given to you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you.” Remember that this was spoken to demoralized, disillusioned people (Jews, mainly) who had long been misguided by the scribes and their traditions. Jesus is trying to instill new hope and confidence in God, and He does so by reintroducing God to them as a caring, loving Father (comp. Mt 6:25-34).

Mk 11:23-24 – “For assuredly, I say to you, whoever says to this mountain, ‘Be removed and be cast into the sea,’ and does not doubt in his heart, but believes that those things he says will come to pass, he will have whatever he says. Therefore I say to you, whatever things you ask when you pray, believe that you receive them, and you will have them.” After all Peter had seen Jesus do, he marveled at the withering of the fig tree which Jesus had cursed the day before (Mk 11:20-21). Jesus speaks this to His disciples who are still uncertain in faith; hence, “So Jesus answered and said to them, ‘Have faith in God’” (Mk 11:22). Jesus will shortly be asking His disciples to do the “impossible”: preach His kingdom into existence among the cities of the Roman Empire. They will not be able to do this by their own resources, but by tapping into the will of God by faith and prayer they will be successful. They must yet come to greater faith. [Faith as a mustard seed and moving mountains seem to be proverbial expressions, see Mt 17:20]

Conclusion

God answers prayers! If we think carefully, I believe we will find that the vast majority of our prayers have been answered in the affirmative. Even when answered in the negative, our prayers have been to our benefit. Let us not allow the major hurt or disappointment set aside the greater truth: God has given us everything we need and so much more!

Lesson 5: Prayer in Our Personal Lives

Introduction

The more our faith grows, the more central God and our dependence upon Him becomes in our conscious thought. Paul exhorted the Philippians to rejoice and pray because “*the Lord is at hand*” (Ph 4:5). That is, He is near in proximity to us though not *visible*. The more aware we are of God’s nearness to our every circumstance, the more active and bold we will be in our prayers.

When Should We Pray?

Always!, Paul tells the Thessalonians (1 Th 5:17) and the Ephesians (Eph 6:18). No, this does not mean endless recitation but that prayer should be a *constant habit of life*. There are times for more lengthy, detailed prayers: a quiet walk in the morning to start the day, for example (see Lk 6:12). But prayer can also be short acknowledgments (“Thank you, God”) or appeals (“Help me, Lord”). Consider Stephen: “*Lord Jesus, receive my spirit*” (Ac 7:59). Such snippets of conversation with God can be uttered silently or spoken while driving, working, frustrated (“God, give me patience with the children!”), before a challenge (“Father, help me say the right thing”) – *at any time, in any situation*.

We have been conditioned mostly by habit to pray before meals (1 Tim 4:5), but we err if mealtime is the full extent of our private communication with God. Our dependence upon God, if properly evaluated, is total. We need God every moment of every day to help us think pure thoughts, to speak with wisdom and love, to sustain our health and protect us from harm. Our relationship with Him should be so developed that we find it easy to speak casually but with reverence at any time.

There are going to be times in every Christian’s life when his/her prayers will be more intense and urgent because of attending circumstances. Not every decision in life is the same in importance: where to go to school; whether to take a job or promotion; what medical treatment to choose; etc. There are occasions which require special time and energy in fervent prayer to God. **However**, if we do not pray regularly, we may find ourselves incompetent, uncertain or feeling guilty when such times arise. The crisis is best met by people of close communion with God, who simply step up their well established communication with God when necessary.

Jesus, Our Example of Prayer

Though we understand Jesus to be God manifested in the flesh and thus a Being of all competency, sufficiency and maturity, it is interesting and instructive to consider the time He spent in prayer. No life is busier than the Lord’s during His years of ministry, yet we repeatedly read of His communion with the Father. He had been alone praying

when He questioned His disciples about His identity in Caesarea Philippi (comp. Lk 9:18 with Mt 16:13). He was praying when asked by His disciples to teach them to pray (Lk 11:1). He prayed before raising Lazarus (Jn 11:41). He prayed during the torturous process of His death (Lk 23:34, 46; Mt 27:46). Jesus exemplifies our need to pray and the discipline to make time for prayer in the midst of hectic, busy lives.

Question: How did Jesus make time to pray in Mk 6:46? Was this unusual (Lk 5:16)?

Question: Why did Jesus go up to the mountain of transfiguration (Lk 9:28)?

What Can Help Us to Pray?

A Prayer List. Can't think of who to pray for? Forget who asked you to pray for them? Write it down! Keep a running list of those who would benefit from your prayers. When we moved to London, a preacher-friend of mine wrote to me and said, "I have put you on my daily prayer list and I will remember your name in prayer." That small promise meant the world to an anxious family flying off to a new continent!

A Set Time for Prayer. If we wait until we "have time," we will never pray, for "time" is a rare commodity (though each day is filled with it). This set time should be when we are mentally alert. Prayer at bedtime often goes like this: "Heavenly Father, zzzzzzzzzz." God deserves better than our last tired thoughts of the day which give way to sleep. There are false religions whose adherents are more disciplined in prayer than many Christians.

The Telephone. On another occasion I was speaking with a fellow-preacher on the phone about a serious problem in the church where I was working, and as we talked he said, "Why don't I lead us in a word of prayer?" And he did – right over the phone. I was somewhat shocked at first because no one had ever done that, but as he prayed I was deeply moved by my brother's petitions to God on my behalf. What a great technological benefit for our mutual prayers that probably goes completely unused!

Turning off the TV. Outside of the problem of evil influence, television eats up time that could be better used in some other way. And have you noticed that once the TV is on, it is hard to turn it off?! It produces a mental lull; it stupefies thinking; it entices to find one amusement after another (channel surfing). More time for both Bible study and prayer would be available without this household god.

Question: When and where did Jesus pray in Mk 1:35?

Can you think of other helpful suggestions for improving our prayers?

- 1.
- 2.

Lesson 6: Prayer in Public Worship

Introduction

As previously noted, prayer is not merely a private, individual activity. Much is to be gained by joining hearts and thoughts together and praying *as a family* to God. Our prayers must be both sound in principle and sincere in attitude for God to hear and respond.

Who Prays?

Everyone! While the thoughts of the prayer may be organized and expressed by one, the prayer is made individual by the concentration of the mind and the agreement at the end (“Amen”). *Men and women are on equal footing in prayer!* Men are not advantaged in any way over women in their access to God.

Question: Name two women in the Bible – one from each the OT and NT – who prayed acceptably to God: _____ and _____

Who Leads?

Males – if present. Paul directs male leadership in prayer in **1 Tim 2:8**, and this is consistent with other teaching regarding the roles of male and female. It is a privilege to lead brethren in prayer, but such an act gives the leader no special spiritual standing. The women (and the other men for that matter) who silently pray along are heard just as equally as the leader. And women are not completely excluded from leading public prayer anyway. In an assembly of women and non-Christian males a woman may lead a prayer without displacing any man from his authoritative position. There is no age limit on prayer. Young Christians may lead in prayer as well as old. However, it must be noted that wisdom, experience and maturity must be taken into account in a congregation’s expressions to God. Prayers led **only** by spiritual babes will not adequately address all of the particular concerns of the group.

What Should We Pray For?

Basically, anything of legitimate interest in or concern for the local church and the individual members. Specifics (see Ph 4:6; Mt 6:9ff; 7:7ff; Jas 5:13-18; 1 Tim 2:1-2):

⇒ Praise for God as Sovereign Creator and Sustainer of life (Eph 3:14-21).

⇒ The physical welfare of all: daily necessities, restoration of health, safety, etc.

- ⇒ Spiritual soundness of the local church including effective leadership, boldness for preachers (Eph 6:19-20), knowledge (Col 1:9-10; Eph 1:17).
- ⇒ Open doors of evangelism (Col 4:3).
- ⇒ Proper functioning of government in securing peace, justice, protection, etc.
- ⇒ The collective forgiveness of sins (which must definitely be *individually* sought by each supplicant in prayer).

These are just general guidelines. *Anything* of significant concern is a legitimate subject of prayer. However, prayer should not be trivialized and corrupted by petty matters of no consequence.

How Should We Pray?

God did not stipulate any particular “prayer language.” By nature, prayer is talking to God, so we should *talk to* Him. Prayer is not a public performance for the brethren; it does not require a change in tone or vocabulary. So many “quirks” of prayer are simply habit and suggest that little thought, originality or sincere expression is being invested in our communication to God. God is a *real Being*; *let us talk to Him as such!* With reverence, yes. But what other living being would be satisfied with stale, timeworn clichés?

Sweeping generalities should be avoided where possible. Individual needs should be tactfully addressed where appropriate. Instead of praying “for all who it is our duty to pray for,” we should mention Sam and Bill and Sally and Barbara and what is specifically troubling them. We don’t support “preachers” but Glenn and Mike and Charles and Tim. They, their families and the churches with whom they labor should be of great concern.

We should not pray as a mere formality. *Warning! Opinion ahead!* My personal concern is that prayer has become a mere ritual that takes place at certain times in the assembly. Being time-conscious, just a few minutes are set aside for each prayer. Stipulating a gathering of the church specifically for prayer in regard to a certain matter is so foreign to our traditions that the mere suggestion of such would undoubtedly provoke cries of “Heresy!” or “Liberalism!” from some. Yet the Jerusalem brethren did just that when Peter was nigh unto execution (Ac 12:12). Prayer is a great power and privilege which must be taken seriously, expressed with wisdom and exercised with confidence.

Question: What does it mean to pray in the name of Jesus?

Question: Do certain postures in prayer (bowing the head, kneeling, etc.) make prayer more acceptable? If so, which ones are commanded?

Question: Is it authorized to have several men lead prayers in succession during the assembly? As you answer consider 1 Cor 14:27, 29-30.

Lesson 7: Intercessory Prayers

Introduction

One aspect of godliness is the recognition of and sympathy toward the needs of others. The proper response to such needs is to petition God on behalf of the needy. Great men of faith through the centuries have interceded for others, often putting their own needs and feelings aside to do so. Some intercessory prayers:

Abraham's Prayer for Sodom/Lot – Gn 18:16-33

1) Note God's consideration of Abraham: *"Shall I hide from Abraham what I am doing ..."* (18:17-19; comp. also Gn 19:29). In the absence of full revelation these were the days of direct dialog with God. While we may long for such intimate conversation with God today, God has spoken to all men for all time in His revealed Scriptures.

2) Though Sodom is an extremely wicked city, Abraham prays for its preservation. Perhaps this is out of consideration for Lot and the choice he had made when separating from Abraham. Whatever his fuller motivation, God demonstrates in the exchange that He knows more about Sodom than Abraham does.

Question: What did Abraham think about Sodom's threatened destruction (18:25)?

Moses' Intercessions for Israel

1) Ex 32:30-35 – Though extremely angry with the people and with Aaron over the golden calf, Moses ventures *"perhaps I can make atonement for your sin"* (32:30). Moses' substitutionary offer of himself is commendable but misguided (32:32-33).

Question: Who will be blotted out of God's book?

2) Num 12:13-15 – Though his sister had demonstrated envy and pride toward his leadership, Moses begs for God's healing hand to restore her.

3) Num 14:11-23 – God's anger probably burns hottest against Israel at this time more than any other. When He threatens to destroy the nation and build another through Moses' seed (14:12), Moses does not respond with vengeance, ambition or resignation. He pleads for the people for the sake of *God's honor* (14:15-16). This episode demonstrates the truth that God's mind can be changed if not unalterably committed to a course of action. The thought that mere mortals can have an influence upon the will of God is truly astounding.

Question: Describe Moses' concept of the character of God. Is He harsh, unyielding?

Samuel's Plea for Israel – 1 Sam 12:16-25

Though crushingly disappointed by Israel's rejection of him, Samuel does not respond with spite or bitterness. *"Your wickedness is great,"* says Samuel, and he proceeds with a divine demonstration to convict the people of their sins (12:17-18). Yet Samuel vows to pray for the people in the hope that they will yet show more faith and obedience in the future: *"far be it from me that I should sin against the Lord in ceasing to pray for you ..."*

Question: What else will Samuel do in addition to praying for the Israelites?

Question: How would Samuel have sinned against God in failing to pray for Israel?

Jesus' Prayer for the Apostles – Jn 17:1, 6-26

As Jesus' death is near, this prayer provides deep insight into what is truly important among God's people. While the apostles occupy a special place in God's purpose in reference to the kingdom's establishment, there are elements of this prayer which are applicable at all times:

1) Jesus has a special relationship with His people, different from the world: *"I pray for them. I do not pray for the world ..."* (17:9). Obviously, Jesus is not unconcerned about the lost for His entire purpose in coming to the earth was for the benefit of those alienated by sin. But He does sustain a peculiar fellowship with the apostles and others who acknowledge and submit to Him as Lord.

2) Protection (17:11, 14-15). *"The world has hated them"* just as it hated Jesus, because the relationship of good and evil is antagonistic. Jesus prays for their protection, not *against* their cooperation and faith, but in respect to the forces which will be unleashed against them as they go about the establishment of the kingdom.

3) Sanctification by truth (17:17-19). Jesus foresees the apostasy, false prophets and corrupted doctrines which will come in the future. He prays that truth will prevail among the disciples (see Paul's similar sentiments to the Ephesian elders, Ac 20:29-32).

4) Unity (17:11, 20-23) – Jesus desires the same oneness and unity among His disciples as He shared with His Father. Such unity would be vital to the success of their efforts.

5) Eternal fellowship (17:24) – As hard as it is to accept, Jesus desires eternal fellowship with those who believe on Him. He longs for His people to see Him through the veil; that is, in His heavenly glory and splendor.

6) Divine love (17:26) – This is the key to all the rest. If Christians love God as Jesus did and love each other as Jesus loved His disciples then they will be all that God desires them to be. Obedience, service, humility, and all other fruits of the Spirit grow out of love.

Lesson 8: Prayers of Distress

Introduction

The nature of the world is such that threats of one kind or another periodically assail us. We are vulnerable in our human frailty to these detrimental forces, and faith recognizes our dependence upon God's power to deliver and provide for us. It is vital to maintain a constant, viable relationship with God so that when times of distress come we naturally cast our cares upon God (1 Pet 5:7). Let's note some prayers of distress and the answers they were given.

Israel's Suffering in Egypt – Ex 2:24-25; 3:7

God was aware of the injustice and suffering inflicted upon His people by the Egyptians, and in answer to their plea Moses is commissioned to lead the people to freedom. When things don't change swiftly enough we may think that God is unaware or does not care, but such is not the case. He will act on our behalf in His own time.

Moses: Burdened by Leadership – Num 11:10-15

The very people whom Moses spared by his intercession so exasperated him upon this occasion that he voiced his complaint to God. He considers his role to be a curse (11:11) and feels overwhelmed by the burden of providing for their needs (11:12-14). God responds to Moses' needs by providing quail for the people to eat and assistants to help in governing the nation (11:16-35).

Question: T/F Moses was so distressed that he preferred death.

Jonah: From the Belly of the Fish – Jon 2:2-9

What is significant about this prayer is that Jonah's predicament is self-inflicted. He has rebelled against God and fled from his responsibility to preach to the Ninevites but repents from within the fish. God hears Jonah's prayer and delivers him. When we are in trouble of our own making we may be reluctant to call upon God, but God understands our frailties and is always ready to help the penitent sinner.

Ezra's Plea for Protection – Ezra 8:21-23

Ezra and a group of captives are about to return to Jerusalem, but the journey ahead is arduous and fraught with danger. Ezra's solution: humble submission to God with fasting and prayer. God blesses them with safe passage.

Question: Why didn't Ezra ask for a royal escort to Jerusalem?

Jesus' Prayer in Gethsemane – Mt 26:36-46

Jesus' distress upon this occasion (26:37-38; comp. Lk 22:44) gives us permission to be concerned when in similar circumstances. Anxiety which leads to doubt is not acceptable, but we are not stoics when faced with a serious crisis. Note Jesus' resignation to the will of God. If we freely submit to God's plans and purposes, He will see that we have all the resources we need to endure. Hebrews notes that Jesus "*was heard because of His godly fear*" (5:7), "*yet He learned obedience by the things which He suffered*" (5:8). This may be the case with us, too.

Question: T/F Jesus had no need for any man's companionship – only God's.

Question: Why wasn't Jesus' three-fold prayer "vain repetition"?

Paul's Request for Health – 2 Cor 12:7-10

Paul's distress was some sort of physical affliction which he desperately wanted removed. What he didn't initially see about the "thorn in the flesh" was that it served a benevolent purpose: it kept him from being "exalted above measure by the abundance of the revelations" he had received. Jesus' answer to his thrice-repeated request: "No." Jesus went on to say to Paul that the measure of grace given to him by the Lord was sufficient for his needs. **Note:** God may reject our specific request but still give us plenty of resource to endure our circumstances. When Paul came to this realization, his whole outlook changed: "*Therefore most gladly I will rather **boast** in my infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon me. Therefore, I **take pleasure** in infirmities ... for Christ's sake ...*". **This attitude is crucial to our view of answered prayer.** A weak faith does not appreciate the "No" responses to our requests. It should be enough to trust that God has heard, has considered and has answered – if not precisely as we had wished. If He says "No," then we must trust that what was requested was not vital.

Question: How can Paul be weak and strong at the same time (12:10)?

Question: In what things does Paul take pleasure and how can he do so when these things are distressing and painful to human beings?

Conclusion

The Psalms are filled with prayers of distress and provide timeless comfort to those who suffer. The bottom line: in all times, under all covenants, God has held out open arms and lent a listening ear to all of man's worries and fears. What a blessed privilege "to carry everything to God in prayer."

Lesson 9: Questions for the Almighty

Introduction

The Scriptures make clear the frail and finite limitations of man. From our perspective things often seem blurry, contradictory or downright unjust. Who are we as mere mortals to come before the Almighty with questions? Should we not just endure quietly the vexations of life and trust that God will handle everything? The Scriptures indicate that God is tolerant of and interested in our questions. He knows that our ignorance of His will leaves us perplexed at times. Throughout human history great men of faith have come before God with frustration and consternation, seeking explanations for the enigmas of life. God does not rebuff questioners but rather encourages man to seek out His wisdom and counsel.

David and Daily Guidance

One of the things that made David a man after God's heart (Ac 13:22) was his constant inquiry of God's counsel. For example, in 1 Sam 23:2-5, 9-13 David attacks the Philistines and flees from Saul according to God's direction. Later, when all of the family and possessions of David's army were taken by the Amalekites, David sought God's counsel and recovered all (1 Sam 30:6-8). David seeks God's advice on how to establish his throne once Saul is dead (2 Sam 2:1). The record also shows that when David did not seek God's guidance disaster often struck (see 2 Sam 6:1ff; 11:1ff).

Question: How did David and his men feel when Ziklag was attacked and burned?

Question: What did David get from God's "rod" and "staff" (Ps 23:4)?

The Prosperity of the Wicked

One of the most puzzling questions of life is why, if God is all-powerful and good, do evil men prosper and succeed in their deeds? Why doesn't God **do** something about these people? Jeremiah wondered this (12:1-2); he entreated God, *"let me talk with You about Your judgments."* Habakkuk posed similar questions in bolder fashion (Hab 1:2-4, 12-2:1). Habakkuk is frustrated by God's apparent inattentiveness (1:2). He wonders how a pure God can abide the treachery of the wicked against the righteous (2:13). He then vows to *"stand my watch and set myself on the rampart, and watch to see what He will say to me ..."* (2:1). Note that Habakkuk's questions are not impertinent or scornful toward God, for at the end of the book he affirms his unwavering faith in God regardless of the circumstances (3:17-19). God thus answers him without rebuke.

Question: What must we remember when life seems chaotic and God seems distant (Hab 2:20)?

Job: Perplexed by His Own Suffering

Job is described as *“blameless and upright, and one who feared God and shunned evil”* (Job 1:1). Yet as a challenge to Satan God allows this man of faith to be tested in the ultimate degree. This gives rise to many questions; in fact, Bullinger states that the book of Job has more questions than any other book of the Bible (329; Jeremiah is next with 195). Some of those questions are presented to God in prayer (Job 13:20-27). Like other men of faith occasionally, Job feels distance from God: *“Why do You hide Your face ...?”* (13:24). Also, the tenth chapter of Job is full of questions directed at God in reference to his immense suffering: *“Does it seem good to You that you should oppress, that You should despise the work of Your hands, and shine on the counsel of the wicked?”* (10:3). Job even questions his existence: *“Why have you brought me out of the womb?”* (10:18). Then this pitiful plea from a tormented man: *“Are not my days few? Cease! Leave me alone, that I may take a little comfort, before I go to the place from which I shall not return”* (10:20-21). God later charges Job with speaking ignorantly and without full appreciation of His sovereignty, but He does not charge Job with sin (38:2-3; 40:2; also 42:7-8).

The lesson of Job is that God is in control of all things, and even when life takes some twists and turns that we cannot fathom we must trust that God will govern all things to our benefit. If we only saw life from God’s vantage point we would say with Job: *“Listen, please, and let me speak; You said, ‘I will question you, and you shall answer Me.’ I have heard of You by the hearing of the ear, but now my eye sees You. Therefore, I abhor myself, and repent in dust and ashes”* (Job 42:4-6).

Question: What questions often enter our minds when suffering or hardship come upon us?

Lesson 10: Confession of Sin

Introduction

Perhaps the most important prayer uttered by man is when he beseeches God for forgiveness of sin. It is sin, and *only* sin, which separates us from fellowship with God; therefore, our spiritual relationship with God is dependent upon the removal of sin. This occurs via confession and repentance which is preceded by a true conviction of guilt. Consider the following prayers of confession:

David: Psalm 51

Though David covered his sin for a time and denied his guilt, conviction finally came through the story of the prophet Nathan. Psalm 51 is an unburdening of David's heart before God.

51:1-2 – Fervent plea for the removal of sin on the basis of God's mercy.

51:3-4 – The acknowledgement of personal responsibility for the sin and justness of God's condemnation.

51:5-6 – David's sense of utter, complete vileness by virtue of his adultery, murder and deceit as repayment of God's great blessings to him.

51:7-12 – Plea for restoration to his former state of inner peace, steadfast faith and intimate fellowship.

51:13 – Vow to learn from his sin and use the experience to counsel others.

51:14-17 – Repeated plea for forgiveness and restoration, and acknowledgement of that which is central to forgiveness: a broken heart.

Note: While God will forgive the *guilt* of sin, the *consequences* of our actions may remain as in the case of David.

Question: Though our sins adversely affect others, who is the sin truly against?

The Sin of Unlawful Marriage: Ezra 9:5-10:1

Upon the return from the captivity the Israelite remnant intermarried “so that the holy seed is intermingled with the peoples of those lands” (9:2). When this situation came fully to light, Ezra “sat astonished until the evening sacrifice” (9:4), whereupon he began a heart-rending confession of national transgression to God (note 9:6, 13-15; 10:1). Note

that Ezra feels deep grief not over his own personal sins but the sins of his people. He fears they will be utterly destroyed after God had blessed them with an improbable return from captivity.

Question: T/F Ezra felt this sin polluted the whole nation (see 9:15).

Question: T/F Ezra blamed God for imposing a law impossible for Israel to keep.

Nehemiah's Sense of Guilt – Neh 1:4-11; 9:2-4, 28-38

Part of God's great objective in punishing the people through captivity was to instill within them a sense of shame and responsibility for their actions. In preceding centuries they had steadily declined in their moral and spiritual awareness and had eventually become worse than the Canaanites whom they displaced. Both Ezra and Nehemiah demonstrate that God's chastisement was effective.

Note that Nehemiah does not merely confess the sins of his countrymen but his own as well (1:6-7). Nehemiah has been reminded vividly of the curses pronounced by Moses so long ago (1:8-9) and begs for God to take note of *"the prayer of Your servants who desire to fear Your name"* (1:11).

The ninth chapter of Nehemiah is a condensed history of the Israelites. The people have a clear view of how the past centuries have unfolded and take full responsibility for their sins (9:28-38). Note in each of these passages the *righteousness* and *justice* of God is confessed: *"However, You are just in all that has befallen us; for You have dealt faithfully, but we have done wickedly"* (Neh 9:33); *"That You may be found just when You speak, and blameless when You judge"* (Ps 51:4); *"O Lord God of Israel, You are righteous ..."* (Ez 9:15). We cannot properly confess our sins while blaming others, especially God, for our mistakes.

Question: What does Nehemiah do before answering the king in Neh 2:4?

Question: What does Nehemiah pray in respect to God's "eyes" and "ears"?

The Eloquence of the Penitent Tax-Collector – Lk 18:13

Here is genuine grief and humility before God. A true appreciation of sin produces a burning blush, the "body-language" of contrition (*"would not so much as raise his eyes to heaven"*) and a simple appeal for mercy. No bartering: "Well, God, I know I blew it but last week I had two Bible studies. Doesn't that make up for it?" No blaming: "Yeah, I messed up, but it was your idea, you know." No bickering: "Butt out of my affairs. I will deal with my sins when I'm good and ready." Penitence does not speak in that way. True sorrow for sin results in heartfelt confession and the plea for restoration to fellowship with God.

Lesson 11: Prayers of Praise

Introduction

Prayer can be so often self-centered: *our* needs/wants, *our* forgiveness, *our* service for God, etc. The mature heart of faith is awed by the nature and character of God. Such a heart seeks to express praise to God simply because *He is* God. It is such occasions of prayer which remind us of the glory of our calling and the privilege of adoption by God.

Psalms of Praise – 145-150

Whether these psalms were originally written as songs or prayers, they can be spoken directly to God in praise. Many aspects of God's greatness are mentioned: His mighty works (145:4-7), His character (145:8-9), His dominion and kingdom (145:12-13), His compassion upon the weak (145:14-16, 19; 146:7-9; 147:3), His eternal being (146:3-4), His creative power (146:6; 147:4), His wisdom/understanding (147:4), His governance of the world (147:8-9); etc. Other praising psalms abound, and to read them is to rediscover the transcendent magnificence of God.

The Restored Remnant of Israel – Neh 9:5-15

In this prayer of praise and blessing the chastened Israelites extol God for His creative power and His special work through Israel. Again the righteousness of God is noted: "*You have performed Your words, for You are righteous*" (9:8). No charge of wrongdoing can fairly be made against God, no matter how hurt and bitter we may be over a situation. Praise is also given to God for His laws (9:13-14). To those without faith, God's laws may be resented and resisted, but those of spiritual maturity realize how crucial those laws are to health and happiness.

Question: What kind of laws and ordinances were given on Mt. Sinai?

The Song of Mary – Lk 1:46-55

This, like the psalms above, may possess the characteristics of a song but may also be construed as a prayer of praise to God. In response to Elizabeth's blessing upon her as "*the mother of my Lord*" (Lk 1:43), Mary magnifies God as she perceives the things that are unfolding in her life. Note again the concepts associated with God: Savior, mighty, holy, mercy, strength, benevolence and mercy to the poor, everlasting promises.

Question: What has God done to the proud, mighty and rich?

Question: Upon whom does God show mercy?

The Persecuted Apostles – Ac 4:23-31

As in so many psalms and prayers of praise, God's creative power is advanced (4:24). In this particular case, the apostles perhaps receive comfort in the face of heavy political opposition that the Creator is in control of the events which are unfolding. Chaos, chance and fate do not rule but God in heaven. All Herod, Pontius Pilate and the other civil rulers did was "*whatever Your hand and Your purpose determined before to be done*" (4:28). Note that the apostles do not pray for the cessation of persecution but for boldness to speak in spite of it. God confirms this prayer of faith and praise with a shaking of the building.

Paul's Prayer for the Ephesians – Eph 3:14-21

In this prayer God is acknowledged as the One "*from whom the whole family in heaven and earth is named*" (3:15). In the context, this refers to God as the spiritual head of a spiritual family (see the discussion of the church just completed in 3:9-11; see also 3:21). Further, God is "*able to do exceedingly abundantly above all that we ask or think*" (3:20). Thus God is praised as the powerful head of a spiritual family who, along with Jesus, loves His people to a degree which "*passes knowledge*" (3:19).

Other Doxologies in the NT

Similar sentiments of praise for God's majesty and power are found in Jude 24-25 and Rom 11:33-36. Again, though not prayers per se, these sentiments may be expressed directly to God as praise for His divine power and nature. Certainly there is a place in our lives for prayer and meditation devoted to the great God whom we serve.

Lesson 12: Expressions of Thanksgiving

Introduction

Properly appreciated, the multitude of blessings and benefits bestowed upon us by God is a constant source of thanksgiving. No matter how disappointed, distraught or depressed we may be, a fair assessment of life will reveal numerous manifestations of undeserved goodness from the hand of God. The word “thank” and its related forms (thankfulness, thanksgiving, etc.) are found over 60 times in the NT alone. Thanksgiving is a vital part of our prayers and our spiritual health as a whole.

Psalms of Thanksgiving

Closely related to psalms of praise are psalms of thanksgiving, for thanksgiving leads to praise for the One who blesses. Consider the mix of thanks and praise in Ps 30. In this psalm David exults over his slow and excruciating rise to the throne. Psalm 136 is a psalm of thanks wherein the phrase “*For His mercy endures forever*” is repeated in every verse with a different application. Psalm 106 ties thanksgiving with the confession of sin and the joy of forgiveness. Psalm 107 repeats the phrase “*Oh, that men would give thanks to the Lord for His goodness, and for His wonderful works to the children of men!*” (107:8, 15, 21, 31) in reference to the many instances of the Lord’s salvation of Israel. It is interesting that when we look *back* at life we see more blessings and reasons to give thanks than we realized at the moment. Perhaps it is the uncertainty of how things will turn out that keeps us anxious and, therefore, blinded to the goodness that surrounds us in the present.

Question: What will a wise person understand (Ps 107:43)?

Question: God’s _____ is but for a moment, and His _____ is for life (Ps 30:5).

Daniel’s Life-Threatening Prayer – Dn 6:10-11

Daniel’s personal habit of prayer was so predictable that his enemies could use it as a set-up. Laws were passed prohibiting petitions to any being other than Darius for a thirty day period, long enough to entrap Daniel (6:7). Daniel refuses to allow such a threat to deter his devotion to God and is arrested for his prayers of thanksgiving.

Paul’s Prayers of Thanksgiving

As much as Paul is persecuted, forsaken and disappointed by men, he genuinely is thankful for brethren whose convictions are enduring and genuine. He is thankful for the

Thessalonians (1 Th 1:2), Ephesians (Eph 1:15-16), Colossians (Col 1:3-4), Romans (Rom 1:8), Corinthians (1 Cor 1:4), Philippians (Ph 1:3), Philemon (Phle 4-5), etc. He is also thankful for the privilege of serving in the kingdom (1 Tim 1:12ff). He is profoundly thankful for the deliverance from sin's dominion (Rom 7:24-25). Through all of the hardships of his apostolic career, Paul maintained a thankful spirit which kept bitterness and self pity at bay. The same thing can work for us in our lives.

Question: In what should we give thanks (1 Th 5:18; Heb 13:15)?

Question: For what was Paul thankful in Ac 28:15?

Jesus' Giving of Thanks

Jesus set the example of continuous thanksgiving as He often expressed His own thanks to the Father. He was thankful for: revelation which was clear and simple to the humble (Mt 11:25-26), the raising of Lazarus (Jn 11:41-42), food (Mt 14:19; Lk 22:17, 19). In all things He acknowledged the Father as the central provider of goodness both material and spiritual. We should likewise acknowledge Him as such.

Conclusion

Prayer is such a vital key to the spiritual well-being of the child of God. Prayer is an outgrowth of relationship with our heavenly Father, a relationship in which we should feel comfortable expressing our needs, wishes, worries and daily thoughts to Him. As we live in close fellowship and constant communion with God, we are gradually transformed into His image and character.

Conversely, when our communication with God lapses, we begin to shrivel and decline spiritually and are thus vulnerable to Satan's wiles. Guilt, despair, loneliness, futility and other debilitating attitudes fill the void left by prayer's absence. *Divide and conquer* is Satan's motto; if he can interrupt our communication with God then his chances of taking us captive greatly increase.

This study has been offered with the prayer that it will renew our appreciation for heavenly communication and that we will *"continually offer the sacrifice of praise to God, that is, the fruit of our lips, giving thanks to His name."*