

20th Century Bible Course

LESSON SEVENTEEN

Dear Friend:

The weather was strange that day. The sun was shining, but an unusual fog-like condition in the air over Texas brought consternation to many a pilot zeroing in on Dallas. We could see the city itself, but not the airport. It was a big airport, we knew. Giant 747's land and take off there, but we could not spot it through the cloudy atmosphere.

"We ought to get a glimpse of it any minute," the pilot said. He picked up his radio and called the tower, and the answer came sharp and clear: "Proceed on course."

As we continued flying on course there were more exchanges between the pilot and the tower. At last we saw the airport, and the tower told us which runway to use. The plane banked sharply, leveled off, and we landed safely.

A man in the tower-completely unseen by us-had guided our landing.

God's mighty cable of prayer, like the radio beams by which the pilot and the tower communicated, provided a two-way system of communication between heaven and earth.

"Well, I don't know," some people say. "I'm not sure prayer is that good. I prayed once and didn't get any results-no one answered."

Perhaps we need to learn more about prayer. Why do some people seem to get answers, and others don't? Take Betty and Paul, for example. They prayed every week that their son, Don, would get home safely from Vietnam. Well, he came home all right, but in a casket. Now neither of them pray any more. Mary and Steve also prayed every week that their son, Ted would get home safely from the same war. After two years of harrowing experiences on the battlefield, he was released and went back home without a scratch. Mary and Steve are firmly convinced prayer pays. Why did God answer their prayer but not Betty and Paul's?

Many people are asking today, Is prayer real? Or is it just an exercise of the mind? If it is real, how can we be sure to get through to God when we need Him? If prayer isn't any good for holding off disaster, what is it good for? Is there a certain formula that some people use?

Today's lesson reveals the secrets of successful prayer. It is my hope and prayer that your own prayer life will be enriched as you study God's Word about this subject.

With best wishes,

Your Bible Instructor

LESSON 17

DIAL DIRECT

SCRIPTURE READING: MATTHEW 6:5-15; LUKE 18:1-5

When the first Atlantic cable was laid in 1850, great celebrations broke out on both sides of the Atlantic, for two great continents were now united. When sin first separated heaven and earth, a mighty cable of prayer was laid, and never from that day to this has it been broken.

The disciples once requested Jesus to teach them to pray. And He did. It would be well for all of us to memorize the Lord's Prayer (Matthew 6:9-13), and pray it from the heart often. All our prayers need not be memorized, however, for prayer is really communion with God and therefore a personal and intimate experience with the Lord.

Part 1-- WHAT IS PRAYER

A scientific-minded youth has likened prayer to radar-you send it into the unseen and the answer "bounces" back. In the simplest sense, prayer is opening your heart to God as you would to a friend. It is not just asking for things. At times it may be communion in utter silence-just a sacred sense of God's presence. "Be still, and know that I am God," the Psalmist suggests (Psalm 46:10).

While on earth, Christ missed the face-to-face communion with God that He had enjoyed in heaven. He spent much time in prayer, for this was how He talked with His Father.

Before he sinned, Adam was able to talk face to face with God. When sin separated man from God, the method of communication had to be modified. What a privilege it is to commune with our heavenly Father by prayer at any time and under any circumstances. God longs for us to open our hearts to Him and bring our problems to Him for His help. Let us discover how we can talk with God so that our prayers will be heard and answered.

Part 2-- WHAT PRAYER IS NOT

1. **Do we pray to earn God's favor? Matthew 5:45** _____, for God sends the rain on both the _____ and the _____.

If the Christian farmer always had good crops and his unbelieving neighbor poor ones, the neighbor would probably join the church, but from a selfish motive. If the Christian never got sick, the churches would be crowded-the whole world would profess Christianity. If prayer would get us anything we wanted, would we not be more inclined to pray for temporal benefits rather than for holiness? Would we not begin to take God's blessings for granted? Many are like the little boy who failed to say grace at the table one morning. When His father asked why, he said, "We don't need to pray for bread today. I looked, and there's enough for three days."

2. **Do we pray to show how religious we are? Matthew 6:5-7** _____
What did Jesus call those who prayed in order to be noticed? _____

Prayer is not just repeating words or phrases. A phonograph record can repeat, repeat, repeat, but it cannot pray. A parrot will repeat phrases, but it can't pray from the heart. Are we being parrots and phonographs, or are we really praying?

3. **Do we pray to tell God our needs? (verse 8)** _____
Why? _____

"O Lord," David prayed, "Thou ... knowest my downsitting and mine uprising, thou understandest my thought afar off. Thou ... art acquainted with all my ways. For there is not a word in my tongue, but.... thou knowest it altogether" (Psalm 139:1-4). Although God knows everything about us, He never wearies of our coming to Him in sincere prayer. We may unburden our hearts to Him whenever and wherever we need Him and He will always understand. Nor will He rush us. Best of all, His line is always open-the circuits never busy.

4. **Do we pray to make God willing to help us? Luke 11:13** _____

Prayer is not to overcome God's reluctance, but to take hold of His great willingness.

5. **Do we pray to change God's mind? Malachi 3:6** _____

Prayer brings *us* up to God, links our minds with His so that we may be in tune with *His* will. Prayer is probably the greatest unused force in the universe to change what needs to be changed-*men*. It enables *us* to receive Him. Paul's experience is a good example (Acts 9:10-18).

Before you pick up the hot line to heaven., you should know that praying involves risks. You may see yourself as you are, which may be quite traumatic. Then there is the danger of having your prayers answered-prayers like, "Lord, make me honest. Make me pure." Have you considered the consequences when He does? Millions of lives have been changed by prayer. Yours can be one.

6. **Do we pray because we need God? Luke 18:13** _____

The publican recognized his great need; the Pharisee only complimented himself. Such conceit short-circuits prayer. Isaiah likens the heart that feels its need to dry thirsty ground (Isaiah 44:3). That kind of ground can drink in every drop of rain. Jesus said, "Blessed are they which do hunger and thirst after righteousness: for they shall be filled" (Matthew 5:6).

7. Do we pray because we know God alone can help us? John 15:5 _____

Only at the altar of God can we kindle our tapers with divine fire (Isaiah 50:10, 11).

To summarize: Prayer *is not* an act of merit that earns God's favor.

It *is not* an ostentatious demonstration of piety.

It *is not* to tell God what we need, for He already knows.

It *is not* a form of bribery to make God willing to help us.

It is not to change God's mind, but to bring us into harmony with Him.

But - Prayer *is* an acknowledgement of our great need and thirst for God. *It is* an admission that we are helpless without Him.

Part 3-- PRAYER PROMISES

1. What does God promise to those who pray?

Psalms 34:10 "They that seek the Lord shall not _____"

Psalms 37:4 "Delight thyself also in the Lord; and he shall _____"

John 15:7 "If ye abide in me, and my words abide in you, ye shall ask what ye will, and _____"

Jeremiah 29:12, 13 "Then shall ye call upon me, and ye shall go and pray unto me, and _____." And ye shall seek me, _____ when ye shall search for me with all your heart." **Jeremiah 33:3** "Call unto me, and _____, and shew thee _____, which thou knowest not." **Isaiah 65:24** "_____ they call, I will answer; and _____, I will hear." **Ephesians 3:20** "Now unto him that is able to do exceeding abundantly _____."

Breathtaking are the promises of God to those who communicate with Him! Apparently all the boundless resources of Omnipotence await the children of the heavenly King! And yet we ask so little! It's as if a bank gave us an unlimited checking account, and we continued to walk instead of drive a car, to shiver in a light coat when we could wear furs, to lie sick at home when the Mayo Clinic is at our command. "Ask, and you will receive." That's the Lord speaking. The Creator. The One who runs the universe. The riches of this world are His. Why then, do we hesitate?

Part 4-- THE REQUIREMENTS OF PRAYER

1. What attitude on our part is necessary before our prayers will be answered? Mark 11:24

2. To what does James compare a person who prays without faith? James 1:5-7

Prayer without faith is like a key with no hand to turn it in the lock. "Without faith it is impossible to please him: for he that cometh to God must believe that he is, and that he is a rewarder of them that diligently seek him" (Hebrews 11:6).

3. What may keep prayers from being heard? Psalm 66:18

"As much as God may wish to help us, cherished sin will keep Him from doing so. Like dirt in an electrical connection, sin stops the flow of power. Remove the dirt, give up the cherished sin, and the power will flow again" (Arthur S. Maxwell, *Good News for You*, p. 157). "He that covereth his sins shall not prosper: but whoso confesseth and forsaketh them shall have mercy" (Proverbs 28:13).

4. What requirement does the apostle John give for answered prayer? 1 John 3:22

Obedience is the fruit of true faith. "Faith without works [obedience] is dead" (James 2:20, NT 200 [158]). Or, put it another way: "Actions speak louder than words."

5. How should we qualify our requests when we pray? 1 John 5:14,15

It was in the Garden of Gethsemane. Our Saviour, facing the greatest trial of His life, and sweating large drops of blood, fell prostrate to the ground. Three times He prayed, "O my Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from me." Jesus was tempted to go back to His Father and leave the human race to the results of their own sins. But listen! His prayer is not yet finished. From those parched lips break forth the

words: "Nevertheless not as I will, but as thou wilt" (Matthew 26:39).

6. Why should we ask according to God's will? Romans 8:27, 28 _____

Sometimes our prayers are purely selfish. "Ye ask, and receive not, because ye ask amiss, that ye may consume it upon your lusts" (James 4:3). No wise parent will give a child everything he wants. Sometimes he must say No; sometimes he provides a substitute-a rubber ball instead of scissors, a glass of fruit juice instead of an icecream bar. And sometimes it may be, Not now. We are to trust God, knowing that He loves us too much to give us anything that would be harmful to us.

Part 5-- ADDITIONAL HELPS ON PRAYER

- 1. To whom should we pray? Luke 11:2** _____
- 2. In whose name are we to approach God? John 14:14** _____
- 3. Who joins in prayer for and with us? Romans 8:26** _____
- 4. With what should our prayers be mingled? Philippians 4:6** _____
- 5. How often should we pray? Ephesians 6:18** _____ **1 Thess. 5:1** _____

We are to be in a spirit of prayer all the times-while we work, while we talk, while we drive, while we sit at our desks. There must also be earnest secret prayer. If Jesus should come to your home, you would welcome Him; you would sit down and talk with Him and show Him respect. You would spend time with Him. So in prayer. The devil will do all he can to stop such communion, for he knows he's no match for the one who connects himself to heaven by the habit of prayer.

Prayer develops patience. We must give God time to work. Would it be manifesting trust to set deadlines for God? It takes time to grow a rose. And it takes time to change a heart. But don't give up. God *will* answer. It may be Yes. It may be No. It may be Later. But if you trust and wait, you will know His answer and be satisfied.

6. What example of prayer did Jesus give? Mark 1:35; Luke 6:12 _____

Jesus prayed early in the morning. He prayed in the evening, and at times, all night. He prayed in public; He prayed in private-mostly the latter. He prayed for Peter, for His disciples, for His enemies, for all who would ever believe-for you and me (John 17:20). He prayed through to victory in Gethsemane, and in heaven He "ever liveth to make intercession" for us (Hebrews 7:25). Shall we who are only weak mortals, neglect to pray, when we have available through Christ all power in heaven and earth (Matthew 28:18)?

7. In addition to praying, what should we do? Habakkuk 2:1 _____

Maurice Stevenson tells of a visit his father made to their home in the oil country of Pennsylvania. They were in the barn. As the father passed an open window, he asked, "Son, where are they drilling?"

"Nowhere," Stevenson replied.

"Yes, they are. I can hear them pulling the tools now."

The son could hear nothing, so he stuck his head out of the window. Very faintly in the distance he picked up the hum of the rope, the turn of the wheels and pulleys. Then he remembered that there was a well being drilled about a mile and a half away.

Why had his father heard it when he did not hear it? Because half of his father's life had been spent in the oil business-he was trained to hear such sounds. So every Christian should be alert and tuned to hear the voice of God!

8. Why are we especially admonished to pray now? 1 Peter 4:7 _____

In these closing years of this earth's history, we need to take heed lest the cares of this life choke out our preparation for our Lord's return. Wouldn't you like to keep so near to God that in every unexpected trial your thoughts would turn to Him as naturally as the flower turns to the sun? The relationship between God and each person is as distinct and full as though there were not another soul upon earth to share His watchcare, not another soul for whom He gave His beloved Son to die. Thank God for the privilege of prayer!

Special Reading Assignment: *Steps to Christ*, (chapter entitled)"The Privilege of Prayer"