

LEARNING TO PRAY (Lesson One)

By Pastor Greg Hooker

Since this facebook group is dedicated to prayer, I think it appropriate and beneficial to explore this important subject from a Biblical point of view. From the very onset let me just say, there are others who are vastly more qualified to expound on prayer than I, but for the next few days I would like to share several lessons exploring this subject as we look to the Scriptures for support. Together, I hope we will discover some truths that will aid us as we pray for our nation, families and friends.

If you're like me, I struggle to remain focused and faithful when it comes to prayer. Many distractions present themselves when God's children approach their Heavenly Father – the phone invariably rings, children come crawling out of the woodwork, pets sound the 'I gotta go to the potty' alarm, your mother-in-law makes a grand appearance, and old man sleepy eyes performs his magic at a importune time! In a nutshell, Satan is very crafty and will hurl you many distractions when you even 'think' of talking to the Lord. He does everything within his means to hinder you from conversing with the One who governs the universe!

1) WHAT IS PRAYER?

Simply put, prayer is communicating with God – we listen, He listens – we talk, God talks. Talking to the Lord is similar to speaking to ones best friend – a two-way dialog occurs. We want to be cautious when we pray and listen more than we talk. God already knows our needs, so it's behooves us to listen more intently to the instructions the Lord is so gracious to give.

2) WHEN DID MEN BEGIN TO PRAY IN THE BIBLE?

The first mention of public prayer in the Bible is in Genesis 4:26, "And to Seth, to him also there was born a son; and he called his name Enos: then began men to call upon the name of the LORD."

Two hundred and forty years after the act of creation, mankind 'began' calling upon the Lord. That's not to say individuals didn't pray prior to this time, but this is the first record of them calling on the Lord as a whole.

3) WHAT IS THE CORRECT POSTURE FOR PRAYER?

We are taught in the Bible, that people approached God in various ways. For examples, I Kings 8:54 we see people on their knees praying; in Exodus 4:32 they are bowing before God; again, in II Chronicles 20:18 and Matthew 26:39 prayer is done while on their faces; and in I Kings 8:22 the people of God are standing in prayer. You see, it doesn't matter so much about posture, but rather the willingness, devotion, and faithfulness to pray – in modern vernacular, 'Just get ur done!' Remember, God looks at the heart, not the outward appearance.

During the course of the day you may pray while at work – singing and making melody with your heart, while lying in bed instead of ‘counting sheep’, while sitting at home on your computer. Most important, though, is that you do find time every day to spend with the Lord - maybe find a comfortable place and time apart from distractions.

In concluding this lesson, we have discovered three basic principles: 1) Prayer is a simple dialog between God and His children; 2) Prayer began as early as Genesis 4:26 when people began to call upon the Lord; and 3) Posture makes very little difference when we pray.

Be sure to watch for lesson two of this series on the subject of prayer. As we learn together, let’s begin applying the Biblical principles to our prayer lives and reap the awesome rewards.

Dear Father, teach us from your Word how to pray. In Jesus name, your son, Greg Hooker.

LEARNING TO PRAY (Lesson Two)

In our first lesson we learned three things concerning prayer: 1) Prayer is simply dialog between God and His children; 2) Prayer began as early as Genesis 4:26 when people began to call upon the Lord; and 3) Posture makes very little difference when we pray. In this lesson we continue with three more truths about prayer.

4) WHAT KIND OF WORDS SHOULD I USE WHEN I PRAY?

There many different kinds of prayers recorded in the Bible. Some are eloquent like Psalm 23 – a favorite prayer by David. Then there are simple, short and to the point prayers like the one prayed by one of two thieves hanging beside Jesus on the cross – He simply said, “Lord, remember me when thou cometh into thy kingdom” (Psalm 23:1). Eloquent words are not necessary to grab God’s attention, however; God hears the language of any heart as long as it doesn’t harbor un-confessed sin!

5) WHY SHOULD WE PRAY?

First, prayer develops a relationship between our Heavenly Father and His children. Think of it this way, how would our relationship be with our spouse, parents, or our earthly children if we never took time to talk with them? I dare say, it would be a weak and shallow!

God said this of His people, “...I will hear them: I will say, It is my people: and they shall say, The LORD is my God” (Zechariah 13:9). Our Heavenly Father created us to commune, worship, and fellowship with Him. Our primary concern when we pray is to worship and forge a strong relationship with our Heavenly Father.

Second, prayer was expressly instructed by the Lord. Part of being a good disciple of Christ is to follow His teachings – one of them happens to be a viable prayer life. “Watch and pray, that you enter not into temptation: the spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak” (Matthew 26:41). Again, in Luke 18:1 Jesus

said, “And he spoke a parable unto them to this end, that men ought always to pray, and not to faint.” We should pray because it develops a firm relationship with God and He instructed us to do so.

6) HOW DO I LEARN TO PRAY?

A new-born baby comes into this world kicking and screaming, but without the ability to articulate even one word. Over time, however, little junior or juniorette begins picking up words from Mommy, Daddy and possibly big brother and sister. In no time at all, he is fluently speaking baby talk.

In much the same way, a new Christian slowly begins to pray to their Heavenly Father. This is accomplished by reading the Word and listening to the instructions of the Holy Spirit. Notice Romans 8:26, 27, “Likewise the Spirit also helpeth our infirmities: for we know not what we should pray for as we ought: but the Spirit itself maketh intercession for us with groanings which cannot be uttered. And he that searcheth the hearts knoweth what is the mind of the Spirit, because he maketh intercession for the saints according to the will of God.” Even though we don’t always know what to pray for, the Holy Spirit knows exactly what we do and do not need and intercedes to the Father on our behalf.

In conclusion, this lesson on pray teaches us 1) God hears all types of prayers regardless of how we express them; 2) the Lord wants us to pray and develop a relationship with Him; and 3) we learn to pray through God’s Word and with the help of the Holy Spirit.

Dear Father, show us ways in which we may develop our prayer life to be more effective. Help us to improve our relationship with you and bring about change in our own life. In Jesus name, your son, Greg Hooker.

LEARNING TO PRAY (Lesson Three)

Let’s face it; it isn’t an easy task to bear the burden of intercessory prayer – going before the Lord on behalf of others. When we engage ourselves in this Christian discipline, the forces of Hell raise their ugly heads. Satan is all too aware of the power of God that is unleashed as the Lord’s children petition before His throne. Although it requires strength and dedication to stay focused on prayer, both the earthly and eternal dividends are immeasurable!

This is lesson three on learning to pray from a Biblical perspective. Our last lesson covered 1) God hears all types of prayers regardless of how we express them; 2) the Lord wants us to pray and develop a relationship with Him; and 3) we learn to pray through God’s Word and with the help of the Holy Spirit.

7) WHAT ELEMENTS ARE REQUIRED FOR SUCCESSFUL PRAYER?

Most things worthwhile have certain requirements needed in order to be successful – prayer is no exception. The following are Biblical requirements for effective prayer:

- A Humble Heart – “If my people, which are called by my name, shall humble themselves, and pray, and seek my face, and turn from their wicked ways; then will I hear from heaven, and will forgive their sin,

and will heal their land.” – II Chronicles 7:14 The Lord hates the spirit of pride and self-arrogance. As Christians we must humble ourselves before God to pray effectively.

- Wholeheartedness – “And ye shall seek me, and find me, when ye shall search for me with all your heart.” – Jeremiah 29:13 Whatever you do for God, give it one-hundred percent, for the Lord does no less for you.

- Faith – “Therefore I say unto you, What things soever ye desire, when ye pray, believe that ye receive them, and ye shall have them.” – Mark 11:24 Believing that God will answer our prayers is vital when we go before Him. Sometimes the answer God provides is not exactly the way we thought He would answer, but He answers in the best way possible to benefit His plans for eternity.

- Righteousness – “...The effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man availeth much.” – James 5:16 Confession and repentance of all know sin is absolutely necessary for God to hear and answer prayer.

- Obedience – “And whatsoever we ask, we receive of him, because we keep his commandments, and do those things that are pleasing in his sight.” – I John 3:22 ‘Trust and obey, for there’s no other way to be happy in Jesus, but to trust and obey.’

8) DOES GOD HEAR AND ANSWER PRAYER?

If you have been a Christian for any length of time, you have, or probably have heard of people for whom God answered their prayers – a loved one is saved, the landing of a job, a healing of a friend, someone’s financial need supplied – all in answer to prayers. Moreover, there are many instances in the Bible where God answers the prayers of His people. Here are two examples:

“The righteous cry, and the LORD heareth, and delivereth them out of all their troubles.” – Psalm 34:17

“He shall call upon me, and I will answer him: I will be with him in trouble; I will deliver him, and honour him.” – Psalm 91:15

In conclusion, we learned 1) there are certain requirements we must meet in order to pray effectively; and 2) God does indeed hear and answer the requests of His children. God is certain to answer your prayers. Sometimes the answer is yes, sometimes no, and sometimes wait a while.

Dear Father, help us to examine ourselves and make sure we have the requirements necessary to go before your presence. We know you hear and answer us, even though the answer is contrary to what we may desire. Thank you for giving us the privilege and ability to boldly approach your throne day or night. In Jesus name, your son, Greg Hooker.

LEARNING TO PRAY (Lesson Four)

Having a viable prayer life is one of the greatest privileges God has given to His children. To be able to go before our Heavenly Father any time and express our love and concern is simply awesome! In the

first three lessons on LEARNING TO PRAY, we discovered eight truths concerning Biblical prayer. This lesson will conclude this study with two more.

9) REASONS GOD DOESN'T ANSWER SOME OF OUR PRAYERS.

- Un-confessed Sin and Iniquities – “If I regard iniquity in my heart, the Lord will not hear me...” – Psalm 66:18. “But your iniquities have separated between you and your God, and your sins have hid his face from you, that he will not hear” – Isaiah 59:2. Perhaps one of the greatest detriments to our prayer life is that of un-confessed sin in our lives. Often we wonder why the prayer line to heaven has no dial tone, often it’s because we continue in sin and refuse to deal with it through repentance and confession.

- Disobedience – “And ye returned and wept before the LORD; but the LORD would not hearken to your voice, nor give ear unto you” - Deuteronomy 1:45. Like un-confessed sin, willful disobedience to God’s directives recorded in His Word will hinder our prayers from being answered.

- Indifference – “Then shall they call upon me, but I will not answer; they shall seek me early, but they shall not find me...” – Proverbs 1:28. When taken in context, God’s people were in a state of indifference, therefore God told them He would not answer, even though they called upon Him. When Christians are indifferent to the things of God, their prayers may not be heard or answered when needs arise.

- Neglect of mercy – “Whoso stoppeth his ears at the cry of the poor, he also shall cry himself, but shall not be heard” – Proverbs 21:13. How can we even think to ask God for something when we close our own ears to our neighbors in need?!

- Despising the Law – “He that turneth away his ear from hearing the law, even his prayer shall be abomination” – Proverbs 28:9. There are certain eternal laws given by our Creator for which it is our responsibility to follow.

- Bloodguiltiness – “And when ye spread forth your hands, I will hide mine eyes from you: yea, when ye make many prayers, I will not hear: your hands are full of blood” – Isaiah 1:15. When I read this passage of Scripture, the holocaust of aborted babies immediately comes to mind. Our hands drip with the innocent blood of millions upon millions of murdered infants. How shall we expect God to hear and answer our prayers with such stains?!

- Stubbornness – “Therefore it is come to pass, that as he cried, and they would not hear; so they cried, and I would not hear, saith the LORD of hosts...” – Zechariah 7:13. When God’s people develop a stubborn spirit – one that refuses to listen to God – the Lord neither hears nor answers their prayers.

- Instability or Doubt – “But let him ask in faith, nothing wavering. For he that wavereth is like a wave of the sea driven with the wind and tossed. For let not that man think that he shall receive any thing of the Lord...” – James 1:6-7. Why even ask for something if you don’t expect to receive it?!

- Self-indulgence – “Ye ask, and receive not, because ye ask amiss, that ye may consume it upon your lusts” – James 4:3. Many times when we ask God for something, we simply ask for selfish reasons – to add to our own lustful desires. God will not hear or grant such petitions!

- It' Not God's Will – “And this is the confidence that we have in him, that, if we ask any thing according to his will, he heareth us...” – I John 5:14. Not everything we ask is according to God's plans and purposes in our lives. In such cases, it is far prudent God doesn't give us what we ask.

10) SHOULD WE PRAY ALONE OR WITH OTHERS?

The answer is both. There are times to pray with our church, families and friends - Matthew 18:19, Luke 1:10, and Acts 1:14. Then, on the flip side, there are times when we should get alone with God in a quiet place and pour out our hearts to our Heavenly Father - Matthew 6:6, Mark 1:35, Luke 5:15-16, and Luke 6:12.

In concluding this four part study on the Christian discipline of prayer, let us begin to improve and build upon our prayer life. Prayer is such an awesome privilege God has given to us. The Lord stands ready to lend His ear to His children anytime day or night.

Dear Father, thank you for providing the means to approach before your presence at a moment's notice. May we take advantage of this awesome privilege and begin interceding for our nation, families and friends, for our time on earth is short and the needs are great. In Jesus name, Pastor Greg Hooker.

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